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Classicism and Originality

1 Paul Signac (1863–1935) from *Eugène Delacroix to Neo-Impressionism*

The author was a painter closely involved with the Neo-Impressionist or Divisionist tendency. His book was of particular importance in formulating approaches to colour and to expression developed among late nineteenth-century French painters and in transmitting a body of theory to a subsequent generation. His concept of the practice of art as knowledge employed in the service of sensation was to be taken up by the Fauves. Originally published as *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionisme*, Edition de la Revue Blanche, Paris, June 1899. The present extracts are translated from pp. 74–5, 89–94 and 137–8 of the new edition, ed. F. Cachin, Paris, 1964. (Additional material from Signac's book will be found in *Art in Theory 1815–1900* VIB14.)

For half a century Delacroix tried hard to achieve more brightness and luminosity, thereby displaying to the colourists who would succeed him the path to follow and the goal to attain. He still left them much to do, but thanks to his contribution and his teaching, their task was made easier.

He proved to them all the advantages of a sound technique, of planning and logic, not hindering the passion for painting but strengthening it.

He gave them the secret of the laws governing colour: the harmony of similarities, the analogy of opposites.

He showed them how a unified and dull colour scheme is inferior to the colour produced by the vibrations of different combinations of elements.

He secured for them the resources of optical blending, which gives rise to new colours.

He advised them to banish dark, dull and drab colours as much as possible.

He taught them that it is possible to modify and reduce a colour without tarnishing it with mixtures on the palette.

He showed them the moral influence of colour which could contribute to the effect of the painting; he initiated them into the aesthetic language of colours and tones.

He incited them to dare everything, never to fear that their harmonies might be too colourful.

The powerful creator is equally the great educator; his teaching is as precious as his work.

Nevertheless it must be acknowledged that the paintings of Delacroix, despite his efforts and his knowledge, are not as light nor as coloured as the paintings of his

followers. *The Entrance of the Crusaders* appears dark beside *The Luncheon of the Boating Party* by Renoir and *Circus* by Seurat. Delacroix seized the Romantic palette, overloaded with colours, some brilliant, others, too numerous, earthy and dark; everything it could give him.

He could not have had a more perfect instrument to suit his ideal. In order to create this instrument, he had only to exclude from his palette the darker colours which were a useless encumbrance. He did violence to them in order to extract from them some brightness, but he never dreamt of painting only with the pure and virtual colours of the prism.

This progress had to be made by another generation: that of the Impressionists.

Everything is both connected to and develops from its own time: first one complicates, then one simplifies. If the Impressionists simplified the palette, if they achieved greater colour and luminosity, it is thanks to the investigations of the Romantic master and his struggles with the complicated palette.

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It was in 1886, at the last of the exhibitions of the Impressionist group, that works appeared for the first time that were painted solely with pure, separated and balanced colours, mixing optically according to a rational method.

Georges Seurat, who instigated this step forward, exhibited there the first separated painting. *A Sunday on the Grande-Jatte* was a decisive canvas which testified to the very rare qualities of the painter; grouped around him were Camille Pissarro, his son Lucien Pissarro and Paul Signac, who also exhibited works painted in a more or less similar technique.

The unexpected vividness and harmony of these innovators' paintings was immediately noticed, if not exactly welcomed. These qualities were thanks to the fundamental principles of *separation*. Since then, this technique has not stopped developing, thanks to the research and contributions of Henri-Edmond Cross, Albert Dubois-Pillet, Maximilien Luce, Hippolyte Petitjean, Théo van Rysselberghe, Henry van de Velde and others; this is in spite of cruel deaths, of attacks and desertions. [. . .]

If these painters, who would be better described by the epithet *Chromo-Luminaristes*, adopted the name *Neo-Impressionists*, this was not to court success (the Impressionists were still in full flight), but to pay homage to the efforts of their precursors, and to emphasize in spite of the differences, the common aim: light and colour. It is in this sense that the title *Neo-Impressionist* must be understood, for the technique used by these painters is not at all impressionistic; to the extent that that of their precursors was based on instinct and the instantaneous, theirs was by contrast based on reflection and the permanent.

The Neo-Impressionists, like the Impressionists, only had pure colours on their palette. But they totally repudiated any mixing of colours on the palette, except, of course, the mixing of colours which were contiguous in the chromatic circle. These, shaded off between each other and lightened with white, tend to reinstate the various colours of the solar spectrum and all their tones. An orange mixed with a yellow and a red, a violet shading into red and blue, a green passing from blue to yellow, are, together with white, the only elements they used. But, by the optical blending of these pure colours, and by varying their proportions, they obtained an infinite quantity of colours, from the most intense to the most grey.

They not only banished from their palettes any mixed colours, they also avoided spoiling the purity of their colours by putting contrary ones together on a canvas. Every touch made purely on the palette remains pure on the canvas.

As they used colours prepared with more brilliant powders, and more sumptuous materials, these painters could claim that their luminosity and coloration surpassed that of the Impressionists, who had darkened and spoiled the pure colours of the simplified palette.

It is not enough for the technique of *separation* to assure, by the mixture of pure optical elements, a maximum of luminosity and coloration; it guarantees the integral harmony of the work by the proportion and balance of these elements, depending on the rules of contrast, shading and radiance.

These rules, which the Impressionists observed infrequently and instinctively, are always rigorously applied by the Neo-Impressionists. It is a precise and scientific method, which does not enfeeble sensation, but guides and protects it.

It would seem that the first question confronting the painter in front of a blank canvas is the decision as to which curves and patterns will divide the surface, which colours and tones should cover it. Quite an infrequent worry at a time when most paintings are instantaneous photographs or useless illustrations.

To reproach the Impressionists for having neglected these concerns would be puerile, for their obvious plan was to seize the patterns and harmonies of nature, as they presented themselves, without any concern for order and combination. 'The Impressionist sits on the bank of a river,' said their critic Théodore Duret, 'and paints that which he sees before him.' They proved that, in this way, one could create marvels.

The Neo-Impressionist, following the advice of Delacroix, will not begin a canvas without having finalized the composition. Guided by tradition and by science, he will harmonize the composition with his idea; that is to say, he will adapt the lines (directions and angles), the light and dark (tones), the colours (pigments) to the character he wants. The dominance of the lines would be horizontal for calm, ascending for joy and descending for sadness, with all the intermediate lines used to depict all the other sensations in their infinite variety. A polychromatic interplay, no less expressive and diverse, joins with this linear interplay: corresponding to the ascending lines are warm colours and clear tones, with the descending lines, cold colours and dark tones predominate; a more or less perfect balance of warm and cold colours, of pale and intense tones is added to the calm of the horizontal lines. Thus submitting colour and line to the emotion he felt and wants to translate, the painter does the work of the poet, of the creator.

In a general way, it is possible to admit that a Neo-Impressionist work is more harmonious than an Impressionist one. Firstly, thanks to the constant observation of contrast, the harmony of detail in it is more precise. Secondly, thanks to the rational composition and to the aesthetic language of the colours, it leads to a harmony of the whole and a moral harmony with which the Impressionist work is deliberately unconcerned.

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It is perhaps easy to paint more luminously than the Neo-Impressionists, but you would lose colour; you can have more colour, but at the cost of darkening. Their colour is

located in the middle of the radius of the chromatic circle which goes from the centre – white – to the circumference – black. This location assures it the maximum saturation of power and beauty. A time will come when one discovers such a combination either from using a better type of colour than those which the painter has now, or from using better substances, or new processes like the direct application of light rays on sensitized surfaces; but it must be admitted that it was the Neo-Impressionists who knew how to exploit the current resources, rendering them at once more luminous and more coloured. Next to one of their paintings, and despite the criticisms which they still encounter, any painting, however great its artistic qualities, will appear dark or lacking in colour. It must be understood that we do not want a painter's talent to depend on how much light and colour there is in his paintings; we know that with white and black one can create masterpieces and one can paint with colour and light without merit. But if this research into colour and light is not the whole of art, is it not at least one of the most important parts? Is he not an artist who endeavours to create unity in the variety of rhythms of pigments and tones, and who employs his knowledge in the service of his sensations?

Remembering the phrase of Delacroix: 'Cowardly painting is the painting of a coward', the Neo-Impressionists could be proud of their austere and simple painting. And if it is passion that makes artists, rather than technique, they can be confident: they have the fertile passion of light, of colour and of harmony.

In any case, they will not have repeated that which had been done before; they will have the risky honour of having produced a new way, of expressing a personal ideal.

They can develop, but always on the bases of purity and of contrast; they knew the importance and charm of these too well ever to renounce them. Gradually freed from the hindrances of their beginnings, the technique of *separation*, which permitted them to express their dreams in colour, became more supple and advanced, promising even more fertile resources.

And if there is no artist among them whose genius allows him to develop this technique further, at least they have simplified his task. The triumphant colourist has only to appear: his palette has been prepared for him.

2 Paul Gauguin (1848–1903) Letter to Fontainas

Written from Tahiti in March 1899, in response to published criticism by André Fontainas of Gauguin's painting *Whence do we come? What are we? Where are we going?*, Fontainas had objected that 'abstractions are not communicated through concrete images unless, in the artist's own mind, they have already taken shape in some natural allegory which gives them life'. Original published in A. Fontainas (intro.), *Lettres de Paul Gauguin à André Fontainas*, Paris, 1921. The present translation is taken from J. Rewald, *Paul Gauguin: Letters to Ambroise Vollard and André Fontainas*, San Francisco, 1943, pp. 21–4. (For further texts by Gauguin see *Art in Theory 1815–1900* VIB18, VIC9 and 13.)

Un grand sommeil noir
 Tombe sur ma vie
 Dormez, tout espoir
 Dormez, toute envie.
 Verlaine

Monsieur Fontainas,

In the January number of the *Mercur de France*, you have two interesting articles, 'Rembrandt' and 'The Volland Gallery.' In the latter you mention me. In spite of your dislike you have tried to make an honest study of the art or rather the work of a painter who has no emotional effect upon you. A rare phenomenon among critics.

I have always [thought] that it was the duty of a painter never to answer criticisms, even hostile ones – especially hostile ones; nor flattering ones, either, because those are often dictated by friendship.

This time, without departing from my habitual reserve, I have an irresistible desire to write to you, a caprice if you will, and – like all emotional people – I am not good at resisting. Since this is merely a personal letter it is not a real answer but simply a chat on art; your article prompts and evokes it.

We painters, we who are condemned to penury, accept the material difficulties of life without complaining, but we suffer from them insofar as they constitute a hindrance to work. How much time we lose in seeking our daily bread! The most menial tasks, dilapidated studios, and a thousand other obstacles. All these create despondency, followed by impotence, rage, violence. Such things do not concern you at all, I mention them only to convince both of us that you have good reason to point out numerous defects, violence, monotony of tone, clashing colors, etc. Yes, all these probably exist, do exist. Sometimes however they are intentional. Are not these repetitions of tones, these monotonous color harmonies (in the musical sense) analogous to oriental chants sung in a shrill voice, to the accompaniment of pulsating notes which intensify them by contrast? Beethoven uses them frequently (as I understand it) in the 'Sonata Pathétique,' for example. Delacroix too with his repeated harmonies of brown and dull violet, a sombre cloak suggesting tragedy. You often go to the Louvre; with what I have said in mind, look closely at Cimabue.

Think also of the musical role color will henceforth play in modern painting. Color, which is vibration just as music is, is able to attain what is most universal yet at the same time most elusive in nature: its inner force.

Here near my cabin, in complete silence, amid the intoxicating perfumes of nature, I dream of violent harmonies. A delight enhanced by I know not what sacred horror I divine in the infinite. An aroma of long-vanished joy that I breathe in the present. Animal figures rigid as statues, with something indescribably solemn and religious in the rhythm of their pose, in their strange immobility. In eyes that dream, the troubled surface of an unfathomable enigma.

Night is here. All is at rest. My eyes close in order to see without actually understanding the dream that flees before me in infinite space; and I experience the languorous sensation produced by the mournful procession of my hopes.

In praise of certain pictures that I considered unimportant you exclaim: 'if only Gauguin were always like that!' But I don't want to be always like that.

'In the large panel that Gauguin exhibits there is nothing that explains the meaning of the allegory.' Yes, there is: my dream is intangible, it comprises no allegory; as Mallarmé said, 'It is a musical poem, it needs no libretto.' Consequently the essence of a work, unsubstantial and out of reach, consists precisely of 'that which is not expressed; it flows by implication from the lines without color or words; it is not a material structure.'

Standing before one of my pictures of Tahiti, Mallarmé also remarked: 'It is amazing that one can put so much mystery in so much brilliance.'

To go back to the panel: the idol is there not as a literary symbol but as a statue, yet perhaps less of a statue than the animal figures, less animal also, combining my dream before my cabin with all nature, dominating our primitive soul, the unearthly consolation of our sufferings to the extent that they are vague and incomprehensible before the mystery of our origin and of our future.

And all this sings with sadness in my soul and in my design while I paint and dream at the same time with no tangible allegory within my reach – due perhaps to a lack of literary education.

Awakening with my work finished, I ask myself: 'Whence do we come? What are we? Where are we going?' A thought which has no longer anything to do with the canvas, expressed in words quite apart on the wall which surrounds it. Not a title but a signature.

You see, although I understand very well the value of words – abstract and concrete – in the dictionary, I no longer grasp them in painting. I have tried to interpret my vision in an appropriate décor without recourse to literary means and with all the simplicity the medium permits: a difficult job. You may say that I have failed, but do not reproach me for having tried, nor should you advise me to change my goal, to dally with other ideas already accepted, consecrated. Puvis de Chavannes is the perfect example. Of course Puvis overwhelms me with his talent and experience, which I lack; I admire him as much as you do and more, but for entirely different reasons (and – don't be annoyed – with more understanding). Each of us belongs to his own period.

The government is right not to give me an order for a decoration for a public building which might clash with the ideas of the majority, and it would be even more reprehensible for me to accept it, since I should have no alternative but to cheat or lie to myself.

At my exhibition at Durand-Ruel's [1893] a young man who didn't understand my pictures asked Degas to explain them to him. Smiling, he recited a fable by La Fontaine. 'You see,' he said, 'Gauguin is the thin wolf without the collar' [that is, he prefers liberty with starvation to servitude with abundance – John Rewald].

After fifteen years of struggle we are beginning to free ourselves from the influence of the Academy, from all this confusion of formulas apart from which there has been no hope of salvation, honor, or money: drawing, color composition, sincerity in the presence of nature, and so on. Only yesterday some mathematician [Charles Henry] tried to prove to us that we should use unchangeable light and color.

Now the danger is past. Yes, we are free, and yet I still see another danger flickering on the horizon; I want to discuss it with you. This long and boring letter has been written with only that in view. Criticism of today, when it is serious, intelligent, full of good intentions, tends to impose on us a method of thinking and dreaming which might become another bondage. Preoccupied with what concerns it particularly, its own field, literature, it will lose sight of what concerns us, painting. If that is true, I shall be impertinent enough to quote Mallarmé: 'A critic is someone who meddles with something that is none of his business.'

In his memory will you permit me to offer you this sketch of him, hastily dashed off, a vague recollection of a beautiful and beloved face, radiant, even in the shadows. Not a gift but an appeal for the indulgence I need for my foolishness and violence.

3 Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) from ‘On Dreams’

Freud was the founder of psychoanalysis, and his theories were instrumental in forming modern concepts of human nature and human motivation. His writings on dreams and on the unconscious changed traditional ideas about the origins of visual imagery and added a new dimension to the problems of its interpretation. The essay from which the present extracts are taken was first published in *Grenzfragen des Nerven- und Seelenlebens*, Wiesbaden, 1901, as a summary of his longer work *The Interpretation of Dreams*, published in 1900. (Section XII of ‘On Dreams’ was added by Freud in 1911.) The present translation is taken from J. Strachey (ed.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, London, vol. 5 (1900–1901), 1953, pp. 633–86.

VI

It is the process of displacement which is chiefly responsible for our being unable to discover or recognize the dream-thoughts in the dream-content, unless we understand the reason for their distortion. Nevertheless, the dream-thoughts are also submitted to another and milder sort of transformation, which leads to our discovering a new achievement on the part of the dream-work – one, however, which is easily intelligible. The dream-thoughts which we first come across as we proceed with our analysis often strike us by the unusual form in which they are expressed; they are not clothed in the prosaic language usually employed by our thoughts, but are on the contrary represented symbolically by means of similes and metaphors, in images resembling those of poetic speech. There is no difficulty in accounting for the constraint imposed upon the form in which the dream-thoughts are expressed. The manifest content of dreams consists for the most part in pictorial situations; and the dream-thoughts must accordingly be submitted in the first place to a treatment which will make them suitable for a representation of this kind. If we imagine ourselves faced by the problem of representing the arguments in a political leading article or the speeches of counsel before a court of law in a series of pictures, we shall easily understand the modifications which must necessarily be carried out by the dream-work owing to *considerations of representability in the content of the dream*.

The psychical material of the dream-thoughts habitually includes recollections of impressive experiences – not infrequently dating back to early childhood – which are thus themselves perceived as a rule as situations having a visual subject-matter. Wherever the possibility arises, this portion of the dream-thoughts exercises a determining influence upon the form taken by the content of the dream; it constitutes, as it were, a nucleus of crystallization, attracting the material of the dream-thoughts to itself and thus affecting their distribution. The situation in a dream is often nothing other than a modified repetition, complicated by interpolations, of an impressive experience of this kind; on the other hand, faithful and straightforward reproductions of real scenes only rarely appear in dreams.

The content of dreams, however, does not consist entirely of situations, but also includes disconnected fragments of visual images, speeches and even bits of unmodified thoughts. It may therefore perhaps be of interest to enumerate very briefly the modes of representation available to the dream-work for reproducing the dream-thoughts in the peculiar form of expression necessary in dreams.

The dream-thoughts which we arrive at by means of analysis reveal themselves as a psychical complex of the most intricate possible structure. Its portions stand in the most manifold logical relations to one another: they represent foreground and background, conditions, digressions and illustrations, chains of evidence and counter-arguments. Each train of thought is almost invariably accompanied by its contradictory counterpart. This material lacks none of the characteristics that are familiar to us from our waking thinking. If now all of this is to be turned into a dream, the psychical material will be submitted to a pressure which will condense it greatly, to an internal fragmentation and displacement which will, as it were, create new surfaces, and to a selective operation in favour of those portions of it which are the most appropriate for the construction of situations. If we take into account the genesis of the material, a process of this sort deserves to be described as a 'regression'. In the course of this transformation, however, the logical links which have hitherto held the psychical material together are lost. It is only, as it were, the substantive content of the dream-thoughts that the dream-work takes over and manipulates. The restoration of the connections which the dream-work has destroyed is a task which has to be performed by the work of analysis.

The modes of expression open to a dream may therefore be qualified as meagre by comparison with those of our intellectual speech; nevertheless a dream need not wholly abandon the possibility of reproducing the logical relations present in the dream-thoughts. On the contrary, it succeeds often enough in replacing them by formal characteristics in its own texture.

In the first place, dreams take into account the connection which undeniably exists between all the portions of the dream-thoughts by combining the whole material into a single situation. They reproduce *logical connection by approximation in time and space*, just as a painter will represent all the poets in a single group in a picture of Parnassus. It is true that they were never in fact assembled on a single mountain-top; but they certainly form a conceptual group. Dreams carry this method of reproduction down to details; and often when they show us two elements in the dream-content close together, this indicates that there is some specially intimate connection between what corresponds to them among the dream-thoughts. [...]

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VII

We have not yet come to the end of our consideration of the dream-work. In addition to condensation, displacement and pictorial arrangement of the psychical material, we are obliged to assign it yet another activity, though this is not to be found in operation in *every* dream. I shall not deal exhaustively with this part of the dream-work, and will therefore merely remark that the easiest way of forming an idea of its nature is to suppose – though the supposition probably does not meet the facts – that *it only comes into operation AFTER the dream-content has already been constructed*. Its function would then consist in arranging the constituents of the dream in such a way that they form an approximately connected whole, a dream-composition. In this way the dream is given a kind of façade (though this does not, it is true, hide its content at every point), and thus receives a first, preliminary interpretation, which is supported by interpolations and slight modifications. Incidentally, this revision of the dream-content is only possible if it is not too punctiliously carried out; nor does it present us with anything more than a

glaring misunderstanding of the dream-thoughts. Before we start upon the analysis of a dream we have to clear the ground of this attempt at an interpretation.

The motive for this part of the dream-work is particularly obvious. *Considerations of intelligibility* are what lead to this final revision of a dream; and this reveals the origin of the activity. It behaves towards the dream-content lying before it just as our normal psychical activity behaves in general towards any perceptual content that may be presented to it. It understands that content on the basis of certain anticipatory ideas, and arranges it, even at the moment of perceiving it, on the presupposition of its being intelligible; in so doing it runs a risk of falsifying it, and in fact, if it cannot bring it into line with anything familiar, is a prey to the strangest misunderstandings. As is well known, we are incapable of seeing a series of unfamiliar signs or of hearing a succession of unknown words, without at once falsifying the perception from considerations of intelligibility, on the basis of something already known to us.

Dreams which have undergone a revision of this kind at the hands of a psychical activity completely analogous to waking thought may be described as 'well-constructed'. In the case of other dreams this activity has completely broken down; no attempt even has been made to arrange or interpret the material, and, since after we have woken up we feel ourselves identical with this last part of the dream-work, we make a judgement that the dream was 'hopelessly confused'. From the point of view of analysis, however, a dream that resembles a disordered heap of disconnected fragments is just as valuable as one that has been beautifully polished and provided with a surface. In the former case, indeed, we are saved the trouble of demolishing what has been superimposed upon the dream-content.

It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that these dream-façades are nothing other than mistaken and somewhat arbitrary revisions of the dream-content by the conscious agency of our mental life. In the erection of a dream-façade use is not infrequently made of wishful phantasies which are present in the dream-thoughts in a pre-constructed form, and are of the same character as the appropriately named 'day-dreams' familiar to us in waking life. The wishful phantasies revealed by analysis in night-dreams often turn out to be repetitions or modified versions of scenes from infancy; thus in some cases the façade of the dream directly reveals the dream's actual nucleus, distorted by an admixture of other material.

The dream-work exhibits no activities other than the four that have already been mentioned. If we keep to the definition of 'dream-work' as the process of transforming the dream-thoughts into the dream-content, it follows that the dream-work is not creative, that it develops no phantasies of its own, that it makes no judgements and draws no conclusions; it has no functions whatever other than condensation and displacement of the material and its modification into pictorial form, to which must be added as a variable factor the final bit of interpretative revision. It is true that we find various things in the dream-content which we should be inclined to regard as a product of some other and higher intellectual function; but in every case analysis shows convincingly that *these intellectual operations have already been performed in the dream-thoughts and have only been TAKEN OVER by the dream-content*. A conclusion drawn in a dream is nothing other than the repetition of a conclusion in the dream-thoughts; if the conclusion is taken over into the dream unmodified, it will appear impeccable; if the dream-work has displaced it on to some other material, it will appear nonsensical. A calculation in the dream-content signifies nothing more than that there is a calculation

in the dream-thoughts; but while the latter is always rational, a dream-calculation may produce the wildest results if its factors are condensed or if its mathematical operations are displaced on to other material. Not even the speeches that occur in the dream-content are original compositions; they turn out to be a hotchpotch of speeches made, heard or read, which have been revived in the dream-thoughts and whose wording is exactly reproduced, while their origin is entirely disregarded and their meaning is violently changed.

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VIII

Having been made acquainted with the dream-work . . . we shall no doubt be inclined to pronounce it a quite peculiar psychical process, the like of which, so far as we are aware, does not exist elsewhere. It is as though we were carrying over on to the dream-work all the astonishment which used formerly to be aroused in us by its product, the dream. In fact, however, the dream-work is only the first to be discovered of a whole series of psychical processes, responsible for the generation of hysterical symptoms, of phobias, obsessions and delusions. Condensation and, above all, displacement are invariable characteristics of these other processes as well. Modification into a pictorial form, on the other hand, remains a peculiarity of the dream-work. If this explanation places dreams in a single series alongside the structures produced by psychical illness, this makes it all the more important for us to discover the essential determining conditions of such processes as those of dream-formation. We shall probably be surprised to hear that neither the state of sleep nor illness is among these indispensable conditions. A whole number of the phenomena of the everyday life of healthy people – such as forgetting, slips of the tongue, bungled actions and a particular class of errors – owe their origin to a psychical mechanism analogous to that of dreams and of the other members of the series.

The heart of the problem lies in displacement, which is by far the most striking of the special achievements of the dream-work. If we enter deeply into the subject, we come to realize that the essential determining condition of displacement is a purely psychological one: something in the nature of a *motive*. One comes upon its track if one takes into consideration certain experiences which one cannot escape in analysing dreams. In analysing my specimen dream I was obliged to break off my report of the dream-thoughts . . . because, as I confessed, there were some among them which I should prefer to conceal from strangers and which I could not communicate to other people without doing serious mischief in important directions. I added that nothing would be gained if I were to choose another dream instead of that particular one with a view to reporting its analysis: I should come upon dream-thoughts which required to be kept secret in the case of *every* dream with an obscure or confused content. If, however, I were to continue the analysis on my own account, without any reference to other people (whom, indeed, an experience so personal as my dream cannot possibly have been intended to reach), I should eventually arrive at thoughts which would surprise me, whose presence in me I was unaware of, which were not only *alien* but also *disagreeable* to me, and which I should therefore feel inclined to dispute energetically, although the chain of thoughts running through the analysis insisted upon them remorselessly. There is only one way of accounting for this state of affairs,

which is of quite universal occurrence; and that is to suppose that these thoughts really were present in my mind, and in possession of a certain amount of psychical intensity or energy, but that they were in a peculiar psychological situation, as a consequence of which they *could not become conscious* to me. (I describe this particular condition as one of 'repression'.) We cannot help concluding, then, that there is a causal connection between the obscurity of the dream-content and the state of repression (inadmissibility to consciousness) of certain of the dream-thoughts, and that the dream had to be obscure so as not to betray the proscribed dream-thoughts. Thus we are led to the concept of a 'dream-distortion', which is the product of the dream-work and serves the purpose of dissimulation, that is, of disguise.

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X

Hitherto philosophers have had no occasion to concern themselves with a psychology of repression. We may therefore be permitted to make a first approach to this hitherto unknown topic by constructing a pictorial image of the course of events in dream-formation. It is true that the schematic picture we have arrived at – not only from the study of dreams – is a fairly complicated one; but we cannot manage with anything simpler. Our hypothesis is that in our mental apparatus there are two thought-constructing agencies, of which the second enjoys the privilege of having free access to consciousness for its products, whereas the activity of the first is in itself unconscious and can only reach consciousness by way of the second. On the frontier between the two agencies, where the first passes over to the second, there is a censorship, which only allows what is agreeable to it to pass through and holds back everything else. According to our definition, then, what is rejected by the censorship is in a state of repression. Under certain conditions, of which the state of sleep is one, the relation between the strength of the two agencies is modified in such a way that what is repressed can no longer be held back. In the state of sleep this probably occurs owing to a relaxation of the censorship; when this happens it becomes possible for what has hitherto been repressed to make a path for itself to consciousness. Since, however, the censorship is never completely eliminated but merely reduced, the repressed material must submit to certain alterations which mitigate its offensive features. What becomes conscious in such cases is a compromise between the intentions of one agency and the demands of the other. *Repression – relaxation of the censorship – the formation of a compromise*, this is the fundamental pattern for the generation not only of dreams but of many other psychopathological structures; and in the latter cases too we may observe that the formation of compromises is accompanied by processes of condensation and displacement and by the employment of superficial associations, which we have become familiar with in the dream-work.

We have no reason to disguise the fact that in the hypothesis which we have set up in order to explain the dream-work a part is played by what might be described as a 'daemonic' element. We have gathered an impression that the formation of obscure dreams occurs *as though* one person who was dependent upon a second person had to make a remark which was bound to be disagreeable in the ears of this second one; and it is on the basis of this simile that we have arrived at the concepts of dream-distortion and censorship, and have endeavoured to translate our impression into a psychological

theory which is no doubt crude but is at least lucid. Whatever it may be with which a further investigation of the subject may enable us to identify our first and second agencies, we may safely expect to find a confirmation of some correlate of our hypothesis that the second agency controls access to consciousness and can bar the first agency from such access.

When the state of sleep is over, the censorship quickly recovers its full strength; and it can now wipe out all that was won from it during the period of its weakness. This must be one part at least of the explanation of the forgetting of dreams, as is shown by an observation which has been confirmed on countless occasions. It not infrequently happens that during the narration of a dream or during its analysis a fragment of the dream-content which had seemed to be forgotten re-emerges. This fragment which has been rescued from oblivion invariably affords us the best and most direct access to the meaning of the dream. And that, in all probability, must have been the only reason for its having been forgotten, that is, for its having been once more suppressed.

* * *

XII

No one who accepts the view that the censorship is the chief reason for dream-distortion will be surprised to learn from the results of dream-interpretation that most of the dreams of adults are traced back by analysis to *erotic wishes*. This assertion is not aimed at dreams with an *undisguised* sexual content, which are no doubt familiar to all dreamers from their own experience and are as a rule the only ones to be described as 'sexual dreams'. Even dreams of this latter kind offer enough surprises in their choice of the people whom they make into sexual objects, in their disregard of all the limitations which the dreamer imposes in his waking life upon his sexual desires, and by their many strange details, hinting at what are commonly known as 'perversions'. A great many other dreams, however, which show no sign of being erotic in their manifest content, are revealed by the work of interpretation in analysis as sexual wish-fulfillments; and, on the other hand, analysis proves that a great many of the thoughts left over from the activity of waking life as 'residues of the previous day' only find their way to representation in dreams through the assistance of repressed erotic wishes.

There is no theoretical necessity why this should be so; but to explain the fact it may be pointed out that no other group of instincts has been submitted to such far-reaching suppression by the demands of cultural education, while at the same time the sexual instincts are also the ones which, in most people, find it easiest to escape from the control of the highest mental agencies. Since we have become acquainted with infantile sexuality, which is often so unobtrusive in its manifestations and is always overlooked and misunderstood, we are justified in saying that almost every civilized man retains the infantile forms of sexual life in some respect or other. We can thus understand how it is that repressed infantile sexual wishes provide the most frequent and strongest motive-forces for the construction of dreams.

There is only one method by which a dream which expresses erotic wishes can succeed in appearing innocently non-sexual in its manifest content. The material of the sexual ideas must not be represented as such, but must be replaced in the content of the dream by hints, allusions and similar forms of indirect representation. But,

unlike other forms of indirect representation, that which is employed in dreams must not be immediately intelligible. The modes of representation which fulfil these conditions are usually described as 'symbols' of the things which they represent. Particular interest has been directed to them since it has been noticed that dreamers speaking the same language make use of the same symbols, and that in some cases, indeed, the use of the same symbols extends beyond the use of the same language. Since dreamers themselves are unaware of the meaning of the symbols they use, it is difficult at first sight to discover the source of the connection between the symbols and what they replace and represent. The fact itself, however, is beyond doubt, and it is important for the technique of dream-interpretation. For, with the help of a knowledge of dream-symbolism, it is possible to understand the meaning of separate elements of the content of a dream or separate pieces of a dream or in some cases even whole dreams, without having to ask the dreamer for his associations. Here we are approaching the popular ideal of translating dreams and on the other hand are returning to the technique of interpretation used by the ancients, to whom dream-interpretation was identical with interpretation by means of symbols.

Although the study of dream-symbols is far from being complete, we are in a position to lay down with certainty a number of general statements and a quantity of special information on the subject. There are some symbols which bear a single meaning almost universally: thus the Emperor and Empress (or the King and Queen) stand for the parents, rooms represent women and their entrances and exits the openings of the body. The majority of dream-symbols serve to represent persons, parts of the body and activities invested with erotic interest; in particular, the genitals are represented by a number of often very surprising symbols, and the greatest variety of objects are employed to denote them symbolically. Sharp weapons, long and stiff objects, such as tree-trunks and sticks, stand for the male genital; while cupboards, boxes, carriages or ovens may represent the uterus. In such cases as these the *tertium comparationis*, the common element in these substitutions, is immediately intelligible; but there are other symbols in which it is not so easy to grasp the connection. Symbols such as a staircase or going upstairs to represent sexual intercourse, a tie or cravat for the male organ, or wood for the female one, provoke our unbelief until we can arrive at an understanding of the symbolic relation underlying them by some other means. Moreover a whole number of dream-symbols are bisexual and can relate to the male or female genitals according to the context.

Some symbols are universally disseminated and can be met with in all dreamers belonging to a single linguistic or cultural group; there are others which occur only within the most restricted and individual limits, symbols constructed by an individual out of his own ideational material. Of the former class we can distinguish some whose claim to represent sexual ideas is immediately justified by linguistic usage (such, for instance, as those derived from agriculture, e.g. 'fertilization' or 'seed') and others whose relation to sexual ideas appears to reach back into the very earliest ages and to the most obscure depths of our conceptual functioning. The power of constructing symbols has not been exhausted in our own days in the case of either of the two sorts of symbols which I have distinguished at the beginning of this paragraph. Newly discovered objects (such as airships) are, as we may observe, at once adopted as universally available sexual symbols.

It would, incidentally, be a mistake to expect that if we had a still profounder knowledge of dream-symbolism (of the 'language of dreams') we could do without asking the dreamer for his associations to the dream and go back entirely to the technique of dream-interpretation of antiquity. Quite apart from individual symbols and oscillations in the use of universal ones, one can never tell whether any particular element in the content of a dream is to be interpreted symbolically or in its proper sense, and one can be certain that the *whole* content of a dream is not to be interpreted symbolically. A knowledge of dream-symbolism will never do more than enable us to translate certain constituents of the dream-content, and will not relieve us of the necessity for applying the technical rules which I gave earlier. It will, however, afford the most valuable assistance to interpretation precisely at points at which the dreamer's associations are insufficient or fail altogether.

Dream-symbolism is also indispensable to an understanding of what are known as 'typical' dreams, which are common to everyone, and of 'recurrent' dreams in individuals.

If the account I have given in this short discussion of the symbolic mode of expression in dreams appears incomplete, I can justify my neglect by drawing attention to one of the most important pieces of knowledge that we possess on this subject. Dream-symbolism extends far beyond dreams: it is not peculiar to dreams, but exercises a similar dominating influence on representation in fairy-tales, myths and legends, in jokes and in folk-lore. It enables us to trace the intimate connections between dreams and these latter productions. We must not suppose that dream-symbolism is a creation of the dream-work; it is in all probability a characteristic of the unconscious thinking which provides the dream-work with the material for condensation, displacement and dramatization.

4 Otto Weininger (1880–1903) from *Sex and Character*

The author became a cult figure in Austro-German intellectual life after his death by suicide in October 1903. His book *Geschlecht und Charakter* had been published a few months earlier in Vienna. Violently misogynistic and anti-Semitic though his own views were, Weininger's acute theorization of the supposed decline of modern civilization had an impact on much wider cultural circles. He was, for example, read in Italian translation by de Chirico, and invoked in de Chirico's essay of 1919 'On Metaphysical Art'. Weininger's work constitutes an early and forceful statement of that influential viewpoint which connects the decay of the spiritual and artistic aspects of life to modern materialism and the rise of science. It also serves to demonstrate the uncomfortable fact that Nazism had a considerable intellectual pedigree. The book was in its sixth edition by 1906, when an authorized English translation was published in London. The present text is taken from that version.

[. . .] The scientific man ranks . . . below the artist and the philosopher. The two latter may earn the title of genius which must always be denied to the scientific man. Without any good reason having been assigned for it, it has usually been the case that the voice of genius on any particular problem is listened to before the voice of science. Is there justice in this preference? Can the genius explain things as to which the man of science, as such, can say nothing? Can he peer into depths where the man of science is blind?

The conception genius concludes universality. If there were an absolute genius (a convenient fiction) there would be nothing to which he could not have a vivid, intimate, and complete relation. Genius, as I have already shown, would have universal comprehension, and through its perfect memory would be independent of time. To comprehend anything one must have within one something similar. A man notices, understands, and comprehends only those things with which he has some kinship. The genius is the man with the most intense, most vivid, most conscious, most continuous, and most individual ego. The ego is the central point, the unit of comprehension, the synthesis of all manifoldness.

The ego of the genius accordingly is simply itself universal comprehension, the centre of infinite space; the great man contains the whole universe within himself; genius is the living microcosm. He is not an intricate mosaic, a chemical combination of an infinite number of elements . . . he is everything. In him and through him all psychical manifestations cohere and are real experiences, not an elaborate piece-work, a whole put together from parts in the fashion of science. For the genius the ego is the all, lives as the all; the genius sees nature and all existences as whole; the relations of things flash on him intuitively; he has not to build bridges of stones between them. And so the genius cannot be an empirical psychologist slowly collecting details and linking them by associations; he cannot be a physicist, envisaging the world as a compound of atoms and molecules.

It is absolutely from his vision of the whole, in which the genius always lives, that he gets his sense of the parts. He values everything within him or without him by the standard of this vision, a vision that for him is no function of time, but a part of eternity. [. . .] The scientist takes phenomena for what they obviously are; the great man or the genius for what they signify. Sea and mountain, light and darkness, spring and autumn, cypress and palm, dove and swan are symbols to him, he not only thinks that there is, but he recognizes in them something deeper. The ride of the Valkyrie is not produced by atmospheric pressure and the magic fire is not the outcome of a process of oxidation.

And all this is possible for him because the outer world is as full and strongly connected as the inner in him, the external world in fact seems to be only a special aspect of his inner life; the universe and the ego have become one in him, and he is not obliged to set his experience together piece by piece according to rule. [. . .] The infinity of the universe is responded to in the genius by a true sense of infinity in his own breast; he holds chaos and cosmos, all details and all totality, all plurality, and all singularity in himself. [. . .]

* * *

[. . .] It is notable that the Jews, even now when at least a relative security of tenure is possible, prefer moveable property, and, in spite of their acquisitiveness, have little real sense of personal property, especially in its most characteristic form, landed property. Property is indissolubly connected with the self, with individuality. It is in harmony with the foregoing that the Jew is so readily disposed to communism. Communism must be distinguished clearly from socialism, the former being based on a community of goods, an absence of individual property, the latter meaning, in the first place a co-operation of individual with individual, of worker with worker, and a recognition of human individuality in every one. Socialism is Aryan (Owen, Carlyle, Ruskin, Fichte). Communism is Jewish (Marx). Modern social democracy has moved far apart from the

earlier socialism, precisely because Jews have taken so large a share in developing it. In spite of the associative element in it, the Marxian doctrine does not lead in any way towards the State as a union of all the separate individual aims, as the higher unit combining the purposes of the lower units. Such a conception is as foreign to the Jew as it is to the woman.

* * *

Judaism, at the present day, has reached its highest point since the time of Herod. Judaism is the spirit of modern life. Sexuality is accepted, and contemporary ethics sing the praises of pairing. [...] It is the Jew and the woman who are the apostles of pairing to bring guilt on humanity.

Our age is not only the most Jewish but the most feminine. It is a time when art is content with daubs and seeks its inspiration in the sports of animals; the time of a superficial anarchy, with no feeling for Justice and the State; a time of communistic ethics, of the most foolish of historical views, the materialistic interpretation of history; a time of capitalism and of Marxism; a time when history, life, and science are no more than political economy and technical instruction; a time when genius is supposed to be a form of madness; a time with no great artists and no great philosophers; a time without originality and yet with the most foolish craving for originality; a time when the cult of the Virgin has been replaced by that of the Demi-vierge. It is the time when pairing has not only been approved but has been enjoined as a duty.

But from the new Judaism the new Christianity may be pressing forth; mankind waits for the new founder of religion, and, as in the year one, the age presses for a decision. The decision must be made between Judaism and Christianity, between business and culture, between male and female, between the race and the individual, between unworthiness and worth, between the earthly and the higher life, between negation and the God-like. Mankind has the choice to make. There are only two poles, and there is no middle way.

5 Max Liebermann (1847–1935) ‘Imagination in Painting’

During the 1870s and 1880s, Liebermann was drawn to the realist aspects of Dutch painting. In the 1890s he became the dominant figure among those German artists who responded to French Naturalism and Impressionism. His own collection included works by Manet, Degas, Monet and Cézanne. He was leader of the Berlin Secession from 1898 until 1911 and as President of the Deutscher Künstlerbund took a leading role in opposing the conservative policies of the Emperor William II, who had identified himself publicly with a pronounced neo-classical tendency in German art. Liebermann was President of the Prussian Akademie der Künste from 1920 until 1932, when increasing attacks from the Nazis forced his resignation. ‘Imagination in Painting’ is the clearest exposition of his views at a time when his work represented a moderate but distinctive synthesis of modern styles, and before his reaction to the work of the German Expressionists marked a limit to his support for new developments. Liebermann here voices a typically Modernist commitment to the priority of imagination over depicted content. His principal concern, however, is not to justify departure from naturalistic canons, but rather to stress the indispensable role of imagination in all painting, naturalist painting included. First published as ‘Die Phantasie in der Malerei’ in *Die neue Rundschau*, vol. XV, no. 3, Berlin, March 1904, pp. 372–80. Our selections are

taken from pp. 372–5. They were translated for the present volume by Nicholas Walker. ('Imagination' and 'fantasy' are not distinguished in German as they are in English. Liebermann's sense is more faithfully translated by 'imagination' – with its connotations of realistic insight – than it would be by 'fantasy'.)

[...] I wish here to speak of painting that has properly 'recovered from all considerations of utility', of painting that would be nothing else but – precisely painting; I wish to speak of the spirit of painting, rather than of the way in which it surmounts its purely technical difficulties, although this is where the public, and I fear many a painter too, still believes its true value to lie.

This said, it is quite true that the word *Kunst* (art) derives from the word *können* (ability and facility), and there is no denying that in no other art is ability as crucial as it is in painting.

But however much we may esteem painting that is well-fashioned, good painting remains painting that has been well-conceived. For what is the significance of the most accurate drawing, the most virtuoso execution, the most brilliant colourism, if these extrinsic virtues lack the innermost thing, the dimension of feeling [*Empfindung*]? Otherwise the picture is nothing but a painted canvas. Imagination [*Phantasie*] alone can animate the canvas, and it is imagination that must guide the painter's hand, must literally penetrate to the very tips of his fingers. Although imagination is itself invisible, it makes itself visible in every brushstroke, if only for those with eyes to see, only for those who can sense and feel its presence.

I am not talking about infernal phantasmagoria or extravagant flights of fancy here. For by 'imagination' I understand the animating spirit of the artist that stands behind every brushstroke of his work. Imagination in the visual arts proceeds from purely sensory presuppositions. Imagination is the envisaging of ideal form for the real appearance of things. It is the indispensable criterion for every work of visual art, for the most ideal and the most naturalist work alike. It is only the imagination that can convince us of the truth of Böcklin's chimeras or of Manet's bunch of asparagus

* * *

A bunch of asparagus, a bouquet of roses, can yield a masterpiece; a beautiful girl or an unattractive one, an Apollo or a misshapen dwarf, anything can be made into a masterpiece as long as there is a sufficient amount of imagination at work. Imagination alone transforms a work of craft into a work of art.

[...] Strictly speaking [...] the art manifested in a picture can only be perceived by the inner eye, just as the art manifested in a piece of music can only be perceived by the inner ear. For what is it, if not the imagination of the artist, which distinguishes a work by Phidias from one that is cast from nature? The value of a work of visual art is utterly independent of what it depicts or represents. It is solely the inventiveness and the expressive potential of its form that constitutes its true value.

[...] The specifically painterly imagination of the artist can thus reveal itself more powerfully in a still life than in the representation of a human being precisely because the bunch of asparagus holds our interest solely by virtue of the way it is artistically handled. With a human being, on the other hand, with a head or a beautiful female body, we are also interested, and especially in the latter case, in the represented object itself.

The specifically painterly content [*Gehalt*] of a picture is greater the lesser the interest in the depicted object itself; the more completely the subject-matter [*Inhalt*] of the picture has been absorbed into painterly form, the greater the painter. From a purely painterly point of view, therefore, Velásquez's *Surrender of Breda* is no more intrinsically valuable than any of his kitchen still-life paintings. And indeed the latter would be more valuable in painterly terms if Velásquez had painted the kitchen implements better than he painted the military leaders in his great historical canvas. All that matters here is to state clearly that the value of painting is absolutely independent of its subject-matter and resides solely in the power of painterly imagination itself.

It follows that the exercise of such imagination is most required in naturalist painting in particular. For the latter strives for its appropriate effect solely by means of its own intrinsic virtues, although I realize this is a view that flatly contradicts the common opinion of the general public. Even now educated people continue to regard naturalist painting as an insipid duplication of nature, as an art that will be rendered obsolete once photography has learned how to reproduce colour as well as form. Not so! Even from colour photography we fear no rivalry. For even the most perfect mechanical reproduction of nature will bring us nothing but a perfect collection of waxworks, and will never lead us to art. What the educated viewer misses in naturalist art is simply literary imagination, and that is because he is looking at art with his thinking mind rather than with his eyes. We are still obsessed with Lessing's famous dictum that Raphael would still have become the greatest painter even if he had been born with no arms. He might well have become the greatest poet or the greatest musician, but certainly not the greatest painter. For painting consists not in the invention of ideas, but in the invention of visible form for an idea. Why else are there so few works of art to be found amongst the countless Madonnas with which we are familiar? And what is it that interests us in a portrait [...] other than that art with which the master here has translated what he saw – and the emphasis lies indeed upon what *he* saw – into the medium of painterly form? And by 'form' here I do not mean some pre-existing form that has now become a formula – like Raphael's form once it had degenerated into an academic exercise, or Rembrandt's chiaroscuro which, amongst his imitators, became an empty artistic gesture; I mean the kind of living form which each artist creates anew for himself. It is precisely in the creation of new forms that the proper criterion of the creative artist, of the genius, must be sought. That is why it is nonsensical to talk about a *single* form, of classical form as such. For there are as many classical forms as there were and will be classical artists. Form perfects itself with every artist, and is born anew with every succeeding artist. The paralysis of form into dogma would be the paralysis of art itself, would be its death. Naturally, in speaking of form here I am not referring to the external moment of technique, to something like the artist's handwriting. I am speaking here only of the ideal form which is invisible, as it were, which the artist alone sees, and which indeed each artist sees quite differently. One who sees a cow merely through the eyes of a Potter or a Troyon is no creative artist, but simply a copyist at best.

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It is not only a question of what one sees, but also of who is seeing it. And the old saying that 'No man is great in the eyes of his valet' also holds for art, although I am not of course referring to the little personal weaknesses of great artists here. He who looks

on art with the eyes of a valet will never comprehend it. 'Nothing is beautiful in itself; it is our perceiving that first makes it so.' He who looks on Phidias with the eyes of Professor Trendelenberg may well see the marble statues of the Victory Boulevard as his work too. Breadth of execution in painting is not enough to make a Velásquez, nor chiaroscuro enough to make a Rembrandt. These are merely, as it were, the earthly dimension of their work.

The imperishable dimension of works of art is the spirit within them, the spirit which presents the finished work to the inner eye of the painter even before he has made the first brushstroke upon the canvas.

And art, like spirit, is unbounded, reaching out as far as the expressive potential of its technical means permit. To extend its expressive potential is to expand the domain of art itself, of the only art that is true, of art that is born of the hand but begotten of imagination.

6 Paul Cézanne (1839–1906) Letters to Emile Bernard

The painter and writer Emile Bernard visited Cézanne in Aix in 1904. In their ensuing correspondence the older artist expounded the priorities of his practice. Bernard drew on these letters in his subsequent writings. His interpretation of Cézanne's work and ideas was all the more influential for appearing to carry the authority of a confidant. From J. Rewald, *Cézanne's Letters*, 4th edition, Oxford, 1976. (For selections from Cézanne's earlier letters See *Art in Theory* 1815–1900 IVA5 and VIB17.)

Aix-en-Provence, 15 April, 1904

[...] I am happy with the expression of warm artistic sympathy which you kindly address to me in your letter.

May I repeat what I told you here: treat nature by means of the cylinder, the sphere, the cone, everything brought into proper perspective so that each side of an object or a plane is directed towards a central point. Lines parallel to the horizon give breadth, whether it is a section of nature or, if you prefer, of the show which the *Pater Omnipotens Aeterne Deus* spreads out before our eyes. Lines perpendicular to this horizon give depth. But nature for us men is more depth than surface, whence the need to introduce into our light vibrations, represented by the reds and yellows, a sufficient amount of blueness to give the feel of air.

I must tell you that I had another look at the study you made from the lower floor of the studio, it is good. You only have to continue to this way, I think. You have the understanding of what must be done and you will soon turn your back on the Gauguins and [*van*] Goghs! [...]

Aix, 12 May, 1904

[...] My absorption in work and my advanced age will sufficiently explain the delay in answering your letter.

You entertain me, moreover, in your last letter with such a variety of topics, though all are connected with art, that I cannot follow it in all its developments.

I have already told you that I like Redon's talent enormously, and from my heart I agree with his feeling for and admiration of Delacroix. I do not know if my indifferent health will allow me ever to realize my dream of painting his apotheosis.

I progress very slowly, for nature reveals herself to me in very complex ways; and the progress needed is endless. One must look at the model and feel very exactly; and also express oneself distinctly and with force.

Taste is the best judge. It is rare. Art addresses itself only to an excessively limited number of individuals.

The artist must scorn all judgment that is not based on an intelligent observation of character.

He must beware of the literary spirit which so often causes the painter to deviate from his true path – the concrete study of nature – to lose himself too long in intangible speculation.

The Louvre is a good book to consult but it must be only an intermediary. The real and immense study to be undertaken is the manifold picture of nature.

* * *

Aix, 26 May, 1904

[. . .] On the whole I approve of the ideas you are going to expound in your next article for *Occident*. But I must always come back to this: painters must devote themselves entirely to the study of nature and try to produce pictures which will be an education. Talking about art is almost useless. The work which brings about some progress in one's own craft is sufficient compensation for not being understood by the imbeciles.

The man of letters expresses himself in abstractions whereas a painter, by means of drawing and colour, gives concrete form to his sensations and perceptions. One is neither too scrupulous nor too sincere nor too submissive to nature; but one is more or less master of one's model, and above all, of the means of expression. Get to the heart of what is before you and continue to express yourself as logically as possible. [. . .]

Aix, 25 July, 1904

[. . .] I have received the *Revue Occidentale*. I can only thank you for what you wrote about me.

I am sorry that we cannot be side by side, for I don't want to be right in theory, but in front of nature. Ingres in spite of his 'estyle' (Aixian pronunciation) and his admirers, is only a very small painter. The greatest, you know them better than I; the Venetians and the Spaniards.

In order to make progress, there is only nature, and the eye is trained through contact with her. It becomes concentric through looking and working. I mean to say that in an orange, an apple, a ball, a head, there is a culminating point; and this point is always – in spite of the tremendous effect; light and shade, colour sensations – the closest to our eye; the edges of the objects flee towards a centre on our horizon. With a small temperament one can be very much of a painter. One can do good things without being very much of a harmonist or a colourist. It is sufficient to have a sense of art – and this is without doubt the horror of the bourgeois, this sense. Therefore institutions, pensions, honours can only be made for cretins, humbugs and rascals. Don't be an art critic, but paint, there lies salvation. [. . .]

Aix, 23 December, 1904

[. . .] I shall not enter with you into aesthetic considerations. Yes, I approve of your admiration for the strongest of the Venetians; we praise Tintoretto. Your need to find a moral, an intellectual point of support in works, which assuredly will never be surpassed, keeps you constantly on the qui vive, incessantly on the search for the means, only dimly perceived, which will surely lead you, in front of nature, to sense

your own means of expression; and on the day you find them, be convinced you will rediscover without effort, in front of nature, the means employed by the four or five great ones of Venice.

This is true, without any possible doubt – I am quite positive: – an optical sensation is produced in our visual organs which allows us to classify the planes represented by colour sensations as light, half tone or quarter tone. Light, therefore, does not exist for the painter. As long as we are forced to proceed from black to white, with the first of these abstractions providing something like a point of support for the eye as much as for the brain, we flounder, we do not succeed in becoming masters of ourselves, in being in possession of ourselves. During this period (I am necessarily repeating myself a little) we turn towards the admirable works that have been handed down to us through the ages, where we find comfort, support, such as a plank provides for the bather.

[...]

* * *

Aix, 23 October, 1905

[...] Your letters are precious to me for a double reason: The first being purely egoistic, because their arrival lifts me out of the monotony caused by the incessant pursuit of the sole and unique aim, which leads in moments of physical fatigue to a kind of intellectual exhaustion; and the second, allows me to reassess for you, undoubtedly rather too much, the obstinacy with which I pursue the realization of that part of nature, which, coming into our line of vision, gives us the picture. Now the theme to develop is that – whatever our temperament or form of strength face to face with nature may be – we must render the image of what we see, forgetting everything that existed before us. Which, I believe, must permit the artist to give his entire personality, whether great or small.

Now, being old, nearly 70 years, the sensations of colour, which give the light, are for me the reason for the abstractions which do not allow me to cover my canvas entirely nor to pursue the delimitation of the objects where their points of contact are fine and delicate; from which it results that my image or picture is incomplete. On the other hand the planes fall one on top of the other, from whence neo-impressionism emerged, which circumscribes the contours with a black line, a fault which must be fought at all costs. But nature, if consulted, gives us the means of attaining this end.

* * *

Aix, 21 September, 1906

[...] I am in such a state of mental disturbance, I fear at moments that my frail reason may give way. After the terrible heatwave that we have just had, a milder temperature has brought some calm to our minds, and it was not too soon; now it seems to me that I see better and that I think more correctly about the direction of my studies. Will I ever attain the end for which I have striven so much and so long? I hope so, but as long as it is not attained a vague state of uneasiness persists which will not disappear until I have reached port, that is until I have realized something which develops better than in the past, and thereby can prove the theories – which in themselves are always easy; it is only giving proof of what one thinks that raises serious obstacles. So I continue to study. [...]

I am always studying after nature and it seems to me that I make slow progress. I should have liked you near me, for solitude always weighs me down a bit. But I am

old, ill, and I have sworn to myself to die painting, rather than go under in the debasing paralysis which threatens old men who allow themselves to be dominated by passions which coarsen their senses.

If I have the pleasure of being with you one day, we shall be better able to discuss all this in person. You must forgive me for continually coming back to the same thing; but I believe in the logical development of everything we see and feel through the study of nature and turn my attention to technical questions later; for technical questions are for us only the simple means of making the public feel what we feel ourselves and of making ourselves understood. The great masters whom we admire must have done just that. [. . .]

7 Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926) from *Letters on Cézanne*

Though known principally as a poet, Rilke also wrote on the art of his own time. His letters on Cézanne were addressed to his wife, the artist Clara Westhoff. They had been married in 1901, following Rilke's second visit to the artistic community in Worpswede, where Westhoff was then working (see *Art in Theory 1815–1900* VI_A7). For nine months in 1905–6, Rilke worked at Meudon as secretary to the sculptor Rodin, on whose work he had previously published a short monograph. The letters on Cézanne were prompted by the large retrospective exhibition of the artist's work staged at the Salon d'Automne in Paris in 1907. Rilke's absorption in Cézanne's work noticeably increases as he reflects on his successive visits to the exhibition. Much space in the earlier letters is taken up with the recounting of anecdotal information about the artist's working circumstances and way of life, but as the month passes, passages of fascinated description expand into reflections on the relations between sensation and creation. A limited French edition of *Lettres sur Cézanne* was published by Editions Corrêa in Paris in 1944, with translation and preface by Maurice Betz. They were first published in the original German in Frankfurt in 1952 as *Briefe über Cézanne*, edited by Clara Rilke (Insel Verlag). Our versions are taken from *Letters on Cézanne*, translated from the German by Joel Agee, London: Vintage, 1991, pp. 28–9, 34, 36, 42–3, 48–51, 79–82. (Paul Cassirer, mentioned in the letter of 10 October, was an art dealer and publisher in Berlin, at whose gallery Rilke had seen work by Cézanne in 1900. The painting described in the letter of 22 October is the portrait of Mme Cézanne in a red armchair now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.)

*Paris VIe, 29, rue Cassette,
October 7, 1907 (Monday)*

. . . I went back to the Salon d'Automne this morning, and found Meier-Graefe in front of the Cézannes again . . . Count Kessler was there too and told me many beautiful and honest things about the new Book of Images, which he and Hofmannsthal had read aloud to each other. All of this happened in the Cézanne room, which makes an immediate claim on one's attention with its powerful pictures. You know how much more remarkable I always find the people walking about in front of paintings than the paintings themselves. It's no different in this Salon d'Automne, except for the Cézanne room. Here, all of reality is on his side: in this dense quilted blue of his, in his red and his shadowless green and the reddish black of his wine bottles. And the humbleness of all his objects: the apples are all cooking apples and the wine bottles belong in the roundly bulging pockets of an old coat. Fare well . . .

*Paris VIe, 29, rue Cassette,
October 9, 1907*

... today I wanted to tell you a little about Cézanne. With regard to his work habits, he claimed to have lived as a Bohemian until his fortieth year. Only then, through his acquaintance with Pissarro, did he develop a taste for work. But then to such an extent that for the next thirty years he did nothing *but* work. Actually without joy, it seems, in a constant rage, in conflict with every single one of his paintings, none of which seemed to achieve what he considered to be the most indispensable thing. *La réalisation*, he called it, and he found it in the Venetians whom he had seen over and over again in the Louvre and to whom he had given his unreserved recognition. To achieve the conviction and substantiality of things, a reality intensified and potentiated to the point of indestructibility by his experience of the object, this seemed to him to be the purpose of his innermost work [...]. While painting a landscape or a still life, he would conscientiously persevere in front of the object, but approach it only by very complicated detours. Beginning with the darkest tones, he would cover their depth with a layer of color that led a little beyond them, and keep going, expanding outward from color to color, until gradually he reached another, contrasting pictorial element, where, beginning at a new center, he would proceed in a similar way. I think there was a conflict, a mutual struggle between the two procedures of, first, looking and confidently receiving, and then of appropriating and making personal use of what has been received; that the two, perhaps as a result of becoming conscious, would immediately start opposing each other, talking out loud, as it were, and go on perpetually interrupting and contradicting each other [...].

*Paris VIe, 29, rue Cassette,
October 10, 1907*

[...] I again spent two hours in front of a few pictures today; I sense this is somehow useful for me. Would it be instructive for you? I can't really say it in one breath. One can really see all of Cézanne's pictures in two or three well-chosen examples, and no doubt we could have come as far in understanding him somewhere else, at Cassirer's for instance, as I find myself advancing now. But it all takes a long, long time. When I remember the puzzlement and insecurity of one's first confrontation with his work, along with his name, which was just as new. And then for a long time nothing, and suddenly one has the right eyes ... [...].

*Paris VIe, 29, rue Cassette,
October 13, 1907 (Sunday)*

[...] Early this morning I read about your autumn, and all the colors you brought into your letter were retransformed in my feelings and filled my mind to the brim with strength and radiance. Yesterday, while I was admiring the dissolving brightness of autumn here, you were walking through that other autumn back home, which is painted on red wood, as this one's painted on silk. And the one reaches us as much as the other; that's how deeply we are placed on the ground of all transformation, we most changeable ones who walk about with the urge to comprehend everything and (because we're unable to grasp it) reduce immensity to the action of our heart, for fear that it might destroy us. If I were to come and visit you, I would surely also see the splendor of moor and heath, the hovering bright greens of meadows, the birches, with new and different eyes; and though this transformation is something I've completely experienced and shared before, ... nature was then still a general occasion for me, an

evocation, an instrument in whose strings my hands found themselves again; I was not yet sitting before her; I allowed myself to be swept away by the soul that was emanating from her; she came over me with her vastness, her huge exaggerated presence, the way the gift of prophesy came over Saul; exactly like that. I walked about and saw, not nature but the visions she gave me. How little I would have been able to learn from Cézanne, from van Gogh, then. I can tell how I've changed by the way Cézanne is challenging me now. I am on the way to becoming a worker, on a long way perhaps, and probably I've only reached the first milestone; but still, I can already understand the old man who somehow walked far ahead, alone, followed only by children who threw stones . . . Today I went to see his pictures again; it's remarkable what an environment they create. Without looking at a particular one, standing in the middle between the two rooms, one feels their presence drawing together into a colossal reality. As if these colors could heal one of indecision once and for all. The good conscience of these reds, these blues, their simple truthfulness, it educates you; and if you stand beneath them as acceptingly as possible, it's as if they were doing something for you. You also notice, a little more clearly each time, how necessary it was to go beyond love, too; it's natural, after all, to love each of these things as one makes it; but if one shows this, one makes it less well; one *judges* it instead of *saying* it. One ceases to be impartial; and the very best – love – stays outside the work, does not enter it, is left aside, untranslated: that's how the painting of sentiments came about (which is in no way better than the paintings of things). They'd paint: I love this here; instead of painting: here it is. In which case everyone must see for himself whether or not I loved it. This is not shown at all, and some would even insist that love has nothing to do with it. It's that thoroughly exhausted in the action of making, there is no residue. It may be that this emptying out of love in anonymous work, which produces such pure things, was never achieved as completely as in the work of this old man; his inner nature, having grown mistrustful and cross, helped him to do it. He certainly would not have shown another human being his love, had he been forced to conceive such a love; but with this disposition, which was completely developed now, thanks to his strangeness and insularity, he turned to nature and knew how to swallow back his love for every apple and put it to rest in the painted apple forever. Can you imagine what that is like, and what it's like to experience this through him? [. . .]

*Paris VIe, 29, rue Cassette,
October 22, 1907*

. . . the Salon is closing today. And already, as I'm leaving it, on the way home for the last time, I want to go back to look up a violet, a green, or certain blue tones which I believe I should have seen better, more unforgettably. Already, even after standing with such unrelenting attention in front of the great color scheme of the woman in the red armchair, it is becoming as unretrievable in my memory as a figure with very many digits. And yet I memorized it, number by number. In my feeling, the consciousness of their presence has become a heightening which I can feel even in my sleep; my blood describes it within me, but the naming of it passes by somewhere outside and is not called in. Did I write about it? – A red, upholstered low armchair has been placed in front of an earthy-green wall in which a cobalt-blue pattern (a cross with the center left out †) is very sparingly repeated; the round bulging back curves and slopes forward and down to the armrests (which are sewn up like the sleeve-stump

of an armless man). The left armrest and the tassel that hangs from it full of vermilion no longer have the wall behind them but instead, near the lower edge, a broad stripe of greenish blue, against which they clash in loud contradiction. Seated in this red armchair, which is a personality in its own right, is a woman, her hands in the lap of a dress with broad vertical stripes that are very lightly indicated by small, loosely distributed flecks of green yellows and yellow greens, up to the edge of the blue-gray jacket, which is held together in front by a blue, greenly scintillating silk bow. In the brightness of the face, the proximity of all these colors has been exploited for a simple modeling of form and features: even the brown of the hair roundly pinned up above the temples and the smooth brown in the eyes has to express itself against its surroundings. *It's as if every place were aware of all the other places* – it participates that much; that much adjustment and rejection is happening in it; that's how each daub plays its part in maintaining equilibrium and in producing it: just as the whole picture finally keeps reality in equilibrium. For if one says, this is a red armchair (and it is the first and ultimate red armchair ever painted): it's true only because it contains latently within itself an experienced sum of color which, whatever it may be, reinforces and confirms this red. To reach the peak of its expression, it is very strongly painted around the light human figure, so that a kind of waxy surface develops; and yet the color does not preponderate over the object, which seems so perfectly translated into its painterly equivalents that, while it is fully achieved and given as an object, its bourgeois reality is at the same time relinquishing all its heaviness to a final and definitive picture–existence. Everything, as I already wrote, has become an affair that's settled among the colors themselves: a color will come into its own in response to another, or assert itself, or recollect itself. Just as in the mouth of a dog various secretions will gather in anticipation at the approach of various things – consenting ones for drawing out nutrients, and correcting ones to neutralize poisons: in the same way, various intensifications and dilutions take place in the core of every color, helping it to survive contact with others. In addition to this glandular activity within the intensity of colors, reflections (whose presence in nature always surprised me so: to discover the evening glow of the water as a permanent coloration in the rough green of the Nenuphar's covering-leaves –) play the greatest role: weaker local colors abandon themselves completely, contenting themselves with reflecting the dominant one. In this hither and back of mutual and manifold influence, the interior of the picture vibrates, rises and falls back into itself, and does not have a single unmoving part. Just this for today . . . You see how difficult it becomes when one tries to get very close to the facts . . .

8 Maurice Denis (1870–1943) 'Cézanne'

The French painter-theorist Denis had a role equal to Bernard's in establishing the terms of Cézanne's modern reputation. In this essay he represents Cézanne's work as the essential form of modern painting: an assiduous blending of the naive and empirical with the classic and rational. Originally published in *L'Occident*, Paris, September 1907, in the year after Cézanne's death. The present translation by Roger Fry was published in *Burlington Magazine*, XVI, London, January–February 1910, pp. 207–19 and 275–80. Fry's introductory note voices the avant-garde view that Cézanne's art was central to an epochal new movement. (For further texts by Denis see IA9 below and *Art in Theory 1815–1900* VC10.)

Introductory Note

Anyone who has had the opportunity of observing modern French art cannot fail to be struck by the new tendencies that have become manifest in the last few years. A new ambition, a new conception of the purpose and methods of painting, are gradually emerging; a new hope too, and a new courage to attempt in painting that direct expression of imagined states of consciousness which has for long been relegated to music and poetry. This new conception of art, in which the decorative elements preponderate at the expense of the representative, is not the outcome of any conscious archaistic endeavour, such as made, and perhaps inevitably marred, our own pre-Raphaelite movement. It has in it therefore the promise of a larger and a fuller life. It is, I believe, the direct outcome of the Impressionist movement. It was among Impressionists that it took its rise, and yet it implies the direct contrary of the Impressionist conception of art.

It is generally admitted that the great and original genius, – for recent criticism has the courage to acclaim him as such – who really started this movement, the most promising and fruitful of modern times, was Cézanne. [...]

Roger E. Fry.

I

There is something paradoxical in Cézanne's celebrity; and it is scarcely easier to explain than to explain Cézanne himself. The Cézanne question divides inseparably into two camps those who love painting and those who prefer to painting itself the literary and other interests accessory to it. I know indeed that it is the fashion to like painting. The discussions on this question are no longer serious and impassioned. Too many admirations lend themselves to suspicion. 'Snobbism' and speculation have dragged the public into painters' quarrels, and it takes sides according to fashion or interest. Thus it has come about that a public naturally hostile, but well primed by critics and dealers, has conspired to the apotheosis of a great artist, who remains nevertheless a difficult master even for those who love him best.

* * *

At the moment of his death, the articles in the press were unanimous upon two points; and, wherever their inspiration was derived from, they may fairly be considered to reflect the average opinion. The obituaries, then, admitted first of all that Cézanne influenced a large section of the younger artists; and secondly that he made an effort towards style. We may gather, then, that Cézanne was a sort of classic, and that the younger generation regards him as a representative of classicism.

Unfortunately it is hard to say without too much obscurity what classicism is.

Suppose that after a long sojourn in the country one enters one of those dreary provincial museums, one of those cemeteries abandoned to decay, where the silence and the musty smell denote the lapse of time; one immediately classifies the works exhibited into two groups: in one group the remains of the old collections of amateurs, and in the other the modern galleries, where the commissions given by the State have piled together the pitiful novelties bought in the annual salons according as studio intrigues or ministerial favour decides. It is in such circumstances that one becomes really and ingenuously sensitive to the contrast between ancient and modern art;

and that an old canvas by some Bolognese or from Lebrun's atelier, at once vigorous and synthetic in design, asserts its superiority to the dry analyses and thin coloured photographs of our gold-medallists!

Imagine, quite hypothetically, that a Cézanne is there. So we shall understand him better. First of all, we know we cannot place him in the modern galleries, so completely would he be out of key among the anecdotes and the fatuities. One must of sheer necessity place him among the old masters, to whom he is seen at a glance to be akin by his nobility of style. Gauguin used to say, thinking of Cézanne: 'Nothing is so much like a *croûte* [a daub] as a real masterpiece.' *Croûte* or masterpiece, one can only understand it in opposition to the mediocrity of modern painting. And already we grasp one of the certain characteristics of the classic, namely, *style*, that is to say synthetic order. In opposition to modern pictures, a Cézanne inspires by itself, by its qualities of unity in composition and colour, in short by its painting. The actualities, the illustrations to popular novels or historical events, with which the walls of our supposed museum are lined, seek to interest us only by means of the subject represented. Others perhaps establish the virtuosity of their authors. Good or bad, Cézanne's canvas is truly a *picture*.

Suppose now that for another experiment, and this time a less chimerical one, we put together three works of the same family, three *natures-mortes*, one by Manet, one by Gauguin, one by Cézanne. We shall distinguish at once the objectivity of Manet; that he imitates nature 'as seen through his temperament', that he translates an artistic sensation. Gauguin is more subjective. His is a decorative, even a hieratic interpretation of nature. Before the Cézanne we think only of the picture; neither the object represented nor the artist's personality holds our attention. We cannot decide so quickly whether it is an imitation or an interpretation of nature. We feel that such an art is nearer to Chardin than to Manet and Gauguin. And if at once we say: this is a picture and a classic picture, the word begins to take on a precise meaning, that, namely, of an equilibrium, a reconciliation of the objective and subjective.

In the Berlin Museum, for instance, the effect produced by Cézanne is significant. However much one admires Manet's *La Serre* or Renoir's *Enfants Bérard* or the admirable landscapes of Monet and Sisley, the presence of Cézanne makes one assimilate them (unjustly, it is true, but by the force of contrast) to the generality of modern productions: on the contrary the pictures of Cézanne seem like works of another period, no less refined but more robust than the most vigorous efforts of the Impressionists.

Thus we arrive at our first estimate of Cézanne as reacting against modern painting and against Impressionism.

* * *

Impressionism – and by that I mean much more the general movement, which has changed during the last twenty years the aspect of modern painting, than the special art of a Monet or a Renoir – Impressionism was synthetic in its tendencies, since its aim was to translate a sensation, to realize a mood; but its methods were analytic, since colour for it resulted from an infinity of contrasts. For it was by means of the decomposition of the prism that the Impressionists reconstituted light, divided colour and multiplied reflected lights and gradations; in fact, they substituted for varying greys as many different positive colours. Therein lies the fundamental error of Impressionism. The *Fifre* of Manet in four tones is necessarily more synthetic than the most delicious

Renoir, where the play of sunlight and shadow creates the widest range of varied half-tones. Now there is in a fine Cézanne as much simplicity, austerity and grandeur as in Manet, and the gradations retain the freshness and lustre which give their flower-like brilliance to the canvases of Renoir. Some months before his death Cézanne said: 'What I wanted was to make of Impressionism something solid and durable, like the art of the museums.' It was for this reason also that he so much admired the early Pissarros, and still more the early Monets. Monet was, indeed, the only one of his contemporaries for whom he expressed great admiration.

Thus at first guided by his Latin instinct and his natural inclination, and later with full consciousness of his purpose and his own nature, he set to work to create out of Impressionism a certain classic conception.

In constant reaction against the art of his time, his powerful individuality drew from it none the less the material and pretext for his researches in style; he drew from it the sustaining elements of his work. At a period when the artist's sensibility was considered almost universally to be the sole motive of a work of art, and when improvisation – 'the spiritual excitement provoked by exaltation of the senses' – tended to destroy at one blow both the superannuated conventions of the academies and the necessity for method, it happened that the art of Cézanne showed the way to substitute reflexion for empiricism without sacrificing the essential *rôle* of sensibility. Thus, for instance, instead of the chronometric notation of appearances, he was able to hold the emotion of the moment even while he elaborated almost to excess, in a calculated and intentional effort, his studies after nature. He *composed* his *natures-mortes*, varying intentionally the lines and the masses, disposing his draperies according to premeditated rhythms, avoiding the accidents of chance, seeking for plastic beauty; and all this without losing anything of the essential *motive* – that initial motive which is realized in its essentials in his sketches and water colours. I allude to the delicate symphony of juxtaposed gradations, which his eye discovered at once, but for which at the same moment his reason spontaneously demanded the logical support of composition, of plan and of architecture.

There was nothing less artificial, let us note, than this effort towards a just combination of style and sensibility. That which others have sought, and sometimes found, in the imitation of the old masters, the discipline that he himself in his earlier works sought from the great artists of his time or of the past, he discovered finally in himself. And this is the essential characteristic of Cézanne. His spiritual conformation, his *genius*, did not allow him to profit directly from the old masters: he finds himself in a situation towards them similar to that which he occupied towards his contemporaries. His originality grows in his contact with those whom he imitates or is impressed by; thence comes his persistent *gaucherie*, his happy *naïveté*, and thence also the incredible clumsiness into which his sincerity forced him. For him it is not a question of imposing style upon a study as, after all, Puvis de Chavannes did. He is so naturally a painter, so spontaneously classic. If I were to venture a comparison with another art, I should say that there is the same relation between Cézanne and Veronese as between Mallarmé of the 'Herodiade' and Racine of the 'Berenice'. With the same elements – new or at all events refreshed, without anything borrowed from the past, except the necessary forms (on the one hand the mould of the Alexandrine and of tragedy, on the other the traditional conception of the composed picture) – they find, both poet and painter, the language of the Masters. Both observed the same scrupulous conformity to the

necessities of their art; both refused to overstep its limits. Just as the writer determined to owe the whole expression of his poem to what is, except for idea and subject, the pure domain of literature – sonority of words, rhythm of phrase, elasticity of syntax – the painter has been a painter before everything. Painting oscillates perpetually between invention and imitation: sometimes it copies and sometimes it imagines. These are its variations. But whether it reproduces objective nature or translates more specifically the artist's emotion, it is bound to be an art of concrete beauty, and our senses must discover in the work of art itself – abstraction made of the subject represented – an immediate satisfaction, a pure aesthetic pleasure. The painting of Cézanne is literally the essential art, the definition of which is so refractory to criticism, the realization of which seems impossible. It imitates objects without any exactitude and without any accessory interest of sentiment or thought. When he imagines a sketch, he assembles colours and forms without any literary preoccupation; his aim is nearer to that of a Persian carpet weaver than of a Delacroix, transforming into coloured harmony, but with dramatic or lyric intention, a scene of the Bible or of Shakespeare. A negative effort, if you will, but one which declares an unheard of instinct for painting.

He is the man who paints. Renoir said to me one day: 'How on earth does he do it? He cannot put two touches of colour on to a canvas without its being already an achievement.'

It is of little moment what the pretext is for this sampling of colour: nudes improbably grouped in a non-existent landscape, apples in a plate placed awry upon some commonplace material – there is always a beautiful line, a beautiful balance, a sumptuous sequence of resounding harmonies. The gift of freshness, the spontaneity and novelty of his discoveries, add still more to the interest of his slightest sketches.

'He is,' said Sérusier, 'the pure painter. His style is a pure style; his poetry is a painter's poetry. The purpose, even the concept of the object represented, disappears before the charm of his coloured forms. Of an apple by some commonplace painter one says: I should like to eat it. Of an apple by Cézanne one says: How beautiful! One would not peel it; one would like to copy it. It is in that that the spiritual power of Cézanne consists. I purposely do not say idealism, because the ideal apple would be the one that stimulated most the mucous membrane, and Cézanne's apple speaks to the spirit by means of the eyes.'

'One thing must be noted,' Sérusier continues: 'that is the absence of subject. In his first manner the subject was sometimes childish: after his evolution the subject disappears, there is only the *motive*.' (It is the word that Cézanne was in the habit of using.)

That is surely an important lesson. Have we not confused all the methods of art – mixed together music, literature, painting? In this, too, Cézanne is in reaction. He is a simple artisan, a primitive who returns to the sources of his art, respects its first postulates and necessities, limits himself by its essential elements, by what constitutes exclusively the art of painting. He determines to ignore everything else, both equivocal refinements and deceptive methods. In front of the *motive* he rejects everything that might distract him from painting, might compromise his *petite sensation* as he used to say, making use of the phraseology of the aesthetic philosophy of his youth: he avoids at once deceptive representation and literature.

II

The preceding reflections allow us to explain in what way Cézanne is related to Symbolism. Synthetism, which becomes, in contact with poetry, Symbolism, was not in its origin a mystic or idealist movement. It was inaugurated by landscape-painters, by painters of still-life, not at all by painters of the soul. Nevertheless it implied the belief in a correspondence between external forms and subjective states. Instead of evoking our moods by means of the subject represented, it was the work of art itself which was to transmit the initial sensation and perpetuate its emotions. Every work of art is a transposition, an emotional equivalent, a caricature of a sensation received, or, more generally, of a psychological fact.

'I wished to copy nature,' said Cézanne, 'I could not. But I was satisfied when I had discovered that the sun, for instance, could not be reproduced, but that it must be represented by something else . . . by colour.' There is the definition of Symbolism such as we understood it about 1890. The older artists of that day, Gauguin above all, had a boundless admiration for Cézanne. I must add that they had at the same time the greatest esteem for Odilon Redon. Odilon Redon also had searched outside of the reproduction of nature and of sensation for the plastic equivalents of his emotions and his dreams. He, too, tried to remain a *painter*, exclusively a painter, while he was translating the radiance and gloom of his imagination. [. . .]

It is a touching spectacle that a canvas of Cézanne presents; generally unfinished, scraped with a palette-knife, scored over with *pentimenti* in turpentine, many times repainted, with an *impasto* that approaches actual relief. In all this evidence of labour, one catches sight of the artist in his struggle for style and his passion for nature; of his acquiescence in certain classic formulæ and the revolt of an original sensibility; one sees reason at odds with inexperience, the need for harmony conflicting with the fever of original expression. Never does he subordinate his efforts to his technical means; 'for the desires of the flesh,' says St Paul, 'are contrary to those of the spirit, and those of the spirit are contrary to those of the flesh, they are opposed one to another in such wise that ye do not that which ye would.' It is the eternal struggle of reason with sensibility which makes the saint and the genius.

Let us admit that it gives rise sometimes, with Cézanne, to chaotic results. We have unearthed a classic spontaneity in his very sensations, but the realization is not reached without lapses. Constrained already by his need for synthesis to adopt disconcerting simplifications, he deforms his design still further by the necessity for expression and by his scrupulous sincerity. It is herein that we find the motives for the *gaucherie* with which Cézanne is so often reproached, and herein lies the explanation of that practice of naïveté and ungainliness common to his disciples and imitators. [. . .]

What astonishes us most in Cézanne's work is certainly his research for form, or, to be exact, for deformation. It is there that one discovers the most hesitation, the most *pentimenti* on the artist's part. The large picture of the Baigneuses, left unfinished in the studio at Aix, is from this point of view typical. Taken up again, numberless times during many years, it has varied but little in general appearance and colour, and even the disposition of the brush-strokes remains almost permanent. On the other hand the dimensions of the figures were often readjusted; sometimes they were life-size, sometimes they were contracted to half; the arms, the torsos, the legs were enlarged and

diminished in unimaginable proportions. It is just there that lies the variable element in his work; his sentiment for form allowed neither of silhouette nor of fixed proportions. [...]

On the walls of Jas de Bouffan, covered up now with hangings, he has left improvisations, studies painted as the inspiration came, and which seem carried through at a sitting. They make one think, in spite of their fine pictorial quality, of the fanfaronades of Claude in Zola's 'L'Œuvre', and of his declamations upon 'temperament'. The models of his choice at this period are engravings after the Spanish and Italian artists of the seventeenth century. When I asked him what had led him from this vehemence of execution to the patient technique of the separate brush-stroke, he replied, 'It is because I cannot render my sensation at once; hence I put on colour again, *I put it on as best I can*. But when I begin I endeavour always to paint with a full *impasto* like Manet, *giving the form with the brush*.'

'There is no such thing as line,' he said, 'no such thing as modelling, there are only contrasts. When colour attains its richness form attains its plenitude.'

Thus, in his essentially concrete perception of objects, form is not separated from colour; they condition one another, they are indissolubly united. And in consequence in his execution he wishes to realize them as he sees them, by a single brush-stroke. [...] All his faculty for abstraction – and we see how far the painter dominates the theorist – all his faculty for abstraction permits him to distinguish only among notable forms 'the sphere, the cone and the cylinder'. All forms are referred to those which he is alone capable of thinking. The multiplicity of his colour schemes varies them infinitely. But still he never reaches the conception of the circle, the triangle, the parallelogram; those are abstractions which his eye and brain refuse to admit. *Forms* are for him *volumes*.

Hence all objects were bound to tell for him according to their relief, and to be situated according to planes at different distances from the spectator within the supposed depth of the picture. A new antinomy, this, which threatens to render highly accidental 'that plane surface covered with colours arranged in a determined order'. Colorist before everything, as he was, Cézanne resolves this antinomy by chromatism – the transposition, that is, of values of black and white into values of colour.

'I want,' he told me, following the passage from light to shade on his closed fist – 'I want to do with colour what they do in black and white with the stump.' He replaces light by colour. This shadow is a colour, this light, this half-tone are colours. The white of this table-cloth is a blue, a green, a rose; they mingle in the shadows with the surrounding local tints; but the crudity in the light may be harmoniously translated by dissonant blue, green and rose. He substitutes, that is, contrasts of tint for contrasts of tone. He disentangles thus what he used to call 'the confusion of sensations'. In all this conversation, of which I here report scraps, he never once mentioned the word values. His system assuredly excludes relations of values in the sense accepted in the schools.

Volume finds, then, its expression in Cézanne in a gamut of tints, a series of touches; these touches follow one another by contrast or analogy according as the form is interrupted or continuous. This was what he was fond of calling *modulating* instead of modelling. We know the result of this system, at once shimmering and forcible; I will not attempt to describe the richness of harmony and the gaiety of illumination of his pictures. [...]

* * *

He is at once the climax of the classic tradition and the result of the great crisis of liberty and illumination which has rejuvenated modern art. He is the Poussin of Impressionism. He has the fine perception of a Parisian, and he is splendid and exuberant like an Italian decorator. He is orderly as a Frenchman and feverish as a Spaniard. He is a Chardin of the decadence and at times he surpasses Chardin. There is something of El Greco in him and often the healthfulness of Veronese. But such as he is he is so naturally, and all the scruples of his will, all the assiduity of his effort have only aided and exalted his natural gifts.

[...] The two operations, the *Aspect* and *Prospect*, as Poussin says, are no longer separate with Cézanne. To organize one's sensations was a discipline of the seventeenth century; it is the preconceived limitation of the artist's receptivity. But the true artist is like the true *savant*, 'a child-like and serious nature'. He accomplishes this miracle – to preserve amidst his efforts and his scruples all his freshness and naïveté.

9 Maurice Denis (1870–1943) 'From Gauguin and van Gogh to Neo-Classicism'

Denis here aims to reassert the importance of the Symbolist movement of the 1890s and to establish a revived classicism as its proper successor. His essay thus provides a bridge between the anti-naturalist tendencies of Symbolism and the 'call to order' of the post-war years. Originally published in *L'Occident*, Paris, May 1909; reprinted in Denis, *Théories 1890–1910*, Paris, 1912, pp. 113–23, from which the present version is translated.

The great hurricane that renewed French art around 1890 originated in the shop of Père Tanguy, colour-merchant, rue Clauzel, and in the Gloanec Inn at Pont-Aven. Gauguin gathered together at Pont-Aven a number of disciples: Chamaillard, Séguin, Filiger, Sérusier, the Dutchman de Hahn. This formed the 'weighty school of fundamentals, in the midst of large pitchers of cider'. At Tanguy's – he was a former member of the Commune, a gentle anarchistic dreamer – there were spread out for the edification of the young, the revolutionary productions of van Gogh, Gauguin, Emile Bernard and their emulators. They hung in disarray next to canvases of the uncontested master, the initiator of the new movement, Paul Cézanne.

Bernard, van Gogh, Anquetin, Toulouse-Lautrec were the rebels of the Cormon studio: we were just ourselves. Bonnard, Ibels, Ranson, Denis, those around Sérusier, were the rebels of the Julien studio. Sympathetic to everything that seemed new and subversive, we were drawn to those who wiped the slate clean of both academic teaching, and of romantic or photographic naturalism, which had been universally asserted to be the only theory worth taking seriously in a scientific and democratic epoch. [...]

Those who witnessed the 1890 movement can no longer be shocked by anything; the most ludicrous and incomprehensible efforts of those who are now called the 'Fauves' can only stir memories of the extravagances of our generation. To know what excitement is, the vertigo of the unexpected, it is necessary to have seen the Volpini café during the exhibition of 1889. Tucked in a corner away from the Great Fair, far from the official art, and the masterpieces assembled for retrospectives, the first works by

Gauguin, Bernard, Anquetin, etc. hung quite pathetically, brought together for the first time. [...]

At this time, the critics reproached us for wanting to babble like children. Actually, we did return to childhood, we played the fool, and that was without doubt the most intelligent thing to do. Our art was an art of savages, of primitives. The movement of 1890 proceeded simultaneously from a state of extreme decadence and from the ferment of renewal. It was the moment when the diver touches bottom and resurfaces.

Without doubt, the hurricane of 1890 had been long prepared. These artists whose appearance caused a scandal, were the products of their time and place; it would be unjust to isolate them from their elders the Impressionists; in particular, it seems that the influence of Camille Pissarro on them was considerable. Moreover, they could not be reproached for having misunderstood their immediate precursors; and they showed from the outset the greatest esteem for those who launched them on their way; not only Camille Pissarro and Cézanne, and Degas, and Odilon Redon, but also Puvis de Chavannes whose official endorsement could have displeased their youthful intransigence.

It was therefore the necessary culmination – action and reaction together – of the great Impressionist movement. Everything has been said on this subject: the absence of any rule, the uselessness of academic teaching, the triumph of naturalism, the influence of Japan, all determined the joyous flourishing of an art apparently freed of all constraint. New motifs, the sun, and artificial lighting and all the vividness of modern life were allowed into the domain of art. Literature mixed with the vulgarities of Realism to put an end to the refined touches of Symbolism; the ‘slice of life’ was served unadorned; at the same time the aristocratic love of the choice word, of the unadulterated state of the soul and of obscurity in poetry, provoked the lyricism of the young writers. That which we demanded of Cézanne, Gauguin and van Gogh, they found in the works of Verlaine, Mallarmé and Laforgue: in a manifesto article in the *Revue Encyclopédique* Albert Aurier wrote: ‘Everywhere the right to dream is demanded, the right to fields of azure, the right to fly to the stars of absolute truth. The myopic copying of anecdotes from society, the stupid imitation of nature’s blemishes, dull observation, trompe-l’oeil, the glory of being as true, as banally exact, as the photograph no longer satisfies any painter, any sculptor worthy of this name.’ Musicians, less nihilistic than painters, but like them preoccupied with more individual liberty and more expressiveness, submitted at once to the influence of Wagnerian romanticism, of Russian picturesqueness, and of the pure music which was revealed to them by César Franck, Bach and the contrapuntalists of the sixteenth century.

Everything was in ferment. But finally it must be admitted that in the plastic arts, the idea of art as at first just restricted to the idea of the copy, relied on nothing more than Naturalist prejudice in both temperament and individual sensation. Critics said that that was how they saw things. We heightened the disgust with conventions, without any other goal than to destroy them: the right to do anything did not know any restriction. The excess of this anarchy brought about as a reaction the pursuit of the systematic and the taste for theory. [...]

Van Gogh and Gauguin resumed with vigour this epoch of confusion and of renaissance. Next to the scientific impressionism of Seurat, they represented barbarity, revolution and fever – and finally docility. Their efforts at the beginning escaped every

classification: and their theories were hard to differentiate from the older Impressionism. For them, as for their predecessors, art was the rendering of sensation, it was the exaltation of individual sensibility. All the elements of excess and disorder derived from Impressionism exasperated them at first; it was only little by little that they became aware of their innovative role, and they perceived that their synthetism or their symbolism is precisely the antithesis of Impressionism.

Their work conquered its domain of influence by its brutal and paradoxical nature. We see the proof in the Northern countries, Russia, Scandinavia, Finland, where their influence preceded – and prepared – that of Cézanne. Without the destructive and contradictory anarchism of Gauguin and van Gogh, the example of Cézanne, with everything that it brings with it from tradition, measure and order, would not have been understood. The revolutionary elements of their works were the vehicle for the constructive elements. However, for the attentive observer, it has been easy to distinguish since 1890, in the excessiveness of the works and the paradoxes of the theories, a classical reaction.

It suffices to remember that we have demanded since this distant era the title of ‘Neo-Traditionalists’. But that is unimportant compared to what has happened since. The important fact is that since then an evolution has occurred towards order, and even amongst those who participated in the movement of 1890, or those who claimed to be attached to it. [. . .] In the midst of its elders, youth has become resolutely classical. One knows of the infatuation of the new generation for the seventeenth century, for Italy, for Ingres: Versailles is in fashion, Poussin applied to the nude; Bach always brings in a full house; Romanticism is ridiculed. In literature, in politics, young people have a passion for order. The return to tradition and to discipline is as unanimous as was the cult of the self and the spirit of revolt in our generation. In support of this, I note the fact that in the vocabulary of avant-garde critics, the word ‘classical’ is the supreme compliment, and consequently serves to designate the most ‘advanced’ trends. Henceforth Impressionism will be considered an era of ‘ignorance and frenzy’ to which stands opposed ‘a more noble art, more measured, more ordered, more cultivated’ (consider the work of Braque).

Truly, the moment has come where it is necessary to choose, as Barrès has said, between traditionalism and the intellectual point of view. Trade unionists, or monarchists of the Action Française, have equally come down to earth from their liberal or libertine clouds, and endeavour to remain within the logic of facts, to reason only with realities; but the monarchist theory, total nationalism, has amongst other advantages, that of keeping alive the successful experiences of the past. We, the other painters, have developed towards classicism because we have had the joy of posing the double aesthetic and psychological problem of art. We have substituted for the idea of ‘nature viewed through a temperament’ [Zola], the theory of equivalences or of the symbol. We affirm that the emotions or states of the soul provoked by some spectacle, create in the artistic imagination signs or plastic equivalents capable of reproducing these emotions or states of the soul without the need to create a *copy* of the initial spectacle; that each state of our sensibility must correspond to an objective harmony capable of being thus translated.

Art is no longer a purely visual sensation that we record, a photograph of nature, as sophisticated as possible. On the contrary, it is a creation of our spirit which nature provokes. Instead of ‘working from vision, we search for the mysterious centre of

thought', as Gauguin said. The imagination becomes once again, as in Baudelaire, the queen of the faculties. Thus, we liberate our sensibility. Art, rather than a *copy*, becomes the *subjective transformation* of nature.

Objectively speaking, decorative, aesthetic and rational composition, which the Impressionists never considered because it ran contrary to their taste for improvisation, has become the counterpart, the necessary corrective to the theory of equivalents. In the cause of expressivity, this authorized all transpositions, even caricatures, any excesses of aspect: *objective transformation* has obliged each artist to transpose everything into beauty. In summary, the expressive synthesis, the symbol of a sensation has become an eloquent transcription of it, and simultaneously an object composed for visual pleasure.

Profoundly linked in Cézanne, these two trends developed to differing extents in van Gogh, Gauguin, Bernard, all of the old Synthetists. One can come to terms with their thinking, can basically summarize the essential element of their theories, as composed of two kinds of formal change. While decorative changes of form are the most common of Gauguin's preoccupations, it is by contrast subjective changes in form which give van Gogh's painting its character and lyricism. In the case of the former, one discovers beneath rustic or exotic surfaces, a rigorous logic and the artifices of composition, which, if one dare say it, preserves a little of the Italian rhetoric. The latter, by way of contrast, is an exasperated Romantic, who comes to us from the land of Rembrandt. The picturesque and the pathetic affect him more than plastic beauty and organization. Thus they represent an exceptional moment of the double movement, both Classical and Romantic. Let us look in these two painters of our youth for some concrete images to illustrate this abstract and perhaps obscure thesis.

In the spirited and abrupt style of van Gogh, in his search for radiance, and his violence of tone, I find everything that seduces the young *Tachistes*, and the reason why they content themselves with patches or streaks of pure colour. They admire his aggressive attitude in the face of nature, his abnormal, heightened, but truly lyrical vision of things; his impulse of conscience to say everything that he feels; the insistence with which he affirms the most capricious movements of his sensibility – and by what rudimentary means! – using a violent stroke, the bold relief of the thickening out of the paint. There is in his works an awkward way of attacking the canvas that the last of the Romantics took as a sign of genius; consider the heavy emphasis that Zola imposed on this type of painting in *l'Œuvre*. The pathetic and trivial influence of Naturalism had left its mark even on this mystic, this sophisticated man, this poet; I still see this in the new generation. The word temperament, with all its animalistic connotations, has retained its prestige. Van Gogh, finally, caused in the younger generation a reversion to Romanticism.

* * *

[...] Gauguin, who created so much disorder and incoherence in his life, did not tolerate any of this in his painting. He loved clarity, a sign of intelligence. The reconstruction of art, which Cézanne began with the materials of Impressionism, was continued by Gauguin with less sensibility and breadth, but with more theoretical rigour. He made the thoughts of Cézanne more explicit. In reimmersing them in the sources of art, in investigating the primary principles which he called the *eternal laws of the beautiful*, he gave them a greater force. 'Barbarity,' he wrote, 'is for me a return to

youth . . . I have retreated far, further than the horses of the Parthenon . . . right back to the dada of my childhood, the beloved wooden horse.'

We are indebted to the barbarians, to the primitives of 1890, for having highlighted some essential truths. We can no longer *reproduce* nature and life by more or less improvised trompe-l'oeil, but on the contrary, must reproduce our emotions and our dreams by *representing* them, using forms and harmonious colours. This is, I insist, a new position – at least for our times – on the problem of the nature of art. This concept is a fertile one.

I repeat, this concept is the fundamental one in art of all ages; there is no real art which is not Symbolist. [. . .]

* * *

If the youth of today manages to reject the negative systems which have disorganized art and aesthetics – and, simultaneously, French society and intelligence – they will find the truly contemporary elements of a classical restoration in our Synthetist or Symbolist views, in the rational interpretation of Cézanne and Gauguin. The theories of 1890 will have done more than just give a paradoxical twist to eternal verities. They will have made a new order rise up from anarchy. Our simple methods had at least the advantage of adapting themselves to new elements introduced by Impressionism, and of using them. Born of an attitude of decadence, they do not offer us an irresistible idea from the distant past, but organize the fresh resources of modern art, *our realities*, in such a way as to allow us to reconcile the example of the masters and the demands of our sensibility.

The history of art is nothing other than a perpetual beginning. The same principles of colour which make up the richness of a Gauguin or a van Gogh were applied by Tintoretto and Titian. The beauty of the curves, the style of the lines of a Degas or a Puvis de Chavannes can be found on the side of Greek vases, and of primitive frescoes.

We are aware of only a small number of positive truths; at least we can verify in the past glimpses of laws, certainties acquired by our own unfettered experience. Thus the idea of tradition, at first shapeless and rudimentary, has developed and enriched itself.

* * *

As the language of man, symbol of ideas, art can only be idealistic. Any confusion on this point has, hopefully, been definitively dispelled. We have once more given pride of place to intelligence, and highest of all, imagination, in the work of the artist. Whatever the impetus of a work towards nature, one must not forget that art does not have superior value unless it corresponds to the noblest and the most mysterious characteristics of the human soul. There is no example of a great artist who was not also a great poet, nor of a great work whose subject was purely pictorial. The most painterly of painters, Rembrandt, Rubens or Corot, were never content with being superb technicians: the works which immortalized them are, properly speaking, religious, no matter what their literary content may be.

The productions of modern art do not extend far beyond a small circle of initiates; these are small coteries which benefit from it. Every type of sensibility, every artist, incomplete though he may be, possesses a set of admirers, his public. Now the work of art must reach and move all people. The classical masterpieces have a character of universality, of the absolute, either because they express and epitomize an entire civilization, or because they give rise to a new culture. These masterpieces depict an order of the universe, a divine order, that the human intelligence can manifest in a way

that is fundamentally the same, though presented via a variety of individual formulations. These formulations only become classical to the extent that they express this order with greater eloquence and clarity. [...]

In this essay we have not tried to explain the enigma of genius. We circle around this miracle only to define various approaches and differing aspects. The evolution from Symbolism to Classicism that we have tried to make clear and to explain, does not diminish artistic spontaneity. If we hope that artistic freedom knows definite limits and that its sensibility submits itself to the judgment of reason, we also hope that these limits will increase its virtues, and that genius restrained by proper rules will acquire greater concentration, depth and force. It is true that we are tired of the individualist spirit, which rejects tradition, teaching and discipline and considers the artist as a kind of demi-god, whose caprice defies rules. It is true that this falsehood, initially our own, has become intolerable to us. However, we still maintain, from our Symbolist point of view, that the work of art is a general translation of individual emotions. The new order that we have discerned, born out of the experiences and the theories of 1890, born from anarchy itself, is based on a subordination of the faculties one to another. At the bottom level one always finds sensation; it proceeds from particular sensibility to general reason. One would not know how to look for the subject of a work of art except in individual perception, in the spontaneous perception of a relation, of an equivalence between certain states of the soul and certain plastic signs which they necessarily translate. The novelty consists in thinking that this type of symbolism, far from being incompatible with the classical method, can renew the effectiveness of that method and draw admirable developments from it. Not the least advantage of our system is the fact that the basis for a very objective art, a very general and plastic language, even a classical art, is the most subjective and the most subtle aspect of the human soul, the most mysterious spirit of our inner life.

10 Julius Meier-Graefe (1867–1935) ‘The Mediums of Art, Past and Present’

Born in the Austro-Hungarian empire, Meier-Graefe studied in Germany, France and Switzerland. In 1895 he moved to Paris, where he became an advocate for Art Nouveau. He returned to Berlin in 1904. The present text is taken from the opening chapter of *Modern Art: Being a Contribution to a New System of Aesthetics*, originally published in German as *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst*, 1904. Meier-Graefe aimed to distinguish a specifically artistic element from social and material factors in the development of culture. His work helped decide the terms of reference in which the historical development of modern art was conceived by subsequent writers. We have used the translation by F. Simmonds and G. Chrystal, London and New York, 1908.

I

Our collective artistic culture was bound to suffer, when the collective forces of art were concentrated in a special domain, that of pictures and statues. The fact is not minimized by the consideration, that this development was the work of a glorious

history, originating in the most brilliant phases of modern culture. Nor can it be denied that the most splendid epochs of humanity achieved their great results without the omnipotence of pictures. [. . .]

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In these days, the pure work of art has been brought into immediate contact with every-day life; an attempt has been made to transform it utterly, to make it the medium of the æsthetic aspirations of the house, whereas this function belongs properly to the house itself and the utilitarian objects in it. We have tried to popularize the highest expression of art, something only significant when applied to the loftiest purposes, something, the enjoyment of which without a certain solemnity is inconceivable, or, at least, only to be attained in moments of peculiar detachment. We have succeeded merely in vulgarizing it.

This is the source of the great error that retards our artistic culture. We revolve in vicious circles round the abstract work of art.

The painted or carved image is in its nature immovable. Not only because it was originally composed for a given space, but because the world of emotion to which it belongs lies wholly apart. This may be so powerful, that its association with the things of daily life cannot be effected without serious damage either to the one or the other.

The association of works of art with religious worship was therefore the most natural association possible. A heavenly illumination, itself possessed of all the attributes of divinity, art gave impetus to the soul in its aspirations towards the mystic, its flight from the sufferings of daily life, and offered the best medium possible for that materialization of the divine idea, which the primitive man demands in religion. The ancient Greek worship, with its natural, purely sensuous conceptions, was the happiest basis for the artist, for in Greece religion and art were one thing: beauty. The god was the ideal of beauty.

When the temple became a church, art lost its original purity, and became the handmaid of the hierarchy. But religion was so deeply implanted in the souls of the faithful, that both to executant and recipient the service never lost the mystic atmosphere, the common bond, and all hostile antagonism was avoided. It was the Reformation that first drove the image from the temple, and gave to worship a form, the austerity of which excluded any sensuous enjoyment.

This was one of the many contributory impulses that brought about the confusion of aesthetics. Art was so closely bound up with religion, that it almost seemed as if the enlightenment that shattered the one, must be dangerous to the other. The mysticism of art and that of religion had formerly mingled their currents. As a fact, the former was no less obscure than the latter – who can say even now, what the essence of art is? But the pious and sometimes beautiful fable of religion had to perish, to make way, not for Luther's compromise, but for something radically opposite, science, by which the *raison d'être* of art remained unaffected. Indeed, as science could not satisfy the mystic yearnings of the soul, the sphere of art was, if possible, extended, though it could no longer be restricted to conventional forms.

The emancipation of man from the dogmas of the church was an advance. In the domain of art, where it destroyed the fixed convention as to subject, it might have become beneficent. But as a fact, it entailed retrogression. Painting was not yet strong enough to stand alone, or perhaps it was already enervated; instead, now that it was free from all objective constraint, of rising to the heights of pure art, sustained by its own

convention alone, it gradually became vulgarized, and finally fell into perplexities from which it had been preserved in the early ages of culture.

A three-fold watchword inspired the political and social contests of the new age: Freedom, Truth, Equality. We think we have the first two; and our generation is warring for a verdict as to the third.

Art thought herself bound to take part in the contest. As on other battlefields, the three sections of the ideal were upheld simultaneously, and as in these again, the fight was sharpest and most decisive over the first two, Freedom and Truth.

Broadly speaking, the trilogy, taken absolutely, is Utopian, and even nonsensical; but in social matters, the ideal regulates itself in a rational manner. In art, where such was not the case, where the extravagance of the postulate was far in excess of its good sense, it worked most mischievously.

Art was to be free – but free from what? The innovators forgot, that freedom implies isolation. In her impulsive vehemence, art cast away the elements that made her indispensable to man. The vaster the wide ocean of unbounded aims before her, the more distant was the terra firma which had been her home. She lost her native land.

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It was only in those earlier days, when proprietary rights were not associated with art, that the relation of the layman thereto approached the socialistic ideal. Art was for all, for it belonged to no one. It stood above individual greed, a highly communistic symbol in an age that in all else was far indeed from the socialism of our day. Now it has become the expression of our terrible class distinctions. It is only accessible to an aristocracy, whose domination is the more sinister, in that it is not based solely on rank and wealth, that is to say, on things by the division of which the ardent socialist hopes to re-establish the social equilibrium. There is nothing so unattainable, for the enjoyment of it presupposes an abnormal refinement of aesthetic perception, which has become as rare as genius itself. Nowadays, one must not only have a great deal of money to buy art, but one must be an exceptional creature, of peculiar gifts, to enjoy it. It exists only for the few, and these are far from being the most admirable or beneficent of mankind; they seem, indeed, to show all the characteristics of the degenerate. Loftiness of character, or of intelligence, are not essential to the comprehension of art. The greatest men of our age have notoriously known nothing about it, and what is more remarkable, artists themselves often understand it least of all. Artists have talked more nonsense about art than any other class of men. Modern artistic culture can scarcely be accounted an indispensable element of general culture any longer, for the simple reason that art has ceased to play a part in the general organism.

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II

The incomprehensibility of painting and sculpture to the general public has been shrouded in a veil of pretentious exposition. The amount of talking and writing about art in our day exceeds that in all other epochs put together. The increase of sociability rising from increase of wealth made it necessary to invent suitable occupations for unproductive energies. Chatter about art became a highly popular form of such amusement; it requires no special preparation, no exertion, is independent of weather and seasons, and can be practised in drawing-rooms! Art has become like

caviare – everyone wants to have it, whether they like it or not. The immaterial elements of the former give a certain intellectual tone to the sport, which is lacking in a feast of caviare; it is therefore complacently opposed to such material enjoyments. [...]

Love of art, however, especially the kind of love that goes beyond platonic limits, becomes rarer as those who meddle with it multiply in every land. Purchase has become the touchstone of such affection; like marriage, it is a practical token of sentiment, and even to the artist, this evidence is generally more important than the impulse that inspired it.

It can hardly be otherwise now. If art is to be anything, it must not arouse merely that languid attention which people manifest when they politely approve something as ‘very interesting.’ It is not enough that it should inspire the pens of scribblers, and develop itself alone, and not others. In the form to which it is confined today – that of picture or statue, a marketable commodity – it could only exercise an influence by fulfilling the purpose of other marketable things: that of being purchased. But the popularization of art is rendered impossible by the extravagant prices commanded by recognized works of art and demanded for those that are not so recognized, by a frantic, absurd, and unhappily, thoroughly dishonest traffic. I can conceive of rich people who would refrain from the purchase of pictures out of sheer disgust at the trade, a desire to keep their hands clean. The purchasing amateur is a personality made up of the most obscure springs of action. The absolutely incalculable fluctuations in prices, the influence of fashion, nowhere so demented as in this connection, the desire to go on improving his collection, i.e., to bring it up to the fashionable standard of the moment, forces the collector to be always selling, to become the shamefaced dealer, who is, of course, the most shameless, and who introduces additional elements of disorder into a commerce already chaotic. The result is that there are, as a fact, no buyers, but only dealers, people who pile their pictures one above the other, deal exclusively, or almost exclusively, with each other, and have no connection with the real public. Statistics, showing how few are the hands to which the immense artistic wealth of the world is confined, would make a sensation. A great London dealer once told me that he had only three customers! Durand-Ruel, of Paris, has several times had certain famous Impressionist pictures in his possession at progressive prices, rising some 1000 per cent each time, and the purchasers have often been the same persons on several occasions.

Such conditions reduce the æsthetic usefulness of a work to a minimum. Pictures become securities, which can be kept locked up like papers. Even the individual, the owner, ceases to enjoy his possession. Nine-tenths of the most precious French pictures are kept for nine-tenths of the year in magnificent cases, to protect them from dust. Sales are effected as on the Bourse, and speculation plays an important part in the operations. The goods are scarcely seen, even at the sale. A typical, but by no means unique, example is afforded by the late Forbes collection. It consisted of I forget how many hundreds or thousands of pictures. To house them, the owner rented the upper storey of one of the largest London railway stations, vast storehouses, but all too circumscribed to allow of the hanging of the pictures. They stood in huge stacks against the walls, one behind the other: the Israels, Mauves, and Marises were to be counted by hundreds, the French masters of 1830 by dozens; there were exquisite examples of Millet, Corot, Daubigny, Courbet, &c., and Whistler. Although the stacks of pictures were held up by muscular servants, the enjoyment of these treasures was a

tremendously exhausting physical process. One walked between pictures; one felt capable of walking calmly over them! After five minutes in the musty atmosphere, goaded by the idiotic impulse to see as much as possible, and the irritating consciousness that it was impossible to grasp anything, every better instinct was stifled by an indifference that quenched all power of appreciation. The deathly calm one broke in upon, as one toiled sweating through these bare gigantic rooms where there was no space to turn, the whistling of the engines, the trembling of the floor as the trains ran in and out below, seemed to inspire a kind of strange fury, a silent longing to destroy the whole lot.

Who would be the loser if this were actually done? If anything could justify anarchism, it is the knowledge that the greatest artists toil in poverty, to enable a few dealers to grow rich after their deaths, and a few fanatics to hoard their works in warehouses. The most notorious vices are not so grotesquely irrational as this mania for hoarding, which, owing to its apparent innocuousness, has not yet been recognised as a malady. All the famous collectors of Paris, London, and America are more or less tainted with this disease. We enter their houses full of eager anticipation, and quit them with a sigh of relief, half suffocated by the pictures that cover every inch of wall-space, and wholly depressed, not by a feeling of envy, but by the thought that there are people who have voluntarily accepted the torture of spending their lives among all these things.

Even if a wiser economy should improve the conditions we have described, it will never be possible to induce a better appreciation of art by commercial means. Hence all the fine ideas of 'popular art' are doomed to remain mere dreams. It is materially impossible to produce pure works of art at prices that will bring them within the means of the masses. [. . .]

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III

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The dwelling-house of to-day has lost its formal relation to the age. Save for non-social, practical considerations, which express themselves in a certain comfort and in the employment of space to the best advantage, it shows a lack of cohesion with our lives. Contrary to the usage of former times, our sphere of action is now generally outside our houses. This action itself has changed, no less than its field; mental effort tends more and more to take the place of physical exertion. The men whose activity is most prolific in these days, that is, whose wills have the strongest influence upon production, use their limbs and muscles the least. The intellectual apparatus accordingly requires care and protection in its leisure.

The dwelling has become a place of recuperation, and this determines the character of the busy man's domicile.

As places of recuperation, our dwellings have, as a fact, become better adapted for artistic elements, and even for abstract works of art. We may for the moment set aside the dismal fact that the pure work of art is generally the only artistic thing in the house, and quite without relation to all the rest. Such conditions only make it the more essential, if man is not to renounce every loftier stimulus from without. But if the work in the house is to have any influence, in conditions so far removed from those of the earlier vehicles of art, it must be subordinated to these new conditions. It is not the

chief object that draws us to the place containing it, as in the case of a museum; we do not approach it with the devoutness of the soul athirst for mystic rapture, as formerly in a church. Comfort is the essential in this modern shrine, and a picture that disturbs our sense of well-being is clearly out of place in a house.

This sense of comfort is certainly not to be satisfied merely by artistic qualities. The very works that make the deepest impression upon us, are least adapted to domestic combination, because the sensuous value that might promote satisfaction, is present in them in forms unsuitable to our four walls or our hundred prepossessions. There are things one admires, and others one wishes to possess. That which decides between them is a whole world, and not a kind of hygiene, which teaches us to live with certain sensations, because they demand intellectual effort and sacrifice.

Art under such conditions ceases to be divine; she is no longer the enchantress who brings men to their knees before her, but rather a gentle little housewife, who surrounds us with tender attentions, and eagerly produces the sort of things that will distract tired people after a day's work.

Such a function is beneath the dignity of art. She could not accept it, if she was to remain what she had been in the past. It did not embrace her whole domain; it belongs by right to utilitarian art.

[. . .] If the uses of art change, art itself must change. If it cannot have the place it requires, it becomes meaningless. If it stands alone, it perishes. To restrict our artistic requirements to abstract painting and sculpture is a folly of the same order as that of the madman in the fable, who wished that everything he touched might turn to gold. Abstract art is a holiday delight. We are not a race of pleasure-seekers, and we are proud to say so. Our most rational idea is to divide, not wealth, but work, to see an era when there will be no drones, when every one will exert himself for the common good. In such a state the amateur will cease to exist.

IV

For what then do artists create, pending what is generally the posthumous consummation – that accumulation of their works described above?

Some for an unattainable object, every step towards which is marked by tears and blood, an ideal that can only be described in somewhat metaphysical rhetoric: the satisfaction of a conscience that has no relation to extrinsic things, of a supernal ambition, grandiose and dazzling in its conscious determination, in its consistent effort towards the elusive goal, amazing in the unconsciousness with which it achieves results that would seem only possible to the most strenuous toil. Creation for the sake of creation.

A far-seeing idealism sustains them, the hope that they will succeed in giving a new form of beauty. A blind optimism leads them, even when most neglected, to believe that they will be appreciated by some, that some will share the new joys they have discovered. And when the futility of such hopes is demonstrated, when they see their works passed over, or, worse still, bought by purchasers who have none of that intimate delight in their creations on which they had counted, they withdraw into themselves and do their greatest work.

Sometimes that which appears to them in their confident self-knowledge their greatest work, is recognized by the enlightened at last, and becomes an eternal

possession, a lasting element in after generations of artists, in whose works it lives in another form, completed by new achievement. It passes into the artistic heritage of the nation, and finally plays its part in national culture. Others fail; not that their self-knowledge is at fault, but that their talent or their intelligence falls short. Their numeric preponderance is so great, that they completely crowd out the few, and the limited demand of the public for pictures is supplied almost exclusively by them. I suppose that to every thousand painters of the one class, there is not more than one of the other. Imagine such a proportion in any other calling! The artist can mislead the public more easily than can a man of any other profession, for setting aside the affinity of the herd for all that is superficial, a sort of halo surrounds the painter; he profits by a number of institutions very favourable to mediocrity, which give a certain importance to the *métier* as such, and are readily turned to account by the adroit.

Foremost among these is the art-exhibition, an institution of a thoroughly bourgeois nature, due to the senseless immensity of the artistic output, and the consequent urgency of showing regularly what has been accomplished in the year. This institution may be considered the most important artistic medium of our age. [. . .]

Artists acquiesce in the system, because if they held aloof, their last means of expression would be denied them. They want, at least, to let their work be seen, and see it themselves, even among that of a thousand others, even for a few months, even under barbaric conditions. What becomes of it after the exhibition is indifferent to them. It is enough if the picture fulfils its purpose at the exhibition, attracts attention, is discussed by the critics, and, perhaps, even – this is the culminating distinction! – receives a medal.

To secure these results in competition with the thousands who are bent on the same ends, it is above all things necessary that a picture should have certain qualities that distinguish it from the rest. If the artist is bold enough, he makes it very large, or at all events very insistent, that it may strike the eye, even if badly hung.

It is obvious that under such conditions the purpose achieved by competition in other domains – that of promoting the selection of the best – can never be fulfilled. A variety of those base impulses, which always urge on the compact majority against the loftier individuality, play their part in the result. Rarely, indeed, has a genius been brought to light through these channels. The greater artists avoid these exchanges, and even the amateur does not frequent them, since quantity is not the only thing he craves.

The remnant of artistic sensibility that lingers in our age bids fair to be systematically crushed out by these exhibitions. If perchance any of the palatial barracks that house them should survive for posterity, they will be more damaging to us than any other relic. There will be persons who will go through these galleries in the spirit in which we visit ruined castles, and the rusty picture-hooks will be to them like gruesome instruments of torture.

Pictures once hung on these hooks . . .

This is the end of the history of pictures. We have, at least, the comfort of knowing that we can sink no lower. Once the symbol of the holiest, diffusing reverence in the church, and standing above mankind like the Divinity itself, the picture has become the diversion of an idle moment; the church is now a booth in a fair; the worshippers of old are frivolous chatterers.

11 Giorgio de Chirico (1888–1978) ‘Mystery and Creation’

Although of an Italian family, de Chirico was Greek by birth and upbringing, with a consequent familiarity with the classical heritage. He studied in Munich, where he was attracted to the painting of Boecklin and Klinger and the philosophy of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. In Paris from 1911 to the outbreak of war he developed his ‘Metaphysical painting’: a self-consciously enigmatic type of picture clearly inviting Freudian forms of interpretation. The present text was written during this phase and before his return to Italy in 1915. It was first published by André Breton in his *Surrealism and Painting*, Paris, 1928 (IVC5). The present translation is taken from the *London Bulletin* (an organ of the Surrealist movement in England), no. 6, October 1938, p. 14. (See also IIIA6.)

To become truly immortal a work of art must escape all human limits: logic and common sense will only interfere. But once these barriers are broken it will enter the regions of childhood vision and dream.

Profound statements must be drawn by the artist from the most secret recesses of his being; there no murmuring torrent, no birdsong, no rustle of leaves can distract him.

What I hear is valueless; only what I see is living, and when I close my eyes my vision is even more powerful.

It is most important that we should rid art of all that it has contained of *recognizable material* to date, all familiar subject-matter, all traditional ideas, all popular symbols must be banished forthwith. More important still, we must hold enormous faith in ourselves: it is essential that the revelation we receive, the conception of an image which embraces a certain thing, which has no sense in itself, which has no subject, which means *absolutely nothing* from the logical point of view, I repeat, it is essential that such a revelation or conception should speak so strongly in us, evoke such agony or joy, that we feel compelled to paint, compelled by an impulse even more urgent than the hungry desperation which drives a man to tearing at a piece of bread like a savage beast.

I remember one vivid winter’s day at Versailles. Silence and calm reigned supreme. Everything gazed at me with mysterious, questioning eyes. And then I realized that every corner of the palace, every column, every window possessed a spirit, an impenetrable soul. I looked around at the marble heroes, motionless in the lucid air, beneath the frozen rays of that winter sun which pours down on us *without love*, like perfect song. A bird was warbling in a window cage. At that moment I grew aware of the mystery which urges men to create certain strange forms. And the creation appeared more extraordinary than the creators.

Perhaps the most amazing sensation passed on to us by prehistoric man is that of presentiment. It will always continue. We might consider it as an eternal proof of the irrationality of the universe. Original man must have wandered through a world full of uncanny signs. He must have trembled at each step.