STUDIES
OF MEANING IN ART

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PLASTIC REDIRECTIONS IN 20TH CENTURY PAINTING

by James Johnson Sweeney

THE MEANING OF UNINTELLIGIBILITY IN MODERN ART

by Edward F. Rothschild

ARNO PRESS
A NEW YORK TIMES COMPANY

ARNO SERIES OF CONTEMPORARY ART

ISBN 0-405-00773-6
LC 71-138693

Manufactured in the United States of America
1972

STUDIES OF MEANING IN ART

A SERIES OF VOLUMES
PUBLISHED FOR
THE RENAISSANCE SOCIETY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

PUBLICATION COMMITTEE
OF THE SOCIETY:
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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS, CHICAGO
The Baker & Taylor Company, New York; The Cambridge University
Press, London; The Maruzen-Kabushiki-Kaisha, Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto,
Fukuoka, Sendai; The Commercial Press, Limited, Shanghai

PLASTIC REDIRECTIONS IN 20TH CENTURY PAINTING

JAMES JOHNSON SWEENEY

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS • CHICAGO

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PUBLISHED JULY 1934

Composed and Printed by the University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A.

"We are living in the last quarter of a century which will end again in an enormous revolution. . . . ."

"[but] is it not already something not to be the dupe of the falseness of one's time and to scent the unhealthy closeness and oppressiveness of the hours that precede the thunderstorm. . . . ."

". . . . the following generations will be able to breathe more freely."

—VINCENT VAN GOGH in a letter
to his brother, Theó, 1885

• • •

"La Barbarie est pour moi un rajeunissement. Je me suis reculé bien loin, plus loin que les chevaux du Parthénon . . . . jusqu'au dada de mon enfance, le bon cheval de bois."

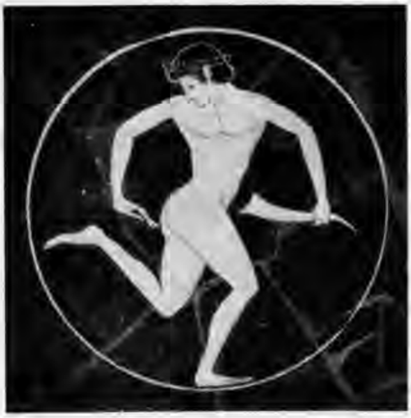
—PAUL GAUGUIN

• • •

"Modern abstract painting is archaic. It is a period of beginnings extraordinarily creative in an extreme conciseness of form. Illusionistic representation is given over for the organization and activation of purely plastic elements."

—W. BAUMEISTER, Réponse à Une
Enquête, "Cahiers d'Art," 1931

FOREWORD TO THE SERIES



GREEK DRINKING-CUP WITH THREE-DIMENSIONAL SWIRLING DESIGN ADAPTED TO THE SPACE (A LINK BETWEEN THE FIFTH CENTURY B.C. AND THE PRESENT TIME)

When nations have ceased to live and create, they may yet be immortalized and their history recovered through their art, as Mr. James Breasted has demonstrated in his work in Egypt and among lost nations in Western Asia. For art can be universally understood, and the plastic arts are among the most enduring records that can be made of vanishing civilizations in the disintegrating materials of the earth.

Art as language (substance and form): "Language exists only when listened to as well as spoken. . . . . The work of art is complete only as it works in the experience of others than the one who created it. . . . . There must be in spite of all indifference and hostility of nature to human interests, some congruity with man, or life could not exist. In art the forces that are congenial, that sustain, not this or that special aim, but the processes of enjoyed experience itself are set free. That release gives them *ideal* quality. For what ideal can man honestly entertain save the idea of an environment in which all things conspire to the perfection and sustaining of the values occasionally and partially experienced?" (John Dewey in *Art and Experience* [1934]).

Exhaustive discussion of art in recent years has given way in the first third of the twentieth century to a theory of a more direct approach, a clearer formulation of ideas concerning art and a philosophy as to "meaning" and its identification in the particular forms achieved. Critical studies of meaning in art have much to do in discovering and opening the most direct avenues of approach to the arts as well as to the individual works themselves. Their service is no longer expected to be translation and explanation. As Mr. Sweeney says: "All a picture asks is to be looked at." What is necessary is to establish a contact between the work of art and the observer, as between presentation of music and the hearer. More of the spirit of adventure is needed. There appears to be sometimes more fear of the unknown in art than there is of the wild beasts in the jungle. It seems as if there were a fear for the safety of our souls, *the fear and dislike of what we do not understand.*

The key to the mind of the twentieth century in its approach to art, either creatively or appreciatively, is perfectly expressed by Mr. Sweeney in the closing words of his first chapter: "The twentieth century has been characterized by a gradual return to origins, to a new archaism, a pre-logical mode of expression—to art as something necessary and organic: a vital element in the world about us, not merely a reflection of it."

Art conceived as a vital element in the world is a worthy basis of study which can be approached scientifically from the angles of philosophy (including psychology) and of biology, as well as of archaeology. The second becomes of greatest importance as the necessity of co-ordination of all senses in creative activity for the best achievements or "realizations" in art is more generally recognized. Art considered as the result of a human need of consolation for the sorrows, uncertainties, and disappointments of life, and the inadequacies of the social organization, is a poor substitute for such recognition of its part in the essential expression of the human mind, and is probably the reason why the arts have been given a secondary place in the scheme of education. They have been regarded as *ornamental* or *external* to the serious business of life; a luxury not an essential in the economic scheme.

Herder's understanding of this inspired Goethe to produce his best work in lyric poetry and his great philosophic achievement in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre.* Goethe expressed Herder's idea of the *organic integral personality* in the terms *das zusammenbrennende, zusammentreffende Ganze* ("the flame-fused indissoluble totality"), which is "spirit," (*Geist*), and by virtue of which the creative personality "acts with all his heart and all his soul."[1]

In recent writings the former conception is being made clear. In the publications of the Barnes Foundation a plan for the study of art as experience has been formulated, placing it for the first time on the basis of a scientific study usable by intelligent teachers, and displacing the emotional approach to a sentimental and associational representation of *subjects,* in place of objects. Usable terms have been formulated, and their meaning clarified. Terms of the structural elements significant in all the arts in their organization: color, space, form, tone, and rhythm, already familiar, were made usable. Sentimental and meaningless jargon was eliminated from the discussion of art.

There have been some very important contributions to the intelligent study of the plastic arts, notably the learned and imaginative archaeological works of Dr. Erwin Panofsky, and the recent stimulating and exhaustive study *Art as Experience* by John Dewey (1934), bringing the subject up to date philosophically.

---

[1] Martin Schütze, *Academic Illusions* (1933).

The Renaissance Society's series of brief studies is published in response to repeatedly expressed wishes that the lectures might be available for reading. The growing conviction that there must be significance in the varied and persistent movements in the art of the present which bears comparison with, and is related to, vital aesthetic expression of other times will no longer be satisfied with shallow and cynical explanations that have added to the general confusion and misapprehension of the nature of art.

We quote the following significant statements:

"The value of formal criticism to the plastic arts exists primarily in direct ratio in its efficiency in stripping away conscious critical attitudes. Neither the plastic arts in their essential nature nor our response to them are explainable.

"The difficulties that one finds surrounding the enjoyment of a contemporary work of art never lie so much in the novelty that is a part of the creation as in the fustian that makes the bulk of criticism. . . . .

"The only genuine constructive criticism that exists in the plastic arts is a creative act which provokes or follows upon another creative act."—JAMES JOHNSON SWEENEY.

"Men associate in many ways, but the only form of association that is truly human, and not a gregarious gathering for warmth and protection, or a mere devise for efficiency in outer action is the participation in meaning and goods that is effected by communication, *the expressions that constitute* art are communication in its pure and undefiled form.

"Art breaks through the barriers that divide human beings, which are impenetrable under ordinary circumstances."—JOHN DEWEY, *Art as Experience* (1934).

The directors of the Renaissance Society wish to express their appreciation to Dean Gordon J. Laing, Mr. Donald P. Bean, Miss Mary D. Alexander, and other members of the Press staff, for their co-operation in the production of the series.

Eve W. Schütze

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PLASTIC REDIRECTIONS
IN 20TH CENTURY PAINTING

PLASTIC REDIRECTIONS IN 20TH CENTURY PAINTING

Perhaps the twentieth century has not yet lived up to all that was expected of it in the way of a revision of spiritual values. Few, however, will deny that in the field of aesthetic concepts there has been a considerable change of face. This is especially evident in the plastic arts. And, while the event is still too close to us to admit an unprejudiced critical consideration, its character has never been ambiguous: an attempt at complete severance from all the dominant trends of the preceding century—a break and a new beginning. It was realized that a new epoch could grow only out of a new archaism. The surface soil had become exhausted. It had to be turned deeply and completely to produce anything young in vigor or sap.

The nineteenth century had been a century of science. In it there had been "a general shift of emphasis throughout the structure of society from faith to reason and from reason to evidence." The previous century had seen the gradual triumph of Cartesian philosophy. Little by little the scale had become overweighted on the side of reason. The consequence was a degradation of instinct and imagination. The nineteenth century saw authority as a principle and dogma abolished from practically every major activity—from the thought, literature, art, and institutions of Western civilization. With it had come the beginnings of industrialism and large-scale production, the shifting of masses of population from the country to cities, specialization and cutthroat competition. A constant and increasing emphasis on material values had brought about a widespread materialism. Science was looked to for a way out; it had offered promises. There were attempts to make religion scientific and science religious. "I am at heart a mystic," complained Flaubert, "and I believe in nothing." The war of 1870 probably helped to precipitate the inevitable disillusion which was bound sooner or later to dissolve the dream of a golden age made imminent by science. "Life had become cheap and ugly. Something priceless had been lost. Effort had become meaningless." Every foundation had finally been undermined. The idealist became the skeptic, the skeptic the cynic, and the cynic was without belief even in himself. The qualities admired in an artist became his "detachment," his lack of integration—what Miss Rebecca West has called in Anatole France his "dappled dishonesty."[1] The only rôle that remained for the artist was that of the observer. To the ideal observer, all things were of equal value, just as they were to a sensitized photographic plate—or had been, theoretically, to the Naturalist in painting. Finally, the last quarter of the century saw as art's proudest objective an elegant and disinfected scientific documentation.

In the plastic field the perfect embodiment of this scientific attitude was Impressionism as brought to its fullest development by Monet. Since the thirteenth century, the main tradition of European painting had been intimately bound up with a desire to reproduce in some way exactly what the eye saw. Since the baroque painters of the sixteenth century, light-effects had been a growing interest.

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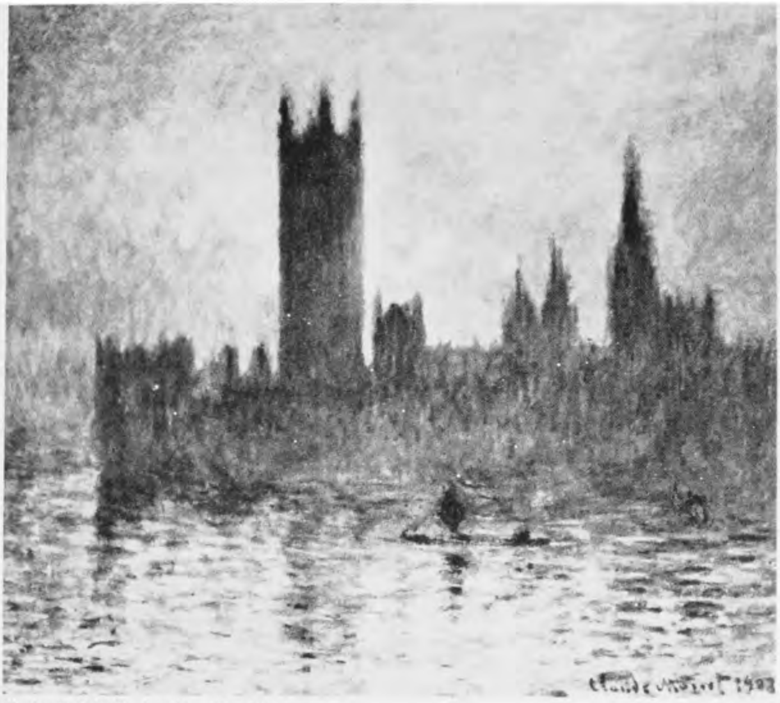
[1] *Tradition and Experiment in Present-Day Literature*, p. 196. For a broader consideration of foregoing and general source of quotations, see Haakon Chevalier, *The Ironic Temper* (Oxford University Press, 1932), particularly chap. iii.



Chester Dale Collection, New York City

PLATE I. CLAUDE MONET, "HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT—SUNSET"

At first, purely as a means toward stressing some feature of the pictorial concept. However, with the Impressionists, this interest had turned to light—and primarily sunlight—for its own sake: a realistic notation of its effects. The results, particularly as we have them in such work as Monet's series of "Haystacks," his "Houses of Parliament," and the like, where each canvas was a study of atmospheric effects at a certain hour of the day (Plate I) or under certain weather conditions, are frankly documentary in character, and ape the scientific in their mode of approach. Monet, the "Eye," as he was called—as Courbet for his "naturalism" had been earlier described by Ingres—is, before all else, the observer. Monet's impressionism is, in the field of the plastic arts, the equivalent of Zola's scrupulousness of *reportage* in literature—Zola plus Anatole France's epicene delicacy of nuance, with the complete disregard for structural unity that marked both writers.

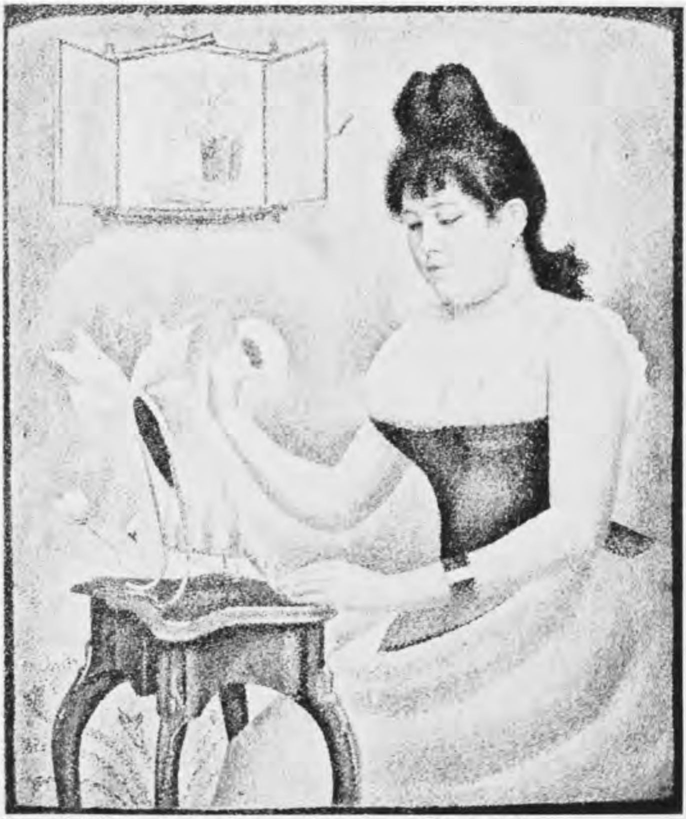
And it was finally these characteristics that provoked the face-about we commonly associate with the opening of the twentieth century in art. This shift of interest from structural integrity, like the decay of faith in other walks of life, had left the artist without any sound plastic basis. The encouragement of a scientific, detached impassivity struck directly at any link with the emotions. And in a conscientiously reportorial notation of natural phenomena there was no place for the imagination or fantasy. A restlessness and dissatisfaction infected all intellectual circles. It was evident that the old had to be abandoned and a new beginning made. First, solid foundations had to be uncovered. On these a structure might be built that would bring back confidence. With the return of confidence, a new communication might be established with the intuitions; and through intuition and the subordination of reason, a new freedom for the imagination.

Already in the last quarter of the century, Seurat, van Gogh, Cézanne, and Gauguin had realized that a return to structural interests in painting was essential. Renoir, in his personalized adaptation of Impressionism's approach, had never departed from them. He was too much "of the earth" ("le maître maçon joyeux, logique et sain," as André Lhote describes him) to forget the essential reality of an object in striving to capture some fleeting effect.[2] Yet, even he is quoted by Vollard as saying, "Toward 1883 there occurred a break, as it were, in my work. I had come to the limits of Impressionism, and I was reaching the conclusion that I neither knew how to paint nor to draw. In a word, I was in a blind alley." They all saw that Impressionism stood at the opposite pole to form. In its attempt at a conscientious snapshot-transcription, it had subordinated emotional, selective *looking* to a scientific, non-selective *seeing*. Likewise, "in subordinating the concreteness of external objects to accidents of light—and to the color or atmosphere of a whole scene," it had "gradually corrupted substance." And while Cézanne probably expressed their attitude, and that of the century to follow, most fully in the words: "I have not tried to *reproduce* nature: I have *represented* it," it was Seurat who pointed out the new direction, in his bold turn to a simplification and monumentality of selective seeing.

To Seurat structure was the prime interest—the struc-

---

[2] "On croit en savoir long quand on a appris, des 'scientifiques,' que ce sont des oppositions de jaune et de bleu qui font les ombres violettes, mais, quand vous savez ça, vous ignorez tout encore. Il y a dans la peinture quelque chose de plus, qui ne s'explique pas, qui est l'essentiel. Vous arrivez devant la nature avec des théories, la nature flanque tout par terre."—Renoir, in a conversation with Ambroise Vollard.



Courtauld Collection, London. Photograph by courtesy of "Creative Art"

PLATE II. GEORGES SEURAT, "LA POUDREUSE"

ture of the picture as a whole. Impressionism's effort to effect "the instantaneity and mosaic aspect of the most primitive moment of vision"[3] was abandoned. Space and the interplay of space-intervals were the keystones of Seurat's conception. "Painting," as he defined it, was "the art of hollowing out a canvas." The human figure, as well as other natural objects, were for him, first and always, elements of an architecture. Every natural object offered a play of volume and interval to be tied up intimately with the total picture-space. Inessentials were eliminated. Broken contours were avoided. And nature, in the making of a picture, was despoiled of any superficial sensual charms that might distract the attention from the total architectonic effect.

In Cézanne we have a sense of the constituent cones, spheres, and cubes beneath the natural form. It was this that made Cézanne so popular when the Cubists were feeling their way back to structure by analytic methods. But with Seurat in his almost-stylized elements we have an anticipation of the post-Cubist reverse-attitude, which, instead of continuing to analyze form, strives to bring geometrized forms to life purely through an interplay of plastic relationships.

This is actually what Seurat accomplished. From such a work as "La Poudreuse" (Plate II) it is evident that he had very little interest in anatomical veracity. The physiology of Seurat's world was completely dominated by the hollow of his canvas. Naturalistic effects were sacrificed on all sides to the architectonic. Sensibility alone saved his forms from a dead, calculated stylization. His drawing aims at the most rigidly simplified statement of desired fundamentals. Contour lines have returned. The imposed structure and strong plastic accents effect an austerity that is more reminiscent of Chaldean sculpture than anything later than Romanesque. And for all the frivolous banality of its subject matter, there is in "La Poudreuse" a repose that gives it almost the dignity of a religious expression. Thus, under Seurat's hand Impressionism, which had been until so recently (and still was in certain quarters) interested not in objects but in "ce qui existe entre objets, la fusion, la confusion des objets,"[4] returned "to a heightened appreciation of the interrelation of objects and so back to the object itself."[5] His larger canvases—"La Grande Jatte," "Les Poseuses," and "Le Cirque"—all show a similar achievement. And today it is clear that Seurat's power lay primarily in this intuition of formal relationships (and his willingness to subordinate all else to it) rather than in any scientific handling of light or rationalized compositional approach, as his earliest commentators preferred to feel.

---

[3] Meyer Schapiro, "Matisse and Impressionism," *Androcles*, February, 1932.

But Seurat was too far in advance of his day. He had shown by his stylized formulations that the fundamental appeal of a work of art lay in something quite beside the veracious reproduction of natural features. And it was precisely this that his contemporaries failed to recognize. They were conscious of the greatness of his work; yet they allowed themselves to be led away from his true findings by what, in reality, was only an incidental of technique: his development of the pointillist method of suggesting light-effects. And the group that professedly built itself round his example, the neo-Impressionists, or Divisionists, as they were called, under Signac and Cross, soon lost themselves down a new *cul-de-sac* of pseudo-scientific color experimentation.

---

[4] André Lhote, *Georges Seurat: (Valori Plastici).*

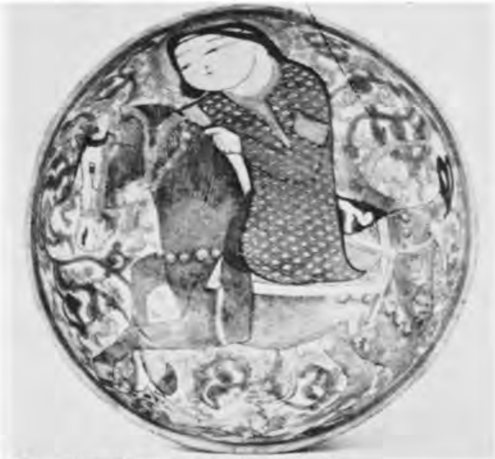
[5] Guy Eglinton, *Reaching for Art* (London, 1931).

Seurat had struck out a new path. But his contemporaries were not yet prepared to follow. Cézanne and van Gogh, while both sensed that redirections were necessary, were themselves too deeply committed to their professional Impressionist technique to be able to effect the necessary fundamental changes. Seurat, though he remained an Impressionist technically, has, in all his mature works, managed to simplify his plastic themes. Cézanne, on the other hand, could not bring himself to choose between the broken color-surfaces of his Impressionist training and his leaning toward simple, solid forms. The result was that effect of tentativeness—that indecision—which we feel in his work: a constant wavering between analysis and synthesis—between a geometrical disorganization and reorganization in his volumes. Van Gogh's aspirations to broad color-areas and a draftsmanship that would stress his compositional rhythms were similarly defeated by his Impressionist approach. Even in the relative simplification of his last years, the most he could achieve through his short brush-strokes was a sort of plastic declamation—never a structural economy.

It lay finally with Gauguin to point the way out. Although he was not an amateur, Gauguin did not feel himself bound by any of the current scientific or empirical prejudices of the West. Dissatisfied with all that Europe represented to him, in his self-imposed exile he submitted readily to the influences of the Orient. While he remained always a minor painter—inefficient as a craftsman, superficial and sentimental—his romantic career brought wide attention to his work. And, what was more important, through his work to its sources. As a result, it was through Gauguin, possibly more than through any other individual, that European painting was brought to a realization of the plastic possibilities of other viewpoints than its own.

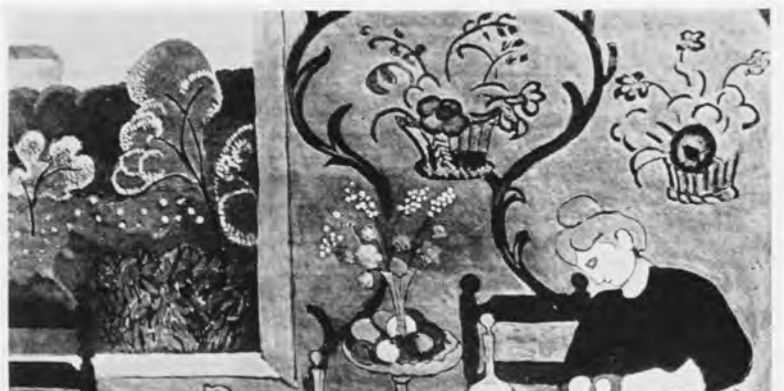
In the nineteenth century the vogue for Japanese prints had somewhat familiarized the occidental public with a plastic outlook that took no interest in the reproduction of the accepted appearance of the actual world. It was seen that the oriental artist sought primarily rhythm in his line, harmony in his color, and perfection in his form. And, that when perspective, *chiaroscuro*, and other accessories of Western expression were not employed by a Sung portraitist (or by the decorator of a thirteenth-century bowl, as in Plate III*a*), it was not because he was unable to make use of them but because he was able to satisfy his will-to-form without them, and, in his opinion, more completely so.

While this first wave of orientalism in the shape of an innocuous taste for colored prints was washing over the dilettantes of the West, Europe was still complacently feeling no need of a new plastic direction. But before Gauguin's death the sentiment had changed. And when, five years later, in 1908, Henri-Matisse described his conception of a work of art, the sources of his outlook were readily recognizable. His redirection was evidently conscious. His words were a frank profession of the major tenets of oriental plasticism, equally applicable to a thirteenth-century bowl as to any of his own work of that period, such as his large canvas, "La Joie de Vivre," of two years earlier, or either of his "La Desserte" compositions, to be painted in



Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City

PLATE III*a*. RHAGES BOWL, PERSIA, THIRTEENTH CENTURY



Museum of Western Art, Moscow

PLATE III*b*. HENRI-MATISSE, "LA DESSERTE," 1909

1909—both now in the Museum of Western Art in Moscow (Plate III*b*). Matisse wrote:

> Expression for me is not to be found in the passion which blazes from a face or is made evident by some violent gesture. It is in the whole disposition of my picture—the place occupied by the figures, the empty space around them, the proportions—everything plays its part. Composition is the art of arranging, in a decorative manner, the various elements at the painter's disposal for the expression of his feelings. In a picture every separate part will be visible and will take up that position, principal or secondary, which suits it best. Everything which has no utility in the picture is for that reason harmful. A work of art must be harmonious in its entirety: every superfluous detail will occupy, in the mind of the spectator, the place of some other detail which is essential.[6]

In this expression of Matisse the purely decorative function of painting was somewhat strongly emphasized. Too, his study had led him to arts that were products of civilizations (the Persian and Indian) as old, and older, than his own. Western art was looking not merely for another tradition but for some sound universals on which a new tradition might be built. It had come to realize that the logical future of the naturalistic tradition lay in the sensitized photographic plate. The brush was no longer a match for the camera (Plate IV*a*). Painting must seek a different field. A new familiarity with the basic nature of art had to be established. And in older cultures, plastic expression is usually so overgrown with extraneous modes of life and manners that it is difficult for one to get at its essence. Evidently the most direct route to the knowledge of the fundamental nature of art would be through a study of its earliest manifestations in primitive man or in children.

And in Rousseau le Douanier, Picasso, and the young painters of the first decade of the century found the ideal

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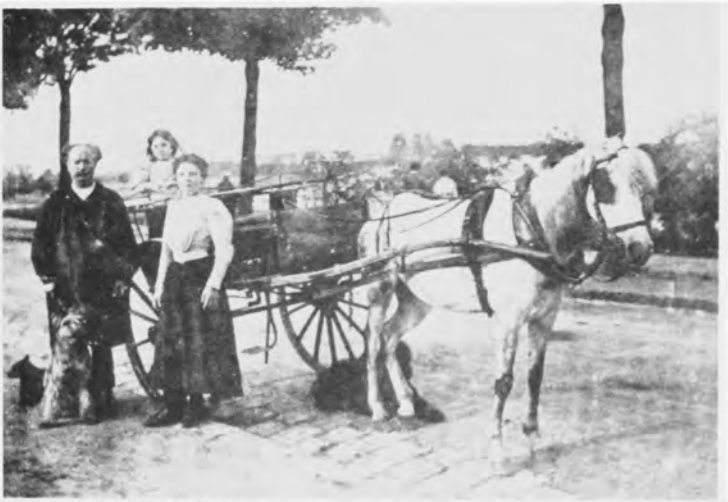
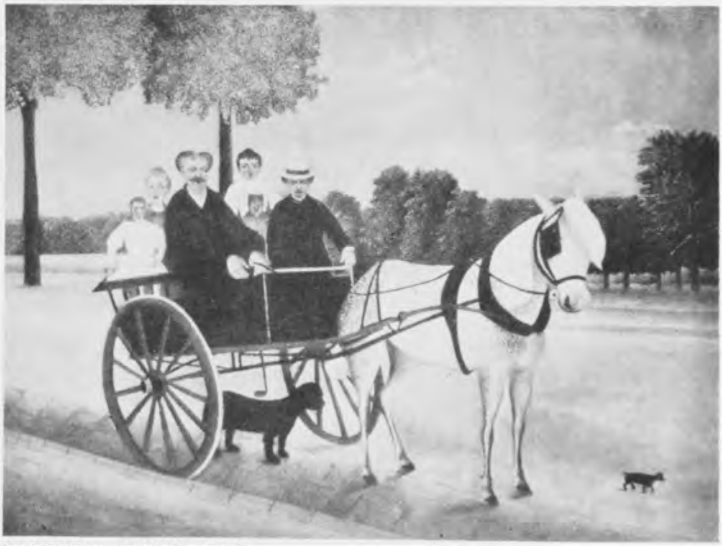
[6] "Notes d'un peintre," *La Grande Revue* (Paris), December 25, 1908.



Courtesy of M. F. Roches, Paris

PLATE IV*a*. PHOTOGRAPH OF PERE JUNIET AND HIS FAMILY



Paul Guillaume Collection, Paris

PLATE IV*b*. HENRI ROUSSEAU, "PERE JUNIET AND HIS FAMILY" combination: a trained craftsman of delicate sensibility with an ideology readily intelligible to Europeans, yet with a childish naïvety of mind that left his art free from the intellectual elaborations of his sophisticated contemporaries. Art for Rousseau, as it is for children and primitive peoples, was in no way "extraneous and complementary to life, but an intensification of it: a stirring of the pulse, a heightening of the heart's beat and a tautening of the muscles, a necessary and exigent mode of expression."[7] In one of his letters Rousseau confided to a friend: "One day when I was painting a fantastic subject I had to open the window because fear took me."

It was this intensity of conception that fused Rousseau's canvases into the tight architectonic units they are—casual and unconsidered as they may seem at first glance. And Cézanne's distinction between the "reproduction" and "representation" of nature will be clear if we will recall the elements here "reproduced" by the camera (Plate IV*a*) when we consider what Rousseau made of them by "re-presentation" in his canvas now in the Guillaume Collection, Paris—"Père Juniet's Cart" (Plate IV*b*).

Here Rousseau allowed his intuitions free play to handle the elements as the pictorial organization demanded. The result is an architectonic unification impossible to a camera's non-selective seeing—and, derivative from this, an emotional communication of a naïve gayety that was no doubt Père Juniet's at the prospect of having his portrait painted "after having filled his cart," as Philippe Soupault puts it, "with his family instead of his vegetables."[8]

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[7] Herbert Read, *Art Now,* p. 46.

[8] Philippe Soupault, *Henri Rousseau le douanier* (Paris: Edition des Quatre Chemins).

And it is the same intensity of visualization that made Rousseau rush to the window, frightened by his imagining, that we find in primitive Negro art (Plate V). Here, also, the same scrupulous craftsmanship, the same sensibility to plastic fundamentals, and the same intuitive interest in the architectonic interplay of abstract forms. With the German Die Brücke group around Kirchner, Schmidt-Rottluff, and Heckel, it was the drama they read into primitive art—its Expressionism—that attracted them to it.[9] But painting in Paris was feeling the need for order and vitalized form with a growing intensity. And it was these characteristics, not the quaintness and exotic appeal of primitive sculpture, that took and held the attention of the younger painters during the first decade of the century.

At first there was naturally a temptation to *pastiche* the actual styles. Picasso was already an enthusiastic collector of African art in 1906. And we see a definite response to the lines of Gabon fetiches, from the Ogové River District, in several of his canvases of a year later (Plate VI). It is easily comprehensible that such a powerful, unfamiliar approach would not be immediately assimilated. And it is not in Picasso's 1907 adaptations, nor even in Modigliani's later elegant stylizations, that we find Negro art's true contribution.

It was first necessary to avoid the confusion of the vital with the unessential, the real with the sentimental. But with time the symphonic organization of planes of these primitive pieces, their monumentality of effect, and the freedom with which personality expressed itself in their craftsmanship began to make themselves subtly but un-

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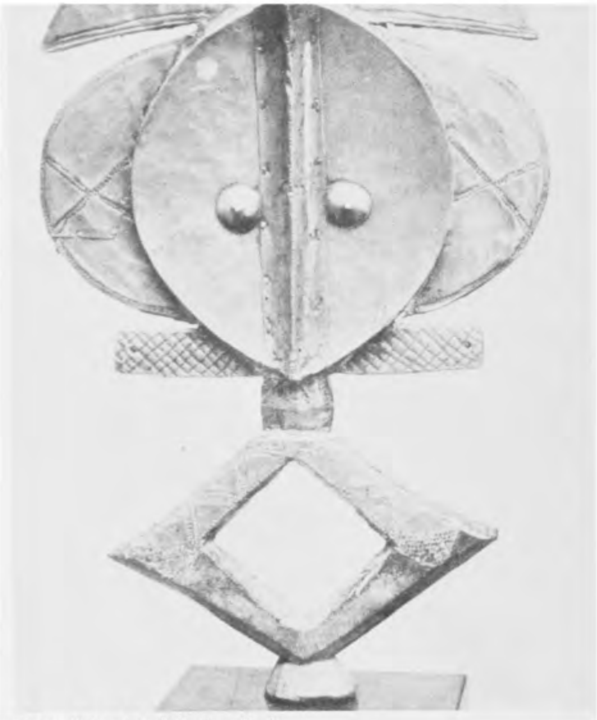
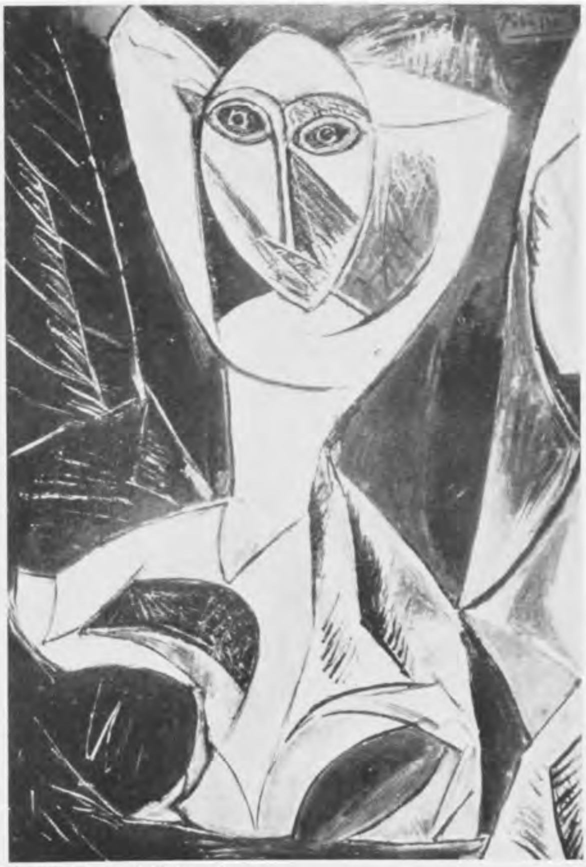
[9] Refer to A. H. Barr, *German Painting and Sculpture* (New York, 1931).



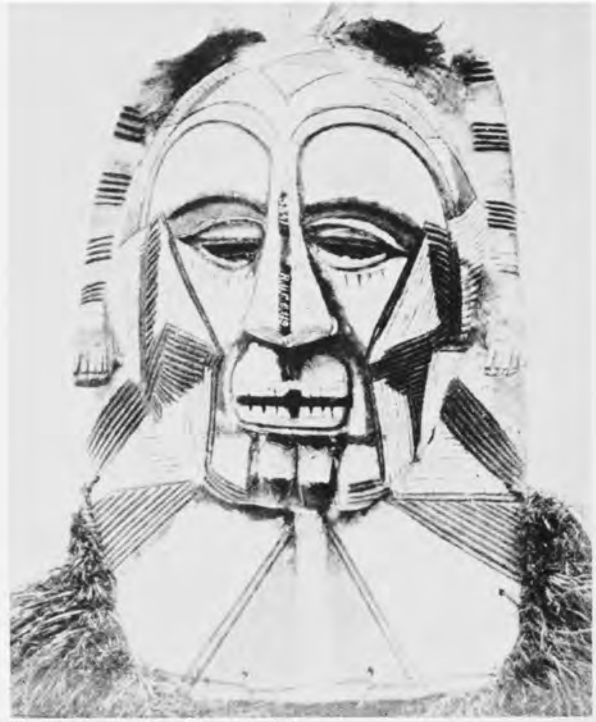
Helena Rubenstein Collection, Paris

PLATE V. AFRICAN FETISH, GABON, OGOVE RIVER DISTRICT



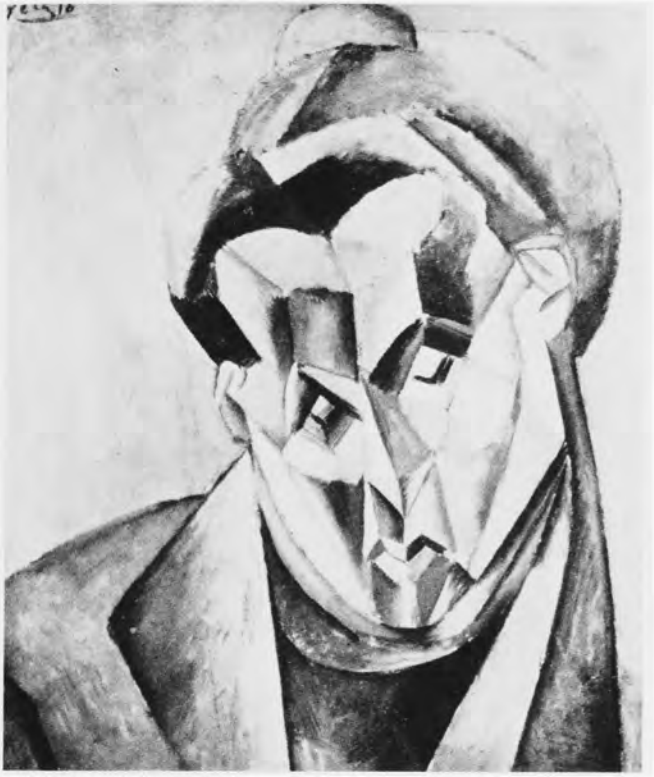
Paul Guillaume Collection, Paris

PLATE VI. PABLO PICASSO, "DANSEUSE," 1907



Musée du Congo Belge, Tervueren, Belgium

PLATE VII. CEREMONIAL MASK, BELGIAN CONGO



Paul Guillaume Collection, Paris

PLATE VIII. PABLO PICASSO, "TETE DE FEMME," 1909

questionably evident in European productions (Plates VII and VIII). Familiarity with African and Melanesian work gradually brought Western painting a sense of the primitive approach that left its effect much deeper than in any surface resemblances. And we may feel the true relationship between contemporary art and that of a primitive people—what one eventually learned from the other—if we will compare the Sudan figure (Plate IX) in its monumental simplicity and force with a composition by Fernand Léger painted in 1925 (Plate X).

Léger's origins were heavily overlaid with Impressionism. But in a canvas such as that reproduced in Plate X we see the rhythmic power, the simplification of plastic themes, and their repetition in variation, that Léger and the others of his generation learned from African art: no condescending emphasis on quaintness or barbarity by way of *pastiche,* but a genuine assimilation of its fundamental qualities of construction and expression.

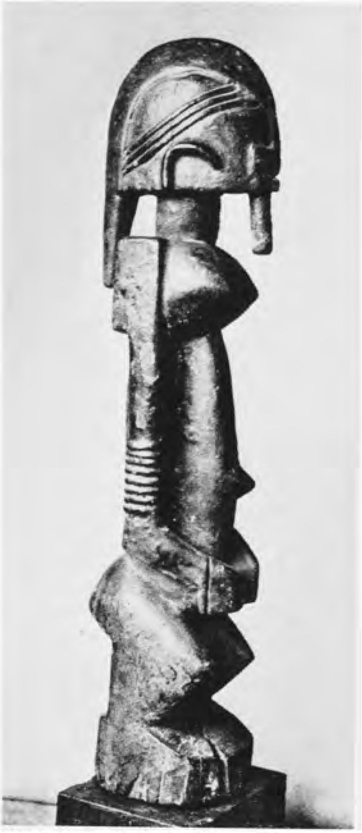
Again, as an example in a different tempo from that of the heavier Sudan piece just considered, we have in Plate XI a seated divinity from the Habbé tribe of the Upper Niger—less monumental, angular, staccato in its rhythms, contrapuntal in its delicate network of forms. And with it we may compare the plastic handling of a 1928 Picasso still-life (Plate XII) offering a contrapuntality of form and color very similar in its restless contrasts and tightly knit organization.

But European painting was only able to compass this assimilation by gradual stages. And to do so it had to make its first steps out of Cézanne.

African sculptures of high quality are primarily thematic conceptions. The negro image-maker intuitively resolved his volumes into their constituent elements, with every inessential shorn away. Nevertheless, the whole was held in an architectonic unity by the artist's single-minded intensity of emotion. Western art through Cézanne had learned to see the elements beneath the natural form. However, a naturalistic interest still remained; and naturalism, it was felt, was what had set European painting on the wrong track. The young painters did not feel that they had yet succeeded in throwing off their inheritance from the past century. Before a fresh start could be made, naturalism had to go. Its abuses were too ingrained. Distortion, even as it was then being employed (for purely plastic ends), was not enough. A complete break had to be made.

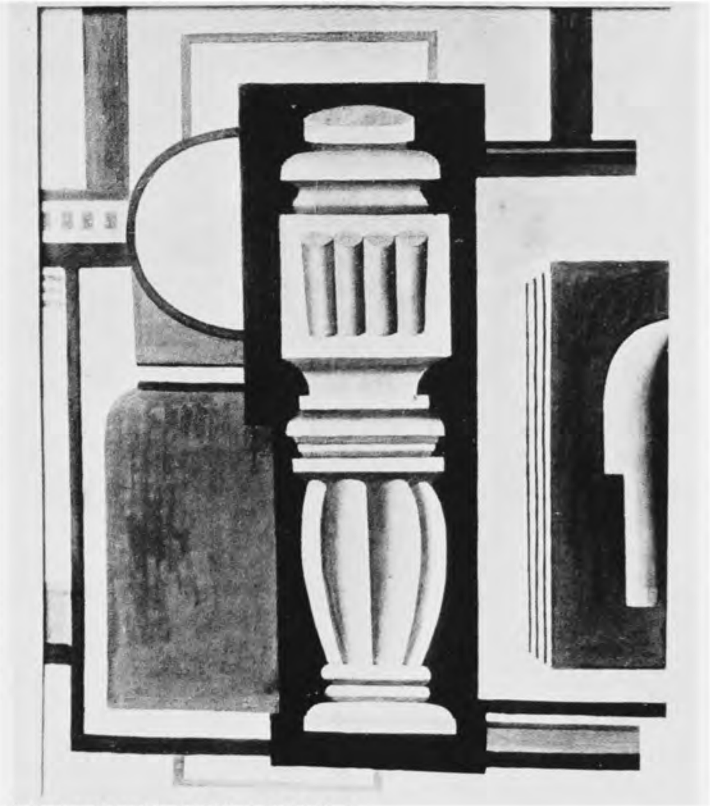
And possibly in following out Cézanne's analytic approach the first steps in this direction were taken unwittingly. In any case, shortly after 1909, Braque and Picasso hit upon the possibility of building new organisms out of the elements arrived at in the analysis of natural forms, which organisms need have no immediate reference to nature. At first, each element made use of was a fragmentary view of an object or objects conceived in the orthodox way as if seen from a fixed viewpoint outside the picture-space and governed by the usual rules of perspective. However, each of these fragments might have a point of view different from that of the adjoining one, or might offer a representation which bore no naturalistic relationship to that of its neighbor. The result was a sort of mosaic of such perspective "boxes" or areas, more or less fused—their organization based solely on formal or chromatic relationships.

However, here the tyranny of perspective and, to a cer-



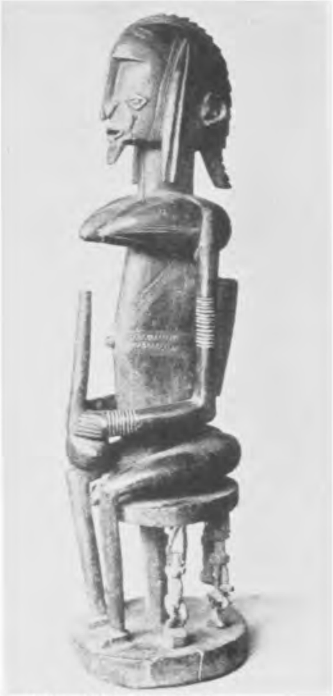
Charles Ratton Collection, Paris

PLATE IX. AFRICAN STATUETTE—SUDAN



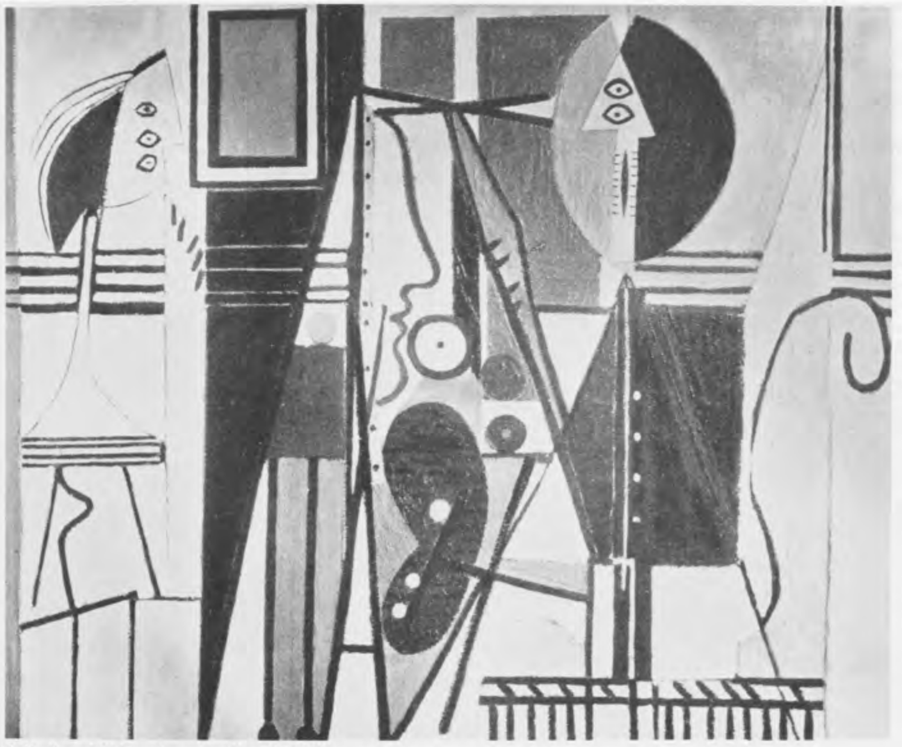
Collection of the Vicomte Alain de Leché, Paris

PLATE X. FERNAND LEGER, "COMPOSITION," 1925



Louis Carré Collection, Paris

PLATE XI. AFRICAN SCULPTURE: SUDAN, HABE, BANDIAGARA

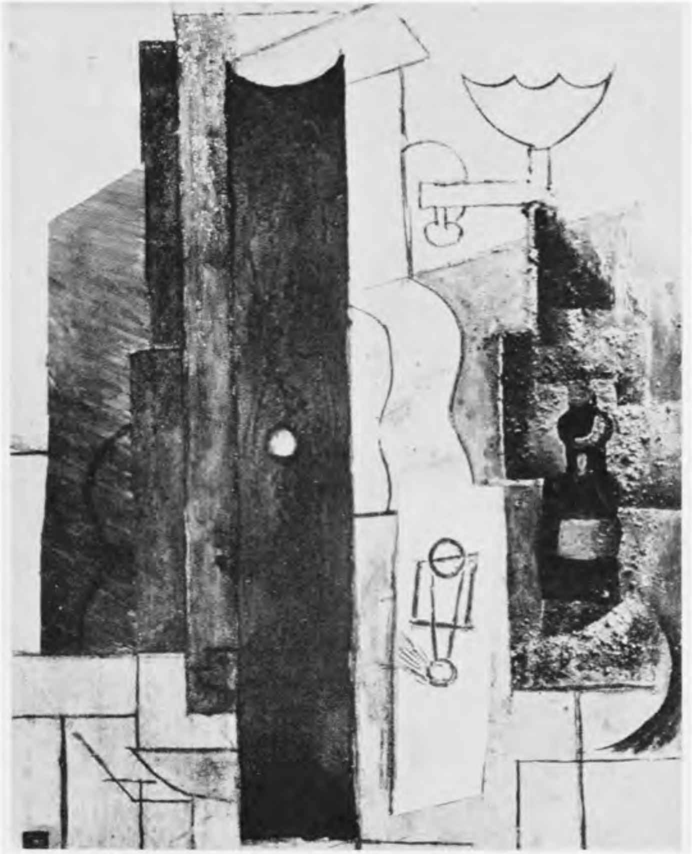


Collection of Sidney Janowitz, New York City

PLATE XII. PABLO PICASSO, "THE ARTIST AND HIS MODEL," 1928

tain extent, of "naturalism" clung on. At least within each of the various perspective areas that constituted the picture-total. But once "naturalism" for the picture-as-a-whole had been abandoned, there was no reason that it should force itself arbitrarily into any part. So the next step was the abandoning of the disparate minor perspectives and the resumption of a single fixed point of view—but not entirely in the old sense. The representation within the picture-space no longer attempted to simulate a slice of the world of nature. It became now aggressively an object to be considered for itself—a plastic organization of forms suggested by line and color on a flat surface. And while the finished representation was depicted as if seen from a single viewpoint, in selecting the formal elements from the world of nature a multiplicity of viewpoints had been adopted. In other words, from a "still-life" of the period we have the impression that the painter studied various natural objects from all sides, then selected those features which from a formal or coloristic angle would be most valuable to him in his plastic expression (Plate XIII). For example, we may have a side view of a guitar, two views of the same pipe, or a glass of water seen from above, all arranged side by side or seen superimposed in the picture-space.

By 1913 the analytic character of Cubism had almost totally disappeared. But the non-naturalistic character still remained. The constituent plastic themes have become bolder—their rhythmic play more assertive, more assured. A new simplicity in its individual elements has appeared with a more mature complexity in the total organization. The need for naturalism had finally been conquered. The artist was now free to represent nature as faithfully as possible—to distort, to analyze, or to resyn-



Courtesy of M. Paul Guillaume, Paris

PLATE XIII. PABLO PICASSO, "STILL LIFE WITH GAS FLARE"

thesize, as his plastic conception demanded. The return to an architectonic integrity had been compassed. A return also to a personalized craftsmanship. In sum, a new sense of clean surfaces and a plastic organization stripped of all extra-plastic, sensuous, or associational charms (Plate XIV).

Only one further step now remained: to carry the integrity of the plastic conception, out of the objective, into the subjective. Klee, Chirico, Ernst, and other Superrealists had already depicted the magic realism of the dreamworld. But the purists fought shy here, also, of anything which, in their eyes, might exert a specious, literary, and not strictly plastic, appeal. As Hans Arp expressed it:

> Art is a fruit growing out of a man like the fruit out of a plant, like the child out of the mother. While the fruit of the plant assumes independent forms and never strives to resemble a heliocopter, or a president in a cutaway, the artistic fruit of man shows, for the most part, a ridiculous ambition to imitate the appearance of other things. I like nature but not its substitutes.[10]

Already Mondrian, and other painters of the "de Stijl" group in Holland, had begun to reduce the planes of their volumes to strictly rectangular areas of flat, contrasting color (Plate XV). As one of their leaders, Théo van Doesberg, said: "Au point de vue de forme un seul element suffit, par exemple le carré." Mondrian, in his work, through a schematic suggestion of planes and a bold opposition of broad areas of pure color, strives to set up what he terms "free rhythms" in contradistinction to the "natural rhythms" of limited forms. Among the younger followers of the group, Jean Hélion tends, particularly of late, to break away somewhat from the austere geometry of the

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[10] "Notes from a Diary," *Transition* (Paris, March, 1932), No. 21.

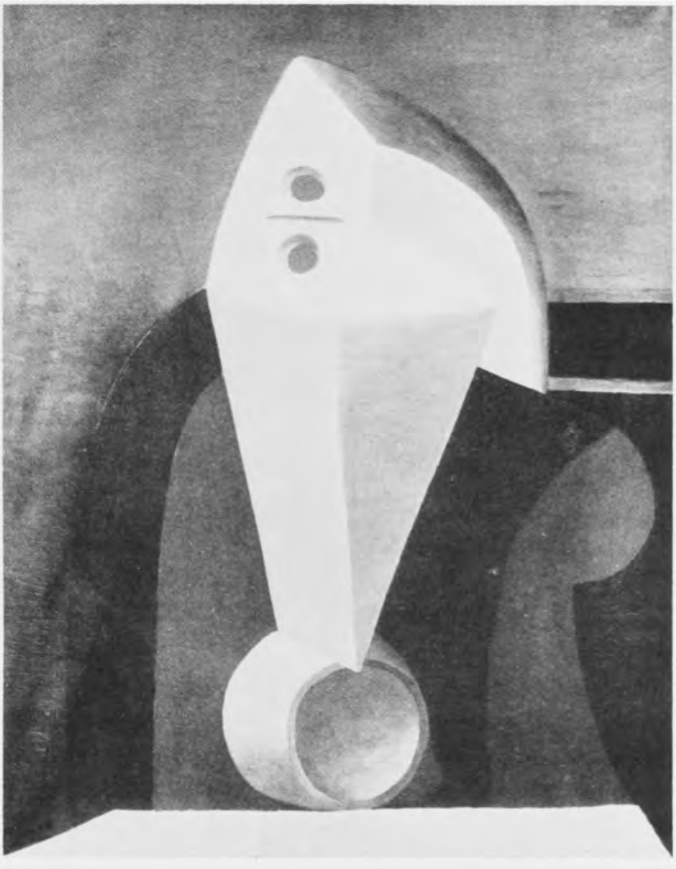


PLATE XIV. PABLO PICASSO "WOMAN IN AN ARMCHAIR," 1929

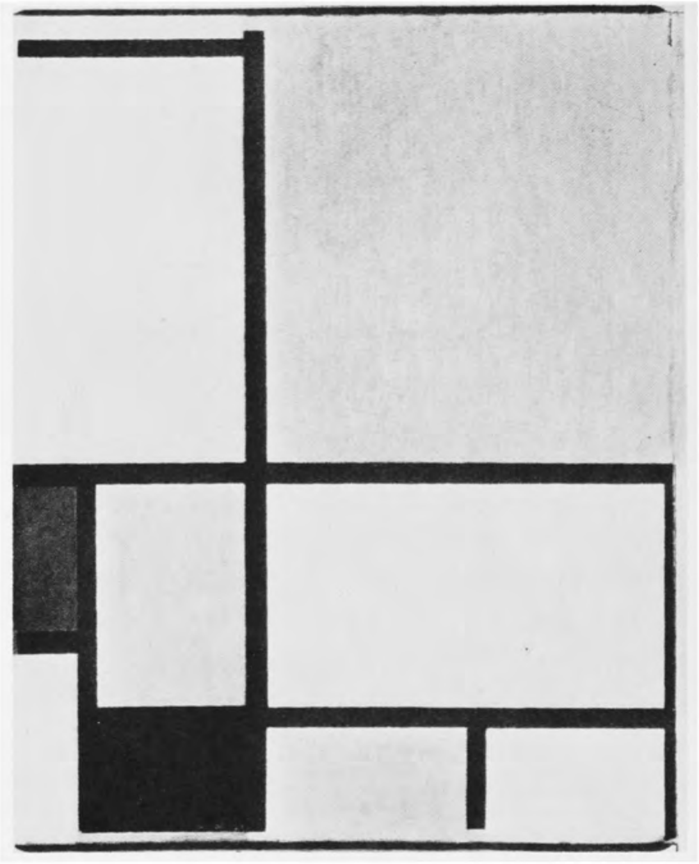


PLATE XV. PIET MONDRIAN, "COMPOSITION," 1921

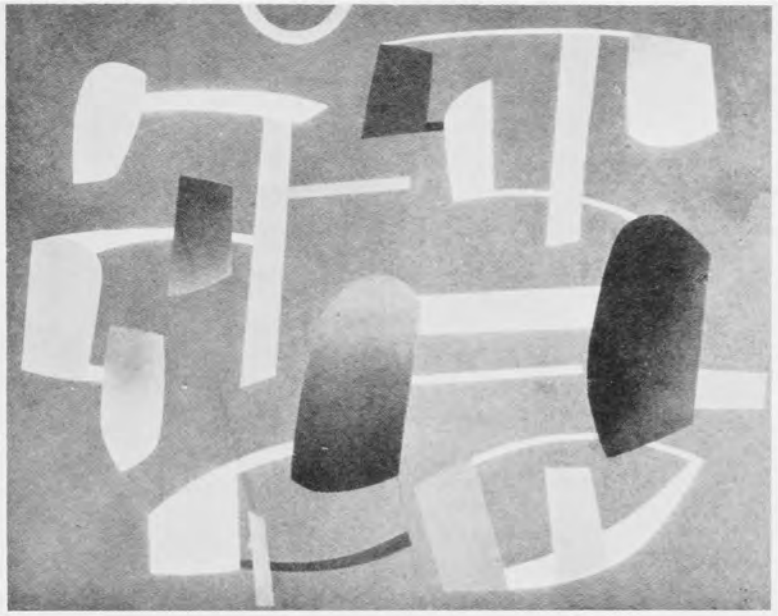
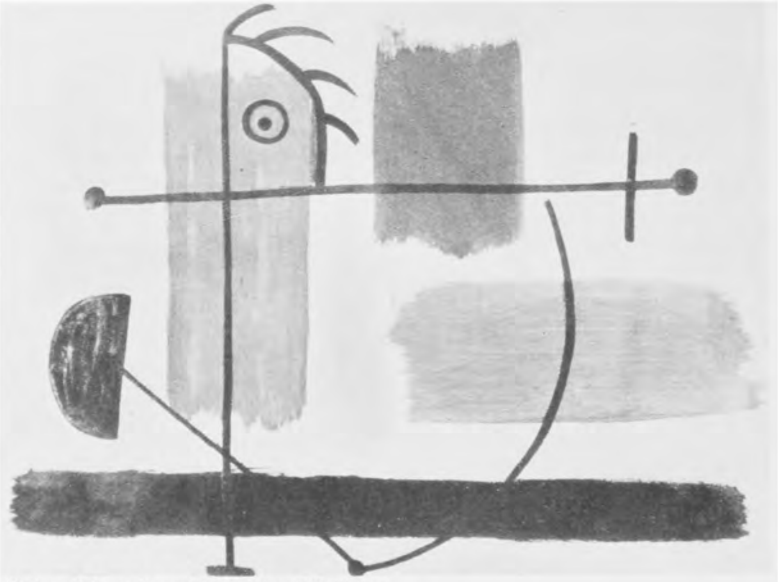


PLATE XVI. JEAN HELION, "PEINTURE," 1934



Photograph by courtesy of the "Cahiers d'Art," Paris

PLATE XVII. JOAN MIRO, "COMPOSITION"

older men. And in his work of the last months we find a relative freedom of contour rhythms (Plate XVI). Yet, for all this recent relaxation in the forms, of Hélion, he does not yet achieve the lyric quality of Joan Miró (Plate XVII). In Miró's fantasies no intellectual control whatsoever seems to come between the artist's free intuitional response to his materials and the plastic result.

The final years of the nineteenth century marked the close of the rationalistic era. In it, art had been conceived as a rational ideal—a painful striving toward intellectual perfection. The period ended with an acute consciousness of its own sterility. To the future, it offered no illusions, no hopes, no creeds. The twentieth century has been characterized by a gradual return to origins, to a new archaism—a prelogical mode of expression—to art as something necessary and organic: a vital element in the world about us, not merely a reflection of it.

FROM THIS SIDE OF "CUBISM"

FROM THIS SIDE OF "CUBISM"

Today we are fortunately far enough removed from the period in which the term "Cubism" had a combative currency to marvel how the works characterized by it could ever have struck contemporary critics as anything but the most logical consequences of all that had immediately preceded them. In fact, the transition now appears to have been so gradual that it is impossible for us, looking back, to say exactly where "Cubism" began, or where, if yet, in its character of "movement," "Cubism" finally reached its culmination.

Labels, categories, and pigeonholes in the discussion of art are notoriously inadequate. Yet, if this inadequacy did not go beyond professional circles, the consequences would be relatively negligible. The creative artist realizes the impossibility of describing an expression in one field through the media of expression belonging to another. It is the popular misconceptions that are stimulated by loose labeling and the barriers which pigeonholes become that make such tags of critical jargon regrettable. As an example, in our practical world of today the term "abstract" in its association with art assumes, more often than not, a definitely derogatory significance. For, when art on the grounds of its basic disinterest in subserving any obviously practical ends is taken little more seriously than as a "jeu d'esprit," certainly "abstract" art can only offer a double-dyed futility. Yet, twenty years from now the term "abstract" in the sense commonly used to describe certain contemporary works will appear to the general public as gratuitous and misleading as it does today to the painters and sculptors producing the works to which it is applied. Picasso may be fairly taken as a representative of this class. Nevertheless, in a discussion of his work during the last few years he is quoted as saying simply, "I paint what I find." Hans Arp, as early as 1915 (incidentally, the close of what is commonly described as "the heroic age of Cubism"), was already producing such canvases as is reproduced in Plate XVIII. Yet, Hans Arp writes:

> Man calls abstract that which is concrete. . . . . It is impossible for him to comprehend as art anything other than a landscape prepared with vinegar and oil, or a lady's shanks cast in marble or bronze. . . . . But a picture-object or a sculpture-object for which no natural object was pretexted, I can find as concrete and perceptible as a leaf or a stone.

Piet Mondrian, member of the Dutch "de Stijl" group and founder of the Neoplastic school, can also, without any straining of the term, be taken as a producer of what are popularly termed "abstractions" (Plate XV). Yet, Mondrian has said, "It is a great error to envisage a Neoplastic work as a total abstraction from life." And Picasso (Plate XII) further expresses himself to the effect that "from the point of view of art there are no concrete or abstract forms, but only interpreters more or less conventional."

There should be no need to examine, fit, refit, and explain labels. Formal criticism in the plastic arts is a parasitic growth. A painting, as Hans Arp says, is as straightforward as a leaf or a stone: it requires no commentary—it asks merely to be looked at. The difficulties that one finds surrounding the enjoyment of a contemporary work of art never lie so much in the novelty that is a part of creation as in the fustian which makes the bulk of criticism. The only genuinely constructive criticism that exists in the

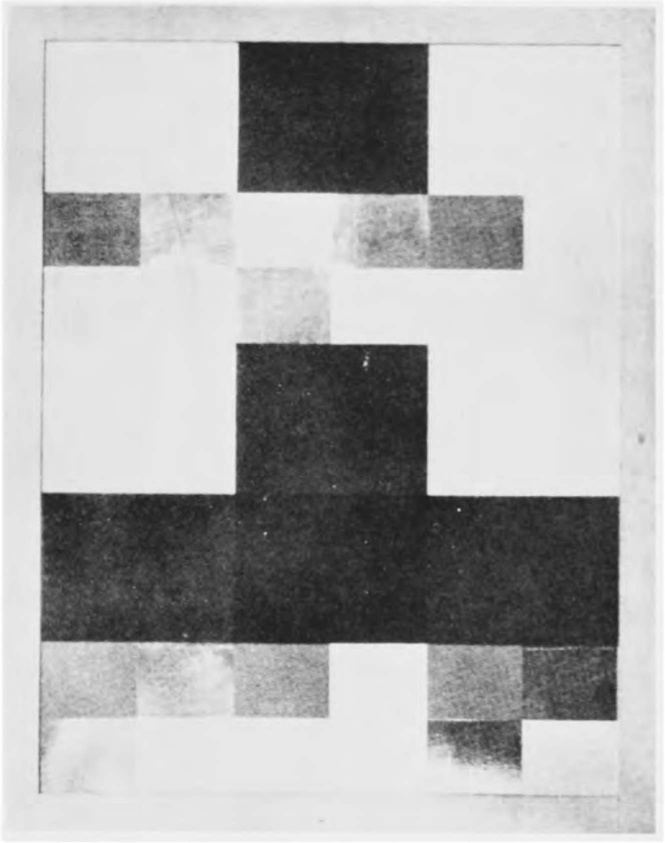
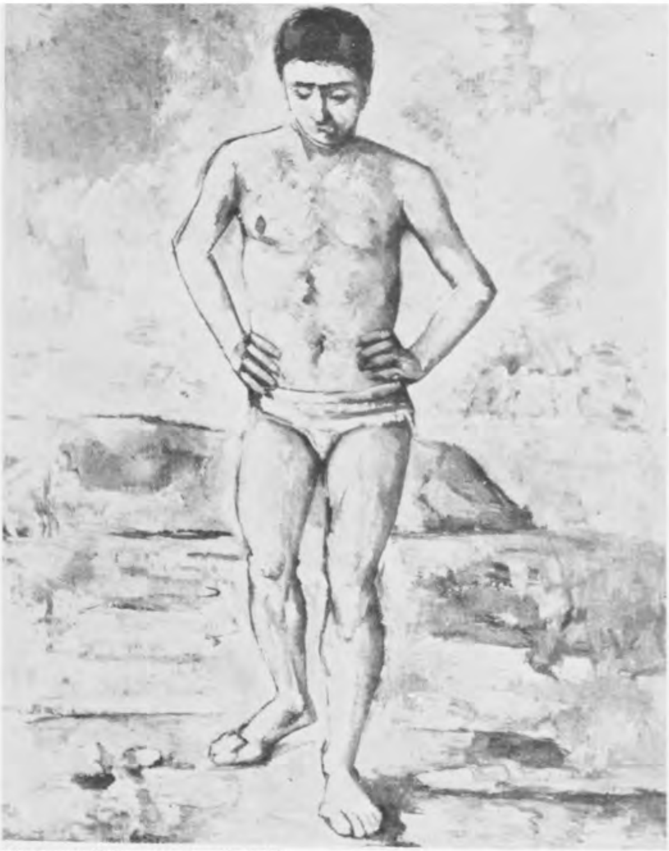


PLATE XVIII. HANS ARP, "COMPOSITION," 1915

plastic arts is a creative act which provokes or follows upon another creative act.

The value of formal criticism to the plastic arts exists primarily in direct ratio to its efficacy at stripping away conscious critical attitudes. Neither the plastic arts in their essential nature nor the fundamentals of our response to them will be explained. The critic's duty is not the application or the elucidation of tags. A critic's evaluation of a creative artist's expression is an impertinence. Still, the only way to understand a work of art which is not merely a *pastiche* of something with which we are already familiar—that is to say, which is a genuine creative work—is by finding its place in the tradition to which it belongs. When we discover what demands or interests gave it its peculiar character and to what particular directive it is a response, it will takes its place with a surprising—almost bathetic—ease. In the process, such terms as "Cubistic" and "abstract" fade completely out. And it is only through such an analytic consideration of both a work and its background-tradition (with a concurrent discard of tags) that we can hope to arrive at an appreciation of the contribution of our contemporaries or even a genuine understanding of their work. Time effects its clarifications for us painlessly; at close quarters a conscious effort is required to compass similar ends.

During the first decade of the present century, European painting felt its heritage of Mediterranean illusionism weighing more and more heavily on its shoulders. Already in the closing years of the nineteenth century Cézanne had foreshadowed a break in his dictum: "I have not tried to reproduce nature, I have represented it" (Plate XIX). Impressionism was merely an intensified naturalism within a



Museum of Modern Art, New York City

PLATE XIX. PAUL CEZANNE, "THE BATHER"

certain definite and restrictively exiguous field. And although Cézanne could never bring himself to a complete severance from the Impressionistic approach, possibly due to his early associations and the influence of Pissarro at a crucial point in his technical formation, he realized that Impressionism's tenets were basically antipathetic to any sound formal interest. Impressionism had grown into a virtuoso transcription of specialized luminary phenomena. Its products were more in the nature of documents than of creations. Cézanne's desire was to "represent" the things in themselves as present to his sensibility: to get away from the direct mechanical recording of visual experience, the commoner ideal of the time. And, while the majority of his contemporaries were interested primarily in "the impression of natural vitality conveyed by the work of art," Cézanne, as Professor Herbert Read has recently expressed it, "staked everything on the inherent form." He sought his form in natural objects, striving with all the passion and integrity of his genius to reveal their latent structure—the constituent "cones, spheres, and cubes," as he put it—without ever totally disrupting representation or abandoning the fundamental conventions of perspective.

However, scientific perspective itself is a construction of the intellect—not a direct perception. And "just as we now infer the roundness of the earth, so in one period the artist (in the manner of the child) had to infer the extensions of plane surfaces, the different directions of the branches of a tree, the placing of objects in a space continuum." For example, if we put aside our habits of seeing for a moment, we are conscious of our vision shifting about from point to point to get a complete view of the scene. "When it has, so to speak, roamed over the whole field, then, by an act of synthesis, the mind retains the scene as a whole." Unconsciously, as a general rule, we focus on a central point, or prominent light, and the rest of the scene arranges itself round this focal center.[1]

With time, however, habits in grouping such visual data little by little freeze into conventions of seeing. And the younger men, particularly Matisse and the *Fauves*,[2] seeking a means to thaw such conventionalized visual concepts and build up new plastic entities, were given their lead by oriental art to an exploitation of this very process in the inverse direction. If the various elements arrange themselves about a central point, or light, in our looking at a scene, why not adopt a selective approach on the same basis in the construction of a picture? Why attempt to reproduce the finished product of our visual and mental synthesis rather than work out a fresh synthesis along similar lines, which would at the same time be relatively representational and yet allow a generous amount of plastic freedom? To this end, in oriental fashion, they set a harmonic organization of rhythmic elements as their basis of unification. And by 1906 this visual analysis of a scene as a whole and the free reorganization of its elements into a new plastic entity had reached an ample realization in such canvases as Matisse's "Joie de Vivre" or his "Young Sailor" in the Hans Seligmann Collection in Berlin.

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[1] Herbert Read, *Art Now* (London: Faber & Faber, 1933).

[2] "On fait d'ordinaire dater le 'Fauvisme' du Salon d'Automne de 1905 qu'on a appelé 'le Salon des Fauves.' Cependant les Fauves exposèrent autant aux Indépendants qu'à l'Automne et c'est aux Indépendants qu'ils débutèrent ... . Quand le Salon d'Automne s'ouvre (1903) ils y exposent également, mais l'importance qu'ils avaient prise aux Indépendants est assez grande pour qu'en 1905 un critique put dire: '*Ce qui continue de donner le ton au Salon d'Automne, c'est ce groupe de coloristes curieux et neufs qui s'étaient fait une réputation au Salon des Indépendants.*' (François Monod: 'Le Salon d'Automne' dans 'Art et Décoration,' 1905 t.XVIII, p. 198.)

"Cependant c'est la réunion des Fauves au Salon d'Automne de 1905 qui les impose. Là se voyaient dans une même salle, les toiles rapportées de Collioure par Derain et Matisse, des œuvres de Vlaminck, Manguin, Rouault, Puy, Valtat. La communauté de leur esprit révolutionnaire et le parallélisme de leur attitude en face du problème de la couleur frappent le public. Le nom de 'Fauves' leur fut donné, non par Guillaume Apollinaire, comme le rapporte Berthe Weil dans ses mémoires, mais par Louis Vauxcelles, dans les circonstances suivantes. Venu pour faire un compte rendu, Vauxcelles, voyant dans la salle où étaient réunis les envois des peintres indiqués au plus haut, une figure d'enfant en bronze du sculpteur Marque à la manière de Donatello s'écria: '*Donatello au milieu des Fauves.*' " —GERMAIN BAZIN: "Historique du Fauvisme," *L'Amour de l'Art*, May, 1933.

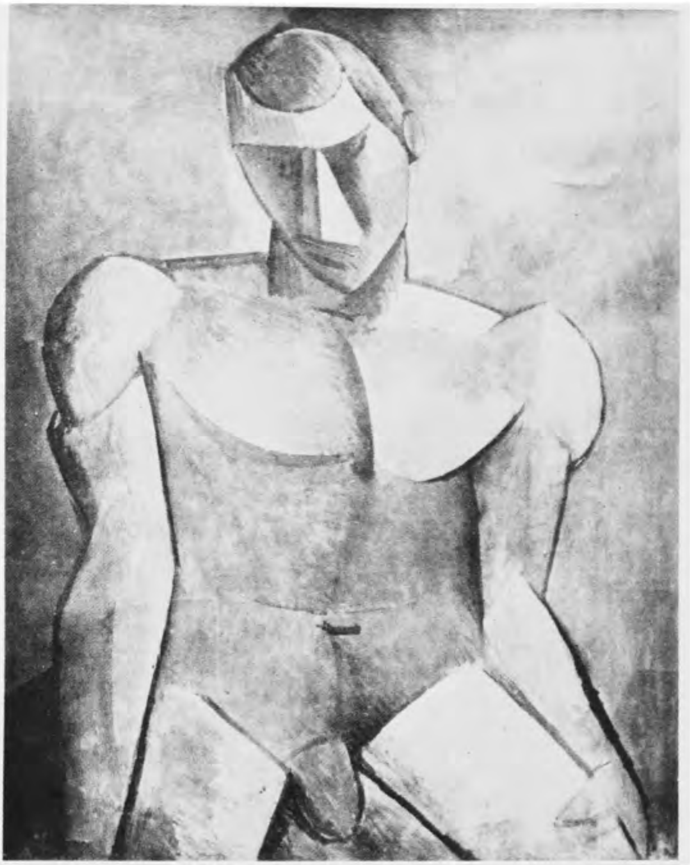
This disregard for the synthetic qualities of the mind and desire to return to a prelogical state of perception was unquestionably anticipated to some degree in Cézanne's distortions (Plate XIX). But, where the *Fauves* and Matisse were interested in analyzing and reconstructing the scene-as-a-whole into a new plastic unit, Cézanne's first interest lay always in analyzing objects. From the inherent forms of which these individual objects were constituted, he would then compose his canvas. Possibly the key to the difference in approach is that Cézanne was interested primarily in the architectonic organization of volumes, while Matisse and his followers were interested in the rhythmic interplay of lines and of flat color-areas. In any case Picasso, later, in following the route Cézanne pointed out toward a formal analysis and an emphasis on intuitional perceptions, was led not to the subtle sophisticated conceptions of Persian art but to the more direct expressions of primitive peoples, particularly to African art.

Already, for some years before the completion of Matisse's "Joie de Vivre," there had been a keen interest among the younger men in the straightforward transcriptions of folk art. Even before his departure from Pont-

Aven for Tahiti, Gauguin had apprenticed himself to the approach sculpturally, and had produced some rude carvings that today are recognized as belonging among his finest work. Rousseau le Douanier was the perfect example of the type—at once folk artist and primitive. He was a trained craftsman of delicate sensibility; his ideology was readily intelligible to Europeans. Yet, in him was preserved that freshness of vision and selective simplification that so frequently gives a character of almost abstract concept to the plastic realization of primitives and children.

Again, negro art offered a curiously intimate relationship with that of Cézanne. The negro sculptor saw thematically. He analyzed his forms to simplified but related elements, then reshaped them into new and subtle entities. Similarly, in his mind, Cézanne would flake off the constituent elements of his visual volumes to re-knit them thematically as color facets into his architectonic structures. Cézanne suggested through color the plastic themes which the primitive African expressed directly in the modeling of his materials.

In the beginning there was a temptation to *pastiche* the actual negro productions, for in them was immediately evident all that order and vitalized form which was being so eagerly sought at the time. But their fundamental architectonics, their manner of compassing a symphony of planes, and their monumentality of total effect were only gradually absorbed. The first recognizable result was a new clarity in envisaging the elemental structure beneath the natural form as we see it in Picasso's work as early as 1909 (Plate XX). While perhaps not so close in appearance to the actual negro sculpture as much of his work of the two



Photograph by courtesy of M. H. P. Roché, Paris

PLATE XX PABLO PICASSO, "MALE TORSO"

previous years, the simplification of plastic themes and repetition of them in variation is, nevertheless, still negroid in character. Again in 1909, we see similar characteristics beginning to show themselves in his landscapes—particularly in such a one as that which, owing to the notoriety it attracted at the time, is said to have given the epithet "Cubism" its permanence[3]—his "Factories at Horta" (Plate XXI).

Picasso by now had conquered all temptation to *pastiche* his negro exemplars. Nevertheless, their influence has left its mark: a broadened simplicity has appeared, inessentials have been shorn away, and, finally, the whole is related in a strictly plastic unity.

However, one feature is still there, which, in its essence, was perhaps the most antipathetic to the young painters of the time—a clearly naturalistic interest. To them, with Impressionism's loose formlessness and academicism's banality vivid in their minds, it seemed that it was naturalism which had originally put European painting on the wrong track and had held it there. Before a fresh start could be made, naturalism had to go. Its abuses were too deeply ingrained. A modified distortion, even such as had been

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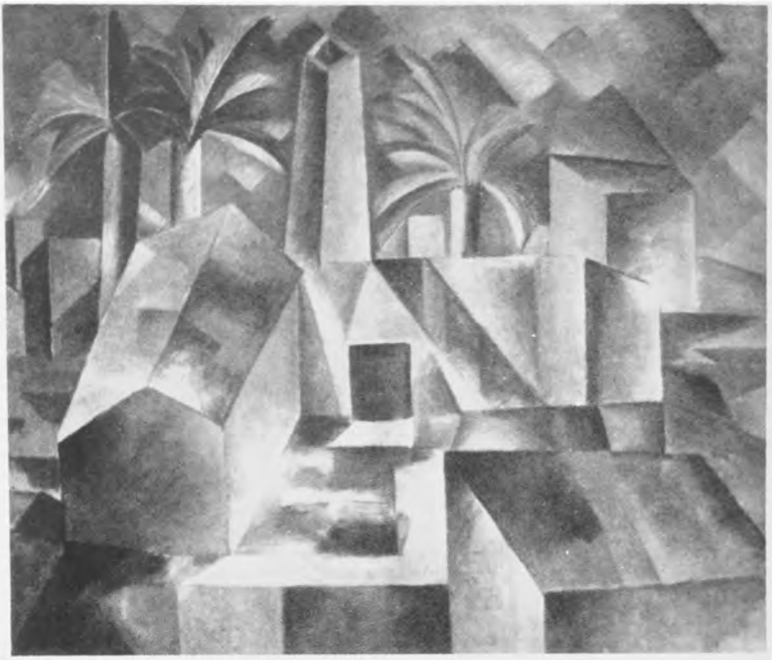
[3] In *L'Amour de l'Art*, November, 1933, André Lhote, in a footnote to an article "Naissance du cubisme," suggests: "Il n'est pas inutile de noter que c'est en 1908 à propos de Braque que le mot 'Cube' fut écrit: 'Il (Braque) meprise les formes, reduit tout, sites et figures et maisons, à des schemas géométriques, à des cubes' [Louis Vauxcelles, *Gil Blas*, November 14, 1908]."

And Léonce Rosenberg in *Cubisme et Tradition* (1920): "Souvent a été demandée l'origine du mot 'Cubisme.' Là voici. Elle date de 1908 et ce mot fut prononcé pour le première fois au jury du Salon des Indépendents. Au moment où passait une toile de Georges Braque une personne du jury s'exclama: 'Encore des cubes! Assez de cubisme.' Le mot ramassé par un journaliste fit fortune et le tour du monde colporté par Guillaume Apollinaire, et, dit on, par le peintre Henri-Matisse."



Photograph by courtesy of the Galerie Simon, Paris

PLATE XXI. PABLO PICASSO, "FACTORY AT HORTA DE EBRO," 1909

recently employed for purely plastic ends, was not enough. A complete break with any naturalistic interest which might preponderate the plastic had to be effected.

About 1909 Picasso, Braque, and some others, setting out from this broadened version of Cézanne's analytic treatment, decided that the most direct means to undermining naturalism was by an attack on its foundation, the time-honored occidental convention of conceiving space as from a fixed viewpoint outside the picture proper—in other words, the basis of linear perspective as applied to a canvas as a whole.

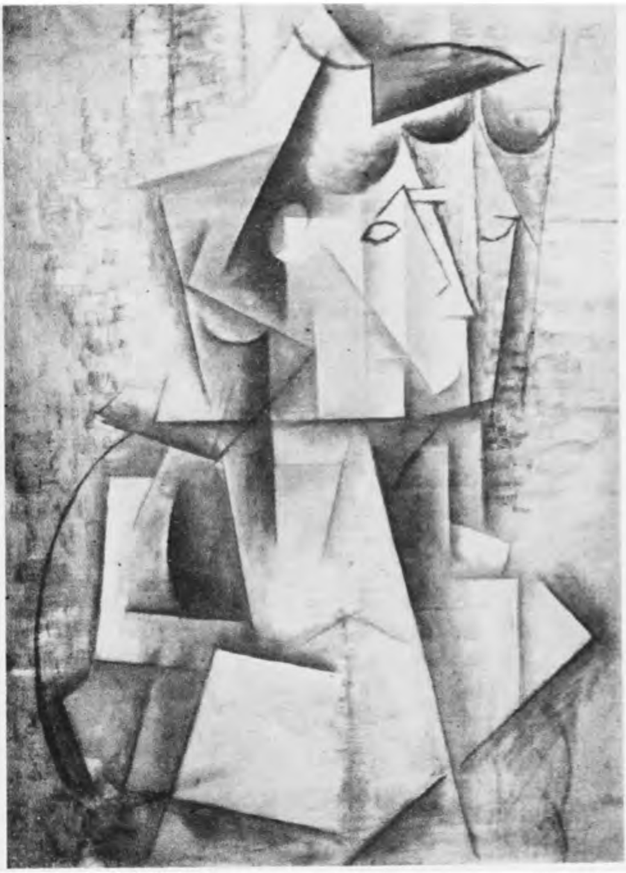
Since the discovery of a means of suggesting perspective on a plane surface in the dawn of the Renaissance, the representation of space had been a dominant interest in Western painting. From a strictly technical interest at first—a means to an end—it had gradually become an end in itself. The possibility of suggesting naturalistic forms in a work of art finally led to the impossibility of offering anything as a work of art in which the forms were not naturalistic. The result was a field of free play for technical virtuosity. Specious values soon began to predominate. The plastic organization became steadily more and more subordinate to the *trompe l'œil*, and plastic expression atrophied in its confinement to limited forms.

Space up to the time of the "Cubists" (as Picasso and his associates were now called, consequent upon the exhibition of his canvas "Factories at Horta" had been conceived as from a fixed point outside the picture proper. The picture was, as it were, a window into space. Objects took their places with an apparent three-dimensionality in this space in strict keeping with the rules of linear perspective: volume masked volume, or offered a surface or fragment of a surface to the observer as the fixed viewpoint dictated.

This conception of space, according to Picasso and his followers, was too narrow. From it they claimed no true sense of space as such—its extension in all directions—could be had. The painter's vision should be, as it were, free to move about within the picture-space. In this way certain elements might be envisaged and made use of, which, if the whole were treated naturalistically, would be masked and, so, invisible.

This theory in its essence was merely a new twist of the argument Matisse and the *Fauves* had made use of, in turning from conventional perspective to a selective analysis of the visual field. Only, instead of roaming *over* the field, these "Cubists" asked that the eye might be considered as penetrating *into*, and roaming about *within*, the picture-space. In this way it would be free to see and select any facet of an object potentially therein—rear, top, or bottom—as it pleased. The result was the possibility of organizing into a new plastic unit various disparate aspects of the objects represented. For example, in a 1913 Picasso conception of a still life (Plate XIII) we may recognize several segments of a guitar seen from varying viewpoints—definitely naturalistic fragments—arranged side by side to produce a concrete plastic organization. Out of these selected fragments of a naturalistic whole the cubist has created a new formal organization of his own, much as another painter might arrange the naturalistic units of his composition.

However, earlier (about 1910), a violent reaction had evinced itself among the Cubists against the brilliant "*pochades*" of the *Fauves* and their successors the Ger-



Collection of Alfred Flechtheim

PLATE XXII. PABLO PICASSO, "PORTRAIT," 1913

man Expressionists. The result had been a monochrome period of grays, olives, slates, and browns, particularly notable in the work of Braque and Picasso of this period (Plate XXII). And it was undoubtedly in part due to this resolution of the color-pattern practically to a monotone that a reaction set in. The focal points of the naturalistic convention had gone; new dominants of some sort had to be found. Again with the decomposition of space into cubes a further problem arose—one, however, that, to judge by the militantly anti-representational sentiment of the generation, the Cubists were sorry to see come up: now that the absolute perspective had been abandoned, the logic of natural appearances could no longer be relied on to give a picture unity. And it became at once evident that the canvas had to remain a hopeless congeries of line- and color-forms or find its unification on a strictly plastic basis.

Thus a crucial blow was struck. The first decisive step had been taken away from the old vision. For, with the breaking-down of the absolute perspective, the illusionistic window-concept of the picture had to go. The canvas became once again a primarily plastic organization of line and color on a flat surface.

Yet, this was merely a beginning. The Cubists' work up to this point had been only a critical fingerpost. It had shown the way to new possibilities. But what had actually happened, in the exchange of the old absolute perspective for a relative one, was merely the replacement of the single fixed perspective in the picture-as-a-whole by a variety of points of view, as we see in "Le Lavabo" (Plate XXIII), a 1913 composition by Juan Gris—a different perspective for each of the small compartments into which the picture-space had been divided. And while, as a unit, the picture

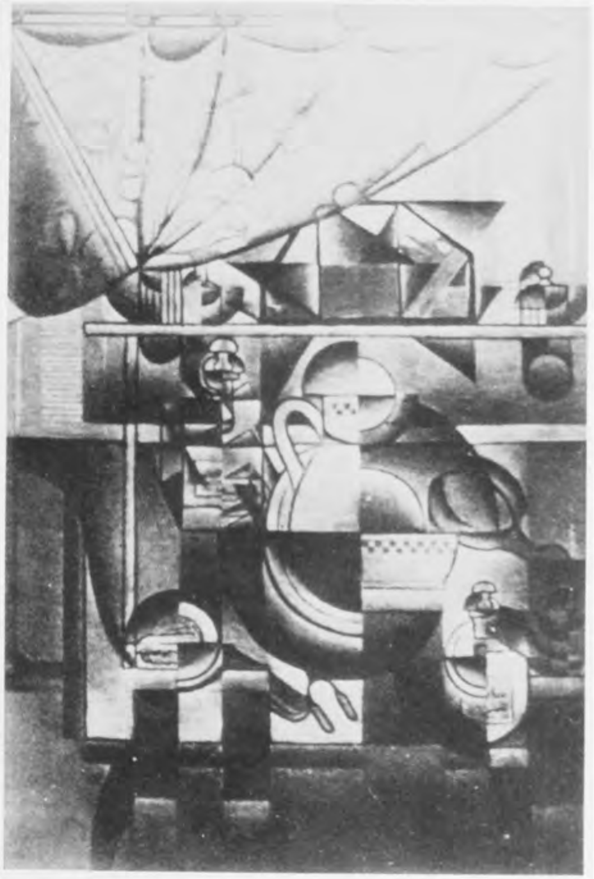


PLATE XXIII. JUAN GRIS, "LE LAVABO," 1913

was no longer a naturalistic representation, it still remained a composition of the naturalistic representations contained in each of these constituent cells.

Consequently, for the purist the limitations to expression of the naturalistic convention and its capacity for creating specious interests still survived. As Mondrian put it,

> By a plastic art that is pure we mean a plastic art based purely on relationships, and those relationships purely of line and color—that is to say, not such as are dictated by arbitrary forms. These latter trammel the pure plastic expression in forcing on it their character of descriptive literary expression.

Again in breaking with nineteenth-century painting, one of the chief issues had been the looseness of pictorial organization which grew out of the Impressionists' analyses of light and light on forms. For the younger men this disintegration had symbolized a decadence. They wished to throw off the old. They considered theirs a period of beginnings—a new archaism. But "archaic periods," they asserted, "are always distinguished by their extreme simplicity of forms. They are synthetic and architectonic in character."[4] So from this point of view also, a strict adherence to the breaking-up of the picture-space into smaller perspective cells would have appeared reactionary, or at best a cul-de-sac.

In sum, it was evident that, on one hand, if plastic elements were to retain the degree of naturalistic representationalism which they now offered, a new plastic dominant had to be found; on the other, if the disintegration of natural forms had gone thus far, what reason for not going farther?

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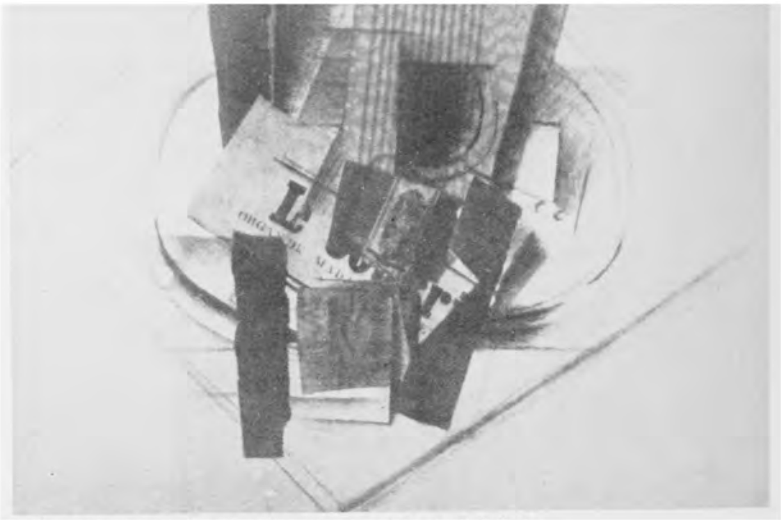
[4] W. Baumeister, *Cahiers d'Art,* No. 4, 1931.

One solution for the former dilemma came, curiously enough, through what are termed *papiers collés.*

This vogue of *papier collés* among the Cubists came first as a direct gesture against technical snobbism in the arts. A *papier collé* was "something anyone gifted with a native sensibility could produce." Through it the Cubists strove to express their disrespect for the superficial side of plastic expression—that is to say, a technical competency, or even virtuosity which might be acquired and did not predicate any natural need or talent to speak in the medium. In this rôle the *papier collé* played a part very similar to that of Kurt Schwitters' later Dadaist "Rubbish" pictures. And in their common dependence on subconscious or "chance" formal organizations (commoner, of course, in the Dada pieces than in the earlier works; nevertheless, existent in both) they and the "Merzbild" were directly related.

These so-called *papiers collés* at first were constructed of bits of paper, fragments of match boxes, playing-cards, and rags pasted to a board or canvas—possibly related by a line or two of pencil or a dab of color (Plate XXIV). But, begun as a gesture of protest, they soon took a new character. The possibility of organizing compositions out of these contrasting textures by a suggested interplay of lines and volumes quickly caught the painter's attention. Here, also, was a means to a new plastic dominant for their compositions of naturalistic fragments. And soon the cubists took to producing pseudo-*papiers collés* in oils, or *gouache*, retaining the interest in texture-contrasts even to the extent of mixing sand and the like with their pigments (Plate XXV). A new breadth in plastic elements was compassed. And through this, in time, it was possible for Braque, Picasso, Gris, and Léger to leave their compositions of broken ele-



Gallery of Living Art, New York City. Courtesy of Mr. A. E. Gallatin

PLATE XXIV. GEORGES BRAQUE, "LE PAQUET DE TABAC," 1913

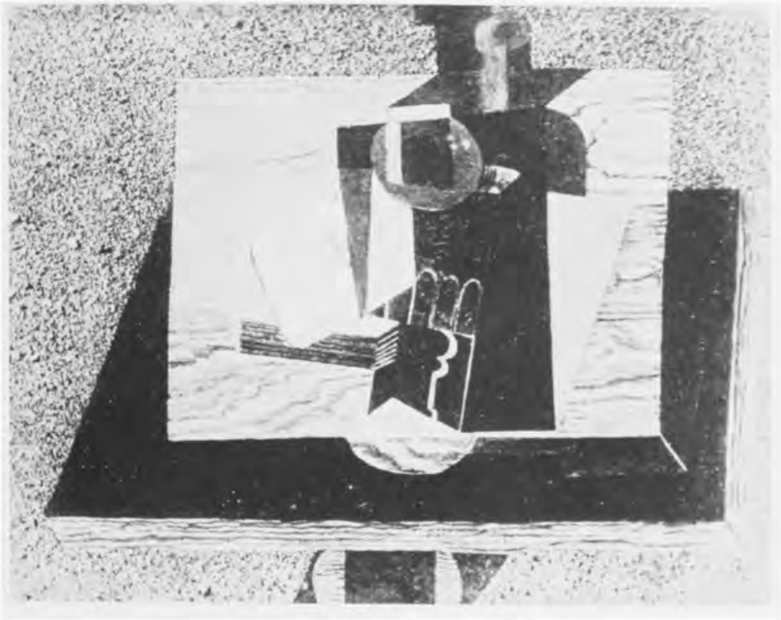


PLATE XXV. PABLO PICASSO, "STILL LIFE," 1916

ments behind for a genuinely new "archaism"—an extreme simplicity and monumentality of form, with no necessary naturalistic association. This we can see very clearly exemplified in comparing an early canvas such as Fernand Léger's "The Woman in Blue" (Plate XXVI), painted in 1913 and still definitely reminiscent of the Impressionist technique, with his "Elément Méchanique," 1925 (Plate XXVII), at present in the Guggenheim Collection in New York; or a Picasso of 1913 (Plate XXII) with his well-known "Seated Woman" of 1927,[5] or such a canvas as his 1929 "Woman in an Armchair" seen in Plate XIV.

But this was only one branch of the trend. At the same time that Braque, Picasso, and their associates were experimenting with *papiers collés*, others were carrying the analysis of naturalistic forms to further logical lengths. After a "relative perspective" had been established for the picture as a whole, it was seen that there was no need that an absolute perspective should persist in the various cells into which the picture-space had been divided.

And mass, which, on the basis of absolute perspective, had been regarded as the transcendent unification of bodies, naturally came next. For, when the spectator imagines space as something which, on the principle of relative perspective, can be looked into and out from at the same time—when the convex view and the concave view of a body may be depicted side by side—mass, in the usual sense of the word, must cease to have any necessary existence. Matter need no longer be represented as opaque—as, for example, in a work of Lissitzky or of Gabo, where the surfaces in celluloid are transparent and suggest a rhythm in their apparent interpenetration of one another; or again,

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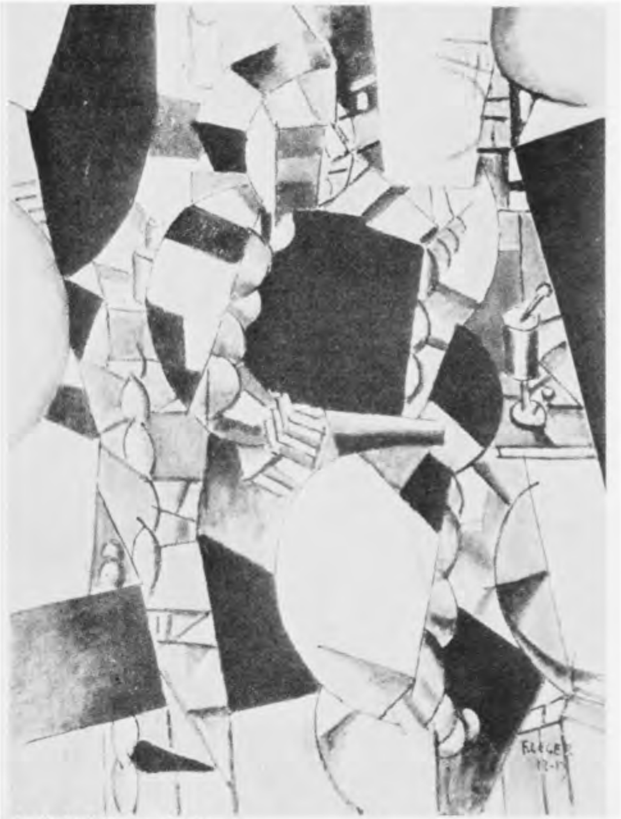
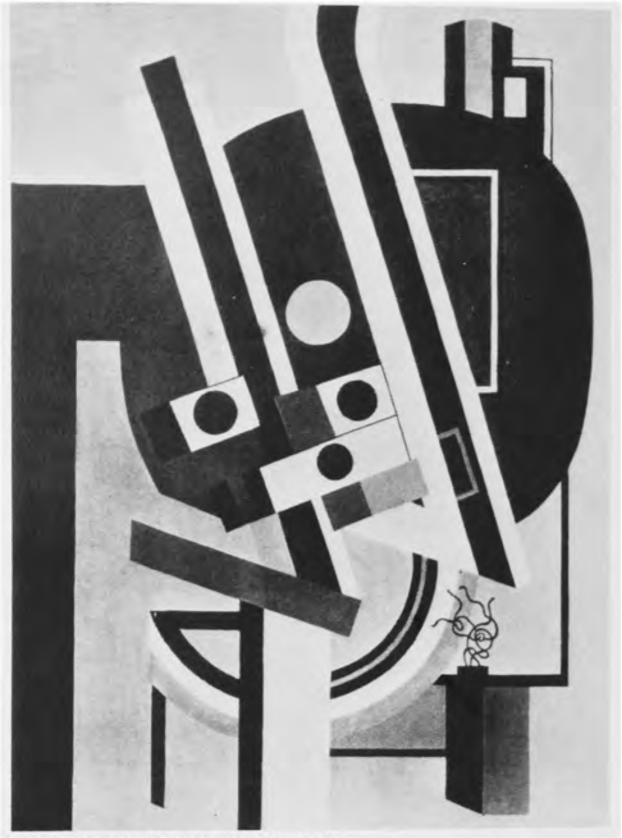
[5] Now in the collection of Mr. James Thrall Soby, Hartford, Connecticut.



La Roche Collection, Paris

PLATE XXVI. FERNAND LEGER, "THE WOMAN IN BLUE," 1912



S. R. Guggenheim Collection, New York City

PLATE XXVII. FERNAND LEGER, "ELEMENT MECHANIQUE," 1925

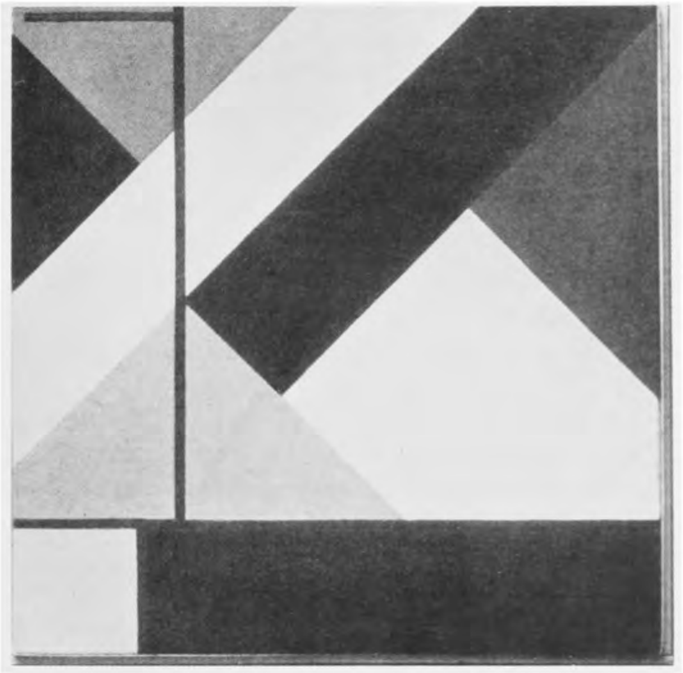


PLATE XXVIII. THEO VAN DOESBERG, "CONTRE-COMPOSITION SIMULTANEE," 1929

mass may be decomposed into simple surfaces, or simple lines, as it was in the Mondrian (Plate XV); or, in a composition by a former associate of Mondrian—also a member of the "de Stijl group"—Théo van Doesberg (Plate XXVIII).

In short, naturalistic illusionism has been the bane of the younger painters throughout the twentieth century. With Hans Arp they have all felt at one time or another: "I like nature but not its substitutes. Illusionistic art is a substitute for nature."

The painter must always keep close to nature as the only vital source of elemental forms. He realizes this. We have seen it from Mondrian's, Arp's, and Picasso's own words. And, in considering his efforts to escape illusionism, particularly in the character these efforts have assumed during the last thirty years, it is only fair to keep this before us. Then, if we grant our own minds the right to synthesize the separate visual concepts we pick up in looking over a scene (and even to infer so much that is invisible), why should we disallow the painter or sculptor a similar procedure in creating a personalized plastic concept?

SUPERREALISM

SUPERREALISM

Today criticism's first responsibility in approaching a contemporary movement in the arts is the location of that movement in its proper historical and environmental perspective.

The rôle of "village explainer" is no longer the prime requisite of the critic. It is accepted that every art is a language peculiar to itself. What is distinctive of one art cannot be expressed in another. Every work of art has a content coexistent with, and inseparable from, its medium and the technical use of that medium. As a result a translation of such a content can never be wholly complete.

A fresh mode of expression can only be understood by tracing its development back to its sources or provocations. The work of art speaks for itself, but the critic's duty is to hold the observer's or reader's attention to the work of art, while assisting him to place it historically and environmentally. This done, the widest polarities of relationship will have their rationale. Even the humorless gelidities of the elephants in Leconte de Lisle's celebrated poem, appearing and disappearing in their classical dignity and grandeur, will be forced to recognize the sons of their sins in Kurt Schwitters' song:

> They must be curious trees indeed, where the big
> Elephants go walking,
> without bumping each other,
> without bumping each other,
> without bumping each other,
> without bumping each other,
> without bumping each other,
> without bumping each other![1]

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[1] From "Revolution: Causes and Outbreak of the Great and Glorious Revolution in Revon—(1919)," English translation by Eugène Jolas in *Transition*, No. 8 (Paris, November, 1927).

However, as Mr. Edmund Wilson says in the first chapter of his *Axel's Castle*, "in attempting to write literary history one must guard against giving the impression that these movements and counter-movements necessarily follow one another in a punctual and well-generaled fashion—as if eighteenth century reason had been cleanly put to rout by nineteenth century Romanticism, which then proceeded to hold the field till it was laid by the heels by Naturalism. . . . What really happens is, of course, that one set of methods and ideas is not completely superseded by another, but that, on the contrary, it thrives in its teeth." For example, Flaubert's prose, Mr. Wilson continues, "learned to see and feel with the delicate senses of Romanticism, at the same time that Flaubert is disciplining and criticising the Romantic temperament. . . ."

And this same holds for the history of movements in painting. Superrealism considered in isolation may seem as rootless as it may seem incomprehensible. Yet, we have only to follow the course of its development back a few years to come on certain of its most vitally contributive elements as bases of Dada. And Dada similarly considered in its maturity may almost totally conceal any suggestion of the expressionistic, futuristic, or cubistic factors which went into its beginnings and are evident to an informed scrutiny. In the arts, what is not newest has a way of fading out of sight after its original *succès de scandale*, until it returns, scarcely noticed, to a quiet orthodoxy. Superrealism seems difficult to relate to that with which we have developed a certain familiarity, only because the transitional steps have slipped our minds.

By 1911, painting in Paris had come to a new parting of the ways. The last quarter of the nineteenth century had seen Cézanne pointing out a fresh direction. Under his leadership interest had turned, from an analysis of light and light-effects on form, to an analysis of form itself. The first decade of the twentieth century had developed this interest along various lines; and finally the most complete and austere analyses were achieved by Braque and Picasso in that relatively monochrome period of their work which dates from 1910 and 1911. Beyond a work of this period by either painter, toward the same end, there was evidently little to be accomplished. Either a step had to be taken backward in the hope of thus being in a better position to set out along a new route; the analytic approach had to give way to a new synthesis; or quite a new mode of formal analysis had to be undertaken. And eventually, one by one, all three of these expedients were adopted: the first by the Futurists, the second by what might be termed the classical Cubists, and the third by such groups as the Purists, the Neoplasticians, and the Constructivists.

And, curiously enough, the first defection from the main line of the so-called "Cubist" development had its origin not in Paris—but in Italy, in Turin. There in a public gathering, at the Teatro Chiarella in March, 1910, five young Italian artists—Boccioni, Carrà, Russolo, Balla, and Severini—with the poet Marinetti as their spokesman, forswore all allegiance to the ideals of their fellow *avant-gardistes*, accusing them of being in reality "masked academicians"—passéists, and asserting that they themselves were the only true "futurists."

Whether or not all the analytic activity and material interest in the construction of bodies that had been so markedly evident during the period was merely a characteristic of the spirit of the times, in painting Cézanne had been canonized patron of the approach. And one of the stones the Futurists had consciously or unconsciously selected upon which to whet their resentment was the desire he had expressed "to do Poussin over after nature." Futurism's prime contention was that Cubism "in order to kill Impressionism had led painting back to the old academic forms." They claimed that the only way to surpass what Impressionism had accomplished in the field of painting was to go beyond it, along the same route it had taken. They described themselves as "primitive Impressionists." They explained that bodies and objects exerted formal influences on other bodies or objects near them and interacted on one another just as lights and colors were supposed to have interacted in the Impressionist conception. And the only way to depict this phenomenon was by breaking up form as the Impressionists had broken up color, the basis of unity being the rhythm of the suggested movement achieved in the disintegration. And in such work as Severini's "Au Bal Tabarin" (Plate XXIX) (despite its evident reminiscences of analytic Cubism) we have what may be taken as a representative illustration of the approach.

Movement with the Futurists became a fetish—more, almost a metaphysical concept. They spoke of "the physical transcendentalism of objects which tended to the infinite by their 'lines-of-force,'" the continuity of which the Futurists' intuitions measured. They claimed Cubism only froze the plastic conception into lifelessness by its static inelasticity. According to them, it was because the Post-Impressionists, Synthetists, and Cubists were all so

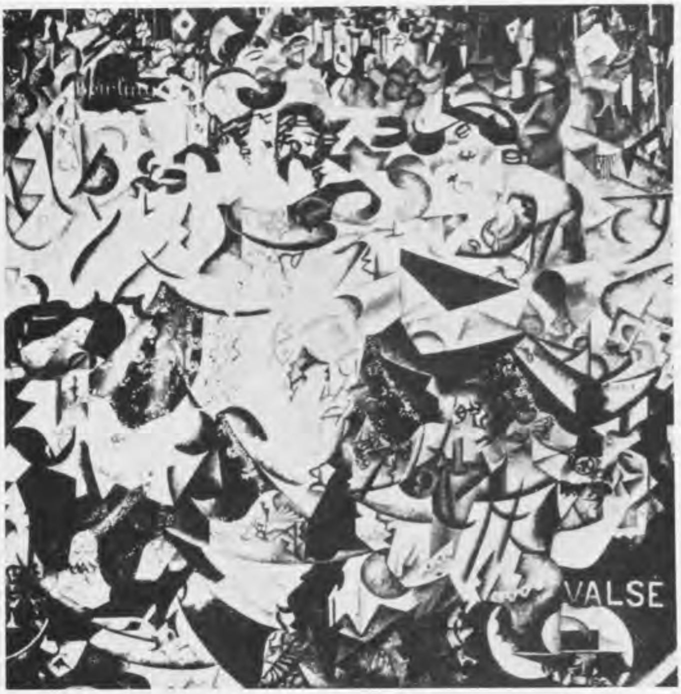

PLATE XXIX. GINO SEVERINI, "AU BAL TABARIN"

implacably set on painting the dead, immobile phases of nature that they adored Poussin, Ingres, and Corot.[1]

From the Futurists' viewpoint an interest in the static was arrantly reactionary. The only view which really turned toward the future must be such a one as theirs—in search of a mode of expression based on movement. This, according to them, had never been sought before. For them, movement effected a desirable dislocation and dismemberment of bodies. Vibration, they said, multiplies incalculably each object: "a running horse has not four legs but twenty"—a fact which Balla in his famous picture exemplified for the dog as well (Plate XXX). They wanted to destroy all the realistic forms and evident details. A picture for them was a synthesis of that which one remembers with that which one sees. They were unwilling to be restricted by the immobile form: they were interested in painting "the states of souls." "The painter," according to them, "carries about with him in his own mind the landscapes that he should put on a canvas."[2]

If we judge Futurism on the quality of its actual plastic production, it must take, as a movement, a definitely insignificant place. The work of its members was feeble and dated. However, in its character of a naïvely couched protest against the materialistic interests of its time it assumes a genuine importance. Here, even before the war, we have a metaphysical preoccupation expressed in plastic terms. Like Dada that was to come, Futurism had its "dis-

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[1] It is interesting, in this connection, to read in André Salmon's *L'Art Vivant* (Paris, 1920), "that the one reproduction to be found in every Cubist's *atelier*—and the only one in Braque's—was Seurat's "Chahut" (Plate XXXI); also, to compare the "Chahut" with such a work as Balla's "Running Dog" or Duchamp's "Nude Descending the Stairs."

[2] *Manifeste des peintres futuristes.*

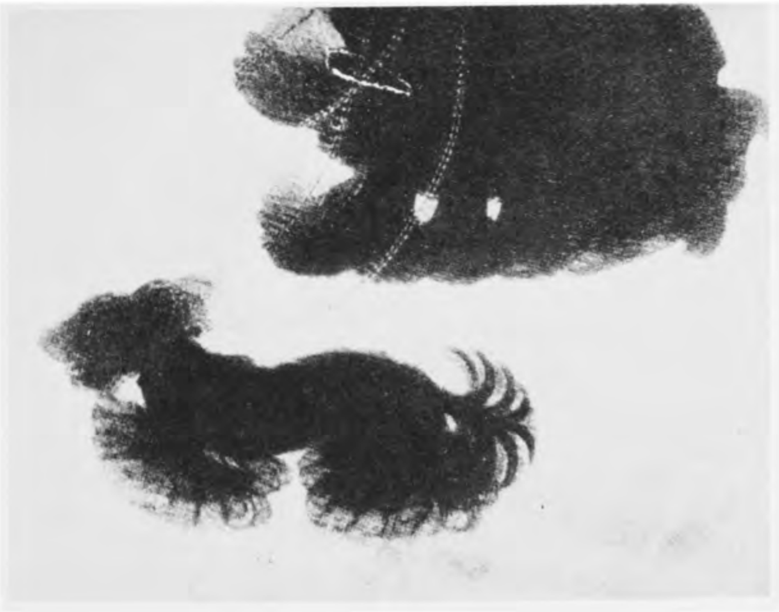
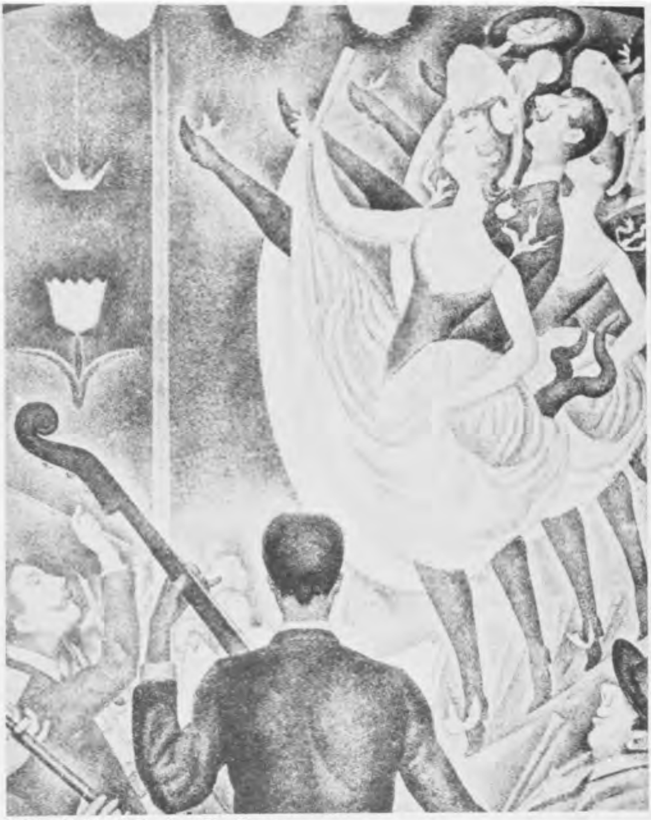


PLATE XXX. GIACOMO BALLA, "DOG RUNNING"



Kröller-Müller Collection, The Hague

PLATE XXXI. GEORGES SEURAT, "LA GRANDE CHAHUT"

gusts." It endeavored to make use of its concept of movement to destroy in effigy what it disliked. Then out of this destruction of static form it strove to build up a world of subjective representation by plastic means. Later, Expressionism was to elaborate its concept, as Marinetti expressed it, of "painting the states of souls." Dada was to repeat and develop the dictum of one of its manifestos, which read: "The public ought also to convince itself that to comprehend aesthetic experiences to which it is not habituated, it must forget completely its intellectual culture." And the Superrealists were to paint landscapes which they had been carrying around in their minds—some even since childhood. And as an initial step to these later developments, Futurism first pointed out the way for Marcel Duchamp to turn the depiction of movement as he conceived in the turning handle of his early "Coffee Mill" (Plate XXXII) to a means for shattering form as exemplified in his later "Nude Descending the Stairs." From there to Dada, which, as Hans Arp explained "wanted to change the perceptible world of man today into a pious senseless world without reason," was only a step. As a matter of fact, Dada's basic ideal, as further described by Arp, was not far from Futurism's own, inasmuch as it also "wanted to destroy the rationalist swindle for man and incorporate him again humbly in nature."[3]

However, the redirection of the analytic approach in European painting which took place between 1910 and 1911 took two other lines which were likewise to meet in Dadaism before going on to their fuller development in Superrealism: one of these toward a purer plastic con-

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[3] "Notes from a Diary," *Transition*, No. 21 (Paris, March, 1932).

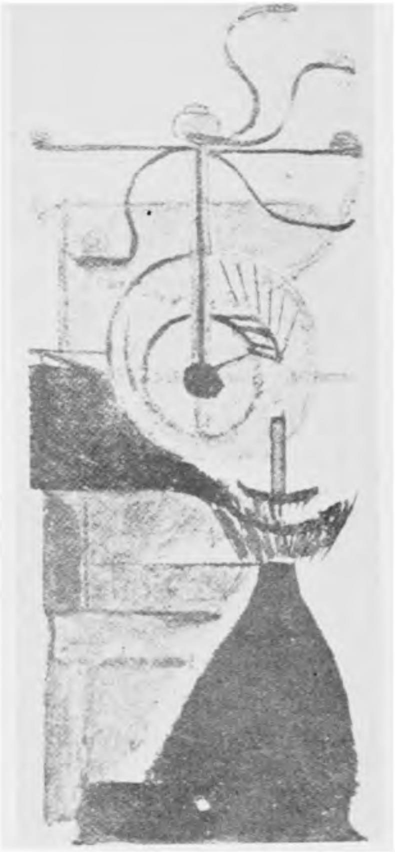

PLATE XXXII. MARCEL DUCHAMP, "THE COFFEE MILL"

cept; and the other toward an elaboration of Braque's and Picasso's *collage* interest.

The outbreak of the war in 1914 caught Hans Arp, a young Alsatian, in Paris. He was sympathetically familiar with the work of the leading Cubists and before his arrival in Paris had been considerably influenced by the German, Klee. However, at the time the tide began to turn from the established analytic procedure of "Cubism-out-of-Cézanne," Arp found his tendency lay in neither of these directions. And by 1915 he had achieved a plastic austerity and simplification of form (Plate XVIII) that was as far from French Cubism on one hand as from the current German "Blaue Reiter" influences on the other.

At the same time, another young German, Max Ernst, who had likewise worked in the "Blaue Reiter" direction, was now turning his interest toward Paris—particularly toward Picasso's *papiers collés* and "constructions." But to their spirit and technique Ernst was adding another ingredient—a phantasmagoric effect similar to that which Giorgio di Chirico had succeeded in giving his work through an extremely personalized use of chiaroscuro and perspective between the years 1912 and 1914 (Plate XXXIII). With a difference, however, for while Chirico's conceptions had a nightmarish character about them, they offered also a vaguely familiar sort of dream-logic. On the other hand, in Ernst's developments of the grotesque (Plate XXXIV) there was always present a definite illogicality and a disturbing suggestion of some incomprehensible satire, both of which came later to be associated with Dada.

But Arp did not succeed in working his way across the French frontier to a refuge in Zurich until late in 1915. And

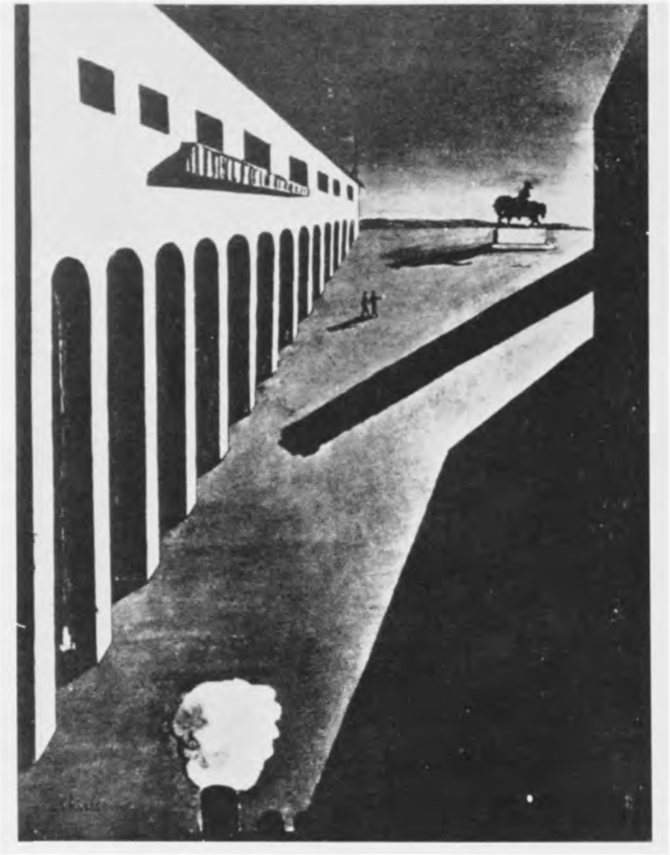

PLATE XXXIII. GIORGIO DI CHIRICO, "LE DEPART DU POETE"

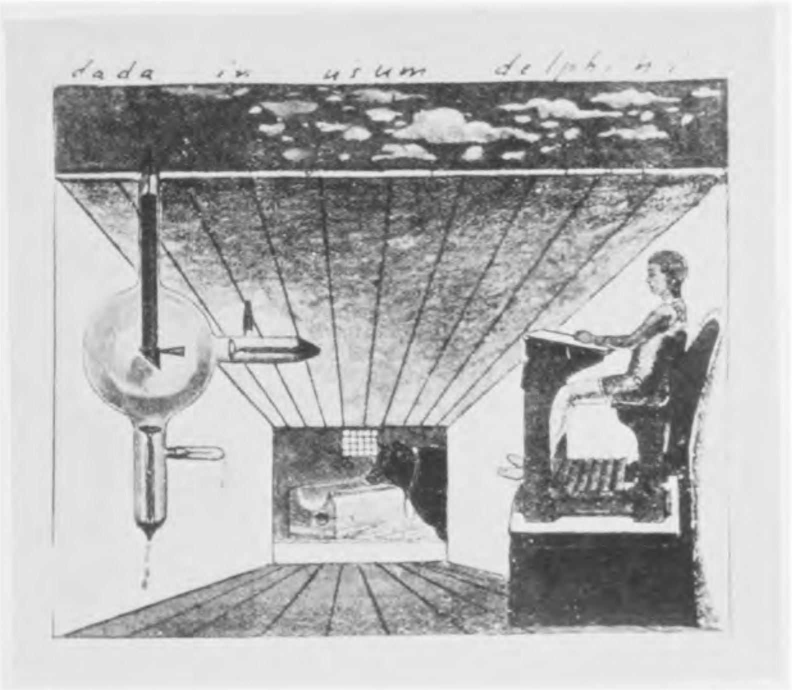
dada in usum delphini

PLATE XXXIV. MAX ERNST, "DADA IN USUM DELPHINI" *(papier collé)*

it was not until June, 1916, that he, with two German poets —Huelsenbeck and Hugo Ball—and a Roumanian, Tristan Tzara, published the first number of their review, the *Cabaret Voltaire,* out of which the Dadaist movement was born.[4]

Basically a literary and philosophical movement, Dada in its beginnings did not achieve any striking conquests in the plastic field. Arp continued along purist lines in both his wood reliefs and his illustrations. Most of the exhibitions which took place during the Zurich phase of Dada were merely typical *avant-garde* assemblages of the period —extremely catholic in character. Picabia, Marcel Duchamp, and Man Ray did, it is true, contribute; but their offerings, particularly those of the two former, were in the nature of half-humorous and half-sardonic gestures rather than essentially plastic expressions. It was not until Ernst, Arp, and another German named Baargeld had organized their Dada group in Cologne that the interest of the movement centered to any notable degree on the plastic arts. There in 1919 Ernst and Arp began to collaborate on their now famous "Fatagaga" series of *collages.* And from one of these (Plate XXXV) we can see the turn that the Dada

---

[4] However, the name of the movement had been arrived at somewhat earlier, as we are advised in a characteristic Dada recording of the event which appeared in a number of Dada entitled *Dada-au-grand-air* and published at Tarenz-bei-Imst (Tyrol) in 1921:

"Je déclare que Tristan Tzara a trouvé le mot Dada, le 8 février 1916, à 6 heures du soir; j'étais présent avec mes douze enfants lorsque Tzara a prononcé pour la première fois ce mot qui a déchainé en nous un enthousiasme légitime. Cela se passait au café Terrasse à Zurich, et je portais une brioche dans la narine gauche. Je suis persuadé que ce mot n'a aucune importance, et qu'il n'y a que les imbéciles et les professeurs espagnols qui puissent s'intéresser aux dates. Ce qui nous intéresse est l'esprit dada, et nous étions tous dada avant l'existence de Dada ... ."

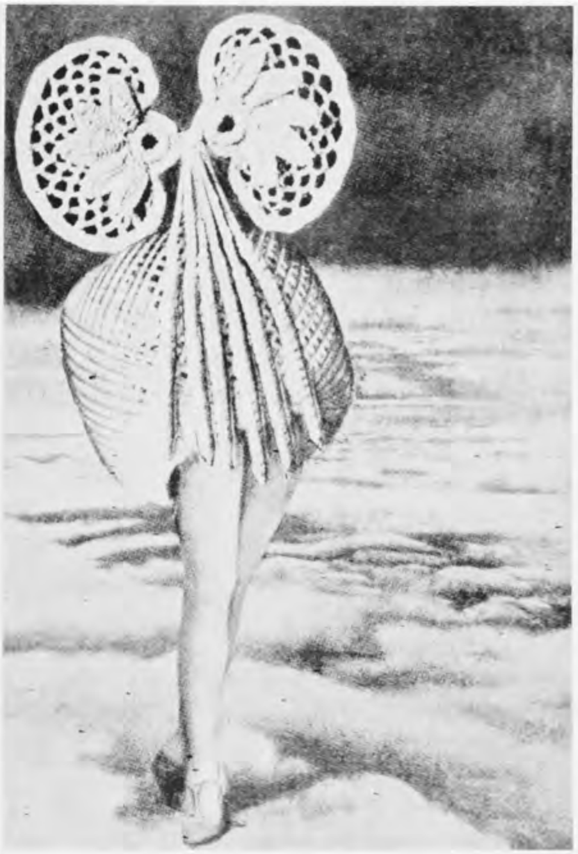

PLATE XXXV. MAX ERNST, "FATAGAGA" (*collage*)

approach had given the spirit and technique inherited from the Cubists.

In the name "Fatagaga" itself we have an exemplification of that appeal to the absurd which is so universally associable with the work of the group. It was contrived from an abbreviation of the term "fabrication de tableaux garantis gazométriques." And while the humor of the conception is immediately striking, we already have in it a hint of the mysterious, the otherworldly, which we are soon to find in Superrealism. What was absurd in Dada was then to take an air of wonder. On the other hand, it is interesting to note how far behind it has left the static and reasoned organization of a Cubist work, such as a 1913 *papier collé* of Picasso or of Braque (Plate XXIV); and how it anticipates, yet how much of its caustic whimsicality must still disappear before, the blithe plastic lyricism of a Miró *collage* of the next decade will have a free field (Plate XXXVI).

Again in a Schwitters "Merzbild" (Plate XXXVII) with its agglomeration of rags, tags, odds and ends, we feel a contempt similar to that of Dada for all that had been emptily hallowed as "art" in the recent past. With the technical appanages of the academician even the very grammar of art is rejected. To Schwitters, as to the Dadaists, conventions disguised emptiness, crutched the unfit. Schwitters' credo was, in his own words, "All an artist spits is art."[5] His ideal was to strip expression of its pretentiousness and to bring a freedom and spontaneity. Beside one of his characteristic pieces, such as that in Plate XXXVII, a Picasso construction looks cold and classic in its evident, considered organization. And in Schwitters' intuitional,

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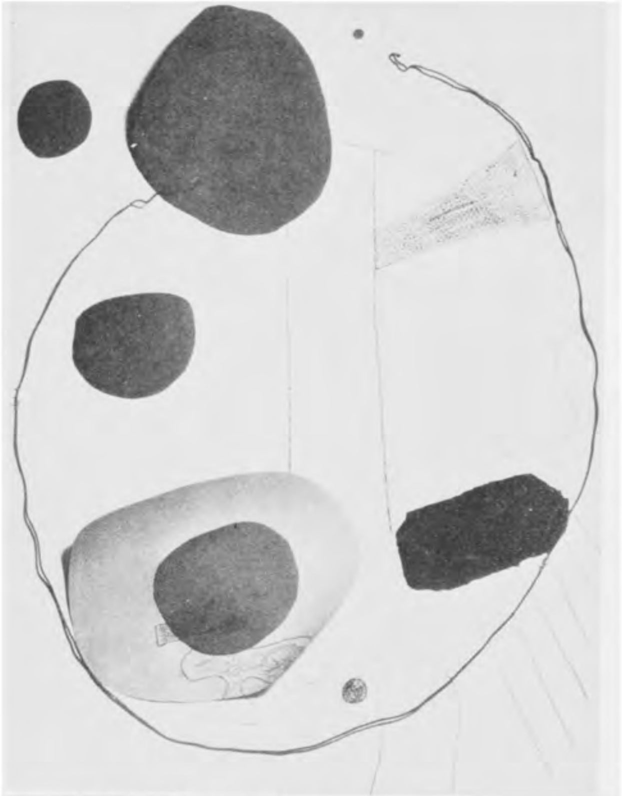
[5] El Lissitzsky and Hans Arp, *Die Kuntismen* (Munich, 1925).



Photograph by courtesy of the "Cahiers d'Art," Paris

PLATE XXXVI. JOAN MIRO, "COMPOSITION" (*collage*), 1930

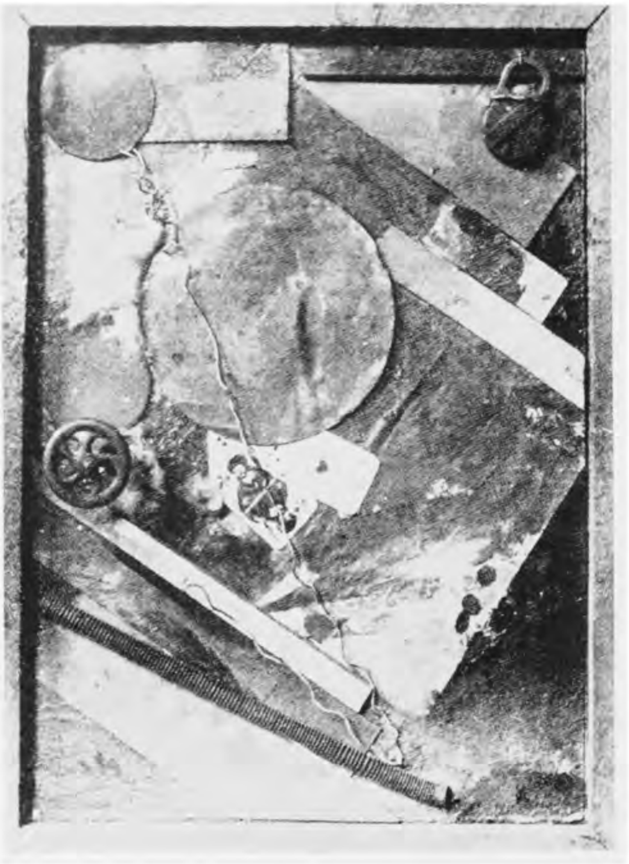


PLATE XXXVII. KURT SCHWITTERS, "MERZBILD"

apparently haphazard, associations of forms and materials, we have already a hint of what, having shed its air of cynicism, will later give Miró's Superrealist arrangements their naïve child-dream character (Plate XXXVIII).

Dada as a movement has probably left no work of genius. As Henri Fluchère[6] has said: "It was more an *état d'esprit* than a school." Its material unproductiveness, however, is of small consequence. Its principles helped to clear the ground more than any positive work could. Its manifestos were a strange mixture of nonsense and a terrible seriousness. Its cruel irony had stripped both "literature" (and "art" in general) of all false pretention. The Dadaists had found themselves in a society built on reason; they saw that society embroiled in what promised to be a suicidal war. Something was rotten. They felt a contempt for it all; they felt they ought to "spit it out," as they said. They felt that reason had dried up everything worth while. Things had to be brought back to a more human ground. And through Dada, humor and fantasy were given once more their true importance in human affairs. Zest came again with the *cocasse* and the unexpected. "The sordidness of reality made way for a new kind of 'marvellous' from which man had been too long led astray."[7]

Because of their contempt for reason the Dadaists hoisted the banner of spontaneity and chance associations. Tzara picked the words for one of his poems out of a hat. Chance association led to automatic writing and an interest in the subconscious. "Reason," they claimed, "was antagonistic to the spirit: it constantly turns toward the useful and mechanically quenches any gratuitous impulse of the spirit." And when Dada's survivors in Paris finally

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[6] "Surréalisme," *Scrutiny*, December, 1932.

[7] Henri Fluchère, *ibid.*

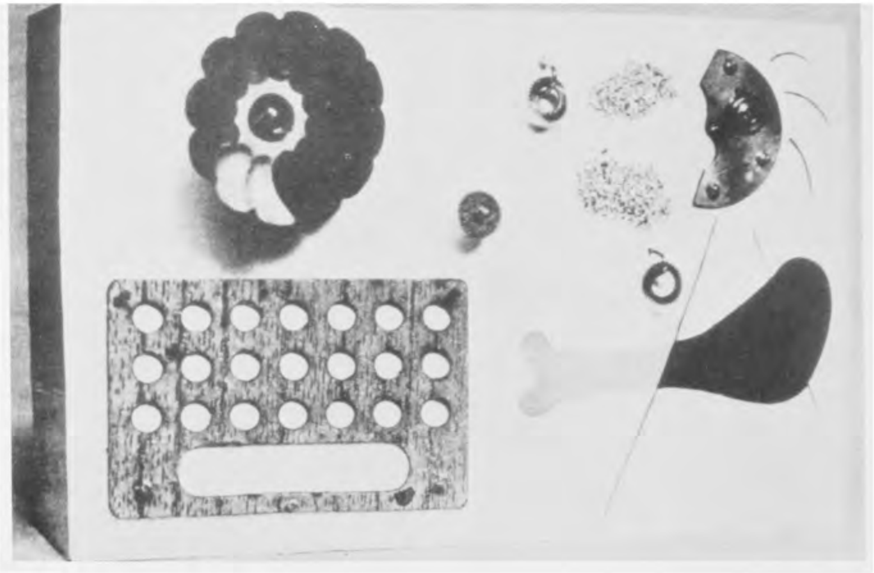


PLATE XXXVIII. JOAN MIRO, "ARRANGEMENT"

achieved a credo for Superrealism, we have its formulation in André Breton's words:

> "The association of thoughts or images must not be led by the cold dry tool of logical reason which works under the control of all manner of preoccupations foreign to the normal character of expression. . . . .
>
> "Superrealism is based upon a belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association which have been hitherto neglected, in the omnipotence of the dream, in the disinterested play of thought. . . . .
>
> "I believe in the future resolution of those two seemingly contradictory states, dream and reality, into a sort of absolute reality, a *surréalité* if it may so be called."[8]

The life of the unconscious became one of the most imperative preoccupations of the Superrealists. Aragon, one of the co-founders of the movement with Breton, writes in his *Le Paysan de Paris:* "Nothing can assure me of reality. Nothing—neither the exactness of logic nor the strength of a sensation—can assure me that I do not base it on the delirium of interpretation." It was this attitude that made one of the main points of departure for the Superrealists. With them it was not objects, but the images they provoke in the individual, that are the material of art. And the *cocasse* of Dada became the *merveilleux*[9] of Superrealism: the magic realism of the dream-world set in what Futurism had once hinted at—"the landscapes of the mind."[10]

The discovery of precursors along these lines for the

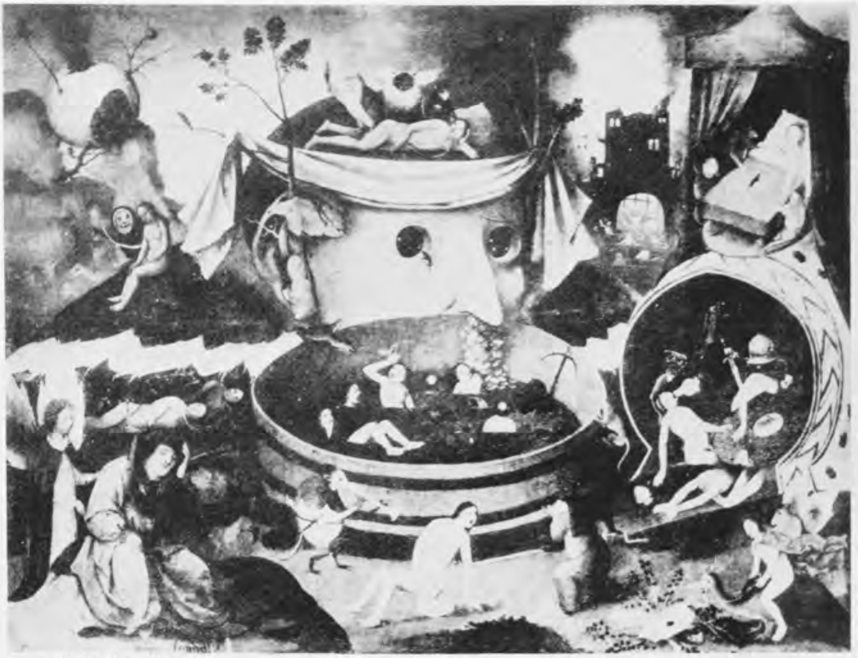
---

[8] André Breton, *Manifeste du Surréalisme* (Paris, 1924).

[9] "Ce qui caracterise le miracle, ce qui fait crier au miracle, est sans doute un peu le surprise .... .

Le miracle est un désordre inattendre, une disproportion surprenante."—L. Aragon, *La Peinture au Defi.*

[10] The first formal group exhibition of Superrealist painting was held at the Galerie Pierre, Paris, in November, 1925.



Lazaro Collection, Madrid

PLATE XXXIX. HIERONYMUS BOSCH, "FANTASY"

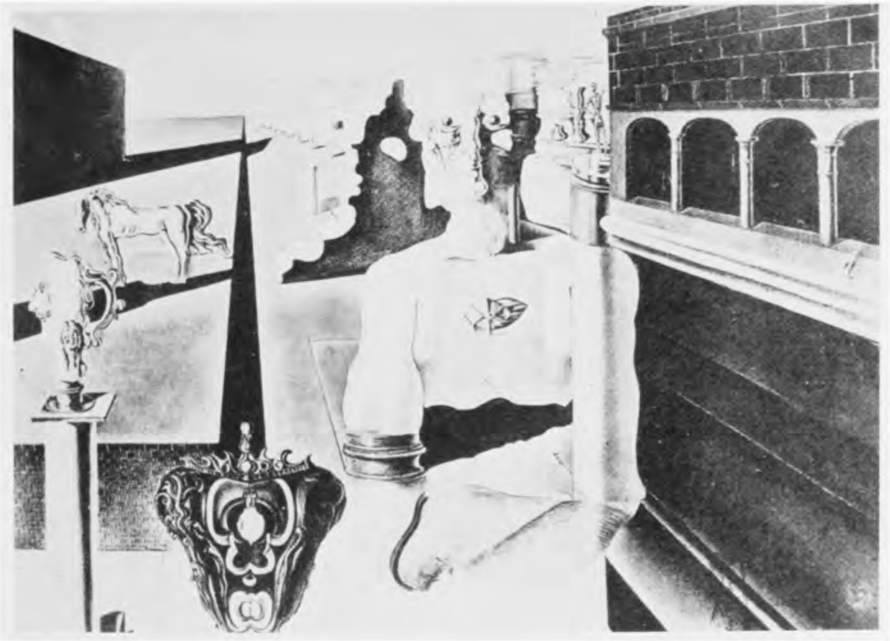
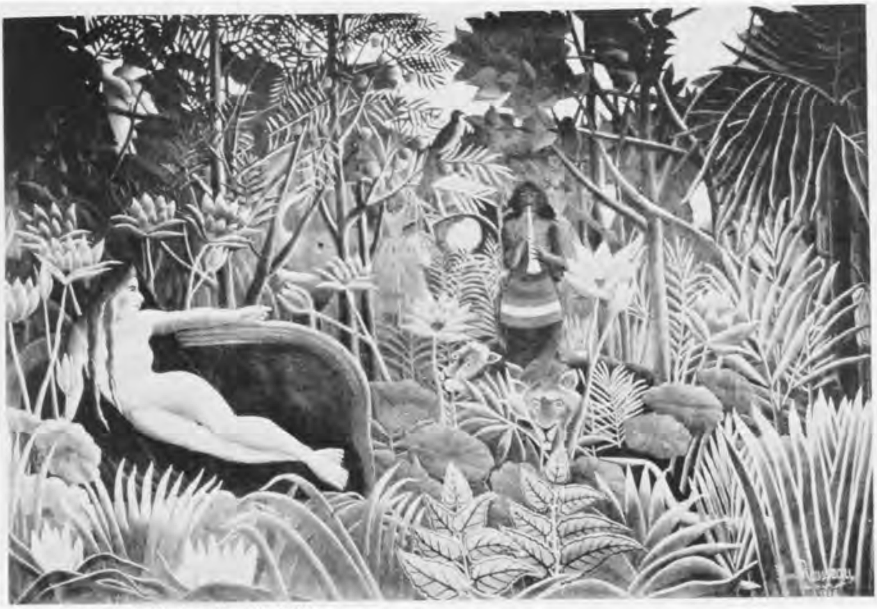


PLATE XL. SALVADOR DALI, "L'HOMME INVISIBLE," 1929

Superrealist painters was not an arduous task. In Hieronymus Bosch they had all the dream fantasies, all the dream-magic, even all the dadaistic *cocasse* they could wish. He seemed an authentic father ready-to-hand for their movement. The only difference between his approach and theirs was perhaps a greater inventive fertility on his part, as we may see from a comparison of such a piece as his "Fantasy" in the Lazaro Collection, Madrid (Plate XXXIX), with Dali's 1929 "L'Homme Invisible" (Plate XL). Again, in a canvas such as Rousseau le Douanier's "Le Rêve" (Plate XLI) they had a naïve transcription that preserved all the freshness and spontaneity of its subconscious associations. And in Paul Klee's work (Plate XLII), with its evident sympathy for the arts of primitive peoples and of children, there was a quality very close to that of automatic drawings, only enhanced by his peculiarly refined sensibility.

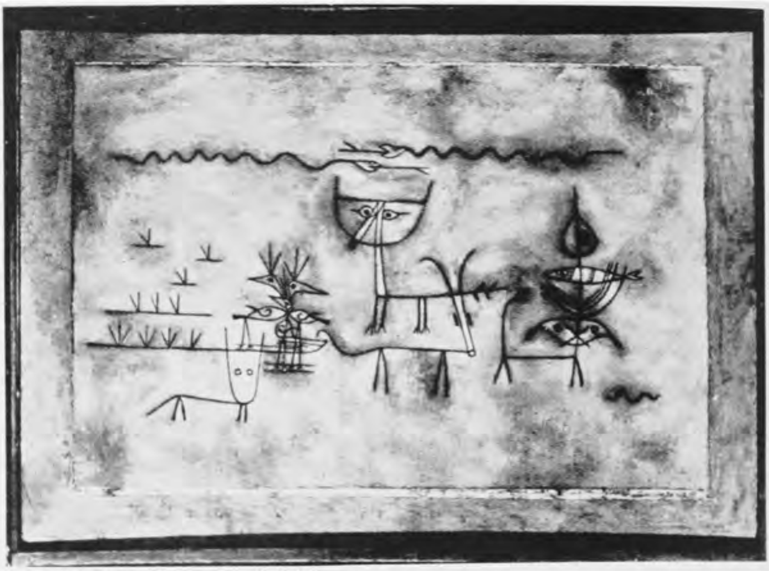
In the meanwhile Max Ernst, on leaving Cologne, had settled in Paris and had fallen in with the new group, as had also Hans Arp. And again these two men came to represent dual trends in a similar general direction. Ernst still retained his interest in perspective and the suggestion of space-effects. And soon his influence, as well as that of Chirico (toward whose approach he had earlier evinced a sympathy), began to show in the work of two younger men: Yves Tanguy (Plate XLIII), who leaned definitely toward Ernst in his treatment; and Salvador Dali, who, a Catalan, replaced Chirico's Italianate architectural fantasies with souvenirs of *art nouveau* motifs possibly burned into his mind by Gaudi's architecture in his native Barcelona (Plate XLIV).

Arp, on the other hand, continued along the road of his simplifications of form, gradually becoming freer and more



Sidney Janowitz Collection, New York City

PLATE XLI. HENRI ROUSSEAU, "LE REVE," 1910



Sidney Janowitz Collection, New York City

PLATE XLII. PAUL KLEE, "THE ZOO"

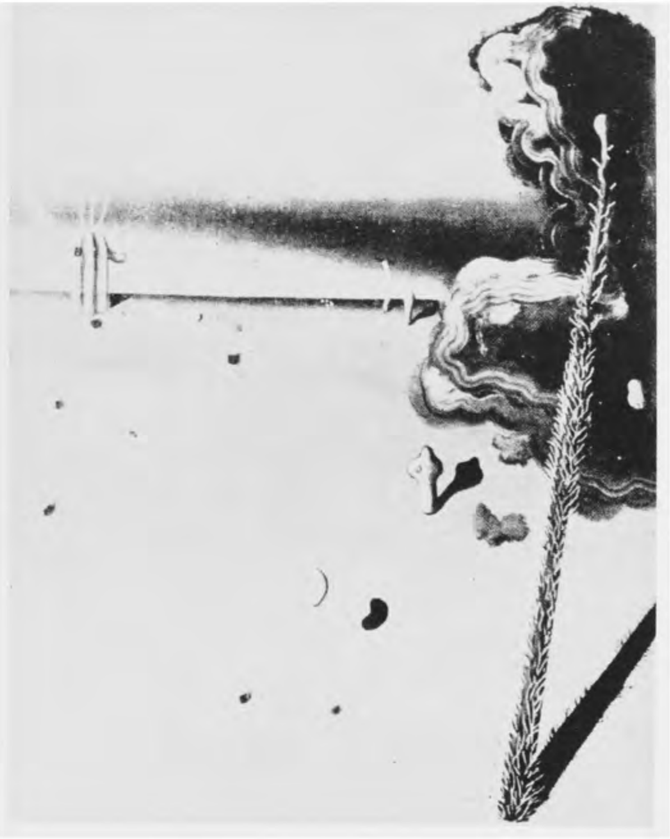
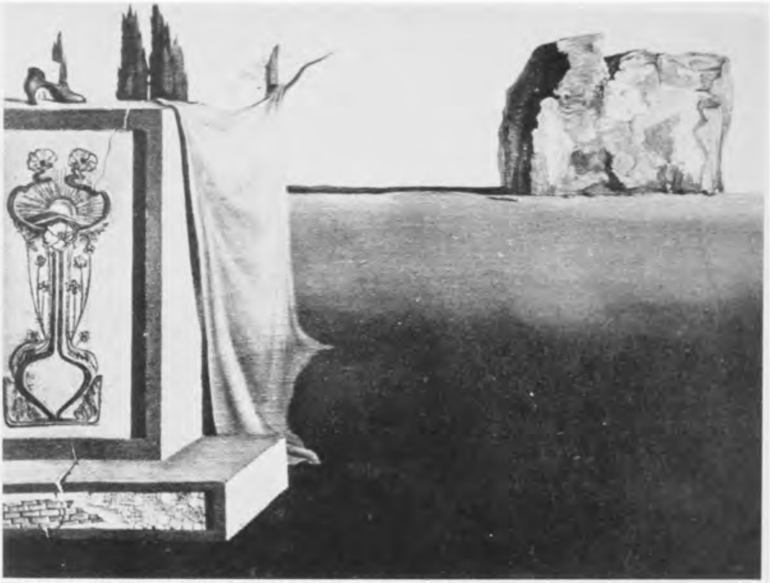


PLATE XLIII. YVES TANGUY, "PAPA, MAMAN EST BLESSEE"



Photograph by courtesy of the Julien Levy Gallery, New York City

PLATE XLIV. SALVADOR DALI, "LANDSCAPE"

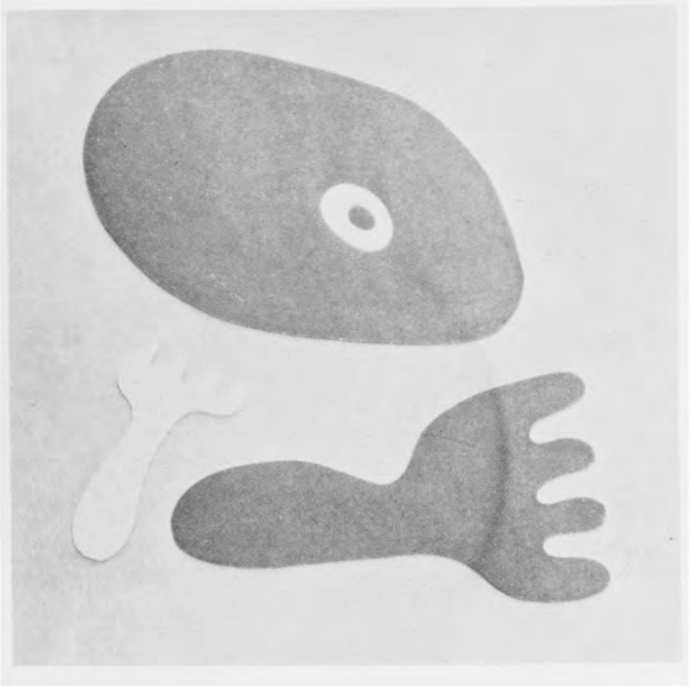


PLATE XLV. HANS ARP, "ASSIETTE, NOMBRIL, FOURCHETTES," 1927

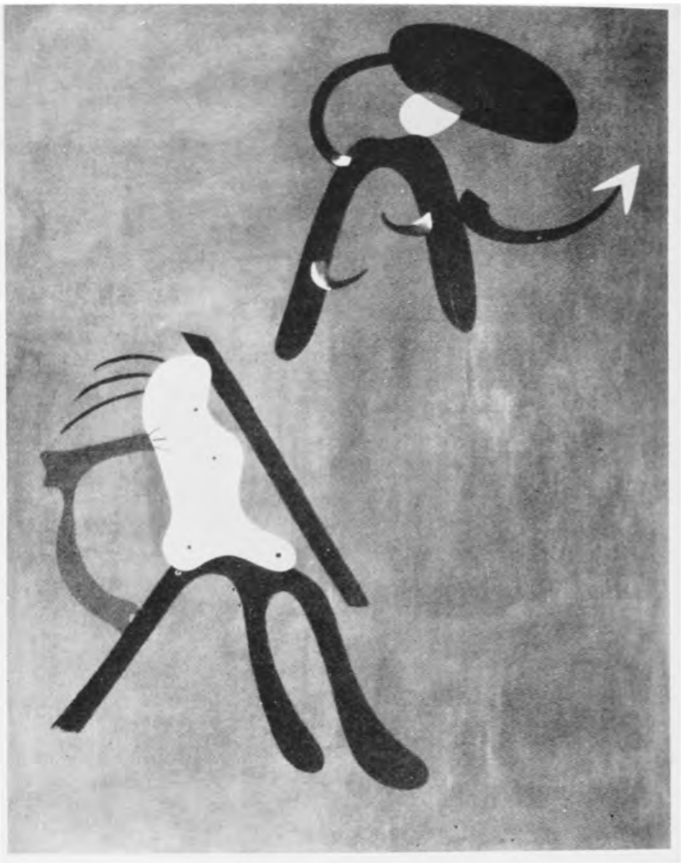


PLATE XLVI. JOAN MIRO, "COMPOSITION," 1933 elastic in his concepts (Plate XLV); while, in a somewhat similar direction Joan Miró, another Catalan, whose early work offered a curiously naïve realism, has grown by gradual stages to a realization of almost pure plastic conceptions in which he has few, if any, rivals today (Plate XLVI).

To sum up, Superrealism has a mixed heritage through Dada out of Futurism and those phases of Cubism and creative abstractionism brought to it by Arp and Ernst. From the Futurist side of its forebears came a tendency to react against the objective. And the resultant interest in subjective fantasy carried it through to Chirico and Bosch.

But, considered primarily from the viewpoint of its spirit, the immediacy of its descent from Dada is its most striking characteristic. With this difference, however, the Superrealists' dissatisfaction with the existing state of things no longer leads to a mere nihilism; they have found life worth living but feel it must be lived on entirely different grounds. The richness of life, according to them, lies in the subconscious. They feel the only true enjoyment of it can come from free expression of the subconscious. For them art has become the means to that end.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

ARP, HANS:
Born: September 16, 1888, Strassbourg

BAARGELD:
Painter and poet, founder of the Dada-Communist review, *Der Ventilator*, Cologne, 1920
Died: 1927

BALLA, GIACOMO:
Born: 188—, Turin, Italy

BAUMEISTER, WILLI:
Born: January 22, 1889, Stuttgart

BOCCIONI, UMBERTO:
Born: October 19, 1882, Reggio (Calabria)
Died: August 16, 1916, Verona

BOSCH, HIERONYMUS:
Date of birth unknown; living in Hertogenbosch, 1480
Died: 1516, Hertogenbosch

BRAQUE, GEORGES:
Born: May 15, 1881, Argenteuil (S & O), France

CARRÀ, CARLO:
Born: February 11, 1881, Quargnento, Italy

CÉZANNE, PAUL:
Born: January 19, 1839, Aix-en-Provence, France
Died: October 23, 1906, Aix-en-Provence, France

CHIRICO, GIORGIO DI:
Born: July 10, 1888, Volo (Greece)

COROT, CAMILLE-JEAN-BAPTISTE:
Born: July 16, 1796, Paris
Died: February 22, 1875, Ville-d'Avray, France

CROSS, HENRY-EDMOND (H. E. Delacroix):
Born: May 20, 1856, Douai, France
Died: May 16, 1910, Saint-Clair near Lavandou (Var), France

COURBET, GUSTAVE:
Born: June 10, 1819, Ornans, France
Died: December 31, 1877, Vevey, Switzerland

DALI, SALVADOR:
Born: March 11, 1904, Figueiras, Spain
DERAIN, ANDRÉ:
Born: June 10, 1880, Chatou, France
DOESBERG, THÉO VAN:
Born: August 30, 1883, Utrecht, Holland
Died: March 7, 1931, Davos, Switzerland
DUCHAMP, MARCEL:
Born: 1887, Blainville (Seine-Inférieur), France

ERNST, MAX:
Born: April 2, 1891, Brühl near Cologne

FRIEZ, EMILE-OTHON:
Born: March 27, 1875, Le Havre, France

GABO (Gabo Pevsner; last name "Pevsner" dropped to avoid confusion with brother Antoine Pevsner):
Born: August 5, 1890, Brjansk, Russia
GAUGUIN, PAUL:
Born: June 8, 1848, Paris
Died: May 8, 1903, Atuana, Marquesas Islands
GOGH, VINCENT VAN:
Born: March 30, 1853, Groot-Zundert, Holland
Died: July 29, 1890, Auvers-sur-Oise, France
GRIS, JUAN (José Gonzales):
Born: March 23, 1887, Madrid, Spain
Died: May 11, 1927, Boulogne-sur-Seine, France

HECKEL, ERICH:
Born: July 31, 1883, Döbeln (Saxony)
HÉLION, JEAN:
Born: 1904, Couterne (Orne), France

INGRES, JEAN-AUGUSTE-DOMINIQUE:
Born: August 29, 1780, Montauban, France
Died: January 14, 1867, Paris

KANDINSKY, WASSILI:
Born: December 4, 1866, Moscow
Founded "Blaue Reiter" group with Franz Marc, 1912

KIRCHNER, ERNST LUDWIG:
Born: May 6, 1880, Aschaffenburg, Germany
Senior member of the "Brücke" group formed with Heckel and Schmidt-Rottluff in Dresden, 1905

KLEE, PAUL:
Born: December 18, 1879, Münchenbuchsee near Berne, Switzerland

LHOTE, ANDRÉ:
Born: July 5, 1885, Bordeaux, France

LÉGER, FERNAND:
Born: February, 1881, Argentan (Orne), France

LISSITZKY, EL:
Born: November 10, 1890, Smolensk

MANGUIN, HENRI-CHARLES:
Born: March 23, 1784, Paris

MARC, FRANZ:
Born: February 8, 1880, Munich
Killed in action: March 4, 1916, Verdun
Founded "Blaue Reiter" group with Kandinsky, 1912

MARQUET, PIERRE-ALBERT:
Born: February 6, 1875, Bordeaux, France

MATISSE, HENRI-:
Born: December 31, 1869, Le Cateau-Cambresis (Nord), France

MIRÓ, JOAN:
Born: April 20, 1893, Montroig (Catalonia), Spain

MODIGLIANO, AMEDEO:
Born: July 12, 1884, Leghorn, Italy
Died: January 25, 1920, Paris

MONDRIAN, PIET:
Born: March 7, 1872, Amersfoort, Holland

MONET, CLAUDE OSCAR:
Born: November 14, 1840, Paris
Died: December 12, 1926, Giverny (Seine), France

PICABIA, FRANCIS:
Born: January 22, 1879, Paris

PICASSO, PABLO RUIZ:
Born: October 25, 1881, Malaga, Spain

PISSARRO, CAMILLE:
Born: July 18, 1830, St. Thomas, French West Indies
Died: November 12, 1903, Paris

POUSSIN, NICHOLAS:
Born: June, 1594, Villers near Les Andelys, France
Died: November 19, 1665, Rome
PUY, JEAN:
Born: November 8, 1876, Roanne (Loire), France

RAY, MAN:
Born: 1890, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, U.S.A.
RENOIR, PIERRE AUGUST:
Born: February 25, 1841, Limoges, France
Died: December 2, 1919, Cagnes, France
ROTTLUFF, *see* Schmidt-Rottluff
ROUAULT, GEORGES:
Born: May 27, 1871, Paris
ROUSSEAU, HENRI JULIEN ("le Douanier")
Born: May 21, 1844, Laval (Mayenne), France
Died: September 2, 1910, Paris
RUSSOLO, LUIGI:
Born: May 1, 1885, Portognaro, Italy

SCHMIDT-ROTTLUFF, KARL:
Born: December 1, 1884, Rottluff near Chemintz, Germany
SCHWITTERS, KURT:
Born: June 20, 1887, Hannover, Germany
SEURAT, GEORGES:
Born: December 2, 1859, Paris
Died: March 29, 1891, Paris
SEVERINI, GINO:
Born: April 7, 1883, Cortona, Italy
SIGNAC, PAUL:
Born: November 11, 1863, Paris

TANGUY, YVES:
Born: January 5, 1900, Paris

VALTAT, LOUIS:
Born: August 8, 1869, Dieppe, France
VAN DOESBERG, *see* Doesberg
VAN GOGH, *see* Gogh
VLAMINCK, MAURICE DE:
Born: April 4, 1876, Paris

PRINTED IN U·S·A

THE
MEANING OF
UNINTELLIGIBILITY
IN MODERN ART

EDWARD F. ROTHSCHILD

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS • CHICAGO

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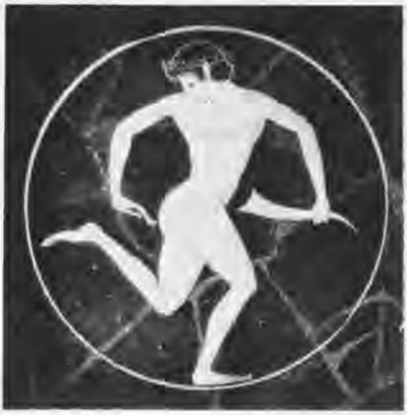
PUBLISHED OCTOBER 1934

Composed and Printed by the University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A.



GREEK DRINKING-CUP WITH THREE-DIMENSIONAL SWIRLING DESIGN, FIFTH CENTURY, B.C., MUSEUM OF ART, FRANKFURT AM MAIN

FOREWORD

To the Foreword printed in the first of the series of lectures published under the heading, "Meaning in Art," may be added a quotation from *Art Now,* by Mr. Herbert Read, formerly professor of art in the University of Edinburgh: "The prejudice against modern art is, I am convinced, the result of a confined vision or a narrow range of sensibility. People forget that the artist (if he deserves that name) has the acutest sense of us all, and he can only be true to himself and to his function if he expresses that acuteness to the final edge. We are without courage, without freedom, without passion and joy, if we refuse to follow where he leads." It is a declaration of confidence in the living and constructive spirit of our age, a direct and rewarded approach to what it has to offer—to which Léger refers as "the cult of the beautiful in which we are now living, which we are creating."

In his thoroughly reasoned view of the true significance of the term "unintelligibility" as he applies it, and its necessity among the vital elements in modern art, Mr. Rothschild has invented a new means of sharing in the spiritual life and vigor of the present. "Art," Mr. Rothschild says, "deals with the whole of life; but its emphasis is in the spiritual realm, and the spiritual realm demands a unifying faith as a basis of intelligibility. . . . . The artist can tell us what he is trying to do only in his art. . . . . If we regard our culture with a certain amount of intellectual curiosity, we shall be rewarded, because there is no age in which we can live so completely as in our own. Life is more important than art; but if we understood life, we should have no difficulty in understanding art, which is its most eloquent expression. And, conversely . . . . ," he continues, after admitting that the understanding of life might seem beyond the possibility of attainment, "we shall find that the artist's intuition will serve as the most gracious and far-sighted guide, because it performs the synthesizing function in the human constitution, and puts sense, mind and spirit into the 'wholes' which it produces, whereas business and science are 'parts' and their only hope of 'wholeness' is through art."

E. W. S.

PREFACE

This book is concerned with the understanding of meaning in art as a way to enjoyment. The work of art is regarded as the locus of various cultural factors—a live product of the vital energies of its age and itself a source as well as a reflection. The analysis of these cultural factors lays no claim to completeness. It seeks merely to indicate conditions, forces, and stimuli in the artist's milieu which are potential motivations of his idiom.

The eager interest and keen inquiries of my students have stimulated many observations and ideas, and frequent discussions with my friends and colleagues have fed a generous stream of inspiration. In the field of modern literature I have borrowed extensively from the books of René Lalou, Werner Mahrholz, and Albert Soergel, and, from Lalou's translator, William Aspenwall Bradley, many English versions of extracts from French writers. I am grateful to all those who have contributed, in a special sense and with sincere affection, to our age—leaping into new enterprises in the spirit of hope and courage, offering the promise and developing the vision of a richer and more enlightened life.

I am indebted, for their interest and support, to the members of the Renaissance Society of the University of Chicago and to the staff of the University of Chicago Press.

EDWARD F. ROTHSCHILD

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
May 1934

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I. INTRODUCTION

In order to undertake the solution of the paradox involved in the title, "The Meaning of Unintelligibility in Modern Art," the author must assume the functions of a critic. The employer, engaging a secretary, would certainly canvass, to some extent, the question of secretarial functions with a prospective employee; so it may be well to reach some understanding at this point concerning the functions of a critic.

Different kinds of critics, like different kinds of secretaries, conceive their functions in different ways. Some critics regard it as their function to tell you what is good and what is bad, with occasional indications of why they think so. Some critics seek to establish the standards and canons of criticism according to which you may pass judgment. Some critics try to animate, enhance, and embellish the work of art so that it will be more alluring to the observer and yield a richer and more expansive experience. Some critics analyze and dissect, revealing the morphology and structure of the work of art. Some critics are concerned with the genesis of the work of art in terms of traditions or biographical or environmental data. Some critics enthuse, some swoon, some apostrophize, some apotheosize, some find fault, some curse, some praise, some blame, and some merely beckon. In different permutations and combinations and in varying measures, these characterizations represent typical functions of criticism.

In this essay the function of criticism will be regarded as the interpretation of the artistic idiom. This is a very limited function, since it seeks merely to begin at the beginning in terms of the requirements of the greatest number of observers or potential observers of art.

It is assumed that the general purpose of art is to produce enjoyment of a richer and more fecund experience by means of revelation or demonstration and synthesis. But enjoyment is partially based upon understanding, and that which cannot be understood in any way cannot be enjoyed. In many cases the understanding which precedes enjoyment may be intuitive and not consciously recognized. This is probably, to a large extent, the case with primitive people, children, and those who possess artistic temperament or highly developed intuition. In many cases, also, the satisfaction in understanding may be so great that there is little possibility of the extension of the experience into other realms of enjoyment. This is a sort of mathematical pleasure which is probably common to scientists and logicians or to puzzle-solvers and which, of course, may often be sought by such temperaments as an end in itself.

But it would seem likely that, to the majority, understanding is a normal stage preliminary to enjoyment. It is, therefore, the interpretation of the artistic idiom, leading to an understanding of it with which this essay is concerned. If this can be accomplished, enjoyment will, in all likelihood, follow as a natural sequel without the need of special invitation or special stimulus.

The term "artistic idiom" has no extensive currency; so its meaning may not be entirely plain. The nature of the subsequent discussion should make its significance apparent by implication, but a guidepost at this point is desirable. A work of art has three essential attributes: *expression*, involving the point of view of the artist, his attitude toward his theme, toward his public, toward himself, his faith, his feelings, his hopes—in short, a message in which certain more or less general and permanent attitudes and certain immediate feelings and reactions are given immediate or particular embodiment; *style,* the physical or sensory means, and their results or record in tangible, visual, or audible experience, which the artist employs as the vehicle of his expression or for the sake of their intrinsic integration; and *quality,* which is the degree of success approaching perfection that any observer may attribute to the result. The value estimate of quality must necessarily vary in terms of the individual frame of reference; so it is idle to speculate on what might be called "absolute quality."

These three attributes of a work of art are not, in fact, discontinuous and separable, nor are they mutually exclusive, but they do cast some light on the validity of critical procedures. Expression and style are, in a sense, tangibles, although their characterization, on the part of the critic, cannot be performed on a purely objective basis. Quality is an intangible; and its characterization must be arrived at subjectively, for the individual, and statistically, by adding up individual judgments, for the group—although it is self-evident that such a tabulation would be devoid of any very important meaning.

It is obvious, therefore, that the critic builds the strongest foundation who chooses for his materials the tangibles—expression and style. These two aspects of a work of art, essentially inseparable, are selected and defined as the subject matter of criticism as it is here understood; and the unity which they constitute is referred to as the "artistic idiom." No claim is made that this is the only criticism.

The critic whose foundation is less broad and solid may be impelled to fly and reach much greater heights. His is a greater and a rarer gift—let us not clip his wings; but let us also beware of skyrockets which seem to fly and make a great display but leave no mark upon the sky when their transient sparks have ceased to glow.

It is the idiom which is the substance of the artist's product; and, since it is the result of a number of attitudes, traditions, and feelings, which he shares with his contemporaries, or is the embodiment of his personal reaction to this common culture, it is largely a reflection and index of his time, just as he himself is largely a creature of his age. That he is able to give substance to what he sees and feels makes him an artist, and, as such, a voice of his era. When, in these terms, he is able to go deeply beneath the surface, to create values which are transcendent, and to achieve a quality which is supreme, then he is a great artist, and a voice of all ages. But the selection and decision must be intuitive, and intuition is usually respected only when it has proved its case, which, in the matter of pronouncing the greatness of an artist, must await the verdict of time for those who prefer to deal in certainties. In the meantime, let us be content to trust our intuitions, realities dear and important to us as individuals. But we must remember that the proper sphere of intuition is beyond understanding, and we must be prepared to go as far as we can within the realm of understanding in order that our intuitions and enjoyments will be projected along a real road between the bogs of the merely capricious and the wilfully arbitrary. If we understand each other, we have no arguments over differences of opinion, and we respect the inclinations of personality and temperament. It is only when these irrational elements invade the field of understanding that we have conflict, anti-social behavior, ineffectiveness, hallucinations, disappointments, and insanity. But the converse is equally true. There is a limit to the powers of understanding; and when these powers try to overstep that limit, the result is academicism, fetishism, puritanism, conventionalism, word-worship, and the other ills of a formalistic, legalistic, taboo-ridden experience.

Understanding and enjoyment are separate but complementary. Understanding without enjoyment is sterile and barren; enjoyment without understanding is only possible on the level of pure animalism, where its corollary is usually pain, and it is totally lacking in any sense of permanence or fecundity. It is, therefore, believed to be one of the functions of the art critic to increase understanding, not for its own sake alone, but for the sake of that enjoyment which will grow out of it, whose efflorescence will be its sanctifying end and validation. In this sense it is proposed to examine and try to understand modern art, particularly that important aspect of its idiom which can be called "unintelligibility."

Any experience in picture galleries will clearly reveal that the idiom of modern art is predominantly unintelligible. The layman does not see reproduced before his eyes the shapes and textures of things as he has learned them from practical experience, and he is ready to condemn as soon as he sees a bird that couldn't sing or a tree that couldn't grow. What he fails to realize is that this factor of unintelligibility is as much a part of the artist's necessary means of presentation as are the mere pigments which he employs. Other idioms besides that of the modern artist are unintelligible—the language of the infant, for example, who utters sounds merely for the sake of uttering sounds and thus manifesting his presence and delighting in his ability to objectify his feelings. And, although no verbal symbols are employed in his expression, the experienced observer will have a fairly good notion of what the infant "means" by his nonsense syllables. Obviously, then, "unintelligibility" can have meaning.

It is not to be implied from this analogy that the language of the modern artist is infantile, although such may sometimes be the case. The analogy simply seeks to demonstrate that certain types of "meaning" are not verbal or explicit, and in that sense they are unintelligible or inaccessible by the process of rational analysis.

The usual difficulty with the observer of modern art is that he does not inquire patiently and sincerely concerning the "meaning" of a work of art which strikes him as grotesque, distorted, or eccentric (in another word, unintelligible), but, by a sort of symbolic thought-process, recognizes its unrecognizability and thus thwarts any possible further intelligent interest or ultimate enjoyment. It is as if, in a crowd, seeking someone we knew and, looking into each strange face, we should recognize its unrecognizability and pass it by as irrelevant to our quest. This would be a perfectly natural procedure under the circumstances; but in art we are not looking for something we already know, we are looking for a new experience whose value and quality is unknown to us. In such a case to permit unrecognizability to be a barrier is to condemn ourselves to a life of monotony, without the thrills of discovery, insight, and "conversion."

This is the characteristic fallacy of any negative interpretation of human experience. It says such and such is not present, therefore there is deficiency or degeneration. But cultural phenomena must be interpreted positively. If, in a work of art, we cannot find recognizability or intelligibility, that should not imply poverty or decay. There must be other values present which were inimical to the presence of intelligibility. Distortion, eccentricity, grotesqueness, fantasy, are all values; and, although they tend to be unintelligible in the verbal sense, they have a very real and positive significance.

Unintelligibility, in the verbal sense in which it is being employed here, does not mean that the object cannot be understood; it means, rather, that the elements of the idiom are essentially antiliteral in character. This antiliteral character of the idiom has a variety of possible explanations. If the idiom is colloquial, it will not be understood by the "classes"; if it is effete, urbane, or aristocratic, it will not be understood by the "masses"; if it is dynamic, it will not be understood by the static-minded; if static, not by the dynamic-minded; and so on.

The idiom may be unintelligible because it is mystical, esoteric, abstract, or exotic. It may be unintelligible because it is nourished by potent forces in the personal or popular imagination which are not regarded by the average observer as belonging to the field which he narrowly defines as art. He fails to recognize in art many aspects of culture which are as much a part of his heritage as they are of the artist's.

These various factors which contribute to the so-called unintelligibility of the idiom are inherent conditions in the artistic situation, and they have a very important historical and expressional significance in any view of art as a phase of human culture. These "factors of unintelligibility" will be dealt with in this essay primarily under the three headings: "Individualism," "Revolution," and "Dematerialization." The significance of the first two terms is perfectly apparent. The term "dematerialization" has two implications: (1) the tendency toward the denial of matter in favor of the spirit, essentially a mystical point of view; and (2) the tendency toward the rejection of matter in favor of the idea or universal, essentially an idealistic or rationalistic point of view.

First, it will be necessary to survey the general background of contemporary culture in terms of these three "unintelligibility factors." Then, it will be possible to arrange typical examples of modern art in the same frame of reference and show, in these terms, how rich and pregnant with meaning is the idiom of modern art in spite of its "unintelligibility."

II. SURVEY OF CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

Unintelligibility is one of the inevitable results of a developing individualism; and individualism, frequently intensified by the adjective "rugged," has been regarded as one of the prime virtues of our age—the chief embodiment of courage, strength, initiative, heroism, leadership, and self-respect—the necessary attributes of the indefatigable pioneer.

The capitalistic system, which represented pioneering in industry when new fields of conquest had been opened up by the transformations of the industrial revolution, demanded individual leadership which was forceful, and sometimes ruthless, in the competitive battle for success. But leadership is necessarily confined to the few, where it is based on ownership; and its natural evils are megalomania and exploitation.

It might be thought that these evils would be precluded by religion, that they are foreign to the Christian ideal and could not develop in a Christian civilization. The answer is, not that the "new individual" denied his creed, but that he found in it his own justification. A personal individual god implies responsible persons, or individuals, as his subjects; and the "new individual" could realize that god in his own image. The new order of "divine right" was established; and the old dictum, *rex a regendo est,* was modified to apply to bankers and captains of industry—the kings of the new era—*redivivi.* The industrial revolution and capitalism represent one of the phases of the development of individualism.

Democracy, as it is practiced, must be regarded in the light of this background of financial control which seems to play a reasonably large part behind the scenes. Even so, democracy is widespread; and it has certain positive aspects, in theory at least, which have to do with the rights of man in questions of liberty, equality, the pursuit of happiness, etc. Universal suffrage, whatever its ultimate importance may be, is one of the symbols of democracy. Furthermore, the very criterion of ownership as a basis of power has a recondite implication of democracy, since it substitutes a transient possession, theoretically available to all, for a birth right as the condition of entrée. But artificial devices must be established to protect the "ins" from the parvenus. The theory of democracy, although it has given those in power their chance, contains also a threat to their positions and security, and so they must develop antidemocratic practices while professing a democratic theory. In other words, they must protect their individualism with such devices as society, exclusive clubs, resorts, etc.; and they must develop an elaborate system of conventions which can effectively disqualify the uninitiated. The reaction to democracy is, therefore, another bulwark of individualism and, at the same time, a source of the unintelligibility of exclusiveness. Naturally, the same sort of isolation develops in other fields; and a democracy may well contain an intellectual aristocracy, an aesthetic aristocracy, an aristocracy of the soil, each with its own "secrets" and "ritual" or "snobbism," unintelligible to those who do not belong. These are all phases of individualism which might be interpreted as protective mechanisms against the threat of democracy as the "great leveler," and they are all potential sources of unintelligibility. Nations, also, become "individuals" in a very similar way.

The belief in the sanctity of individualism probably has its most vivid expression in the apotheosis of national heroes or "stars," whether they belong to the realms of politics, industry, technology, sport, or entertainment—witness the fluttering miles of ticker-tape which, almost like the banderoles of a medieval illustration, convey the message of the populace to the returning hero, or the columns of newsprint devoted to the whims and caprices of the current Hollywood idol. These "kings" and "queens" are regarded in the popular imagination as leading charmed lives, and their "unintelligible" actions and modes of life are accepted as part of the myth by most of us; but it is important to realize that the lives of our heroes and heroines, the apotheosized individuals, are in a sense as unintelligible as the canvases of the modern painter.

In the realm of literature we find individualism emerging as the heir-apparent of nineteenth-century naturalism. René Lalou, in *Contemporary French Literature,* points out how this naturalism ended in an escape from naturalism: in the case of the Goncourts in impressionistic mobility; in the case of Daudet in freshness of fantasy; in the case of Zola in lyrical imagination; in the case of Maupassant in psychology and the fantastic; in the case of Huysmans in the circumstance that "writing" became more important than the theme.

It is obvious and psychologically appropriate that these different escapes from naturalism should be essentially individualistic and, to some extent, romantic in character. The objectivity inherent in naturalism necessarily terminates in subjectivity, because a particular object requires a particular subject to perceive it. If you observe a particular object, the accuracy of your observation depends on the accumulation of sensory data peculiar to your physiological equipment and sensitivity and to the particular time and place at which you make the observations. If you look at a tree, you may regard it as a dramatic event, in which case the evidence of its protean vitality seems to come from the tree itself and is produced spontaneously without concern for completeness and accuracy of observation, which would, in fact, be hostile to such an interpretation. You may also regard it as a symbol, the type and principle of all trees, in which case its conventionalized general aspect is sufficient to provide understanding of its character. Naturalistically, you regard it as a particular phenomenon, and you realize that the descriptive evidence which you accumulate is largely dependent upon you and the time and place of observation which you have selected. As this awareness of the function of self in the observation grows, you begin to permit the self to play a more prominent part in determining or modifying the observation, since you realize that what you had believed to be "objective" seeing is so largely conditioned by factors of self. Ultimately the self will begin to indulge in fantasy, lyricism, mysticism, or caprice; and, finally, what had begun as the subjectification of the objective ends as the objectification of the subjective. This, as we shall see, is what happened in modern culture when "naturalistic individualism" evolved into "subjective individualism" and, in the various fields of literature, art, science, philosophy, and politics, when what we call "expressionism" emerged out of "impressionism."

In art it is apparent in the development from Pissarro, Plate I*a* (naturalistic individualism), to van Gogh, Plate

I*b* (subjective individualism). In science and philosophy it is evidenced doubly by the development from Darwin to Bergson. In the first place, Darwin produced a theory, on the basis of observation, which resulted from the classification of his accumulated data; whereas Bergson felt something into this situation, dramatized it by capitalizing its emotional possibilities, and became a great impresario of evolution by conceiving it in terms calculated to satisfy the needs of personal human desire. In the second place, one might find some significance in the fact that *The Origin of Species* was produced as a scientific (naturalistic) work and *L'Évolution créatrice* was conceived as a philosophical (subjective) work.

In general, the inductive or "scientific" method, paradoxical as it may seem, placed a great emphasis on the observer, or individual, because he determined the character and extent of the data which could be accumulated. In general, this individualism may be hostile to science. This is to some extent demonstrated by the success of the physical sciences, where all observations are made with respect to dials and scales and can be made best by an abstraction, like Einstein's ideal observer, who consists essentially of a non-temporal, non-spatial, retinal point capable of perceiving simultaneous events at a point in space. When physics goes beyond the limit of its observations to speculative problems, it runs the risk of getting lost in a maze of contingencies and producing hypotheses which may strike the layman as rather sentimental, like the theory of the uncertainty of principle, which was widely heralded in recent years. This theory itself might well be regarded as "expressionistic physics" which has evolved out of "impressionistic physics." And the importance of

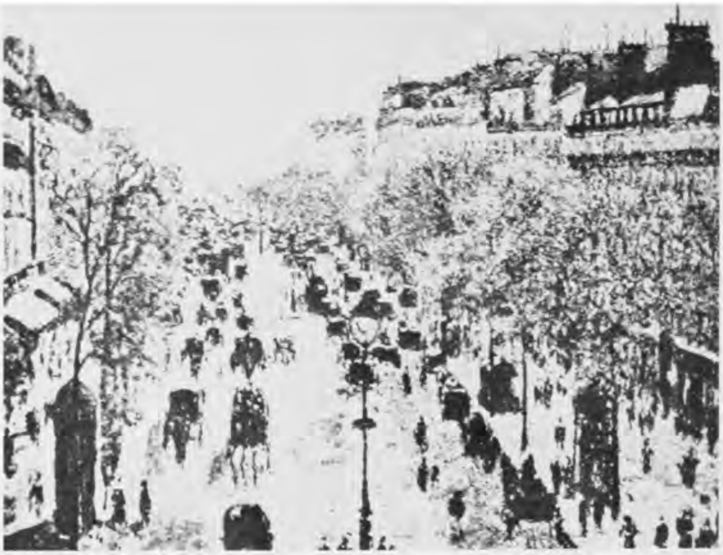
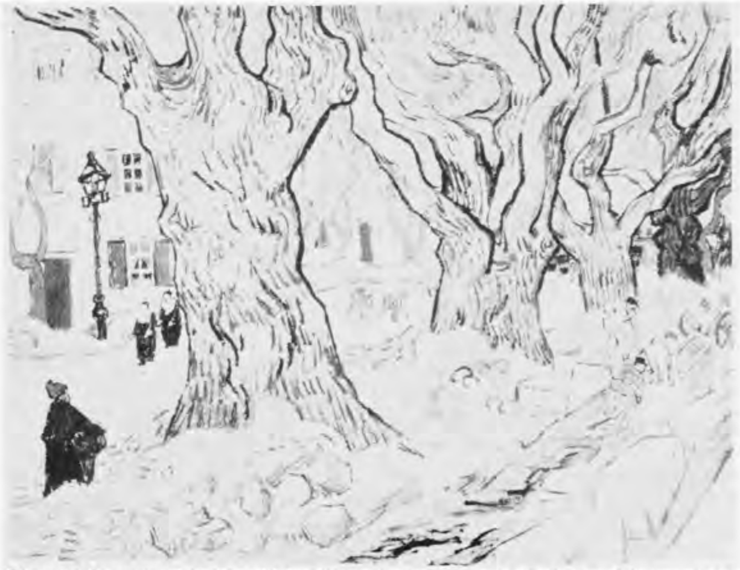


PLATE I*a*. CAMILLE PISSARRO, "BOULEVARD ST. MICHEL"



Photograph by courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago (*lent anonymously to the Century of Progress, 1933*)

PLATE I*b*. VINCENT VAN GOGH, "THE PAVERS: STREET IN ST. REMY," it for our point lies in the fact that it deals with uncertainty or, in another word, unintelligibility. Obviously, the scientific motivation at the core of much which we call individualism is specialization. Science may be a co-operative venture, but the necessity of thoroughness in each of its many compartments produces a group without a common basis of communication. No one is as unintelligible as the specialist.

We have dealt briefly with individualism in modern culture and have tried to indicate that it was the product of a situation which demanded a more effective naturalistic control and, furthermore, that it followed a tendency from "naturalistic individualism" (impressionism) toward "subjective individualism" (expressionism)—hence toward unintelligibility. Further evidence will be adduced in the consideration of the individualistic elements of the artistic idiom. In the meantime, it is important to observe that this development, involving the natural, protective, or self-aggrandizing isolation of the individual, has produced "secrets," "rites," "fantasy," "uncertainty," "dynamic transformations," "specialization," and many other aspects or sources of "unintelligibility."

Individualism has an almost inevitable corollary. Individuals or individualistic groups and the forces which they control are such, in a dynamic sense, against a background of the exploited, the rejected, the incompetent, the submissive, the uninvited, the suppressed, etc. This situation contains the seed of conflict, and this conflict can be called revolution. This may mean that individualism, in itself, has become such a preoccupying source of satisfaction that its adherents have neglected the mechanisms of control which made it possible. It may mean that the "outs" want their "innings." It may mean that individualism proves itself to be a solipsistic snare and a lonesome delusion, and the rarefied atmosphere of the heights is uncomfortable for human respiration. It may mean the assertion of what is called the gregarious instinct. It may be a crusading search for a new faith. In any event, the balance seems to sway, there is revolt and, if the venture be successful, the establishment of a new order.

The importance of revolution, in our consideration, is the discovery of the contributions which it makes to "unintelligibility." One of the elements of radicalism is adventure—of revolution, destruction. Adventure seeks the unknown and untried; it delights in prospecting, and it rejects the established ways and the blazed trails. It has a thirst for freedom. This is a sort of romanticism; and it is apparent that much of nineteenth-century liberalism, whether we look in Karl Marx or William Morris, contained a large measure of the romanticism of freedom as an antidote for the oppression of industrial servitude and its banal standardization of experience. In so far as it sought freedom, variety, and the new or unknown, radical "adventure" contained the germs of unintelligibility. The "novel" may be stimulating and exciting, but it is also bewildering. It is only after it has been experienced often that it can be rationalized and classified. Furthermore, it is a gamble whose realization may not fulfil its promise.

In a sense, it is the strong who are the revolutionaries and the protestants. They release their energies by fighting with their enemies; and they are able to discover all that is at fault outside of themselves, where it can be attacked and can become the object and focus of a "cause."

They are extroverts. The weak have not the strength to oppose what is outside of themselves; so they find their enemies within and must endure an eternal conflict with their "egos" or their "inferiority complexes." They are introverts.

This vigor of externalization which belongs to radicalism and revolution is an intense dynamic force which is capable of producing dynamic action and dynamic imagery. Because radicalism and revolution are adventurous and extroversive, they seek the unknown and are dynamic, impetuous, and tentative, or—we might say—experimental. The unknown and the dynamic are both hostile to the processes of logical thought—the one because it offers no clues, the other because the processes of logic are essentially static. In both these senses, radicalism and revolution contribute to "unintelligibility."

But revolution goes beyond adventure to destruction. Everything which is comfortably associated with the old order must be extinguished. All that is familiar and conventional must be eliminated; every vestige of the old and established must be effaced. This means that, from the point of view of tradition, all of the concepts which made life intelligible must be discarded, and the new life which supplants the old must be a chaos and, therefore, unintelligible, since we understand only that for which we have concepts of some sort, and the concepts of tradition are no more applicable to the new order than the concepts of classical or Renaissance appreciation of art are to the appreciation of the art of the modern era.

Tradition and conservatism are strong forces, and their tendency toward permanence links them up very closely with faith—in so far as faith is associated with the group and is not purely mystical. The discoveries of science since the time of the Renaissance had been upsetting a number of traditions. Even before this time the conflict of church and state and of the popular with the theocratic ideal had begun to undermine faith. And, although faith has had its periods of revival since, it seems to have been progressively diminishing with the growth of science, since the more that is made natural, the less need there is for a supernatural explanation. And where faith has had its revivals, they were partly a romantic reaction to the definiteness and certainty of science; partly an attempt to bolster and revive traditions in a life that was otherwise rather barren; partly an inevitable fear-reaction to the "new chaos" which the unrelenting and incompassionate "machine" brought with it to produce a new primitive precariousness from which man sought escape; and partly, particularly of more recent date, a sort of paradoxical situation in which the minister put his arms around the scientist and whispered in his ear that he was going to "debunk" faith according to the lastest scientific principles.

If, then, there is a close relation between tradition, or conservatism, and faith, the decline of faith, which is partly an *obbligato* to the rise of science, is a condition pertaining to the weakening and ultimate rejection of tradition and conservatism and constitutes one of the aspects of radicalism and revolution.

To some extent, of course, old faiths have been replaced by new. The "cause," or the "aim," or the "plan," or the "leader," has replaced what we have been accustomed to call a faith and are served with an equal—or rather, far greater—religious zeal. One is tempted to say that we are at the dawn of a new era of faith, or that there has been a "revolution in faith." In any case, since intelligibility is bound up with the tenets of the old faith, the abandonment of the old faith moves in the direction of unintelligibility.

Revolution as a source of unintelligibility has another somewhat more self-conscious phase which has been of particular importance in modern art and represents, in the artistic realm of culture, an analogy to political or social revolution as a reaction to individualism. It has been observed that individualism gave rise to an abracadabra of the "élite," to pretense and vanity and conceit, which served to disguise a social chaos in which war, misery, poverty, deceit, exploitation, depredation, and charlatanism were rampant. By the revolutionist of art, whom we shall discuss later in connection with the artistic idiom of Dadaism, satire and ridicule were employed as weapons against the eccentricities, the fantastic escapes, the introversions, and the potential sources of conflict and disintegration which were involved in the "isms." His satire and ridicule consisted in making an absolute of disorder and of perpetrating pure nonsense as a demonstration of the antisocial pitfalls which the individualistic "isms" were preparing. This emphasis on nonsense, although its aim was cathartic, produced a definite positive trend in the subsequent idiom, which was further nourished by the tendency toward the liberation of the imagination into the psychic fields of the dream and the unconscious, which developed as a sequel to expressionism, and which will be subsequently discussed with reference to "dematerialization" in the modern cultural idiom. The elevation of nonsense to a rôle of importance is definitely a significant factor in the complex of the elements of unintelligibility. And, perhaps, more than the mere revolutionary character of this development is noteworthy. Nonsense is the antithesis and the reaction to *sense.* Where reason is found wanting in the solution of crucial dilemmas, where "common sense" seems unavailing in the face of overwhelming odds, why bother with the elaborate mechanisms which intelligence employs? In such a situation nonsense may appear to have superrational values—at least, it has something frank, sincere, and fresh about it; and, above all, it represents one level on which we can all be free and equal and even fraternal. In this sense, nonsense, like unintelligibility, can have meaning.

Radicalism and revolution—adventuresome, experimental, and destructive, even to the point of apotheosizing chaos and nonsense—were powerful forces in the development of unintelligibility, particularly with reference to the "civilized" and upper classes, since they tapped a soil which was alien to the "higher" levels of society.

Perhaps the most important comprehensive unintelligibility factor is dematerialization. "Dematerialization" is a rather strange and cumbersome word, but it is chosen for several reasons. Verbally, it has a reasonably definite meaning which suggests an antithesis to "materialism." This is significant in so far as it can be demonstrated that dematerialization represents an escape from, and compensation for, the materialism of our age. The word also has a negative value, in that it has fewer confused connotations than words like "transcendentalism," "spiritualism," "abstraction," etc., which might have been employed in its place. This negative situation has a further virtue in that two distinct meanings will be grouped under the term dematerialization, that is, there are two general kinds of dematerialization which will be discussed.

The two general types of dematerialization are, in many ways, analogous to the two unintelligibility factors which we have already discussed—individualism and revolution—and might be called personal, or subjective, dematerialization, and universal, or objective, dematerialization. In both cases the tendency is antimaterialistic—on the one hand, because the individual finds that the psychic phenomena of his introversive explorations and communions are vague, evanescent, dynamic, transparent, and in every way insubstantial; on the other hand, because the search for unity and principle, whether it be in terms of universal brotherhood, aesthetics, or science, discovers that design, plan, order, and law are abstractions which are inherent in particular situations but seem to have an existence apart from them, and at a higher level. There is nothing new about these points of view—Plato and Aristotle shared the latter, and Plotinus espoused the former; the same respective positions were held by Thomas Aquinas, together with the Scholastics, and Meister Eckhart, together with the Mystics. It would seem also that the point of view of objective dematerialization ("abstractionism") generally tends to develop into subjective dematerialization (mysticism, solipsism, introversion) just as, in the case of individualism, we noted that "naturalistic individualism" developed into "subjective individualism," and for similar reasons. However, since this pendulum movement seems to swing back and forth in successive rhythms, it would require a special demonstration to indicate which came first; and, since the problem of priority is not urgent, this question may be neglected.

To return to the conditions under which dematerialization developed—science, the keynote of our age, provides a fitting point of departure. Science is necessarily concerned with laws and principles—in other words, abstractions. We noted previously how this concern may become so highly developed that the scientific observer may be shorn of all but the very minimum residue of sensory equipment. Obviously, sensory equipment, which records only immediate and particular phenomena, and has no memory or reason, is antithetical to the process of intellectual abstraction with which science must concern itself in the search for universal principles; so it is natural that the ideal observer should be practically devoid of senses.

As a result of this situation the picture which science gives us of reality is extremely abstract—and extremely unintelligible. Talk to a physicist about matter, and he is likely to tell you that matter is a form of energy. This is dematerialization par excellence. It is the translation of the static into the dynamic; and, to the popular mind, energy is less material than matter, just as a body in movement seems to lose its substance, or at least its definition, compared with a body at rest. The wheel of a moving vehicle has no spokes but a series of *lines* (a line is also an abstraction) in the form of concentric circles centrifugally distorted in a direction opposite to the direction of their movement in a plane. If you get the physicist or the chemist to discuss matter with you, he will talk about the atom, which is its smallest unit. He has never seen one and you have never seen one and neither of you will ever, because the atom turns out to be a hypothesis, an abstraction. Modern physicists agree with Swan, *The Architecture of the*

Universe, that a fundamental tenet of their science is, "the irrelevance of the obvious."

In the physical sciences most conspicuously, and in the other sciences to only a slightly less evident degree, results depend upon measurements, and measurements depend upon standards, and standards are abstractions; hence the dematerialization of science. The biologist talks about blood-counts, bacteria per cubic centimeter, index of metabolism, temperature, blood-pressure, rate of respiration, etc.; and most of his terms mean nothing to us because they are abstractions in terms of standards unfamiliar to us. The economist talks about index numbers (adjusted for seasonal variations), and uses elaborate formulas and batteries of calculating machines to arrive at his diagnoses, interpretations, and prognostications. But even when he makes no great show of his figures and talks about inflation, deflation, gold movements, etc., he seems to the layman to represent the very acme of unintelligibility. It would be easy to accumulate further evidence of the unintelligibility of modern science: the multiple-factor measurements and vector analyses of the psychologists, population curves and densities of the geographers and the sociologists, etc.; but these matters are too much a part of our experience to require further stress. We have already indicated the part which specialization, as an aspect of individualism, has played in this situation. We shall now see that "the machine" plays a great part because it is through the division of labor which follows the pattern of machine production that individualistic specialization came about.

"The machine," in so far as it is rigid, exact, inflexible, and unvarying, and in so far as it is motivated by design and structural and operational logic, is a sort of instrument of abstraction translated into a non-intellectual realm. This is best evidenced by the fact that the products of a given machine are absolutely identical, so that the particular can stand, without qualification, for the universal. The machine might be called the ideal instrument of "Platonic creation" because it reduces to a minimum the recalcitrancy of matter. It is also interesting to note that Raimundus Lullus (d. 1315), a Catalan philosopher, of the scholastic tradition, made a "thought machine" in the thirteenth century.

But what is, perhaps, most characteristic of the machine, and most important for considerations of modern culture, is the fact that the machine demands division of labor to a degree far beyond any system practiced prior to the "machine age." The machine is essentially a device for making parts which are subsequently assembled. Each machine has a limited share in the total process, and each machine attendant or assembly-line operator has one single function which is a fractional part of the whole additive procedure. A craftsman or artisan makes an object; a machine makes a "part." A machine attendant might perform his function perfectly without ever knowing whether he was making a washing-machine or an automobile. The different parts of a machine-made product could be manufactured according to specifications at four different corners of the world and assembled at a fifth. The negligibility of the human (integrating) factor is an important aspect of the "abstraction" and unintelligibility of the machine.

Machine ideals and machine organization go beyond the processes of manufacture to permeate the whole organization of society. In order to achieve efficiency, we come to have a definite task to perform; and since each does his own task completely, in his own corner, it is largely a matter of indifference to him what is going on in someone else's corner. Thus scientists, business men, laborers, and artists become isolated and indifferent to one another and are content with a narrow and intense following of their own pursuits. This doesn't seem entirely reasonable. Machine production serves an end—it produces a product; and isolated though each fractional stage of the process is, each machine, machine attendant, and assembly-line operator follows strict, unvarying specifications, whose plan and unity guarantee the ultimate integrity of the product. This situation can be brought home very vividly by comparing two experiences which most of the readers have had or can imagine. At the Chicago "Century of Progress" Exposition millions of people have seen a modern automobile assembly line in operation which shows the functional efficiency of machine production. A recent film of wide popularity is René Clair's brilliant "A Nous la Liberté," in which a most humorous and illuminating scene develops when one of the operators on the assembly line of a phonograph plant is distracted from his routine by permitting his eyes to occupy themselves with a girl who smiles. He misses his act and tries to follow the neglected object, thus disturbing the next man, who misses and follows, and so on until the assembly line has been transformed into a chaos of frantic, emotional human beings instead of an orderly platoon of automatons. These two exhibitions complement one another beautifully in giving a complete educational résumé of the character and implications of machine production.

In machine production the division of labor has a plan and an end which control the operations of the fractional elements in the additive scheme. When the pattern of machine production conditions a similar division of labor in society, the plan and the end are less predominant, because no one is agreed on the question of the identity of the "ultimate consumer" and, therefore, can hardly agree on the nature of the desirable end-product, and still less upon the plan whereby it can be achieved. It is much easier to write the specifications for the mass production of automobiles than it is for the mass production of "human happiness"—if, indeed, the phrase is not a paradox. Consequently, without definition and agreement in plan to determine their specifications, the different fractional elements in the "additive composition" of society follow their own special, and sometimes capricious, interests without regard for their fellows, often to their detriment, and certainly in terms which are so exclusive to their fractional domain that they are utterly unintelligible to those outside of their compartments. In the factory, it doesn't make much difference whether No. 1723 knows what and how No. 2609 makes, and vice versa, because the industrial engineer knows what the product is going to be in the end; but in human experience there are no discontinuous and fractional compartments—there is a continuum. Human experience is dynamic; machine theory is static. There is no end product apart from the actual doing, thinking, and enjoying which are its substance, except in the terms of abstraction which are essentially foreign to organic life.

If these observations on the application of the division of labor to society as a whole are true, why is it that the artist alone seems so emphatically unintelligible compared with the members of other groups? One reason is that the artist is "impractical" and his products have a less obvious functional significance than those of the business man and scientist. Most of us haven't the slightest conception of the theory of radio transmission and reception, but we do not hesitate to make use of the radio. We haven't the faintest idea of what a vitamin is; yet we readily permit our diet to be regulated by the "vitamin-wise." We know nothing of internal combustion engines, but we drive automobiles; photography is a chemical mystery, but we take pictures and go to the movies; electricity is a closed book to us, but its services are utilized on every hand. But when the artist is unintelligible, we are prone to reject him and to be at a loss to make use of his service. We subsist, starving for enjoyment; and when it is offered to us, we reject it because we do not know how to embrace it. The artist bakes no bread, and we are thinking only of the stomach's hunger. Perhaps the struggle is so great "to make ends meet" and to thread our way through chaos and conflict that we have no energy left for any spiritual exercise except sentimentality, day-dreaming, embroidering the "good old days," and the vicarious satisfaction derived from witnessing the lives of the heroes and heroines in the fairyland of the conventional "movies" and romantic magazine fiction. We live in a world of drama, excitement, mystery, and challenge, but we are blank and find no inspiration in it. We prefer to withdraw into our conventional shells, or to chase our tails or to bay at the moon. We can only venture where we have previously been led by the hand, and that is usually a very limited area, because we are cautious and practical.

But the artist is impractical and without caution. It is his gift to understand by intuition; and he can see the elements of drama, poetry, and vital expression of all sorts which are going on in his environment even though he lacks the techniques of the business man or scientist, who understands in terms of action or thought. He is impractical because he does not ask of an object what is its use, but is it gay or is it wistful, does it sparkle or is it somber, what is its mood and its "message." He looks at the steel mills and does not ask how many tons of steel are produced a day and at what cost in labor, materials, and capital investment; but he sees the busy movement of transfer cranes and the obeisance of derricks, the sky made red with furnace flames, the billowing clouds of smoke, sweaty bodies, plastered with grime, like ants at their labor; he hears the clank and the roar, whistles and bells, curses and grunts: he sees a picture, and he hears a symphony. What the artists sees and hears may be less real than the balance sheet of the business man and the formulas and blueprints of the scientist, but it is more actual. The artist has asked of his experience only that it move him and inspire him and thus bring him joy. His intuitive understanding that has grasped and transformed certain essential aspects of experience sometimes moves too fast and far for the layman, who then calls him unintelligible.

But what the artist has grasped is likely to be a more permanent and fertile phase of the situation than that which the business man and scientist selected. If we enter a Gothic cathedral we "see" the faith, and hope, and love which the artist put into it, and not the measurements, material specifications, and techniques in terms of which they were realized. What the modern artist has to say as an expression of modern culture will probably be of much greater interest to our future descendants than all the statistics in a current world-almanac. And there will be no question of "unintelligibility" lacking meaning. "Unintelligibility" will be recognized as being of the very essence of the culture whose idiom it characterizes.

The artist's interest is impractical and non-functional, but in his own mind it is intimately connected with a search for truth and reality. Artists have always made much greater pretenses and claims to truth and reality than they have to beauty. This is one of the guarantees of artistic sincerity (an artist who is going to make something "beautiful" should be regarded with suspicion), and it means that the artist is giving you his immediate experience of actuality; and to the naïve mind actuality is the most obvious criterion of truth and reality. It is only when we become professors and scientists that we know that actuality is neither true nor real and that a whale is not a fish, and that the sun doesn't set, and that it isn't the heat —it's the humidity, etc. Apropos of Einstein's theory of relativity, there once were popular some German verses which clearly set forth the distinction between actuality and reality:

> Du denkst der Mond geht unter?
> Er geht nicht unter, er tut nur so.
> Du denkst du bist ein Käse?
> Du bist kein Käse, du stinkst nur so.

In any situation where the actualistic-realistic dualism involves a considerable span or tension there is bound to be "unintelligibility." In the modern period this age-old situation has even given rise to theoretical interpretations, like Vaihinger's *als ob* philosophy, which seek to formalize (objectify) familiar human (subjective) attitudes and practices and effect an explicit reconciliation.

Because the artist has an isolated position in the division of labor applied to the culture of modern society, he is unintelligible like the occupants of the other compartments; but because he has no practical or functional contact with society at large, his unintelligibility constitutes a greater barrier than it does elsewhere. This view can be supported by reference to modern architecture and applied design (furniture, textiles, ceramics, clothing and millinery, etc.), where the artistic idiom is distinctly parallel to that of painting and sculpture, but where the products are much more readily acceptable because of the addition of obvious utility. It is a situation similar to the situation in science and industry where the unintelligibility of science is mitigated by practical, industrial utility.

In another sense mechanization and the division of labor have rendered the artist's position peculiar. John Dewey points out, in *Art as Experience*, that the artist cannot work mechanically for mass production. "He is less integrated than formerly in the normal flow of social services. A peculiar esthetic 'individualism' results." Mechanization, which otherwise tends to standardize, thus has a reflex action upon the artist, producing individualism and unintelligibility. In some cases the artist may be invited to co-operate in mass production; but, since his participation is of the drawing-board variety, divorced from the actual mechanics of production, the result is very likely to be eccentric or confusing.

In a mechanistic and experimental era the rate of change in physical environment and material culture is comparatively rapid. One hardly has time to get accustomed to the new when it is out-moded and replaced. The "novel" and the "different" come to have special values. But this situation strains our capacity for adaptation, and also introduces an element of uncertainty and precariousness. The "new-fangled" burglar-alarm may drop a brick on your head if you didn't set the switch properly. Strangely enough, these environmental novelties are analogous to the precarious elements of a primitive environment and may provide one explanation why "primitivism" has been such an important factor in modern culture—a factor which obviously, in its exotic and animalistic and animistic tendencies, has been a rich mine of "unintelligibility." The tension would seem to result from the fact that physical and material development ("progress") have a more rapid rate of acceleration than spiritual development. In the negative direction this circumstance has inspired "back-to-nature" movements; in the positive direction it would seem to call for greater spiritual flexibility and adaptability.

One of the solutions of this tension dilemma has been sought in the doctrine of "scientific determinism." Scientific determinism, like dematerialization in general, can yield two answers to the rather depressing notion that there is no benevolence (God) in nature—a subjective answer which says: "Therefore seek your destiny only within yourself," and an objective answer which says: "Determinism is necessity, necessity is order, order is fixed and immutable, therefore absolute." Determinism, whether it leads to individualism and irresponsibility or to necessity and abstraction, is a potential source of dematerialization and unintelligibility.

The sense of blind force which is inherent in the ideas of determinism, mechanization, and the lock step of standardization is a threat which leads to a desire for escape and compensation. Such escape may either take some form of introversion—mystical, romantic, or expressionistic—as a satisfaction of the inferiority complex which the oppression and suppression by "blind forces" produces, or it may produce some sort of "mass romanticism," in which animalism, primitivism, or nonsense may play a large part.

The former case has already been discussed in connection with individualism. The latter case represents one of the most prevalent conditions in modern popular culture. We have only to witness the oriental or rococo splendor of our "movie palaces," the "old English aristocracy" of suburban developments and filling stations, even the Tudor staidness of our college campuses, to realize what is meant by the escape of popular romanticism. Inside of these edifices one will find further exhibits bearing the same witness, if one should require further evidence. The lyrics of our popular songs provide eloquent data in the same direction. They embody, with a certain conviction lent them by a syncopated rhythm so typical of the eccentricities of modern culture, all of our sugar-coated dreams and hopes, and even, in the "blues" and "torch songs," disappointments palliated by a rhythmic, mystic reverie and a complacent satisfaction in self-pity, which dissolves all ills by focusing attention on the sufferer and endowing him with a halo of importance as the precious victim and sacrifice chosen by fate.

Jazz is the organic, animal, and primitive in us asserting itself against the domination of the mechanical, lifeless, soulless, overcivilized prescriptions of standardized living. And, hand in hand with the "animalism" of jazz, goes the nonsense of the jazz singer and its analogy in popular slang. "Hot-cha-cha," "hi-de-ho," and "boop-boop-a-doop" are nonsense syllables, obviously "unintelligible," which have acquired a universal popular meaning. Any child can tell you the appropriate connotations of such palpable nonsense as "horsefeathers," "nerts," "zowie," and "gaga." The élite may make themselves unintelligible with foreign phrases or Oxford diction, but the populace has an unintelligible language of its own.

The animalism and the nonsense of the jazz age are a phase of popular romanticism which has made large contributions to the unintelligibility of the modern cultural idiom.

Finally, and possibly the most intriguing of the "dematerialization factors of unintelligibility," is the modern invasion of the psychic realm. If we regard the development of modern science in general, it will be apparent that the real scientific child of the twentieth century is psychology, to which might be added its "not-quite-scientific" stepsister, psychoanalysis. The latter, whether you call it a science or not, has taken such a hold on the popular imagination that it is of immense importance as a determinant of our cultural idiom.

Psychology in this connection seems to be less important for what it does than for its more popular implications. Psychology, in its struggle to achieve recognition in an age of science, has been obliged to concern itself largely with physiology, neurology, or tests and measurements. These interests do not seem to have a particularly psychic flavor, but to the layman the psychologist is a person who investigates the human mind and soul. Psychoanalysis, as a result of its interest in the subconscious, dreams, and idiosyncrasies of individual behavior patterns, is much more intimately concerned with the psyche and has a somewhat more just claim to pre-eminence in this domain. There are many other forms of widespread and popular psychic movements, like spiritualism, Couéism, mental healing, faith cures, etc., which represent the more popular equivalent of the increasing importance of psychiatry in medical practice.

The importance of psychic interests for dematerialization, and hence for unintelligibility, is self-evident. Psychic phenomena have no substance, they are dynamic, usually rather vague, frequently capricious. They are difficult to define and, being defined, to classify and interpret. "Such stuff as dreams are made of" is hard to measure and pigeonhole. Psychic motivations are particularly elusive, since they so largely inhabit the veiled atmosphere of the subconscious. Of course, one of the reasons why psychic phenomena seem strange and intractable is that we are new hands at the game, and future generations will probably marvel at our ingenuousness in such matters. But another important aspect of the contribution of "psychic dematerialization" to unintelligibility is one that has already been anticipated. The psyche, as we know it, is the expression of the individual, par excellence. We all have bodies and senses which are pretty much alike or whose differences are visible or measurable and, hence, intelligible. We even have reasonable evidence to indicate that our ratiocination mechanisms operate in similar ways; but, when it comes to our souls, we feel that we are individuals or, at least, that identities are harder to measure. Religious people are likely to feel the need of establishing the principle of identity of souls, and so they believe in the immortality of the soul, and the individuality of the soul is minimized because all souls are dependent upon the one eternal and absolute principle. Individualists are likely to reject any sincere belief in the immortality of the soul because they jealously guard their souls against any such infringement upon the individual integrity of the soul as is constituted by immortality.

Whether in spite of our age of science or because of it, we live in a "psychic era." We are just at the beginning of it, and some of us haven't fully realized the significance of this situation. The relation of the "psychic era" to the age of science is a fertile field of speculation which must be neglected here. When future historians write about the later half of our century, it is possible that they will be concerned more with psychic phenomena than with science.

No recapitulation of the contribution of the factors of "psychic dematerialization" to unintelligibility is necessary, since they represent one of the most self-evident phases of the problem. The psychic realm is to us, because of its veiled elusiveness and its emphasis on individualistic idiosyncrasies, at the very heart of unintelligibility.

This survey of certain currents of contemporary culture has been introduced as a background in terms of which the modern artistic idiom in general and the various idioms of particular modern artists could be understood as a preliminary to the appreciation of specific examples of modern art. The next step is to discover and interpret these idioms in relation to the background which has been adumbrated.

III. INDIVIDUALISM

Individualism as a factor in the unintelligibility of the artistic idiom began with Impressionism. Every artist is to some extent an individual; and in the past, in cases like Rembrandt and El Greco, this feature has produced what some contemporaries regarded as unintelligibility. It was with Impressionism that individualism became a "systematic" source of unintelligibility.

Impressionism was the outgrowth of the Naturalism of men like Courbet and Manet. We have had previous occasion to refer to the naturalistic-impressionistic succession which is our present concern. Impressionism means, as far as the idiom is concerned, that the eye, and the eye alone, determines the picture.

In an attempt to present a faithful rendering of the natural object it had become increasingly important to take complete account of sensory evidence. A symbol which can indicate the kind of thing is largely determined by mental imagery; and we can express this situation by saying that, on the part of the observer, it is "read," not "seen." To make it more actual, it can be given tangibility—substance, texture, mass, and contour—which the mental image lacks. This "tactile imagery," however, necessarily preserves the definition of objects, so that they retain something of their symbolic character, and also locates them in space. But a more penetrating investigation of actuality reveals that at different times and places and under different conditions things "look" different; and when the retina ("visual imagery") determines the observation, definition and spatial location are largely eliminated because the eye "sees" only hues, values, and intensities.

Of course, the eye also has mechanisms of tactile perception; but with the rejection of the insufficiently "actual" tactile imagery the Impressionist consulted only the retina, the mechanism of "pure" visual perception.

Previously artistic imagery had been determined by mental, tactile, and visual factors. With Impressionism it was determined by visual factors alone. Not only was this the result of the naturalistic approach, but it appears to be a purely "scientific" procedure.

In science, evidence is determined exclusively by the instruments of observation or measurement; and in order to have consistent and homogeneous data, the instruments must be selective and specialized. To hear the heartbeats, the doctor uses a stethoscope; to record them, an electrocardiograph; to measure the heart, an X-ray machine; to determine its power, a Baumannometer for registering blood-pressure. No one of these instruments can perform the functions of another, and their evidence taken all together does not give a complete "picture" of the heart. They tell nothing about its color, weight, temperature, or flavor; but their evidence can be "interpreted" to tell something about the pathology, muscle tone, fatigue, structure, and compensation of the heart.

It might be said that each of these instruments, like all the instruments of science, abstracts from a complex situation the evidence which it is specifically designed to measure. In this sense, the instruments of measurement determine the science; and the dangers and limitations of science are that it may not realize when it is missing some "measurables" through a deficiency or insufficiency of instruments, and there may be "immeasurables" with which it cannot deal—in either case producing an incomplete picture.

The instruments of science are specialized or selective, and in operation they "abstract." Impressionism is like a science in that it uses a very specialized, selective instrument, the retina, to "abstract" or extract all of the visual evidence which its object contains. The one important difference, which makes Impressionism more individualistic than science, is that the instrument of Impressionism, is within and, therefore, not absolutely independent of the observer; whereas the best instruments of science are absolutely independent of the observer.

In addition to this "scientific attitude" of Impressionism, science played a further part in determining its idiom. Most of the new devices of technique which Impressionism employed were based on recent scientific discoveries by Rood, Chevreul, Helmholtz, and others, in the field of the physics of color and physiological optics.

The eye "sees" only color; and color has three properties: hue, value, and intensity. In terms of hue, Impressionism sought the "naturalistic" effect of light by means of chromatic saturation. Since the spectral colors result from the disintegration of white light and may be reintegrated into white light, a full assortment of spectral hues in a pure, unmixed state will produce the illusion of light when they are "mixed" on the retina. In terms of value, Impressionism sought natural illumination by means of a relative, rather than an absolute, value-scale. The physical nature of the pigments of the artist's palette makes it impossible for him to "match" the values in the upper ranges of the value-scale of nature. The Impressionist proceeded to establish a relative scale where the intervals had smaller magnitude than those in nature but where they were perfectly consistent in ratio. He located this relative scale in the upper ranges of his potential values, using white and lightened hues (tints) rather than black and darkened hues (shades). In terms of intensity, the Impressionist sought the brilliance of natural light by avoiding neutrals or mixed colors and by using the juxtaposition of complementaries, rather than dark tones or black, to produce the effect of shadow. In the physical handling of his pigment he produced a rather rough, granulated surface whose many facets could break up and reflect the light which fell upon them to produce a scintillant sparkle or warm glow or transparent mist, depending on the combination of other color factors.

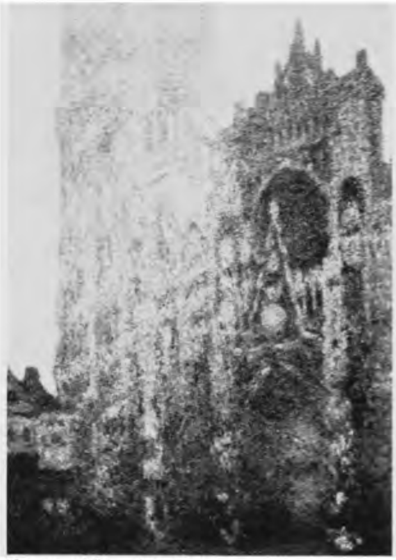
It is perfectly obvious that these technological devices, as well as the "attitude" of Impressionism, were scientific. But what do we see when we look at an impressionistic painting? We are not particularly aware of any "scientific evidence"—on the contrary, the shimmering, vaporous veil before our eyes reminds us of the glittering tinsel hanging on the Christmas tree, masking its body with a spidery web of magic, glistening strands. The effect is romantic—it is evanescent and fantastically insubstantial. And now we realize better wherein Impressionism, with all its science, differs from science. The instrument of observation is within the observer; and though the instrument is scientific, the observer is romantic. This is not a paradox. A romantic may drive an automobile, and the way in which he drives it and his route and destination may reveal that he is a romantic. Science is the objectification of the objective, Impressionism is the subjectification of the objective.

The artist, somewhat isolated and out of place in a scientific world, is constrained to use the means which the scientist provides for him; but he can use them in a way which voices his protest against, escape from, or compensation for, what he recognizes as the deficiencies of science.

The individualistic criterion of Impressionism, the retina within the observer as the "discoverer" of nature, plays a part in the determination of the Impressionist's theme as well as in matters of technique. If the "eye" determines the picture, it makes very little difference what the theme is, where it is bounded, or how casually it is treated. As a result the Impressionist's choice of theme was "accidental." It might be better to say it was calculated to give the effect of being accidental.

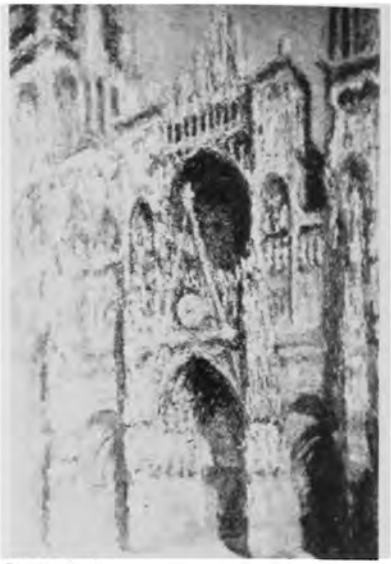
Being a romantic, the Impressionist preferred landscape, with its infinite expanse, infinite variety of mood, and its vague or dynamic, rather than definite and mechanical, structure; and being an Impressionist, he found in landscape the infinite abundance of light and *plein air* and color which he relished. The same vista or object was a new subject every hour of the day. (See Plates II*a* and II*b*.) The color magic of the retina could transform the most inconsequential "there" into the most resplendent "here." The Impressionist was a miracle-worker, a jinni with a ring, a fairy with a wand.

Whatever one may think of impressionistic pictures as works of art, and that will not be very much if one follows the current critics, one thing of tremendous importance must be granted to the Impressionists: they divorced the visual from the verbal. By permitting the "eye" to determine the picture, they began to play havoc with the identities of "things." Their atmospheric light was no respecter



Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

PLATE II*a*



Louvre, Paris

PLATE II*b*

CLAUDE MONET, "ROUEN CATHEDRAL," 1894

of the literal identification of objects. An impressionistic picture is a poor inventory. The eye, as a sense organ, extracts sensuous images and neglects the interests of the intellect, a logical mechanism, which abstracts mental symbols.

Whether or not we believe that the Impressionists succeeded in capitalizing this new departure, at least they paved the way which made it possible for succeeding modern artists to operate in the realm of sense, to develop an "aesthetic vision" without having to hurdle the barrier of "literalism." Literalism had done great service to art in the past, but in the time of the Impressionists it had grown sentimental or self-sufficient and was responsible for the inanities and banalities of men like Jules Breton, Bastien-Lepage, Meissonier, and Detaille, to mention only its "best" exponents.

When "impressionistic individualism" forsook the literal in favor of the visual, when it said that it is sufficient "to see" without having "to know," it was crossing the threshold which led into what we call "modern art," and at the same time it was making the first and, perhaps, the most crucial step in the introduction of unintelligibility into the modern artistic idiom.

The artists of succeeding movements owed a great debt to the Impressionists for their "emancipation." It was by way of Impressionism that men like Cézanne, van Gogh, Gauguin, Matisse, Dufy, and many others in this rather varied assortment made their way to new "revolutionary" achievements. Van Gogh expressed this debt when he referred to Pissarro as "notre Père à tous." And even the Impressionists themselves anticipated and reflected some of the new departures. Pissarro's painting (Plate I*a*) tended more toward an expression of mood than a mere record of the effects of light. Monet, for a time, came under the spell of the vigorous brushwork of van Gogh. Lovis Corinth, in paintings like the Walchensee landscapes, used an impressionistic technique for expressionistic purposes. These directions, as we shall see later, seem to have been inherent in the individualistic or subjective nature of Impressionism.

If Impressionism had been a phenomenon peculiar to art, we might have considerable difficulty in any attempt to illuminate or interpret it. But it was characteristic of the cultural, as well as the artistic, idiom of its time.

We have already had occasion to note that the scientific method had much in common with Impressionism. We pointed out that Darwinism was an impressionistic interpretation of scientific evidence and that, like artistic Impressionism, it was followed by the more subjective and dynamic interpretation of Bergson (expressionism). Atomic physics and chemistry, in reducing matter to an association of minute particles like the granular color-spots of Impressionism, were following an analogous course. The social sciences, in rejecting concepts (the equivalent of mental imagery in art), were following the same procedure of random or accidental selection of theme. And the general tendency of science to find potential material in even the most trivial situation is like the tendency of Impressionism to make a picture out of anything which the eye happened to light upon.

In philosophy the "phenomenalism" of Eduard Mach is purely impressionistic, and it is succeeded by a more expressionistic variation in the "phenomenology" of Husserl. Less obvious, but of greater importance, is the impressionistic character of Pragmatism. Pragmatism was the philosophy of the dawning age of science, and the observations made in connection with the Impressionism of science are largely cogent with relation to Pragmatism. One test that can be applied to induction, the method of Pragmatism, and Impressionism, which reveals their similarity, is the separation of the parts from the whole. They are meaningless without their context. Their purpose and significance are apparent only when the functioning whole is grasped. In comparison, the elements of deduction, idealism, and naturalism are self-contained and self-explanatory, and the whole is no more than the sum of its parts. It is only in terms of an ultimately "impressionistic thinking" that an "experimental logic" (again the terminology of science recurs) is conceivable.

William James's *Pluralistic Universe* discusses the "faith ladder" (an essentially impressionistic concept) as a substitute for the sorites of formal logic:

> A conception of the world arises in you somehow, no matter how. Is it true or not? you ask.
>
> It *might* be true somewhere, you say, for it is not self-contradictory.
>
> It *may* be true, you continue, even here and now.
>
> It is fit to be true, it would be well if it were true, it *ought* to be true, you presently feel.
>
> It *must* be true, something persuasive in you whispers next—and then—as a final result—It shall be *held* for *true*, you decide; it shall be as if true for you.
>
> And you acting thus may in certain special cases be a means of making it securely true in the end.
>
> Not one step in this process is logical, yet it is the way in which monists and pluralists alike espouse and hold fast to their visions.

As James points out, this procedure is not logical, nor is it scientific—but it is impressionistic. It represents the subjective or individualistic aspect of Impressionism and might be characterized as a form of "romantic logic."

In the field of criticism Impressionism has one of its foremost exponents in Walter Pater. Experience is divided into moments, more or less discrete and more or less transient, which will be rich if properly selected and intensively exploited so that life in these moments will burn with a "hard, gem-like flame." This is Impressionism in its sensuous emphasis and in its total concern with the unpremeditated present moment of experience. It is Impressionism in its "irresponsibility" and lack of conceptualization. It is Impressionism in the accidental or casual character of the theme pattern of life which results. And it is Impressionism because the results are wholly determined by the time, place, and constitution of the *individual* observer.

In the literary production of the impressionistic era we find the same attitudes represented. In literature, as in philosophy, where the subjective element is stronger than in science, there is the emergent tendency toward Expressionism; whereas in science the tendency is toward Postimpressionism. In painting, both begin to develop at about the same time, Postimpressionism making the stronger start, Expressionism making the stronger finish.

We are so familiar with the impressionistic attitude in literature, although we may know it by other names, that it does not require extensive examplification. Even the name is often employed, and we find Werner Mahrholz (*Deutsche Literatur der Gegenwart*) referring to Schnitzler as "der eigentliche Impressionist aus Weltanschauung und innerem Stil." A little later in this discussion of Schnitzler the attitude is concisely characterized: ". . . . am Reiz zu hängen, die Passivität des Ichs auszukosten, die Sensationen in ihrer Flüchtigkeit zu empfinden."

The tentative and accidental character of the impressionistic attitude is clearly conveyed by a passage from the second part of Strindberg's autobiography, *Son of a Servant:*

> Now he had to assume a rôle, learn it, and carry it through. He composed one for himself out of the skeptic, the materialist, the agnostic—and look, it fitted him well; for the simple reason that the time was skeptical and materialistic and because he had unconsciously developed into a man of the time. It was his Ego-complex, as the time had formed it. It was exactly what the time demanded of him.

This conditioning power of "the time" and the circumstances is distinctly analogous to the complete importance of the "time-place" situation for determining the character of the theme in an Impressionistic painting.

The particularly individualistic importance of this "determinism" is found in a later passage from the same part of Strindberg's autobiography, wherein may be observed the incipient tendency toward complete egocentrism and consequently Expressionism:

> . . . . he felt the necessity of revising his attitude according to the new principle: help yourself; and the new duty: to live at any price for one's self and his own. Everything else is vanity, untimely interference in human destiny. The "great thing" is nothing more than the interest of many egoists. In order to be entirely honest, he need no longer ask: is it your duty to further this thing, but he must ask: is it to your interest that this thing be furthered.

This same attitude and moral point of view had been clearly anticipated in Nietzsche's *Zur Genealogie der Moral:*

> Es gibt keine moralische Phänomene, sondern nur eine moralische Ausdeutung von Phänomenen.
>
> Wir sind es, die allein die Ursachen, das Nacheinander, das Füreinan-

> der, die Relativität, den Zwang, die Zahl, das Gesetz, die Freiheit, den Grund, den Zweck erdichtet haben.

And to emphasize the individualistic aspect of this point of view, Nietzsche says elsewhere:

> Gut ist nicht mehr gut, wenn der Nachbar es in den Mund nimmt. Und wie könnte es gar ein 'Gemeingut' geben! Das Wort widerspricht sich selbst: was gemein sein kann, hat immer nur wenig Wert.

This latter observation, in which Nietzsche rejects as anomalous the idea of the *common* good, reveals very clearly how the individualistic point of view can lead to unintelligibility.

One of the most brilliant and, at the same time, most volatile forms of Impressionism was the poetry of the French Symbolists. Even in literature it was possible to reject the "verbal," if not in favor of the visual, at least in favor of the audible and the vague. Their resultant obscurity is undeniable, but it is pregnant with "meaning." Mallarmé said: "To name an object is to suppress three-quarters of the enjoyment of the poem which consists in the pleasure of guessing little by little. To suggest, that is the dream." There can be no doubt that the consequent "unintelligibility" was largely produced by the individualistic attitude which this dictum implies. Mallarmé also said: "There must be this flight into self." Therewith he is making the passage into Expressionism which was the natural outcome of the Symbolist point of view; and we find Rimbaud saying: "I end by finding the disorder of my spirit sacred."

It is no wonder, then, that the cautious critic should suspect the Symbolists and interpret their expressionistic leanings as meaningless or unintelligible "unintelligibility," as François Porché does in *Poètes français depuis Verlaine:*

> Autre abus: le Symbolisme étant, par définition, une mode d'expression indirect, il était à craindre que le poète fut seul à comprendre ce qu'il avait voulu suggérer.
>
> ... mais encore qu'il n'avait rien voulu dire. Les Symbolistes, dans leurs derniers excès, ont feint de confondre la profondeur de la pensée ou le mystère de la vie avec l'inintelligibilité de la phrase.
>
> ... une musique du vide.

The farther we go in Impressionism the closer we approach the verge of Expressionism. In one of Maeterlinck's plays an omniscient character says: "You are like immovable dolls, and in your souls so much goes on. You do not know, yourselves, what you are." This might be called "impressionistic passivism." He adds: "One must put something into daily life, in order to be able to grasp it." This might be called "expressionistic activism."

An analogous case can be found in the comparison of two of Bergson's definitions of *durée.* Both are individualistic, but one presents the case rather coldly:

> Outside of me, in space, there is never any more than *one* position of the hand of the clock, since the past positions of the hand do not any longer exist. *Inside me*, however, a process of organization and penetration is going on, which is *durée.*

The other is more intense and uses a dynamic metaphor, talking about "the past penetrating the present" and "the present *eating into* the future."

Impressionism was characterized by "formlessness" and transiency. Impressionistic painting lacked outlines; Impressionistic sculpture and architecture lacked contours; Impressionistic poetry discovered "free verse"; Impressionistic philosophy got along without abstractions; Impressionistic music preferred "color" to structure. But "impressionistic formlessness" is born of the casual, the accidental, the passive. Expressionism is also characterized by "formlessness," but it is motivated by participation, destruction, and dynamism. Where Impressionism was content with the suggestive, Expressionism demands the eloquent, passionate, bizarre, and intense.

In spite of these differences, Expressionism was the natural sequel to Impressionism as a phase of individualism. As was pointed out earlier, Impressionism was characterized by the fact that the instrument of observation was within the observer. But this instrument was the retina, and its process of registering was more or less objective, so that the subjectivity of its "withinness" was partially mitigated. Being within, however, the instrument readily expanded beyond its boundaries into other realms of the "within." Imagination, emotions, *das Gefühl*, appetites, desires, and all the other phases of the *psychic* constitution were potential adjuncts of the new instrument of observation. The instrument became more animated, flexible, and dynamic.

The new instrument had many sources of inspiration. Science and industry were thrilling, audacious, and exciting beyond the limits of what the eye alone could register. The hectic world of discovery, conflict, tension, crime, megalomania, demagoguery, and speed found its idiom in Expressionism. On the other hand, there was a negative element in the expressionistic development. Regulated by the "machine order," the individual of the "masses" was a pawn—a mere cog on a wheel. In the economic sense he was fundamentally without freedom. So and so many rivets per hour; so and so many embryonic or fractional products of industry passing No. 5395 every day to be nicked, knocked, or tightened (the mechanical efficiency and economy of his movements having been scientifically determined) in the metamorphosis pageant of the assembly belt; so many bolts; so many nuts; contract completion dates; schedule time; the unvarying rhythm of so many revolutions per second, per second, per second, per second, ... It makes one numb, dumb, dizzy, or mad. Expressionism, which offered complete freedom to the individual, instead of complete subjugation, was a hope of escape or compensation. In its egocentric world the soul could shriek as loud as the whistle and the heart could beat as hard as the trip hammer.

Every picture that the Expressionist paints is a "self-portrait." The object is distorted, disintegrated, or disrupted by the participating, self-projecting, dynamic "transcendent subject." This is what is meant by "egocentrism." This is why the expressionistic idiom is explosive, fantastic, violent, centrifugal, or centripetal; its colors bizarre or eerie; its composition dynamic; its texture rough and varied; its rhythms eccentric; its imagery confused or dissociative; its mood electric, thunderous, prestidigitative, or nervous.

Symbolic of the egocentric or "subjective individualistic" character of Expressionism are two paintings of analogous themes but quite different means of realization—Ludwig Meidner's "I and the City" (Plate III) and Marc Chagall's "I and the Village" (Plate IV). Both are self-portraits by intent as well as in the sense implied above, so they provide a particularly appropriate introduction to Expressionism. They also indicate, in comparison with one another, the "particularistic" or "separatistic" character of Expressionism, dependent on the enlargement of

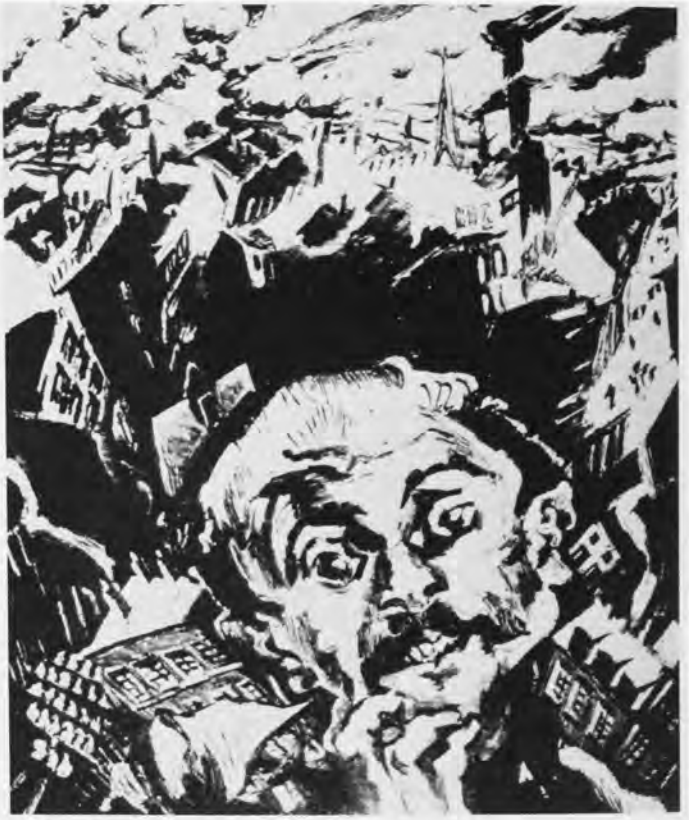
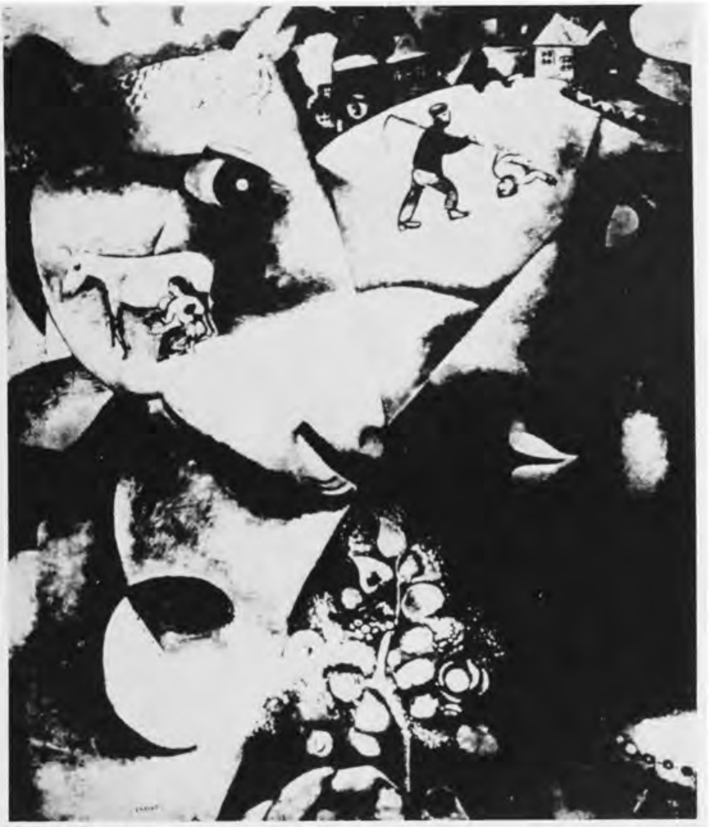


PLATE III. LUDWIG MEIDNER, "I AND THE CITY"



Collection of R. Gaffé, Brussels

PLATE IV. MARC CHAGALL, "I AND THE VILLAGE," 1911–12

the subjective factor. All impressionistic paintings have much in common. Expressionistic paintings develop more idiosyncrasies of a personal, school, or national character. Meidner's Expressionism is sensuous and emotional; Chagall's is more intellectual. Meidner is a German; Chagall belongs to the Parisian school.

Chagall reflects the influence of Cubism, which was the leading style of French Expressionism. In German Expressionism the ego is voracious; in Cubism the ego is completely disembodied. In Braque's "Still Life" (Plate V) the disembodied ego has made all sorts of explorations in the realm of its object. Being disembodied, the resultant observations were of a more or less geometric character; the "bodily" structure of the object was irrelevant, and so its elements were dissociated; and the ego was more or less "logically" motivated, so that it reassociated these elements in its own terms, partly capricious and partly rational with a *two*-dimensional emphasis appropriate to "disembodiment." This was Impressionism "in reverse" —instead of the subjectification of the objective, an objectification or "rationalization" of the subjective.

The Italian version of Expressionism was Futurism, in some respects a combination of the German vehemence and the French logic. In Severini's "Au Bal Tabarin" (Plate VI) one perceives the observations of the disembodied ego, but these observations have all been made with special reference to the dynamic indication of movement by the simultaneous representation of discrete phases of a continuous action. But logic deals with static relationships because its elements are discrete; and if you really want to "see" movement in a Futuristic picture, you have to provide the "movie flicker" yourself by blinking

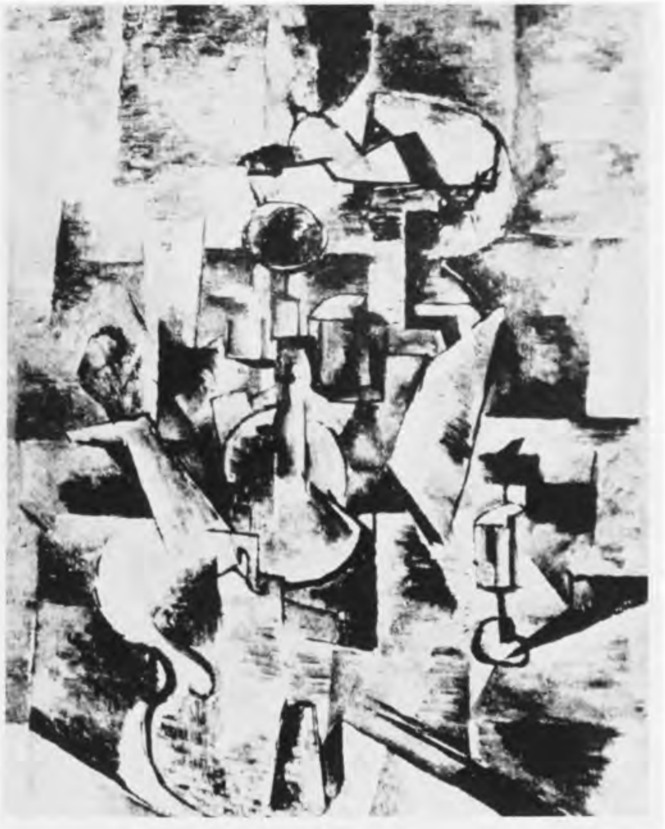


PLATE V. GEORGES BRAQUE, "STILL LIFE"

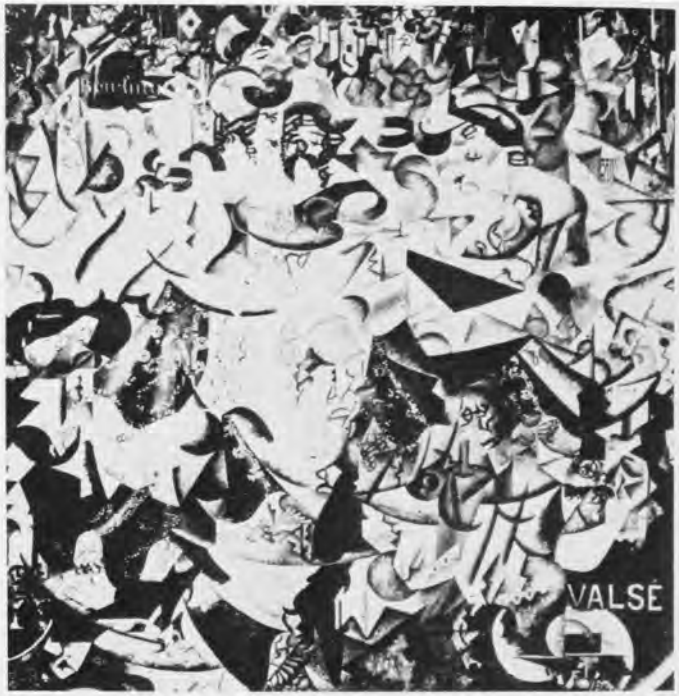


PLATE VI. GINO SEVERINI, "AU BAL TABARIN," 1911

your eyes. There were also French outgrowths of Cubism which moved in the direction of Futurism, represented by men like Marcel Duchamp and Robert Delaunay.

The program of Futurism, as formulated by the poet Marinetti, embraced other fields besides painting; and there is some reason in the contention that Fascism is Futurism translated into practical, political terms. Some of the "individualistic" elements in the "manifesto" of the Futurist painters are: scorn of all forms of imitation and glorification of originality; as a corollary, the uselessness or harmfulness of critics; and the consideration as an appellation of honor of the title "fools" applied to the originators of the movement.

Expressionism, like Impressionism, can exist in cultural fields outside of art. It is somewhat limited in science because of its predominant subjectivism; but energy physics, electricity, the astronomy of galaxies, "perfebrile therapy," individual psychology and psychotherapy, and certain theories of education have what might be called expressionistic elements in so far as dynamic or individualistic factors are stressed. Bertrand Russell remarks: "In Einstein's world there is more individualism and less government than in Newton's."

In philosophy, we have already mentioned Bergson as an Expressionist and Croce is certainly one of the arch-Expressionists of the expressionistic era. A part of the philosophic background of Expressionism can be most fittingly expressed in the words of Martin Schütze's *Academic Illusions:*

> The man of later ages can return to his primordial state of perfect unity only by overcoming the division of his nature produced by reflection. . . . .

> Rousseau's teaching was developed further by Hamann. Hamann drew the practical sum of it in the formulation which was adopted by Herder and Goethe: "Whatever you do, do it with your whole heart and all your soul." The proper vehicle of this wholeness is total, spontaneous, unreflective "feeling." Out of this teaching the "Storm-and-Stress" elaborated its cultural ideal of the absolute autonomy of the individual, which included the theory of "original genius" and "superman," the "characteristic" as the standard of beauty, the rejection of all traditional rules of conduct and art, and the belief that "Gefühl ist alles."

> Fichte's disciples, especially Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, and after them, the entire transcendentalistic movement, in America also, encountered no serious obstacles on their expeditions from the "Ego," the seat of human consciousness, directly into the core of the divine mind [for present purposes the Unintelligible might be substituted] and of the universe.

Nietzsche provides the most vivid embodiment of one phase of the philosophic background of Expressionism with his "superman" ideal, his egoism ("Geben wir den Menschen den Mut zu den als 'egoistisch' verschrieenen Handlungen zurück"), and his violence ("Zu langsam läuft mir alles Reden: in deinen Wagen springe ich, Sturm!").

The Danish theologian, Kierkegaard, was an Expressionist in characterizing truth as "daring-deed." Expressionism and other aspects of unintelligibility associated with the incomprehensible and the unconditioned, have, naturally, played a great part in modern religious tendencies. The reader is referred to Paul Tillich's *Die religiöse Lage der Gegenwart* and Wilhelm Pauck's *Karl Barth—Prophet of a New Christianity.*

The literary reaction to the religious question of Expressionism recurs constantly in modern prose and poetry. In *Belphégor*, Julien Benda says: "... l'absolu d'aujourdhui

... n'est plus quiétude, mais agitation; l'Eternel est devenu passion." Georges Duhamel writes:

> Je suis l'Esprit, je suis l'éternelle Beauté ...
> Et Dieu s'il est, n'est Dieu que pour m'avoir créé.

Rainer Marie Rilke cries out: "Was wirst Du tun, Gott, wenn ich sterbe?"

Modern literature is so full of Expressionism that it is not necessary to reproduce further examples by way of demonstrating egocentric individualism. But one further observation can be made in line with a circumstance previously mentioned. Expressionism tended to develop national boundaries; and we find literary men, like Maurice Barrès, starting out as individualists and ending up as nationalists. This is particularly important in connection with the "conflict motive," one of the salient unintelligibility factors of Expressionism.

Modern music had its first great expressionistic forbear in Wagner, the friend and then the enemy of Nietzsche. Debussy sometimes looked across the fence from Impressionism to Expressionism. Among the "moderns," Stravinsky, Prokofieff, Holst, Pratella, Ravel, and Milhaud are a few of the better-known composers who have produced expressionistic works. It is interesting that, in practically each case, elements of primitive, "folk," or exotic music have played an important rôle.

The course of individualism from Impressionism to Expressionism pushed farther and farther into the realm of "unintelligibility." And the same "disintegration" which individualism represents in the social order was reflected in the artistic idiom—the granular color-spots of Impressionism and the explosiveness or dissociation of Expressionism. Unintelligibility arises, in all of these cases, because the principle of order or structure is obscure and the excited pattern of the whole can be recognized only at some distance or by means of a key to interpretative understanding. The movements of the individuals in a colony of ants may seem to be chaotic, and one ant may not know how another ant lives or what he does; but the experienced observer can illuminate the bewildering complex and reveal the cosmos in what appears to be chaos. Cosmos is order, and hence meaning; chaos is disorder, and hence unintelligibility. What appears to be disorder and unintelligibility may be orderly and meaningful. Such may well be the case with the individualistic unintelligibility of Impressionism and Expressionism. There are different "orders" of order in meaning, just as there are different "orders" of infinitesimals in calculus, which stands at the threshold of "unintelligibility" in mathematics (because it is dynamic) and which was devised by Leibnitz, who might be considered as one of the ancestors of Bergson, the Expressionist.

IV. REVOLUTION

"Today everybody without any exception is revolutionary. Some know they are, and some do not; that is the only difference" (Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man*). Whether or not we agree with this comment by an observer of our era, we must admit that revolution is one of the dominant concepts of our time. It is, therefore, consequent that we should look for the reflection of revolution in the artistic idiom of the Revolutionary Age.

It has been pointed out that the greatest significance of Impressionism lay in its revolt against the literal. It was this "revolution" which started modern art on its way, and incidentally on the way of unintelligibility.

As an actual embodiment of revolutionary "feeling," however, Expressionism is a much more appropriate style. Its language is violent, and violence is one of the tenets of revolution. It is a fitting vehicle of the passion for action because it is explosive and dynamic. It is the idiom of propaganda, par excellence, because it appeals to the heart rather than to the head.

We find this best illustrated in German Expressionism and in Italian Futurism because these styles were sensuous and full-blooded enough to be able to shout. Cubism was a revolution in itself; but it was a sort of metaphysical revolution, so that it could not deal with the pulsating surface of things.

To deal with the matter in its most simple and obvious form, let us choose examples in which revolution is the actual theme, paintings, so titled, by Meidner (Plate VII*a*) and Russolo (Plate VII*b*). Meidner is somewhat more lit-

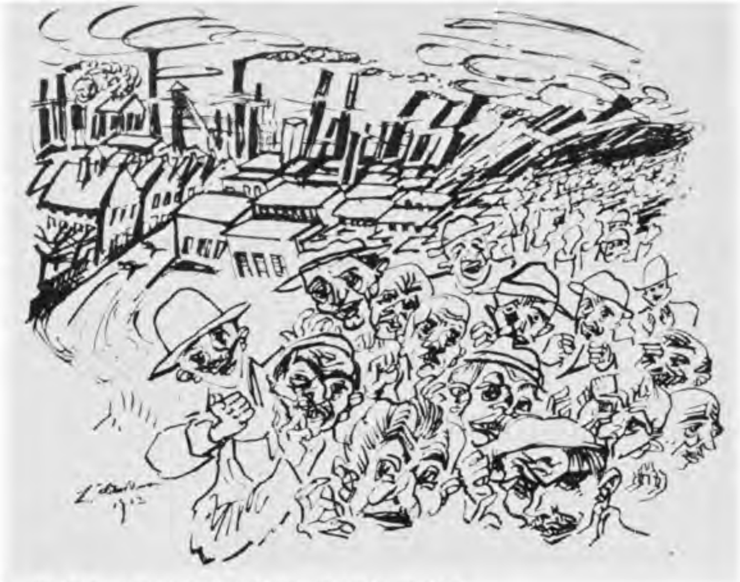


PLATE VII*a*. LUDWIG MEIDNER, "REVOLUTION"

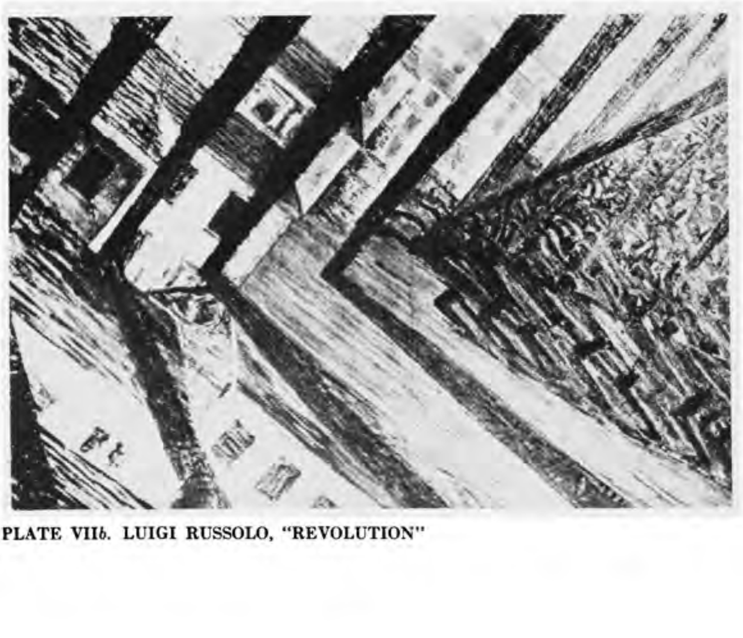


PLATE VII*b*. LUIGI RUSSOLO, "REVOLUTION" eral. The grimacing faces and threatening gestures of the foreground are shown against the factories and smokestacks of the background left. But when the eye passes into the background right, whence the multitude issues forth, there are no figures, only lines which seem to repeat the motive of the clenched and upraised fist. The factories and smokestacks have become amorphous. The mob is growing out of the slime, and it moves forward, threatening to break through the picture plane. Expressionistic pictures have a habit of revolting against their spatial limits, represented by the frame and the picture plane. In Russolo's painting, the theme is somewhat more "abstractly" handled, with the movement symbolized by the evolution of the "flying wedge." The figures are more stylized and compactly integrated, so that regimentation assumes a more dominant rôle than passion; but the salient quality of the composition, as in the case of Meidner, is dynamism.

In America, revolutionary Expressionism in art is not extensively popular. Good examples in graphic media have been reproduced in radical papers and magazines, but these do not have a very large circulation. The answer may be that in America revolutionary Expressionism is largely forestalled by "mass romanticism," which is somewhat easier to take and has been developed in our democracy (and it may be one of the best proofs that we are a democracy) to a point considerably beyond its position in European countries, where it remains, to a considerable extent, an evidence of "Americanization." "Mass romanticism" is to be found outside and inside of our magazine and "summer fiction" covers, in our "Arrow-collar-advertising," our popular songs, our "movies," our "movie palaces," etc. Although it is usually dark inside of the motion-picture house and we have little opportunity to look about, Plate VIII illustrates the remarkable degree of oriental ("or what have you?") splendor and luxury in which we, "overstuffed" and sinking into overstuffed upholstery, are languishing when we witness "Nirvana," according to Hollywood. This is Expressionism *à la Américaine*, perhaps with apologies to Sankt Pauli and other dionysiac sailors' havens.

One of the essential differences between Expressionism and "mass romanticism" is the fact that the former tends to break with tradition and the latter is likely to glorify the "time-honored." The "manifesto" of Futurist painting, previously cited, urges "revolt against the tyranny of such words as 'harmony' and 'good taste.' " (The Dadaist, Tzara, eulogizing Apollinaire and his condemnation of "good taste," explains: "Ce qu'Apollinaire entendait par 'bon goût' c'est un ensemble de conventions et de préjugés particuliers aux civilisations vieilles et contre lesquels sa nature instinctive et primitive s'insurgeait; en cela résidait son génie.") The Futurist poets' "manifesto" contained, among other items: "Exaltation of aggressive movement, feverish insomnia, gymnastic pace, perilous jump, etc.—Glorification of war—the only hygiene of the world—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of the anarchist, and scorn of woman." ("Mass romanticism," on the contrary, prefers to glorify woman.)

Even Cubism, for all its egocentrism, has been hailed as a revolution against individualism. Stefan Hirsch ("Concerning Cubism," in *Space*, January, 1930) remarks that "Cubism in its purest manifestations is an attempt at an impersonal strategy, in a historical period of, and as a reaction against, pronounced individualistic tendencies."

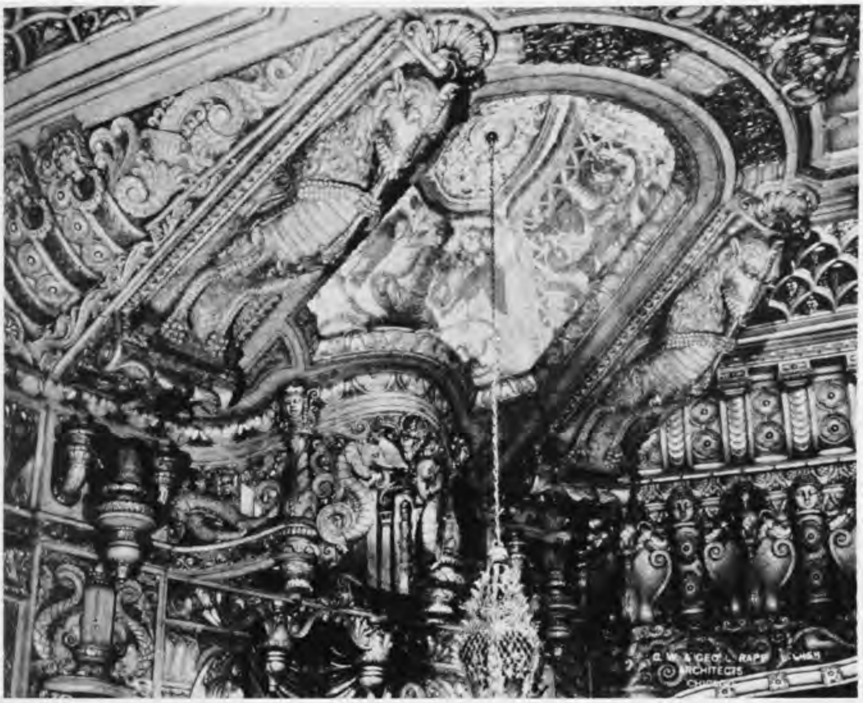

C. W. & GEO. L. RAPP
ARCHITECTS

PLATE VIII. INTERIOR DETAIL, ORIENTAL THEATRE, CHICAGO (C. W. AND GEORGE RAPP, ARCHITECTS)

Obviously, revolution is, to a large extent, a reaction against individualism as a motivation of exploitation. This has been one of the favorite themes of the literature and social philosophy of the modern era—individualism as the motivation and mechanization as the means of exploiting the "masses." Examples can be set down without comment, since their theme is unmistakable:

> [Life is] Aneignung, Verletzung, Ueberwältigung des Fremden und Schwächeren, Unterdrückung, Härte, Aufzwängung eigener Formen, Einverleibung und mindestens, mildestens Ausbeutung.
>
> Ausbeutung gehört ins Wesen des Lebendigen, als organische Grundfunktion. . . . . Gesetzt, dies ist als Theorie eine Neuerung,—als Realität ist es das Ur-Faktum aller Geschichte: man sei doch so weit gegen sich ehrlich [Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*].
>
> Never was the gulf between the thought of this privileged society and the masses greater than now, and never had this privileged society so completely made its egoistic and separate terms of peace with the unreason of things [Lange, *History of Materialism*].
>
> It is only by such external functions as the millions have in common, their uniform and simultaneous movements, that the many can be united into a higher unity: marching, keeping in step, shouting "hurrah" in unison, festal singing in chorus, united attacks on the enemy, these are the manifestations of life which are to give birth to the new and superior type of humanity. Everything that divides the many from the one, that fosters the illusion of the individual importance of man, especially the "soul," hinders this higher evolution, and must consequently be destroyed [Fülöp-Miller, *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism*].
>
> Welt- und Menschenverbesserung, gesehen als pathetischer Socialismus mit stark gefühlsmässigem Einschlag, ist der Kern des expressionistischen Aktivismus. Er ist eine Revolution der Seele gegen den Mechanismus, der Friedensgesinnung gegen den Gewaltgeist in jeder Form, der neuen Menschlichkeit gegen die Uebergewalt der Dinge und Verhältnisse [Mahrholz, *Deutsche Literatur der Gegenwart*].

In a discussion of post-war democracy Julien Benda, in *Belphégor*, says: "We would willingly say with a woman of the eighteenth century:“‘I call “people” all those who think commonly and basely.’ ” Jules Vallès comments on Beranger’s remark, “Beggars are happy folk,” by saying: “That must not be said to the beggars! If they believe it they will not rebel. They will take up the staff and scrip, not the rifle!”

The revolutionary idea in poetry is represented by these verses, from “L’Hiver,” by Jehan Rictus:

Et qu’on m’ tue ou qu’ j’aille en prison,
J’ m’en fou, je n’ connais pas d’ contraintes;
J’ suis l’Homme modern, qui pouss’ sa plainte,
Et vous savez bien qu’ j’ai raison.

This is revolutionary in theme and also achieves a certain vigor of language by elision. “Revolutionary poetry” can also take the form of a sharp opposition of juxtaposed images, as in the case of these verses from “Romanze zur Nacht,” by Georg Trakl:

Die Mutter leis im Schlafe singt.
Sehr friedlich schaut zur Nacht das Kind
Mit Augen, die ganz wahrhaft sind.
Im Hurenhaus Gelächter klingt.

This exhibits a certain analogy to the “simultaneism” of Futurism and other expressionistic styles.

That modern experimental science is revolutionary appeared in an earlier part of the discussion. It can be recalled by quoting from *Time and Western Man*, by Wyndham Lewis:

> The technical basis of production is the true source of the inevitably revolutionary conditions subsisting today, apart from any political creed.
>
> . . . . all serious politics today are revolutionary, as all science is revolutionary.

Revolution today, in its most general definition, is modern positive science, and the incessant and radical changes involved by that.

Science and individualism, or what they have in common, seems to be at the root of revolution, in so far as revolution has been a source of unintelligibility. Where science contributes to revolution independently of individualism the revolutionary results are usually intelligible. This situation is the potential source of a paradox in which absolute unintelligibility equals universal intelligibility. This paradox produced an "art" known as Dadaism, generally disregarded as capricious nonsense, but undoubtedly one of the most important keys to the modern idiom and particularly to unintelligibility.

Dadaism was not without its positive ancestry. Malcolm Cowley provides an interesting discussion of its genesis in the second January, 1934, number of the *New Republic*, in which he mentions Gautier and Flaubert among its forefathers. Mahrholz, *Deutsche Literatur der Gegenwart*, says of the latter: "Nicht mit Liebe versenkt Flaubert sich in die Tausendfältigkeit des realen Daseins, sondern er sucht durch Gestaltung des banal-wirklichen Lebens in allen seinen Nuancen diese Banalität zu überwinden." His realism was hate, revenge, and defense. The only object of his love was art. One of Courbet's defenders sought to excuse the harsh realism and display of ugliness for which his critics reproached him by saying that life is harsh and ugly and M. Courbet was being only true to nature. "La belle nature" is the antithesis of Dadaism.

But Flaubert's "proto-Dadaism" belonged to the cult of art, against which Dadaism vehemently revolted—"l'art n'a rien de supérieur." Dadaism was an "ism" designed to end all "isms," which were the natural progeny of the cult of art. The cult of art which produced "isms" was individualistic; and, according to Dada (which means *hobby-horse*), individualism was the enemy of society and the source of all of its ills.

The Dadaists looked upon the flourishing crop of "ists" as dilettantes, parasites, and complacent irresponsibles. Gathered together in Switzerland during the war (an expression of their rejection of the chaotic belligerence in which their own various nations were indulging), they desired to revolt against individualism among men and among nations and against the conflict and misery which it had bred. They were true revolutionists; but their number was small and, as artists, they were, to an important extent individualists. Physical violence would certainly have been unavailing to their numerically puny group, and so they chose a more penetrating and expansive weapon, satirical violence.

Their philosophy can be interpreted positively and negatively, as a crusade and as a prank. It was both. The absolute must have order, but the appearance of disorder may result from difference in point of view. The world spectacle revealed war, misery, and deceit; everything seemed to be topsy-turvy, and every man seemed to be at the throat of his brother. Where was the rhyme and reason of things? To the Dadaists it lay in disorder; hence nonsense and unintelligibility. Disorder is the absolute. Become a part of disorder or echo its pattern, and order results. Disorder is only disorder when you are outside looking in. When you are inside looking out, what was disorder has become order and what was order has become disorder. The Dadaists went in. Everything that reason had ever accepted was regurgitated and unreason was swallowed in large chunks to fill the cavernous hollow which had contained the accumulated store of ages. The auto-intoxication which "unprincipled" reason and contradictory "understandings" had produced was cured by the emetic action which the putrefaction of the "cock-eyed world" engendered. The new diet of nonsense, with all its "roughage," was more digestible, and the *catharsis* of Dadaism sanctified its excrement.

Since there is no "reason" in Dadaist art, there can be no intelligibility. But the paradox is not yet complete. If a thing means nothing, then everybody knows what it means. "Il ne signifie rien" and "connais pas" are the phrases most frequently employed by the Dadaists. The individualists had had their inning and had glorified in obscurity. Dadaism went even farther in its satirical purposes, showing that the absolutely individual, the absolutely unique, means nothing and therefore has the same meaning to everybody—hence universal meaning.

The typical example of Dadaist "painting" could be produced by throwing eggs at a board, sprinkling with sawdust, pasting on a piece of a can label or newspaper, hammering in a few nails to fasten the worn sole of an old shoe, tying with wire, and baking in a moderate oven until "ripe." The example of Dadaist art illustrated, "Portrait of Tristan Tzara," by Picabia (Plate IX), is somewhat more "dematerialized" but indicates the same capricious and "nonsensical" tendency. A child making mud pies is a Dadaist, and a child squashing them is even more of a Dadaist.

Having gone this far, it is now proper to let the Dadaists, themselves, say what they were trying to do.

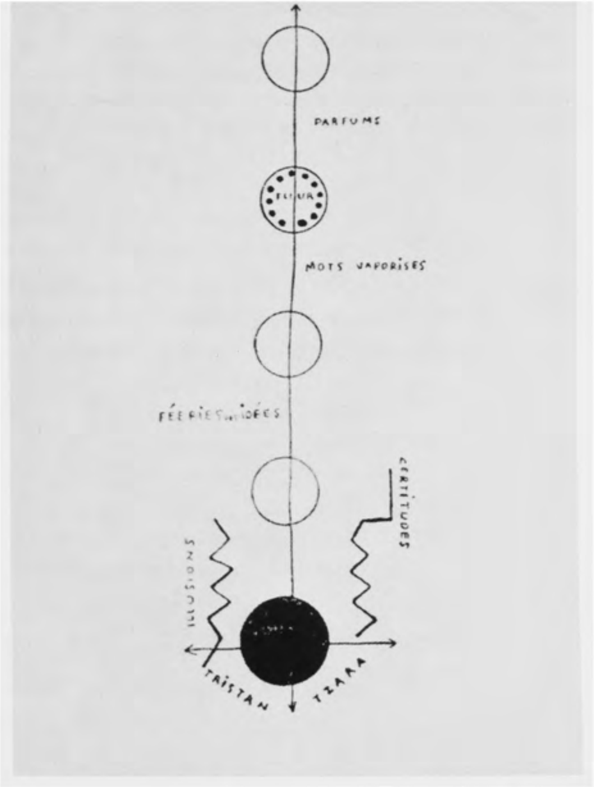

PARFUMS
FLEUR
MOTS VAPORISES
FÉERIES IDÉES
ILLUSIONS
CERTITUDES
TRISTAN
TZARA

PLATE IX. FRANCIS PICABIA, "PORTRAIT OF TRISTAN TZARA"

MANIFESTE DU MOUVEMENT DADA

Vous ne comprenez pas n'est-ce pas ce que nous faisons. Eh bien chers amis nous le comprenons moins encore. Quel bonheur hein vous avez raison. J'aimerais coucher encore une fois avec le pape, vous ne comprenez pas? moi non plus; comme c'est triste.

(*signé:* FRANCIS PICABIA)

MANIFESTE RIBEMONT-DESSAIGNES[1]

Qu'est-ce que c'est beau? Qu'est-ce que c'est laid? Qu'est-ce que c'est grand, fort, faible? Qu'est-ce que c'est Carpentier, Renan, Foch? Connais pas. Qu'est-ce que c'est moi? Connais pas. Connais pas. Connais pas.

L'intelligence a un avenir.
Dada n'a aucun avenir.
L'intelligence est une manie.
Dada est Dada.

PHILIPPE SOUPAULT

As the Dadaists sincerely proclaimed, true Dadaists were against Dadaism. They meant that Dadaism was an "ism" to end all "isms," and in opposing "isms" they opposed Dadaism. Paradox is the essence of Dadaism and one of the most typical forms of "unintelligibility."

In poetry the Dadaists followed the same capricious peregrinations in the realm of nonsense. Apollinaire had said: "Le plus grand chef-d'œuvre de la littérature n'est jamais qu'un lexique en désordre." Dadaism produced its literature by a very strict adherence to this principle. Two examples will be sufficient to indicate the scheme and then the reader can proceed to be his own Dadaist:

---

[1] Ribemont-Dessaignes is the author of *Histoire de Dadaisme.*

Suicide

A b c d e f
g h i j k l
m n o p q r
s t u v w
x y z
Louis Aragon

This is an example of the universal intelligibility of absolute unintelligibility. You don't even have to know French to read this "French" poem. Incidentally, its title is symbolic, since Dadaism was a consciously suicidal movement.

Paroxysme

---; ---; ----o--O
!!! tsi--i--i--I
--et sam--et sam--sam--sa M
--et sam--et sam--sam--sa M.
?oha--Keink----tsi H.
!rrroor--O
--atakak--af--oh--tzzi g.

This example is also interesting as a possible illustration of the influence of the "machine age," the arch-enemy, on Dadaism. It is difficult to conceive of its composition in a world where there were no typewriters or linotype machines. The "etaoinshrdlu," which occasionally escapes the newspaper proofreaders, could never have occurred on a hand-set page. It represents the order of the keys on the linotype machine and is introduced for "limbering-up" purposes or to kill a line in which an error has been made. It is one of the symbols of the unintelligibility of the machine "on its own."

One of the conflicts within the Dadaistic movement centered about the question of projecting Dadaistic principles into actual social intercourse. Cowley's reference (*loc. cit.*) to Flaubert's behavior in a brothel gives an indication of what is implied. There is a passage in Salmon's *MS. Found in a Hat* which might be taken as a record of a mild form of Dadaistic behavior:

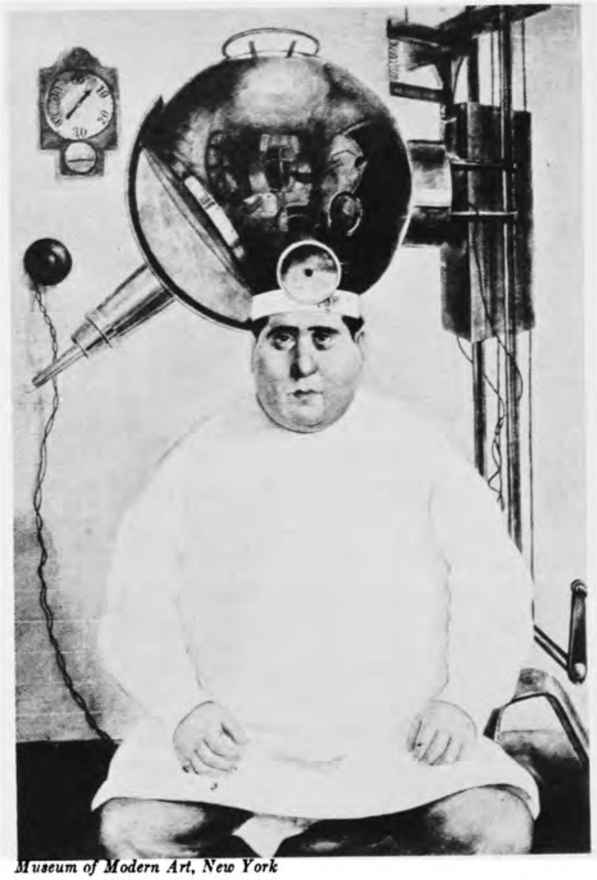
> One evening I insulted my best friend and, in that hostile night, picked up a passing woman. I keep her. She is sweet, she is wise, she knows a surprising lot of idiotic songs and is good at making hash. Let's toast ourselves, my heart, in this comfortable commonplace sensuality, between my hallucinated shadow and this child who collects postcards.

But Dadaism has found its echo in our own popular idiom, as the nonsense syllables of "jazz slang," previously mentioned, so clearly indicate. Rube Goldberg's famous cartoons of "inventions" and many other similar travesties are, in a sense, a variety of Dadaism designed for mass consumption.

Dada, for all the ridicule which has been heaped upon it, was serious, universal, and deep-seated. Marcel Arland wrote in *La nouvelle révue française*, Februry 1, 1924: "Le mouvement dada n'exprima un peuple, mais fut permis et sans doute causé par l'état et la civilisation de ce peuple."

The question as to whether or not what Dada produced was art is relatively unimportant. To a certain degree, perhaps a very slight one, there is never a contemporary "art." The artists who are our contemporaries convey so much vital and often controversial meaning, even in spite of "unintelligibility," that the question of quality, which is the essentially artistic question, is largely obscured. In this sense, the abode of art is in the past, where meaning has been settled, or it is at least more transparent because we know it in a vague form; and the factor of quality can begin to emerge when the smoke has cleared away from the battlefield of meaning. That is why we so often hear, in connection with judgments of contemporary art, "Only time can tell." What was ritual and religion to the primitive or medieval man, history, politics, or worship to the man of the ancient Orient, ethics to the Greek, is often just art to us. This is both fortunate and unfortunate, and the question has many implications, but this is not the place to discuss them.

Modern art has certainly produced revolutionary upheavals. To what extent has the goal of collectivism, as opposed to individualism, been achieved? Opinions will differ, but some evidence can be adduced to show that the revolutions were successful as far as the achievement of a "potential collectivism" in the artistic idiom is concerned. One of the most important Postexpressionistic styles was *Die neue Sachlichkeit* ("The New Objectivity") of postwar Germany. An example by Otto Dix, the "Portrait of Dr. Meyer-Hermann" (Plate X), shows this precise descriptive literalism, which does its job in the same workmanlike way that the "functionalism" of its contemporary in architecture, the "Bauhaus style" advocates. This is "collectivistic intelligibility." Everything has a reason. There is a certain mechanical accuracy and precision, differentiation of textures, and structural integrity, which are all apparent. But these elements are part of the idiom—they are meanings which happen to be derived from functional intelligibility rather than dynamic or psychic unintelligibility; but this idiom is eminently capable of serving the artistic sensibility which creates quality. In this respect "functionalism" can have a dualistic nature, as was the case with Gothic and many other architectural styles.



Museum of Modern Art, New York

PLATE X. OTTO DIX, "PORTRAIT OF DR. MEYER-HERMANN," 1926

Literalism need not be like the literalism of the nineteenth-century photographic realists, but can be an artistic vehicle as it was in the hands of Jan van Eyck, who might be called an ancestor of *Die neue Sachlichkeit.*

The same is true, but somewhat more difficult to explain, in the case of the Postexpressionistic movements which reacted to Cubism and Dadaism, of which Superrealism (*Surréalisme*) is the most widely known. The name itself constitutes the simplest demonstration. Superrealism expresses the same sort of dualism which was found to be characteristic of functionalism or the literalism of *Die neue Sachlichkeit.* The superreality which is dealt with is psychic and is therefore collective or universal, primarily in the sense of Schopenhauer's Will, Freud's "Id" and the subconscious, and the meaninglessness of Dadaism. In this sense, the collectivism of Superrealism did not get any closer to intelligibility; but, nevertheless, it was a sort of collectivism. All of the immediately post-Cubistic tendencies moved in the direction of an archaic simplicity which was essentially collectivistic. (The reader is referred to the important discussion of "the archaic" in Mr. Sweeney's volume on *Plastic Redirections in 20th Century Painting.*)

With respect to the art of Léger (Plate XV), this tendency is clearly set forth by several observations of Carl Einstein, in *Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts:*

> From Léger comes no personal expression, but a collective standard. For Léger the typical is the wonderful and the extraordinary.
>
> Léger, the standardizer, is the legitimate follower of the folk painter Rousseau, a man without bias, optimistic, interpretative and without dialectic, he is concerned with the *mythos* of the object . . . . an architect, a definer, a man for the collective.

Modern art, in an age of revolution, has been predominantly revolutionary. Taking its cue from science, and "set off" by individualistic fantasy or ambition, it has revolted, experimented, and propagandized. The overthrow of tradition, or at least respectable tradition, and "good taste," have carried it to the heights of unintelligibility.

V. DEMATERIALIZATION

Dematerialization as an unintelligibility factor is not separate from individualism and revolution. It is part of each of them and, as such, has been extensively involved in the earlier discussions. At the same time, it was obvious that individualism and revolution, themselves, were rather intimately related at many points. But in terms of a broad and conventional generalization, which, it must be admitted is clumsy and inadequate, individualism gave rise to the "free" expression of the spirit; and revolution or collectivism, dealing in "scientific" terms, ideologies, and universal (or international) interests, was concerned with the abstract products of mind. Yet both are psychic, and the dematerialization consists in this psychic aspect which is incorporeal and insubstantial, whether in terms of emotional fantasy or intellectual principle. The unintelligibility of dematerialization resides in this incorporeal or insubstantial character.

Again, in terms of a clumsy and inadequate generalization, the "spiritual" phase of dematerialization may be regarded as escape and compensation, as the solution of a dualism in which the spirit revolts against matter, as embodied in our "materialistic" age; the intellectual phase of dematerialization may be regarded as the positive result of the conceptualization produced by a "scientific" age, where mind transcends matter.

Since dematerialization covers the same ground as individualism and revolution, it can be dealt with more concisely. The necessary interpretative comments can be taken over from the earlier chapters; and, conversely, the new concepts may be referred back to the earlier material. For convenience, the discussion will be divided between the two types of dematerialization, but it will be apparent that they frequently overlap and many idioms should be dealt with under both headings. Individualistic dematerialization will be treated first.

The dematerialization of Impressionism remained largely within the sensuous field and was, therefore, relative. Retinal vision is less material than touch. It dissolved all solids in the vapor of light color and left "wraiths," which floated without anchor. That Expressionism was the natural outcome of Impressionism can be partially demonstrated in the item of the "Futurist manifesto" which cites "the necessity of movement and light destroying the materiality of the bodies." The simultaneity of representation of the dissociated elements of objects, characteristic of Cubism and Futurism, has a psychic implication, particularly in the field of dreams. The dematerialization of the "spiritual" or individualistic idioms is so completely apparent that it requires no further presentation. We may turn, therefore, to a consideration of the conditions of dematerialization in other fields of culture.

Psychic science is the natural realm in which to look for the scientific evidence of an essentially unscientific theme. Psychology hesitates to go very far in this direction and is completely outdistanced by psychoanalysis. This is an interesting situation. All of the social sciences, since they deal with human phenomena, should have some concern for the human psyche. But they derive their methodology from the natural sciences and are faced with the dilemma of measuring immeasurables. Perhaps they will realize, some day, that the "social sciences" are incomplete without the "social arts." Psychoanalysis, since it is not quite a science, concerns itself, not only with the individual, but even with the most immeasurable aspects of the individual, his history, his subconscious, and his dreams. The dematerialization of this procedure is apparent—psychic phenomena have become the "realities" in terms of which "appearance" is disintegrated. The unconscious is less "intelligible" than the conscious, and in one sense more subjective, in another sense more objective. Schopenhauer, Dadaism, and Superrealism provide the keys to this situation. Schopenhauer proclaimed the universality of the unconscious (Will), Dadaism proclaimed the universality of the unintelligible, and Superrealism proclaims both (psychic automatism). At the same time these points of view are arrived at by subjective penetration. Wyndham Lewis (*Time and Western Man*) writes of the philosophy of Schopenhauer: ". . . . it appears to us to be the first philosophy that natural science, of the modern age, can lay claim to, or that would fit its subjective and one-sided mood." There are more reasons than one for finding in Schopenhauer a direct antecedent of Freud.

In philosophy, Bergson, defining intuition as "that sort of intellectual sympathy by which we transport ourselves into the interior of an object in order to coincide with that part of the object which is unique and therefore inexpressible" (this translation from Martin Schütze's *Academic Illusions*), is certainly a leading exponent of "spiritual, dematerial unintelligibility." Croce's "intuitional, expressionistic" aesthetic with its "definition-resisting" definition of "beauty" as a universal containing particulars but no kinds is another important monument on this ground.

In literature, particularly in poetry, spiritual dematerialization, resulting from individual fancy, is rampant, beginning with the impressionistic phase. The brothers de Goncourt were able to boast about the nervous, fevered, subcutaneous perception of nuances which belonged to the impressionistic talents: "We have succeeded in seeing what no one sees, in hearing what no one hears."

Verlaine wrote (*Art poétique*) in the same vein:

De la musique avant toute chose
et pour cela préfère l'Impair
plus vague et plus soluble dans l'air,
sans rien en lui, qui pèse et qui pose.

Mallarmé, preferring art to life and boasting his incompetence in anything but the absolute, wrote:

Ma faim qui d'aucuns fruits ici ne se régale
Trouve en leur docte manque une saveur égale.

A German version of impressionistic dematerialization is to be found in "Märztag," by Detlev von Liliencron:

Wolkenschatten fliehen über Felder
Blau umdunstet stehen ferne Wälder.
. . . .
Lustig flattern, Mädchen, deine Bänder
Kurzes Glück träumt durch die weiten Länder.
Kurzes Glück schwamm mit den Wolkenmassen,
Wollt' es halten, musst' es schwimmen lassen.

When Impressionism becomes expressionistic, the metaphors of dematerialization are more dynamic and egocentric. Nietzsche writes in the "Vorspiel" to *Fröhliche Wissenschaft:*

Ja! Ich weiss woher ich stamme
Ungesättigt gleich der Flamme
Glühe und verzehr' ich mich.
Licht wird alles, was ich fasse,
Kohle alles, was ich lasse:
Flamme bin ich sicherlich!

Lalou (*Contemporary French Literature*) says of Stendhal that the "psychologist in him [was] infinitely more important than the Realist, that his work was less a picture of French or Italian customs than an indefatigable abstract analysis of the human heart."

From Rimbaud come some of the purest expressions of dematerialization. He states his quest as the search for a language which "will be soul for the soul, summing up everything, perfumes, sounds, colors, thought locking thought and dragging." The same spirit is reflected in other passages:

> The poet reaches the unknown; and even, demented, should he end by losing the intelligence of his visions, he has had them.
>
> Beside his dear sleeping body, how many hours of the night have I kept watch, seeking why he wanted so much to escape from reality.

The three following passages are by typical literary representatives of the Cubist, Dadaist, and Superrealist movements, respectively, and show facets of the dematerialization problem in these idioms:

> Max Jacob: "We are neither what we are nor what we are not, nor what we should like to be, nor what we believe ourselves to be, nor what we should pass for were we not what we are."
>
> Tristan Tzara: "L'absence de système est encore un système, mais le plus sympathique."
>
> André Bréton: "L'esprit humain ne semble ainsi fait qu'il ne peut pas être incohérent, ni pour lui-même, ni d'ailleurs pour d'autres."

An extract from Proust combines these points of view and, in a sense, shows how they are all ultimately derived from Impressionism:

> Before going to sleep, I thought so long I could not that, even when asleep, I had a little thought left. It was a mere gleam in the almost obscurity, but it sufficed to reflect in my sleep, first the idea that I could not sleep, then, reflection of this reflection, the idea that it was in sleeping I had had the idea I was not asleep, then, by a new refraction, my

> awakening . . . . to a new nap in which I wanted to tell some friends who had entered my room, that just now, while sleeping, I had thought I was not sleeping.

The spiritual dematerialization process sometimes tends away from the individualistc course into idealism or faith. Jaurès writes: "When we flash on a blind and brutal world this possibility, this reality of liberty and of harmony, we ourselves cast, in reality, the basis of our idealistic interpretation of the world." We must not be "forever judging, judging all the time." And Paul Claudel, in the mystic terms of the religion of Christ who had said, "Judge not, that ye be not judged," writes of "Quelqu'un qui soit en moi plus moi-même que moi." Barrès, who had rejected individualism, writes: "Catholicism is above all a maker of order," in which we can see spiritual dematerialization becoming rational dematerialization in keeping with the Neo-Scholastic movement.

Paul Valéry sums up, in terms of the greatest sensibility, all of these attitudes and, in addition, is an important figure in the rational dematerialization movement of pure poetry. The Ego is the point of departure, but it is transformed and subordinated in terms of mystical dualism; the Ego is all-important as the only accessible abode of the absolute; but the Ego is all-unimportant, since the absolute dwells in every Ego alike, and it is the presence of the absolute, not the Ego, which is all-important. Several passages, set down without further comment, should suffice to reveal the remarkable dematerializing insight of this genius:

> . . . . pure Ego dwells eternally in our senses.

> . . . . the highest contemplation of the mind is a Narcissism which transcends Egoism.

> These thoughts are not mysterious. It might have been written quite abstractly that the most general group of our transformations, which includes all sensations, all ideas, all judgments, everything that manifests itself within or without, admits an invariable factor.
>
> [The problem] presented to us by our fellowmen, which consists simply in the possibility of other intelligences, in the plurality of the singular, is comparable to the physical problem of relativity.
>
> The things of the world interest me only in their relation to the intellect. Bacon said this intellect is an idol. I agree, but I have never found a better.
>
> La vie est vaste, étant ivre d'absence,
> Et l'amertume est douce, et l'esprit clair.

The dematerialization of spirit borders on the dematerialization of mind, and there is no precise dividing-line between them. In general, the latter belonged more to the objective idioms of Postimpressionism and Postexpressionism than to the subjective idioms of Impressionism and Expressionism, but it is a question of relative predominance rather than exclusive prevalence.

In so far as Impressionism followed a formula, it was "abstract" in its method. In *La peinture indépendante en France*, Volume I, Adolphe Basler and Charles Kunstler observe, in connection with Monet: "Au reste, le goût de l'abstraction, qui séduisait la nouvelle génération, enthousiaste et inquiète, se manifestait déjà chez le maître de Giverny. Son art était devenu conventionnel et toute convention porte en soi quelque chose d'abstrait."

This was the bridge over which Impressionism moved to Neoimpressionism, which may be classified as a Postimpressionistic style; and Seurat, the outstanding master of this new departure, pointed out to Jules Christophe: "Le moyen d'expression, c'est le mélange optique des tons, des teintes et de leurs réactions ... suivant des lois très fixes."

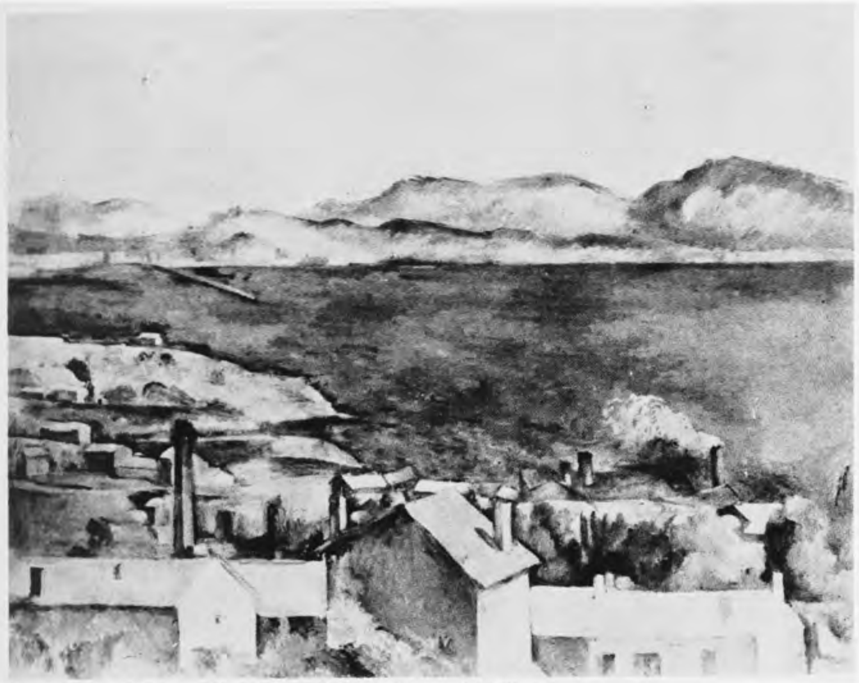
Cézanne (Plate XI), interested in the fundamental forms of nature—the cone, the cube, and the sphere—followed dematerialization on the way to geometry. Cones, cubes, and spheres are things which we have never "seen." They are geometric abstractions. This is what prompted Emile Bernard to say of Cézanne: "Son optique était donc bien plus dans sa cervelle que dans son œil."

The apparently geometrical appearance of many Cubist paintings shows this same tendency and indicates the debt of Cubism to Cézanne. The same thing is true in Futurism, where the poet-leader Marinetti said that beauty should be merely a mechanical conception.

The dematerializing tendency of post-Cubistic movements, like Neoplasticism, may be disposed of by the reference to Mr. Sweeney's discussion of the "archaic." Ozenfant explains his Purism in similar terms:

> Purification du langage plastique, tirage des formes et des couleurs en vue de créer un clavier de moyens expressifs nécessaire et suffisant (économie, intensité)—clavier à réactions bien définies et aussi universelles que possible.

In the case of the Superrealists the procedure is somewhat more varied. They achieve their goal of "metaphysical objectivity," or, as they put it, "psychic automatism," by regarding the realms of imagination and the subconscious as universal. In one sense they are still Dadaists, because they verge on the concept of the universal intelligibility of unintelligibility. In another sense, they are just artists, trying to clear away the débris of meaning in order that the imagination may go unhampered in its search for quality. In still another sense, they are intellects in search of



The Art Institute of Chicago (Mr. and Mrs. Martin A. Ryerson Collection)

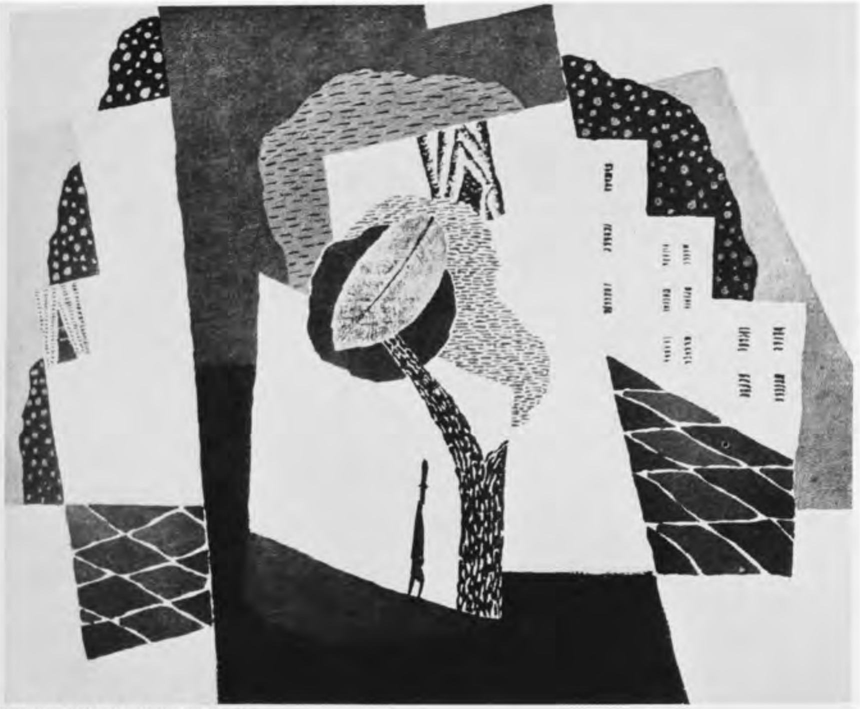
PLATE XI. PAUL CÉZANNE, "L'ESTAQUE," *ca.* 1886–88

ideas—ideas which have been purged of every vestige of substance. A painting by Survage (Plate XII), for example, reveals this character, and also shows his double debt to the Postimpressionists (Cézanne and Seurat) and the Cubists. Wilhelm Uhde (*Picasso and the French Tradition*) would also put Paul Klee (Plate XIII) in this classification. He writes:

> At bottom, the romanticism of Picasso and that of Paul Klee are simply one and the same phenomenon. Both set up against banal reality a pathetic reality. And Klee knows as well as Picasso that the reality of objects does not reside in their aspect; that, on the contrary, there are only apparent realizations, imperfect and ephemeral, of eternal ideas, determined as they are by chance and the moment. That is why his love for the principle and the essence of things carried him on toward the ideas themselves, and why he endowed them, by virtue of his intuition and his artistic vision, with a new life under a new form through the creative act. "As to this point, I am not at all intelligible," he writes of himself.

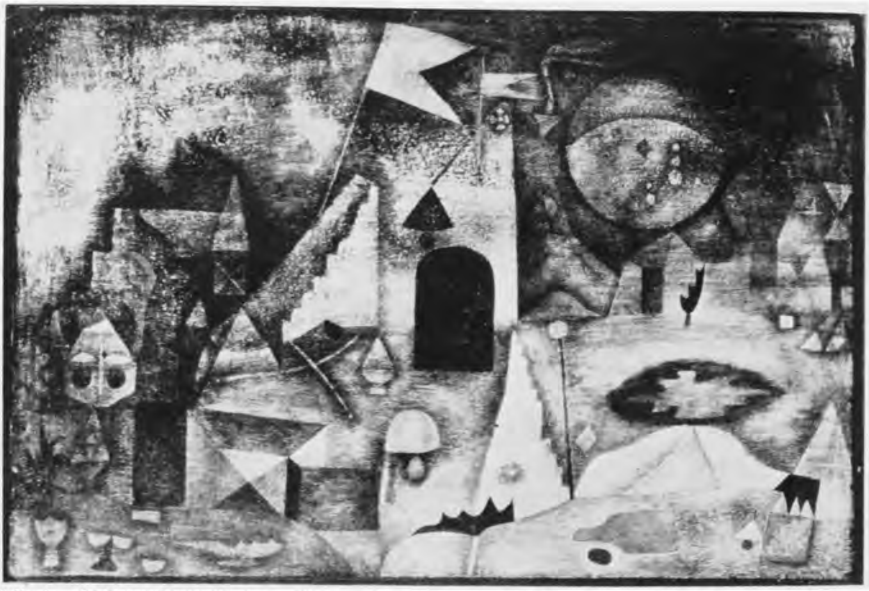
Klee could just as well, or better, be put into the first and second classifications. The Superrealists discovered that in the absolute nihilism of Dadaism there was a potential artistic heaven where line and color could be put down with whatever sensitivity the artist commanded without a care for anything which pure imagination did not dictate. The interest of Picasso (Plate XIV), although it is partly covered by this attitude, is also vigorously motivated in terms of the experimental adventurousness of the third category above, where it is also placed by Uhde in the discussion just quoted.

The painting of "Die neue Sachlichkeit" and the architecture of "The International Style," both Postexpressionistic in idiom, show dematerialization in what might be called "supermaterialization." By an absolute acceptance



Collection of M. H. P. Roché, Paris

PLATE XII. LÉOPOLD SURVAGE, "MAISONS," 1920



Collection of Edward M. M. Warburg. Photograph by courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, New York

PLATE XIII. PAUL KLEE, "ROMANTIC PARK"

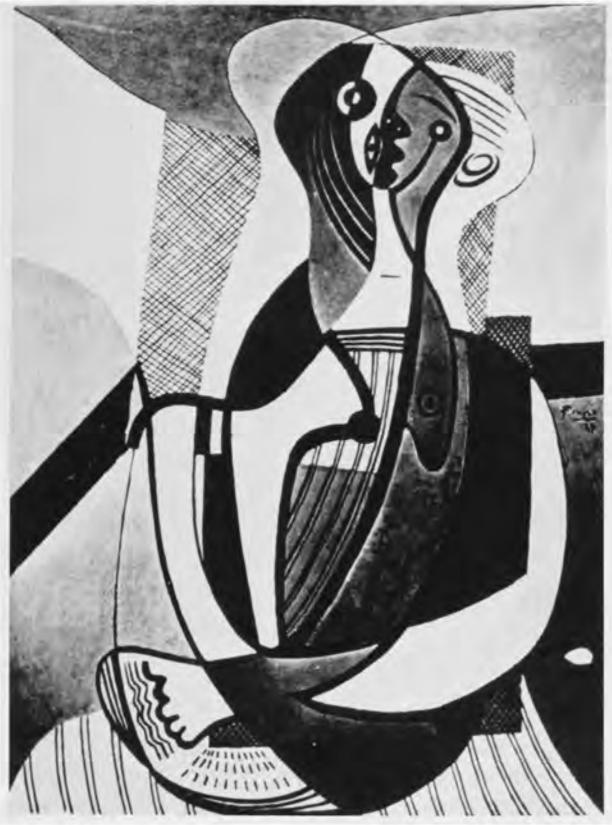


PLATE XIV. PABLO PICASSO, "FIGURE," 1927

of the material theme or the material substance or the material function, the artist is able to transcend the material in an aesthetic sense and deal with it in terms of "pure color," "pure surface," "pure structure," or, even, the ultimate paradox, "pure texture." The "Portrait of Dr. Meyer-Hermann" by Otto Dix (Plate X) has already been considered in this connection. It is also interesting to find French critics referring to the pavilion of Mies van der Rohe, at Barcelona, as an example of "the metaphysical architecture."

Science, industry, finance, literature, and music offer extensive material for the cultural background of the intellectually dematerialized artistic idiom. We have already noted Paul Valéry's reference to relativity in relation to the "plurality of the singular."

Relativity, with its ideal observer, is certainly one of the best "disembodiments" of scientific dematerialization. Space and time are *relations* between the parts of nature rather than *containers* for its content. The tangible has been supplanted by the intangible. The importance of light (cf. Impressionism) in the relativistic concept of the simultaneity of coexistent events and motion in the form of light propagation, the bending of the light rays in the "Einstein effect," the measurement of the attraction of light rays by the "red shift," the multi-dimensionality of a relativistic universe—these are all obvious dematerialization factors. Relativity, apart from science, had been anticipated in modern culture and social philosophy. Einstein, himself, is reported by his biographer, Moszkowski, to have said: "The discovery discovers the discoverer." This is an important but, by no means, a novel historical concept.

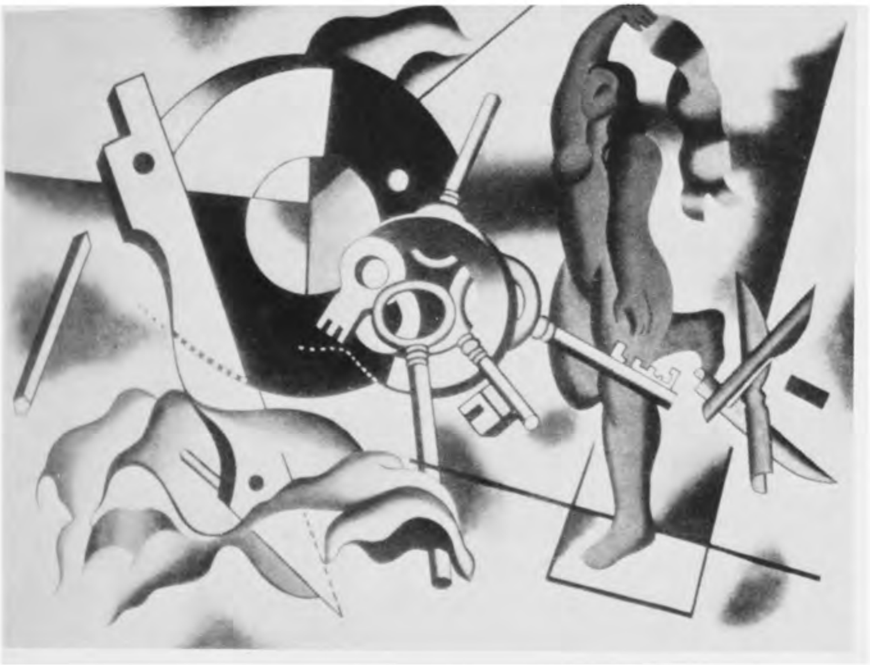


PLATE XV. FERNAND LÉGER, "COMPOSITION," 1930

Strindberg, eternally bothered by the problem of the Ego, says in the first volume of his autobiography, *Son of a Servant,* "The I is not a self; it is a mass of reflexes, a complex of drives and appetites, now suppressed, and, again, let loose."

Lewis Mumford writes, in *Technics and Civilization:* "Capitalism turned people from tangibles to intangibles. . . . . the whole process of business took on more and more an abstract form; it was concerned with non-commodities, imaginary futures, hypothetical gains." We deal in stocks and debentures of holding companies. What could be further from the material products of industry? Even such a familiar concept as a "dollar" turns out to embrace the foci of a thousand different economic measurements and its surfeit of meaning begins to make it unintelligible.

Philosophy, in an age of science, gets its nourishment from atoms, ergs, and quanta. The philosophers have a great time juggling the universe on the ends of their "dematerialized" noses. Usually they let it fall and have an even better time putting the pieces together again. Sometimes they seem to resent science. Wyndham Lewis writes, in *Time and Western Man,* that "science can be regarded as the means of communication that matter has found to explain itself, full of coldness and lassitude, pessimistically, to man." Sometimes they have a much gayer song, to accompany the electrons dancing around the protons in the atom:

> Alexander: " . . . . An ordinary perceptual object, like a penny, as understood by common-sense, is really a *compositum* consisting of a number of correlated constituent objects of various kinds, all occupying a place in the movement-continuum. . . . . The compositeness of a perceptual object infects the notion of 'its' duration with an incurable vagueness. We can make accurate statements about the durations of

> the correlated scientific objects, but the perceptual object of commonsense is too much a mixture of non-homogeneous constituents to be worth treating very seriously as a whole."
>
> Broad: "Whenever a penny looks to me elliptical, what really happens is that I am aware of an object which is, in fact, elliptical. . . . When I look at a penny from the side, what happens is this: I have a sensation, whose object is an elliptical, brown sensum: and this sensum is related in some way to a certain round physical object, viz. the penny."

In other words, the senses are practically extinct as far as science is concerned. Dematerialization is accomplished and the philosopher is in his paradise because he never did get along so well when he had to bother with the senses.

Literary men also look to science for the hope of order when they do not seek it in faith or pure intellect. Maurras, in his pacific socialism, saw tolerance growing out of static order: ". . . . universal peace will one day be realized, not because men will become better (this is not permitted to hope), but because a new order of things, a new science, new economic necessities will impose upon them the state of peace, as formerly the very conditions of their existence placed them and maintained them in a state of war."

In general, Postexpressionistic literature seeks formal values, intellectual transparency, structural devices, and more or less "insubstantial meaning." The following extract from *Three Lives*, by Gertrude Stein, shows these interests very clearly:

> Melanctha Herbert had not made her life all simple like Rose Johnson. Melanctha had not found it easy with herself to make her wants and what she had agree. Melanctha Herbert was always losing what she had in wanting all the things she saw. Melanctha was always being left when she was not leaving others. Melanctha Herbert, etc.

Pure poetry tends to dispense with subject and therefore to approach the universal. It is abstract and dematerialized in the sense of the qualities of Postexpressionistic literature listed above. It is confident of the achievement of order because, as Valéry said, "The human mind seems to me so made as to be incapable of incoherency for itself." Valéry characterizes M. Teste's room as "any habitation whatsoever, analogous to the any point whatsoever of the theorems—and perhaps as useful." This spirit carried into poetry enabled Valéry to produce the following verses from *Ébauche d'un serpent:*

> Ma fureur ici se fait mûre
> Je la conseille et la recuis
> Je m'écoute et dans mes circuits
> Ma méditation murmure

The structural analysis of this poem is like the solution of a mathematical problem. The first and last lines begin and end with the same syllables. The phonetic consonantal sequence of the first line is: m f r r—s s f m (r); in the last line: m m—d t s (voice—breath—sibilant)—m (r) m (r). The vowel sequence of the last line, a e i, a o u, is the absolute vowel sequence of physiological phonetics. These are but a few of the most obvious elements of a complete phonetic or structural analysis. (It is not surprising that Valéry put so much of his philosophy into *Eupalinos,* the story of an architect, who "elaborated the emotions and the vibrations of the soul of the future contemplator of his work.") The meaning of the poem is completely "insubstantial" with its imagery of "ripening furor" and "murmuring meditation."

As an exponent of the music of Postexpressionistic dematerialization, we may select Schönberg. Music in Schönberg's "twelve-tonal" scheme becomes pure structure. There is an absolute unity of musical space, defined by the vertical and the horizontal, and what happens in one point happens in the whole musical space. Furthermore, there is absolute perception of musical space, and the perception of the "object" is independent of position. The *Grundgestalt*, a more formal conception of "theme," is developed by inversion, retrogression, retrograde inversion, or inverted retrogression, and other formal devices which, however, are always strictly subordinate to the imagination of the composer. Imagination is simply provided with a "unified space." These observations might all be made, with appropriate substitution of analogous terms, to the painting of the Superrealists or the architecture of "The International Style."

Intellectual dematerialization contributes to unintelligibility to whatever extent the observer fails or refuses to exercise his dialectic mechanism. This happens quite extensively; and therefore we have another category where objectivity is "unintelligible," which refutes the notion that unintelligibility is the exclusive result of individualistic, subjective caprice.

VI. CONCLUSION

Because the artist is "unintelligible" does not signify that his work has no meaning. We have tried to show how "unintelligibility" is of the very essence of "meaning" in modern art. It is inevitable that the artist should be unintelligible because his sensitive nature, inspired by fascination, bewilderment, and excitement, expresses itself in the profound and intuitive terms of ineffable wonder. We, who are not artists, may be fascinated or bewildered but we are too inarticulate to crystallize our reactions in an expression of affirmation or protest. Perhaps we are too deep to be intuitive and not deep enough to be profound.

We think we know the way to go because we can read the road signs. But life must be more than a set of road signs because we don't know by whom and why they were erected, and because the going is just as important as the getting there. It is better to cover less ground and to understand and enjoy what you are seeing. We are too likely to think that the mountain-climbers and the strollers in the meadow lane aren't "getting anywhere." The smaller the area covered, the deeper the penetration; the narrower the pipe, the faster the flow.

If we regard our culture with a certain amount of intellectual curiosity, we shall be rewarded, because there is no age in which we can live so completely as in our own. Life is more important than art; but if we understood life, we should have no difficulty in understanding art, which is its most eloquent expression. And conversely, if the understanding of life seems to be a considerable task—we shall find that the artist's intuition will serve as the most gracious and foresighted guide, because it performs the synthesizing function in the human constitution and puts sense, mind, and spirit into the "wholes" which it produces, whereas our business and science are "parts" and their only hope of "wholeness" is through art.

This is the big-business era, the jazz age, and the age of speed; it is the age of science and the machine; and it is the psychic era and the age of individualism. "What an age!" we should cry, whether in exhilaration or disgust; but we just stare, agape. We want the artist to scratch our backs in the old, familiar places when we should be eager to mount behind him on his Pegasus, that we might see the world from his many points of vantage. We do not realize that the old, familiar things were once new, spontaneous, even shocking, and therein lay the force and meaning of the spiritual energy which they embodied.

We live in an age of unintelligibility, as every age must be that is so largely characterized by conflict, maladjustment, and heterogeneity. We can boast of science as the achievement of our age, but science has so completely revolutionized our world that it is a new and precarious world and *we are its primitives.* We have yet to reach the new archaism in life which we are having in art, although we are already pointing along the path. We shall have to pass through this archaism before we shall again reach a "developed" state of civilization. Will that be progress? Yes and no. Progress in the pure quantitative sense that we shall have gone farther, but not progress in the sense that the quality of the going must be higher. Progress is a purely quantitative concept, and there can be no quantitative measure of pure quality.

This same idea must be applied to all the idioms of modern art with which we have dealt. The potentiality of quality within every idiom is the same. A preference for one idiom to another is not a qualitative expression. Quality is only inherent in particulars. We may not like individualism or revolution, but that need not necessarily hinder our perceptions of quality in works of art which reflect these influences in their idiom or meaning. Meaning has no inherent part in quality perception. Quality is "unintelligible."

There are many senses in which unintelligibility in art may be an index of the general cultural conditions of our age, but there is also this sense in which unintelligibility is native to all art. It has always been true, to a certain extent (in so far as we are artists), that what we cannot "do" or "say" or "think"—we "dance" or "sing" or "paint" or "carve" or "build."

Doing or action (commerce, agriculture, manufacture, etc.) and thought (science, philosophy, etc.) and their in-between subjects (politics, economics, education, etc.) require definite methodologies, fixed concepts and definitions, constant systems of measurement, standardized techniques, consistent skills, reliable tools, and rational analyses. They have essentially verbal (definitive) limitations and conditions. But art, dealing with sensory and spiritual experience, with emotions and intuitions—in other words, with immeasurables and imponderables—is essentially non-verbal, indefinable, impractical, if you will; and its idiom may be nebulous, fantastic, psychic or "abstract," hence unintelligible, but this situation does not jeopardize the potential quality, which is the heart of the work of art, because quality is also unintelligible.

Modern art has made a tremendous contribution to the realization of this point of view, beginning with Impressionism's emancipation of the visual from the verbal, and following the varied courses of unintelligibility which we have traced. No doubt the artist grew tired of the Philistine's acceptance of him on a basis of misunderstanding (taking the "counterfeit" for the qualitative); and, in a psychic age of individualism and revolution, he embraced unintelligibility as a sublimation of his fear of being misunderstood.

It may be a source of concern to some that in a book about art, containing many illustrations, very little has been said about the specific monuments. This is not an oversight; it is done advisedly. The purpose of the critic has been conceived to be the providing of techniques of understanding and examples of their application. This understanding is not for its own sake alone, but as a way to the enjoyment of quality or value. It is, therefore, believed that all that has been said about modern culture is a contribution to the enjoyment of modern painting which is more important than the dissection of works of art.

Not one "intelligible" word can be said about the quality of a work of art. Quality is here an end-product whose "non-functional" aspect makes standards impossible. Each individual will get a different enjoyment. We are not the standardized recording instruments of science.

This inherent individualism of artistic enjoyment (as of artistic creation) is neither selfish nor "isolated." True individualism demands that every individual preserve for every other individual the rights which he claims for himself. A true individualist does not find fault or proselyte. Individualism should be essentially pacifistic. It gives rise to conflict only through misunderstanding. A Babel is chaos when one cannot understand the other; but there can never be any absolute Babel of artistic idioms because, ultimately, every artist is seeking the same goal. In order to do it sincerely, he must do it in his own way.

The artist can tell us what he is trying to do only in his art. Reduced to principles and ideas, it ceases to be art. And the artist is not always a competent guide in looking at pictures because he sees so intensely in his own way, and his understanding is so much a matter of intuition, that he may not always do justice to another's point of view. The difficulty with the naïve approach to art is that it is likely to make the observer look for his own image in the work rather than the image which the artist put into it. The difficulty with the rational approach to art is that it can never get close enough to the real goal of art which is ultimate quality or value.

The artistic idiom may be egocentric, cosmocentric, or anthropocentric, but quality must be perceived in terms which are anthropocentric. This "taking life whole," as the Greeks recognized, placed art and ethics on the same plane. It is the ideal which is represented by the notion of the art of life. Perfection can be sought in any task, and perfection in the smallest is as perfect as in the greatest.

Art deals with the whole of life; but its emphasis is in the spiritual realm, and the spiritual realm demands a unifying faith as a basis of intelligibility. Philosophies and religions provide faiths in the realms created by mind and soul. Science demands no faith because it deals only with demonstrable material. The faith which art demands is tolerance, the belief that each man may seek quality in his own way. Only the insecure and unimaginative must be forever judging. "Good and bad," "right and wrong," "beautiful and ugly" are the comfort of the incompetents.

It is not the philosophy or religion which we profess or the artistic idiom which we employ that is of primary significance. It is what we do with them and make of them that is of real importance. No two men have the same philosophy, religion, or artistic idiom; nor does any one man at different times. Dealing with these matters logically or scientifically, we discover constants and common denominators. The difficulty arises when we try to carry over these constants and common denominators into the realm of values.

As individuals we must be different and, hence, to some extent "unintelligible" to one another. To dispense utterly with unintelligibility, humanity will have to "jell" or dissolve. To any live individual neither eventuality represents a hope of salvation or the road from hatred toward love.

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ARNO SERIES OF CONTEMPORARY ART

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