

## READINGS: POST-IMPRESSIONISM AND EXPRESSIONISM

Background  
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#### POST-IMPRESSIONISM

Term applied to the reaction against [Impressionism](#) led by Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh and Georges Seurat. It can be roughly dated from 1886, the year of the last Impressionist exhibition, to c. 1905, when Fauvism appeared and the first moves towards Cubism were made. While it was predominantly a French movement, there were related developments in other countries, which often occurred somewhat later. Post-Impressionism can be loosely defined as a rejection of the Impressionists' concern for the naturalistic depiction of light and colour in favour of an emphasis on abstract qualities or symbolic content. It therefore includes [Neo-impressionism](#), [Symbolism](#), [Cloisonnism](#), [Synthetism](#) and the later work of some Impressionists. The term was coined in 1910 by the English critic and painter Roger Fry for an exhibition of late 19th-century French painting, drawing and sculpture that he organized at the Grafton Galleries in London.

##### 1. History and application of the term.

After considering more substantive terms such as 'expressionism', Fry settled on 'Post-Impressionism' for the title of the exhibition at the Grafton Galleries in 1910–11, as this did no more than point out that the Post-Impressionists came after the Impressionists. From the beginning he admitted that the label was not descriptive of a single style. The catalogue preface, written by Fry with Desmond MacCarthy, secretary to the gallery, but not signed by either, begins (1910–11 exh. cat., p. 7):

The pictures collected together in the present exhibition are the work of a group of artists who cannot be defined by any single term. The term 'Synthetists', which has been applied to them by learned criticism, does indeed express a shared quality underlying their diversity; and it is the critical business of this introduction to expand the meaning of that word, which sounds too much like the hiss of an angry gander to be a happy appellation.

For Fry and MacCarthy the only common denominator between the Post-Impressionist painters was their rejection of Impressionism (1910–11 exh. cat., p. 7):

In no school does individual temperament count for more. In fact, it is the boast of those who believe in this school, that its methods enable the individuality of the artist to find completer self-expression in his work than is possible to those who have committed themselves to representing objects more literally ... the Post-Impressionists consider the Impressionists too naturalistic.

The full title of the exhibition was *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*, although Manet was represented by fewer works (nine) than the painters of the next generation. There were, for example, forty-six works by Gauguin, twenty-five by van Gogh and twenty-one by Cézanne. Other artists whose work was shown included Seurat (two works), Paul Sérusier (five), Maurice Denis (five), Félix Vallotton (four) and Odilon Redon (three). The Fauves were represented by Albert Marquet (five), Henri Manguin (four), Maurice de Vlaminck (eight) and André Derain (three). The two paintings by Matisse and the three by Picasso were supplemented by numerous drawings and sculptures by both. Fry felt that Manet had begun the rejection of the Impressionists' realistic goals and that Cézanne was Manet's heir. Gauguin and van Gogh concurred in their rejection of nature in favour of expressing emotion in their works. According to Fry, Cézanne most distinctly marked the transition away from naturalism. He 'aimed first at a design which would produce the coherent, architectural effect of the masterpieces of primitive art' (1910–11 exh. cat., p. 10). Cézanne's goal was to move away from the 'complexity of the appearance of things to the geometrical simplicity which design demands' (1910–11 exh. cat., p. 10). Fry viewed Gauguin as more of a theorist than a painter, claiming that his interest was 'the fundamental laws of abstract form' and 'the power which abstract form and colour can exercise over the imagination of the spectator' (1910–11 exh. cat., p. 11). Van Gogh was singled out for his Romantic temperament. Fry's initial definition of Post-Impressionism excluded Neo-Impressionism, even though he included two works by Seurat in the exhibition. Of the generation following Gauguin, Cézanne and van Gogh, only Matisse was mentioned in the catalogue preface. He was praised for the fact that his 'search for an abstract harmony of line, for rhythm, has been carried to lengths which often deprive the figure of all appearance of nature' (1910–11 exh. cat., p. 11).

In 1912 Fry organized a second Post-Impressionist exhibition at the Grafton Galleries (*see* London, fig. 21). While he had concentrated the first solely on French artists, in the second he admitted that the movement had existed in England and Russia as well. He therefore included works by such English artists as Duncan Grant, Vanessa Bell, Stanley Spencer and Wyndham Lewis and by such Russian artists as Natal'ya Goncharova and

Mikhail Larionov. He disparaged the Post-Impressionist painting in European countries outside France, England and Russia, writing: 'Post-Impressionist schools are flourishing, one might say raging in Switzerland, Austro-Hungary and most of Germany. But so far as I have discovered, they have not added any positive element to the general stock of ideas.' His introduction to the 'French Group' concentrated on Cézanne and ignored both van Gogh and Gauguin. There were, however, more works by Matisse and the Fauves than before. The development of Cubism was also highlighted by a large number of works by Picasso.

The one area of late 19th-century French art that Fry left unexplored was Symbolism. Of its pioneers, Gustave Moreau and Pierre Puvis de Chavannes developed their style and aesthetic before Impressionism, while Odilon Redon (whose work was included in the 1910–11 exhibition) developed his contemporaneously with Impressionism. Symbolism exerted its most powerful influence on the artists of the generations immediately following the Impressionists. By its contribution to the redirection of art from the external to the internal world and by its rejection of the superficiality of Impressionism, Symbolism is characteristically Post-Impressionist. Though imprecise, the term 'Post-Impressionism' remains widely used: John Rewald used it as the title for his encyclopedic work, *Post Impressionism: From Van Gogh to Gauguin*, first published in 1956, although he limited his attention to French artists. The exhibition entitled *Post-Impressionism: Cross-Currents in European Painting*, held at the Royal Academy, London, in 1979–80, attempted to broaden the term to include works by a variety of such European artists as Carlo Carrà, Lovis Corinth, James Ensor, Erich Heckel, Fernand Hodler, Fernand Khnopff, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Edvard Munch, Emil Nolde, Giovanni Segantini, James McNeill Whistler and many others.

## 2. Development in France and elsewhere.

Influenced by the Symbolist movement in literature, the French Post-Impressionists ignored the minutiae of natural scenes in favour of the more intangible areas of aesthetics or symbolic content. Deeper meanings, as well as the personal feelings of the artist, became valid subjects. Cézanne used colour to explore the spatial relationships between objects in nature, while at the same time studying the underlying forms of nature itself. His work shows one of the earliest reactions against Impressionism, as in *Zola's House at Médan* (c. 1880; Glasgow, Burrell Col.; see fig.), where he used carefully brushed, diagonal paint strokes to lend structure to the composition. Van Gogh, on the other hand, allowed his brushstrokes and colour to express his almost pantheistic fascination with the energy that animates natural forms as well as individual people, as in *Starry Night* (1889; New York, Met.). Gauguin preferred to use colour and line in order to suggest the spiritual as well as physical environments of the places he painted, especially Brittany and Tahiti, as in *Nevermore* (1897; U. London, Courtauld Inst. Gals). Seurat, the chief theorist and practitioner of Neo-Impressionism, produced harmonious, static paintings by adopting a meticulous, scientific approach to colour and composition, as in *Young Woman Pondering herself* (1889–90; U. London, Courtauld Inst. Gals).

In the work of all these artists, the abstract concerns of harmony and the two-dimensional arrangement of forms took precedence over naturalism. Many French artists were soon influenced by these innovations, particularly by those of Gauguin and Seurat. A group of painters, including Paul Sérusier, Emile Bernard and others, gathered around Gauguin at [Pont-aven](#) in Brittany, while Seurat's divisionist technique was taken up by such artists as Henri Edmond Cross, Maximilien Luce and Paul Signac. Some of the original Impressionist artists, including Renoir, themselves moved away from their earlier aesthetic in an attempt to introduce a greater structure to their work, as shown in Renoir's painting *La Roche-Guyon* (c. 1885; Aberdeen, A.G.), executed in meticulous brushstrokes like those used by Cézanne. Monet, on the other hand, loosened his compositions and colour schemes in order to become more subjective in his interpretation of nature.

In France the political and cultural anarchy of the 1880s and 1890s encouraged artists to reject the stylistic norms of the past. In other European countries different aesthetics and political environments spawned varying responses to this artistic freedom. In Germany the lack of a strong Impressionist tradition, as well as of any single artistic centre, diluted the impact of Post-Impressionism. The Norwegian Edvard Munch caused a stir in Berlin in 1892 with such starkly expressionistic works as *Sick Child* (1885–6; Oslo, N.G.) and created a following in avant-garde circles. The predominant artistic style among avant-garde painters nonetheless remained Naturalism, as in the works of such painters as Hans Reinhard von Marées and Lovis Corinth. A few painters, such as the Swiss artists Arnold Böcklin and Ferdinand Hodler, who worked mainly in Germany, moved from Naturalism to Symbolism, as shown by Hodler's *Eurhythmy* (1895; Berne, Kstmus.). The critic Julius Meier-Graefe was largely responsible for bringing the works of van Gogh, Gauguin and the other French Post-Impressionists to the attention of the German public. Visits between France and Germany by such artists as Paula Modersohn-Becker, Alexei Jawlenski, Maurice Denis, Jan Verkade and Paul Sérusier further helped to establish an awareness of Post-Impressionist work in the next generation of German painters, the Expressionists.

In 1883, when Octave Maus and 20 disgruntled artists established Les XX in Belgium, they opened their annual exhibition to French Post-Impressionist artists. Redon, Seurat, Signac, Gauguin, Bernard, Denis and van Gogh were among those represented in exhibitions between 1886 and 1893. These close contacts between French and Belgian artists quickly led such painters as Théo Van Rysselberghe, James Ensor and Fernand Khnopff to adopt French ideas: Neo-Impressionism and Symbolism dominated avant-garde Belgian artists from the 1890s until the beginning of the 20th century. The British were less interested in the politics of the French Post-Impressionists but were more open to the intellectual approach to art offered by Cézanne. Impressionism, filtered through the more naturalistic work of Jules Bastien-Lepage, remained the predominant style in Britain until the 1890s. Fascination with the work of Whistler in London led some artists, including Walter Richard

Sickert and George Moore, to an interest in the work of Degas. Moreover, the large number of British art students in Paris helped to transmit Post-Impressionist ideas back to London, as did the fact that such artists as Roderic O'Connor and Robert Bevan spent time in Pont-Aven, absorbing the ideas of Gauguin and his circle. However, the greatest influence of Post-Impressionism came in the first two decades of the 20th century in the work of such artists as Grant and Bell and certain members of the Camden Town Group, especially in the wake of Fry's two exhibitions.

The anarchist or socialist beliefs of many French Neo-Impressionists particularly attracted Dutch and Italian artists to their political as well as artistic causes. In the Netherlands the Impressionist landscape and light of the Hague school set the standard for most Dutch artists in the late 19th century. However, Jan Toorop's exposure to Neo-Impressionist and Symbolist ideas, when he studied in Brussels (1882–5) and became a founder-member of Les XX, led to his efforts to introduce these new art forms to his native country, as did Johan Thorn Prikker soon afterwards. The proximity of Brussels led many Dutch artists to visit the annual exhibitions of Les XX, so furthering awareness of French Post-Impressionism. These new ideas, however, were often subordinated to the Dutch passion for order and carefully defined spaces, as seen in the early works of Piet Mondrian. In Italy the divisionist techniques of the Neo-Impressionists were influential on the work of many artists in the early years of the 20th century, most notably on the work of those artists who later became Futurists, such as Giacomo Balla, Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà and Gino Severini. In Scandinavia, Russia and North America, Impressionism and Naturalism continued to dominate the art world until well after 1900. In these areas, as in other countries, Post-Impressionism was never considered a 'movement' in art. The French Post-Impressionists nevertheless later influenced many artists who were trying in various ways to move beyond the realistic concerns of the Impressionists. Thus the synthetism of Gauguin, the geometry of Cézanne, the expressionism of van Gogh and the divisionism of Seurat found followers throughout the world.

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### EXPRESSIONISM

International movement in art and architecture, which flourished between c. 1905 and c. 1920, especially in Germany. It also extended to literature, music, dance and theatre. The term was originally applied more widely to various avant-garde movements: for example it was adopted as an alternative to the use of 'Post-Impressionism' by Roger Fry in exhibitions in London in 1910 and 1912. It was also used contemporaneously in Scandinavia and Germany, being gradually confined to the specific groups of artists and architects to which it is now applied

#### 1. Painting, graphic arts and sculpture.

Expressionism in the fine arts developed from the Symbolist and expressive trends in European art at the end of the 19th century. The period of 'classical Expressionism' began in 1905, with the foundation of the group [die Brücke](#), and ended c. 1920. Although in part an artistic reaction both to academic art and to Impressionism, the movement should be understood as a form of 'new Humanism', which sought to communicate man's spiritual life. It reflected the deep intellectual unrest c. 1900, reflected in contemporary literary sources, about the destruction of the traditional relationship of trust between man and the world. This was set against 19th-century notions of reality. Art took on a new and crucially different role, no longer being used, as previously, to reproduce that which was visible, but rather to 'make things visible' (Paul Klee). The motivating forces or 'inner communication' were considered to be the only concepts worth portraying. A young generation of artists believed that the traditional artistic medium was inadequate to enable them to do this. In order to communicate the human spiritual condition the Expressionists made use of new, strong, assertive forms, often violently distorted, symbolic colours and suggestive lines. Their work also showed an interest in Primitivism (see [Primitivism, §2](#)).

#### a) Origins.

The roots of Expressionism lay in international developments of the late 19th century, although the German Expressionists always emphasized their independence from every foreign influence. Crucial impulses came, for example, from Norway, the Netherlands and Belgium, countries that had, like Germany, an old tradition of expressive art. Gauguin and the Nabis as well as the Swiss artist Ferdinand Hodler, were also

involved with its pioneering ideals. In Germany before 1900 such local schools as those at the artists' colonies of Dachau or Worpswede developed intensely expressive landscape painting, in which stylized depictions of nature represented overpowering emotional experiences, as in German Romantic painting. These lyrical images of nature, linked to similar ideas in *plein-air* painting and *Jugendstil*, significantly influenced Expressionism. Another important influence during the first phase of Expressionism was the use of pure colours developed in Neo-Impressionism and Fauvism.

The work of Vincent van Gogh, Edvard Munch and James Ensor was still more important. These artists inspired a feeling of spiritual kinship in others and promoted several ideas, which were as yet unclear, about an art that could express spiritual dimensions. This potential was exemplified by van Gogh, in both his tragic life and work, characterized by an intensely expressive use of pure colours, and dynamic brushstrokes and outlines. Munch's work transformed people and landscapes into images representing dramatic tensions arising from areas of the psyche that had hitherto been taboo. The expressive strength of the symbolic colours and lines developed traditional motifs into images of the artist's psychological world. The tormented, hallucinatory view of the world of masks and phantoms painted by Ensor was equally characteristic of the Expressionists' sense of alienation. Expressionism developed in Germany not as a 'style', but rather as an 'ideology' formed by a sense of spiritual unity, although with no theoretically defined goal. It arose simultaneously in many places in Germany and was not confined to one generation: even such an established artist as Lovis Corinth responded to its impulses.

ii) International developments and legacy of Expressionism.

Although Expressionism particularly flourished in Germany, significant developments occurred in other European countries. The principal Austrian Expressionists were Schiele and Kokoschka, both of whom had been influenced by *Jugendstil* and especially Gustav Klimt. Kokoschka produced powerful Expressionist portraits, including some drawn for *Der Sturm*. Other important work was done before 1908 by Richard Gerstl, who was influenced by Arnold Schoenberg. Outside German-speaking countries, some Expressionist art was produced in Scandinavia (e.g. by Henrik Sørensen in Norway). However, the most important other group was based in the artists' colony of [Laethem-saint-martin](#) in Belgium, which from 1905 developed an Expressionism dominated by rural and religious themes. Albert Servaes created a vigorous style characterized by schematic forms and sombre colours, which also informed the work of [constant Permeke](#), [gustave De smet](#) and [frits Van den berghc](#). French art was dominated by other trends, although individual painters produced some work that showed Expressionist influences, for example that of André Dunoyer de Segonzac before World War I. [georges Rouault](#) combined Expressionism with more traditional drawing techniques. Although such artists as Marcel Gromaire rejected the Expressionist label, their art betrayed an obvious debt: for example, work by Gromaire after World War I was heavily influenced by Flemish and (to a lesser extent) German Expressionism. The painting of [chaim Soutine](#) was also highly expressionistic, characterized by violent brushwork. Among sculptors active in Paris, the work of Alexander Archipenko and Ossip Zadkine also showed Expressionist influences.

The legacy of Expressionism was widespread. In Germany the period of '*Sturm und Drang*' ended c. 1920, although a younger generation, formed by the disorders of the period of World War I, were vociferous for a long time in their support of certain Expressionist positions: in particular, the Expressionists' social criticism inspired [Neue sachlichkeit](#). It can be argued that all later stylistic tendencies in German art have in some way been involved with Expressionism, even if only by clearly defining themselves in contrast to its formal and ideological arguments. Internationally the innovations of the Blaue Reiter undoubtedly influenced the development of later expressive abstraction. A more direct link between later movements and Expressionism was evident from c. 1980 in the figurative work of artists sometimes termed neo-Expressionists. These included the German Georg Baselitz and the so-called 'Neue Wilden', and the American Julian Schnabel and the *Nieuwe Beelding* movement.

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## Van Gogh, **Letters to Theo van Gogh**

I have just sent off three big drawings. The third garden is the one from which I made some painted studies as well. Under the blue sky the splashes of orange, yellow, red of the flowers take on an amazing brilliance, and in the limpid air there is a something or other happier, more lovesome than in the North. The little cottage garden done lengthwise has in itself amazing colour: the dahlias are a rich and sombre purple; the double row of flowers is, rose and green on one side, and orange with hardly any leaves on the other. In the midst is a dwarf white dahlia, and a little pomegranate with flowers of the most vivid reddish-orange, with yellowish-green fruits, in the morning in full sunshine, in the evening drowned in shadow thrown by the fig trees and the reeds.

If only Quost were here, or Jeannin ! What's to be done? To embrace everything it needs a whole school of men completing one another like the old Dutchmen, portrait painters, painters of genre, painters of landscape, of animals, painters of still-life.

Well, you have damn good reason to say: Let us go quietly on our way working for ourselves. You know, whatever this sacrosanct impressionism may be, all the same I wish I could paint things that the generation before Delacroix, Millet, Rousseau, Corot, could understand. Ali, Manet has been very, very near it, and Courbet - the marrying of form and colour.

If the work gets on and our courage does not fail, we may hope to see some very interesting years to come.

You are shortly to make the acquaintance of Master Patience Escalier, a sort of 'man with a hoe,' formerly cowherd of the Camargue, now gardener at a house in the Crau. The colouring of this peasant portrait is not so black as in the 'Potato-Eaters' of Neunen, but our highly civilized Parisian Portier - probably so called because he chucks pictures out - will find his nose confronted by the same old thing. You have changed since then, but you will see that he has not.

I do not think it would be an insult to the de Lautrec you have to put my peasant beside it, and I am even bold enough to hope that the de Lautrec would appear still more distinguished in the simultaneous contrast, and that mine would gain by the odd juxtaposition because that sun-steeped, sunburnt quality, tanned with burning sun and swept with air, will show up still more beside all that rice ponder and elegance.

What a mistake Parisians make in not having a palate for crude things! But there, what I learnt in Paris is leaving me, and I am returning to the ideas I had in the country before I knew the impressionists. And I should not be surprised if the impressionists find fault with my way of working, for it has been fertilized by the ideas of Delacroix rather than by theirs. I use colour more arbitrarily so as to express myself forcibly. Well, let that be as far as theory goes, but I am going to give you an example of what I mean.

I should like to paint the portrait of an artist friend, a man who dreams great dreams, who works as the nightingale sings, because it is in his nature. He'll be a fair man. I want to put into my picture my appreciation, the love that I have for him. So I paint him as he is, as faithfully as I can.

But the picture is not finished yet. To finish it I am now going to be the arbitrary colourist. I exaggerate the fairness of the hair ; I come even to orange tones, chromes and pale lemon-yellow. Beyond the head, instead of painting the ordinary wall of the mean room, I paint infinity, a plain background of the richest, intensest blue that I can contrive, and by this simple combination of the bright head against the rich blue background I get a mysterious effect, like a star in the depths of an azure sky.

In the portrait of the peasant, again, I worked in this way, but without wishing in this case to produce the mysterious brightness of a pale star in the infinite. Instead, I think of the man I have to paint as terrible in the furnace of the full harvest, the full South; hence the stormy orange shades, vivid as red-hot iron, and hence the luminous tones of old gold in the shadows.

Oh, my dear boy!-and the nice people will only see the exaggeration as caricature. But what has that to do with us? We have read 'La Terre' and 'Germinal,' and if we are painting a peasant we want to show that what we have read has in the end come very near to being part of us.

Yesterday McKnight broke his silence by saying that he very much liked my last two studies (the garden of flowers), and ha talked about them for a long time. Bock is staying with McKnight. He is a young min whose appearance I like very much-a'face like a razor blade, green eyes, and a touch of distinction. McKnight looks very common beside him. I have seen the work of this Book; it is strictly

impressionist, but not powerful. It is the stage when this new technique still so preoccupies him that he cannot be himself.

The village where they are staying is real Millet-poor peasants and nothing else, absolutely rustic and homely. This quality completely escapes them. The natives are like Zola's poor peasants, innocent and gentle beings. I think that McKnight has some money, so they taint the village; only for that I should go there often to work. They know the stationmaster and a score of 'sticky' people. Naturally the simple and artless country folk laugh at them and despise them. But if they did their work without taking up with these village loungers, they could go into the peasants' homes and let them earn a few pence; then this blessed Fontviette would be a mine for them. -Probably McKnight will soon be making little landscapes with sheep, for chocolate boxes. ,

McKnight and Bock see nothing but heat, or, rather nothing at all. Now, even if I begin to see things a little clearer, it needs a very long stay to do them. The painted studies lack clearness of touch. That is another reason why I felt it necessary to draw them.

Today I am probably going to begin the interior of the cafe where I eat, by gaslight, in the evening. It is what they call here a cafe de nuit, staying open all night. Night-prowlers can take refuge there when they have no money to pay for a lodging, or are too tight to be taken to one.

This morning I was at a washing-place with figures of women as big as Gauguin's Negresses, one especially in white, black, and red, and another all in yellow; there were about thirty of them, old and young.

These days, so far as material things go, are cruelly hard. Living, no matter what I do, is pretty dear-almost like Paris, where you can spend five or six francs a day and have very little to show for it. If I have models, I suffer for it. But it does not matter; I am going to continue. The only choice I have is between being a good painter and bad one. That is why painting ought to be done at the public expense, instead of the artists' being overburdened with it. But there, we had better hold our tongues, because no one is forcing us to work, indifference to painting being unluckily widespread and by way of being eternal. I can assure you that if you happened to send me a little extra money sometimes, it would benefit the pictures but not me.

Here there is still one advantage over the North during penniless days, that is the fine weather (even the mistral is fine weather to look at), perfectly glorious sunshine in which Voltaire dried up as he drank his coffee. You feel Zola and Voltaire everywhere involuntarily. The South is so alive! Like Ian Steer, like Ostade. Here farms and low pubs are less dreary and less dramatic than in the North, since the warmth makes poverty less harsh and melancholy. Oh, these farm gardens with their lovely big red Provençal roses, and the vines and the fig trees! It is all a poem, and the everlasting bright sunshine too, in spite of which the foliage keeps very green.

Fortunately my digestion is so nearly all right again that I have lived for three weeks of each month on ship's biscuits with milk and eggs. It is the blessed warmth that is bringing back my strength, and I was certainly right in going at once to the South instead of waiting unfit the evil was impossible to remedy. Yes, really, I am as well as other men now, which I have never been except momentarily at Neunen, and it is rather pleasant. By other men I mean men like the navvies, old Tanguy, old Millet, the peasants.

If you are well you must be able to live on a bit of bread while you are working all day, and have enough strength to smoke and drink your whack at night-that's all in the bargain-and at the same time feel the stars and the infinite high and clear above you. Then life is after all almost enchanted. Oh! those who do not believe in this sun here are the real infidels.

I am happier to feel my old strength returning than I ever thought I could be. What Gruby says about doing without women and eating well is true, for if your very brain and marrow are going into your work, it is pretty logical not to spend yourself more than you must is lovemaking. But this is easier to put into practice in the country than it is in Paris.

The desire for women that you catch in Paris, isn't it the effect of that very enervation of which Gruby is the sworn enemy rather than a sign of vigour? So, you feel this desire disappearing just at the moment that one is oneself again. The root of the evil lies in the constitution itself, in the fatal weakening of families from generation to generation, and besides that in one's unwholesome job and the dreary life of Paris, and there's no cure for it. Provided the impressionists produce good stuff and make friends, there is always the possibility of a more independent position for you later on. It's a pity at it cannot be from now on.

Unfortunately, along with the good god sun, three quarters of the time there is the devil mistral But I think it likely that we shall now have extreme heat without wind, since the wind has been

blowing for six weeks. If so, it is a very good thing that I have a supply of paints and canvas, because already I have my eye on half a dozen subjects, especially the little cottage garden.

I have just received the ten metres of canvas. If on it I paint only masterpieces half a metre in size, and sell them cash down and at an exorbitant price to distinguished connoisseurs of the Rue de la Paix, nothing will be easier than to make a fortune from this packet!

Well, I must go on and work. I saw a very quiet and lovely thing the other day: a girl with a coffee-tinted skin darker than the rose of her bodice, under which you could see the breasts, shapely, firm, and small. This against the emerald leaves of some fig trees. A woman as simple as the fields, every line of her virginal.

It isn't altogether impossible that I shall get her to pose in the open air, and her mother too—a gardener's wife—of colour, the figure in dirty yellow and faded blue thrown up in strong sunlight against a square of brilliant flowers, snowwhite and lemon-yellow.

It's not a bad place, the South. In the end I think I shall come to belong to the country altogether. And I should very much like to see Gauguin here for a good long time.

Oh! I keep wishing for the day to come when you will see and feel the sun of the South!

In a picture I want to say something comforting, as music is comforting. I want to paint men and women with that something of the eternal which the halo used to symbolize, and which we seek to give by the actual radiance and vibration of our colourings.

Ah! portraiture, portraiture with the thought, the soul—the model in it, that is what I think must come.

So I am always in one of two currents of thought: first, the material difficulties turning round and round to—make a living; and second, the study of colour. I am always in hope of making a discovery there, to express the love of two lovers by a marriage of two complementary colours, their mingling and their opposition the mysterious vibrations of kindred tones; to express the thought of a brow by the radiance of a light tone against a sombre background; to express hope by some star, the eagerness of a soul by a sunset radiance. Certainly there is nothing in that of stereoscopic realism, but is it not something that actually exists?

I am having two oak frames made for my new peasant's head, and for my poet study.

The sunflowers are getting on; there is a new bunch of fourteen flowers on a greenish-yellow ground. And I have a still-life of an old pair of shoes. Counting the sunflowers, I have at the moment another fifteen new studies.

Ideas for my work come to me in swarms, so that although solitary I have no time to think or to feel; I go on like a steam-engine at painting. I think there will hardly ever be a standstill again. And my view is that a living studio you will never find ready-made; it is created from day to day by patient work.

After some worrying weeks I have just had one of the very best. And just as worries do not come singly, neither do joys.

Because I am always bowed down under this difficulty of paying my landlord who after all isn't a bad fellow, I swore at him and told him that to revenge himself for paying him so much money for nothing, I would paint the whole of his rotten shanty. Then to the great joy of the landlord, of the postman, of the visiting night-prowlers, and of myself, for three nights running I sat up to paint and went to bed during the day.

In my picture of the 'Night Cafe' I have tried to express the idea that the cafe is a place where one can ruin oneself, run mad, or commit a crime. I have tried to express the terrible passions of humanity by means of red and green. The room is blood-red and dark yellow, with a green billiard table in the middle there are four lemon-yellow lamps with a glow of orange and green. Everywhere there is a clash and contrast of the most alien reds and greens in the figures of little sleeping hooligans in the empty dreary room, in violet and blue. The white coat of the patron, on vigil in a corner, turns lemon-yellow, or pale luminous green.

So I have tried to express, as it were, the powers of darkness in a wine-shop, and all this in an atmosphere like a devil's furnace of pale sulphur—all under an appearance of Japanese gaiety and the good nature of Tartarin.

The 'Night Cafe' carries on the 'Sower,' and so also the head of the old peasant, and of the poet, if I manage to do this latter picture. It is colour not locally true from the point of view of the stereoscopic realist, but colour to suggest the emotion of an ardent temperament.

When Paul Mantz saw the violent and inspired sketch of Delacroix, 'The Barque of Christ,' he turned away from it, exclaiming: 'I did not know that one could be so terrible with a little blue and

green.' Hokusai wrings the same cry from you, but he does it by his line, his drawing. When you say in your letter, 'The waves are claws, and the ship is caught in them,' you feel it. If you make the colour exact, or the drawing exact, it won't give you sensations like that.

But what would Monsieur Tersteeg say about the 'Night Cafe,' when he said before a Sisley-Sisley, the most discreet and gentle of the impressionists-I cannot help thinking that the artist who painted that was a bit tipsy? If he saw my picture, he would say that it was delirium tremens in full career.

I am greatly pleased that Pissarro thought something of the 'Young Girl.' Has he said anything about the 'Sower'? Afterwards, when I have gone further in these experiments, the 'Sower' will still be the first attempt in that style; and the idea of it continues to haunt me all the time.

Exaggerated studies such as the 'Sower' and the 'Night Cafe,' usually seem to me atrociously ugly .and bad. The picture of the 'Night Cafe' is one of the ugliest I have done. It is the equivalent, though different, of the 'Potato-Eaters.' But when I am moved by something, as now by a little article on Dostoevsky, these are the only ones which appear to have any deep meaning.

I see absolutely nothing to object to in your suggestion of exhibiting once at the Revue Independante provided, however, I am not a hindrance to the others who usually exhibit there. So far hardly any but the 'Sower' and the 'Night Cafe' are attempts at finished pictures.

I now have a study of an old mill painted in broken tones like the oak tree on the rock, that study you were saying you had had framed with the 'Sower,' and a third study of a landscape with a factory and a huge sun in a red sky above red roofs, a day with a wicked mistral when nature seems to be in a rage.

Yesterday I was busy furnishing the house. Just as the postman and his wife told me, the two beds to be substantial will come to three hundred and fifty francs apiece. They are country beds, big double ones instead of iron ones. That gives an appearance of solidity, lastingness, and quiet; if it takes a little more bedding, so much the worse, but it must have character. Naturally this has swallowed up the greater part of the money. With the rest I have bought twelve chairs, a mirror, and some small necessary things.

The room you will have-or Gauguin if he comes-will be the prettier room upstairs, which I shall try to make as much as possible like the boudoir of an artistic woman. It will have white walls with a decoration of great yellow sunflowers, twelve or fourteen to the bunch. In the morning when you open the window you will see the green of the gardens and the rising sun, and the road into the town.

I am in a public garden, quite close to the street of the pretty women. Mourier would hardly enter it, although almost daily we walked in the gardens, but on the other side. It is just this that gives a touch of Boccaccio to, the place. This side of the garden is also, for the same reason of chastity or morality, destitute of any flowering bushes such as oleanders. There are ordinary plane trees pines in stiff clumps, a weeping tree and the green grass. But it is also so intimate. Manet has gardens like this.

Then there will be my own bedroom, which I want extremely simple but with large solid furniture, the bed, the chairs and table all in white wood. I am going to paint my own bed; there will be three subjects on it; perhaps a nude woman or a child in a cradle; I have not decided, but I shall take my time over it.

Downstairs there will be the studio-the red tiles of the floor, the walls and ceiling white, rustic chairs, white wood table and I hope a decoration of portraits. It will have a feeling of Daumier about it, and I think I can promise you it will not be hackneyed.

Henceforth you can feel that you have your country-house at Arles; for I am very keen to arrange it so that you will be pleased with it, and so that it will be a studio in an absolutely individual style. I want to make it really an artist's house - nothing precious but with character in everything, from the chairs to the pictures. If in a year, say, you come here and to Marseilles for your holidays, the house will be ready, and as I intend it will be full of pictures from top to bottom. You shall have a picture some day or other of the little house itself in bright sunshine or with the windows lit up, and with a starry sky. And do look for some lithographs of Dau'mier's for the studio and some Japanese things....

I have never had such a chance; nature here is so extraordinarily beautiful Everywhere and aver all the vault of the sky is a marvelous blue and the sun sheds a radiance of pale sulphur that is soft and lovely. What a country!

I cannot paint it as lovely, but it absorbs me so much that I let myself go, never thinking of a single rule; I have no doubts, no hesitation in attacking things I am beginning to feel that I am quite

a different creature from the one I was when I came here. I am returning to what I was looking for before I came to Paris; I have got back to where I was at Neunen when I made a vain attempt to learn music, so much did I feel the relation between our colour and the music of Wagner.

I do not know whether anyone before me has talked about 'suggesting colour. Delacroix and Monticelli, without talking about it, did it, and it is true that I see in impressionism the resurrection of Eugene Delacroix, but the interpretations of it are so divergent and in a way so irreconcilable that it will not be impressionism that will give us the final doctrine. I myself remain among the impressionists because it binds you to nothing, and as one of the crowd I have not to declare my formula. At the same time I think it is right to see in the impressionist movement a tendency towards great things, and not only a school which would confine itself to optical experiment. And after all, our own personal future we know nothing really about, but we feel that impressionism will last.

Good Lord, how you have to mess about in life! I ask only for time to study, and do you yourself really ask for anything but that? I am so afraid of taking it from you by my demands for money.

What is Seurat doing? I should not dare to show him the studies already sent, but the ones of the sunflowers, and the cabarets, and the gardens, I should like him to see.

What days these are, not for what happens in them, but I feel so strongly that you and I are not in our decadence, nor done for yet, nor shall we be in the end. But, you know, I do not contradict the critics who will say that my pictures are not-finished.

Since seven o'clock this morning I have been sitting in front of a clipped round bush of cedar growing amid grass. A row of bushes in the background are oleanders raving mad; the blasted things are flowering so riotously they may well getl ataxia. They are loaded with fresh flowers, and heaps of faded flowers as well, and their green is continually renewing itself in fresh, strong jets, apparently inexhaustibly. A funereal cypress stands above them, and some small figures are sauntering along a rose-coloured path.

This garden has a fantastic character that makes you quite able to imagine the poets of the Renaissance, Dante, Petrarch, strolling over the flowery grass. It is the garden just in front of my house. And it shows perfectly that to get at the real character of things here you must look at them and paint them far a long time. Perhaps you will see nothing from the sketch except that the line, is very simple.

What I am sure of is that to make a picture which will be really of the South, it is not enough to have a certain cleverness. It is looking at things for a long time that ripens you and gives you a deeper understanding. If we study Japanese art, we see an artist who is wise philosophic and intelligent, who spends his time-how? In studying the distance between the earth and the moon? No. In studying the policy of Bismarck? No. He studies a single blade of grass. But this blade of grass leads him to draw the plant, and then the seasons, the wide aspects of the countryside, the animals, then the human figures. So he passes his life.

Come, now, isn't it almost an actual religion which these simple Japanese teach us, who live in nature as though they themselves were flowers? We must return to nature in spite of our education and our work in a world of convention. And you cannot study Japanese art without becoming gayer and happier.

I envy the Japanese the extreme clearness which everything has in their work. Their work is as simple as breathing, and they -do a figure in a few strokes, with ease. Oh! I must manage some day that in a few strokes the figure of a man, a youngster, a horse, shall have head, body, legs, all in keeping.

I have a letter from Gauguin, who seems very unhappy and says that as soon as he has sold something he will certainly come. He says that the people where he lodges have been wonderful to him, and that to leave them would be an outrage; but that I should be turning the knife in his heart if I were to think that he would not come straight off if he could. He says, too that if you could sell his pictures at a low price he would be content.

I have just bought a dressing-table with everything necessary, and my own little room is complete. The other room needs still a dressing-table and a chest of drawers, and downstairs I shall need a big frying-pan and a cupboard. I am also thinking of planting two oleanders in tubs in front of the door.

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**Background: Eugen Weber, *Expressionism, Movements, Currents, Trends*, pp. 227-229.**

The years after the Franco-Prussian war were for Germany a time of violent and widespread revolution. Within one generation, the country that had been a congeries of little states and provincial capitals became a great power, a highly industrialized capitalist society, and a European cultural center. The social and psychological cost of these changes was immense, and its reflection appears in the intense and twisted products of certain artists and writers whom we group under the general, probably too general, label of Expressionism. As usual, their inspiration had come largely from France, particularly from the symbolism and inward searching of men like Gauguin and Van Gogh, and also from Norway, through the work of Edward Munch (1863-1944)

Like all its contemporaries (and evidently the uneasiness and trouble were not limited to Germany alone) Expressionism is a movement of revolt. It is interesting to see, however, that the revolt first expressed itself under the Naturalist label, and that it was the naturalistic approach which Germans adopted at the turn of the century to express their social grievances and protest against injustice. The social realism with which young artists and writers inspired chiefly by the French depicted the sufferings of the poor was soon denounced as "socialist painting"; the influence of Impressionism was branded as un-German; the new art movement, eclectic in its interests but united in its dislikes and its antiacademic attitude, became a center for antiauthoritarian radicals. It is not too surprising that in 1908 the Director of the National Gallery in Berlin, Hugo von Tschudi, who had done so much to introduce Impressionism and Post-Impressionism to the German public, was kicked out by order of the Kaiser.

By then, however, new and as yet unsuspected sources of subversion had appeared more effective because more insidious than the Naturalists' straightforward attacks. 1907 had seen the publication in Germany of Wilhelm Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy*, which presented all art as subjective and intuition as the main creative element. The same year in France Henri Bergson had published his *Creative Evolution*, which presented every free act as a creative one and intuition, once again, as a most important factor in human activity. Intuition, subjectivity, "free" creation - these; were going to furnish the basis of the reaction which, especially in Germany, would express in art the growing antimaterialistic, antirationalistic, often mystical mood of anxiety and revolt. But where the naturalistic political and social criticism Heinrich Mann's novels, or the early paintings of Käthe Kollwitz protested against the fat philistinism of the new society and the sordid suffering of its exploit underlings, Expressionists tried to go beyond the surface horror of any particular situation to its deeper emotional meaning and it is the emotions - the hope, the dread, the love, or the horror contained in a situation or an object (whether human or not) - that they tried to express rather than the visible surface realities. To do they used distortion, exaggeration that ends in caricature, and a brutal, slashing color.

For the Expressionists, every object, whether lifeless or not, has an inner meaning that only the artist can reveal. Hence their writing and their painting provide running commentary on the contemporary mood; and the disturbance this causes within them is revealed by their ever more macabre treatment of grimacing themes. For Hermann Bahr "this whole pregnant time is one great cry of anguish," and it is this anguish, this darkness, that we find in the paintings of George Grosz and in the great German films of the twenties, *The Golem*, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, all of which affirm a

**KANDINSKY**

Wassily Kandinsky (7866-7944) was born in Moscow, brought up in Florence and Odessa, studied political economy and law at the University of Moscow. In 1896, the thirty-year-old Russian economist went to Munich to study painting; he soon opened his own painting school and began to move toward non-figurative painting, trying to rely on imagination rather than on visual experience and asking beholders to "look at the picture as a graphic representation of a mood and not as a representation of objects." In 1912, he was one of the founders of *Der Blaue Reiter* (the Blue Rider) - a group that tried to return to the "basic" elements in painting, their approach to color and form being strongly influenced by Neo-Impressionists like Gauguin and Van Gogh, their chief interest being in the intellectual and universally valid contents and possibilities of art. It was in 1912 that Kandinsky's essay, the first part of which follows, and most of which had been written in 1910, was published in Munich. *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* ("Concerning the Spiritual in Art") had a great stir: the German edition was reprinted thrice within the first year, an English and Russian translations had already been published before the First World War broke out.

*In 1914, Kandinsky returned to Moscow, taught there for some years, briefly after the Revolution held the Directorship of the Museum for Pictorial Culture, and helped found the Russian Academy of Artistic Sciences. In 1922 he joined Gropius' Bauhaus, but eleven years later left Germany for Paris where he remained (at Neuilly) until his death a few months following the Liberation. His epitaph, only slightly exaggerated, may be left to his wife: "Kandinsky," she wrote in 1946, "was perhaps the greatest revolutionist in the field of plastic art; by completely detaching painting from the object he gave endless possibilities to those with the gift of creation."*

## Concerning the Spiritual in Art

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Every work of art is the child of its time; often it is the mother of our emotions. It follows that each period of culture produces an art of its own, which cannot be repeated. Efforts to revive the art principles of the past at best produce works of art that resemble a stillborn child. For example, it is impossible for us to live and feel as did the ancient Greeks. For this reason those who follow Greek principles in sculpture reach only a similarity of form, while the work remains for all time without a soul. Such imitation resembles the antics of apes: externally a monkey resembles a human being; he will sit holding a book in front of his nose, turning over the pages with a thoughtful air, but his actions have no real significance.

But among the forms of art there is another kind of external similarity, which is founded on a fundamental necessity. When there is, as sometimes happens, a similarity of inner direction in an entire moral and spiritual milieu, a similarity of ideals, at first closely pursued but later lost to sight, a similarity of "inner mood" between one period and another, the logical consequence will be a revival of the external forms which served to express those insights in the earlier age. This may account partially for our sympathy and affinity with and our comprehension of the work of primitives. Like ourselves, these pure artists sought to express only inner and essential feelings in their works; in this process they ignored as a matter of course the fortuitous.

This great point of inner contact is, in spite of its considerable importance, only one point. Only just now awakening after years of materialism, our soul is infected with the despair born of unbelief, of lack of purpose and aim. The nightmare of materialism, which turned life into an evil, senseless game, is not yet passed; it still darkens the awakening soul. Only a feeble light glimmers, a tiny point in an immense circle of darkness. This light is but a presentiment; and the mind, seeing it, trembles in doubt over whether this light is a dream and the surrounding darkness indeed reality. This doubt and the oppression of materialism separate us sharply from primitives. Our soul rings cracked when we sound it, like a precious vase, dug out of the earth, which has a flaw. For this reason, the primitive phase through which we are now passing, in its present derivative form, must be short-lived.

The two kinds of resemblance between the forms of art of today and the past can be easily recognized as diametrically opposed. The first, since it is external, has no future. The second, being internal, contains the seed of future. After a period of materialist temptation, to which the soul almost succumbed, and which it was able to shake off, the soul is emerging, refined by struggle and suffering. Cruder emotions, like fear, joy and grief, which longed to this time of trial, will no longer attract the artist. He will attempt to arouse more refined emotions, as yet unnamed. Just as he will live a complicated and subtle life, so his work will give to those observers capable feeling them emotions subtle beyond words.

The observer of today is seldom capable of feeling such vibrations. He sees instead an imitation of nature with a practical function (for example, a portrait, in the ordinary sense) or an intuition of nature involving a certain interpretation (e.g., "impressionist" painting) or an inner feeling expressed nature's forms (as we say, a picture of "mood"). When they are true work of art, such forms fulfill their purposes and nourish the spirit. Though this remark applies to the first case, it applies more strongly to the third, in which the spectator hears an answering chord in himself. Such emotional chords cannot be superficial or without value; the feeling of such a picture can indeed deepen and purify the feeling of the spectator. The spirit at least is preserved from coarseness: such pictures tune it up, as a tuning fork does the strings of a musical instrument. But the subtilization and extension of this chord in time and space remained limited, and the potential power of art is not exhausted by it.

Imagine a building, large or small, divided into rooms; each room is covered with canvases of various sizes, perhaps thousands of them. They represent bits of nature in color—animals in sunlight or shadow, or drinking, standing in water, or lying on grass; close by, a "Crucifixion," by a painter who does not believe in Christ; then flowers, and human figures, sitting, standing, or walking, and often

naked; there are many naked women foreshortened from behind; apples and silver dishes; a portrait of Mister So-and-So; sunsets; a lady in pink; a flying duck; a portrait of Lady X; flying geese; a lady in white; some cattle in shadow, flecked by brilliant sunlight; a portrait of Ambassador Y; a lady in green. All this is carefully reproduced in a book with the name of the artist and the name of the picture. Book in hand, people go from wall to wall, turning pages, reading names. Then they depart, neither richer nor poorer, again absorbed by their affairs, which have nothing to do with art. Why did they come? In every painting a whole life is mysteriously enclosed, a whole life of tortures, doubts, of hours of enthusiasm and inspiration.

What is the direction of that life? What is the cry of the artist's soul, if the soul was involved in the creation? "To send light into the darkness of men's hearts-such is the obligation of the artist," said Schumann. "A painter is a man who can draw and paint everything," said Tolstoi.

Of these two definitions we must choose the second, if we think of the exhibition just described. With more or less skill, virtuosity and vigor, objects are created on a canvas, "painted" either roughly or smoothly. To bring the whole into harmony on the canvas is what leads to a work of art. With cold eye and indifferent mind the public regards the work. Connoisseurs admire "technique," as one might admire a tight-rope walker, or enjoy the "painting quality," as one might enjoy a cake. But hungry souls go hungry away.

The public ambles through the rooms, saying "nice" or "interesting." Those who could speak have said nothing; those who could hear have heard nothing. This condition is called "art for art's sake." This annihilation of internal vibrations that constitute the life of the colors, this dwindling away of artistic force, is called "art for art's sake."

The artist seeks material rewards for his facility, inventiveness and sensitivity. His purpose becomes the satisfaction of ambition and greediness. In place of an intensive cooperation among artists, there is a battle for goods. There is excessive competition, over-production. Hatred, partisanship, cliques, jealousy, intrigues are the natural consequences of an aimless, materialist art."

The public turns away from artists who have higher ideals, who find purpose in an art without purpose...

During periods when art has no champion, when true spiritual food is wanting, there is retrogression in the spiritual world. Souls fall ceaselessly from the higher to the lower segments of the triangle, and the whole seems motionless, or even to move down and backwards. During these mute and blind times men attribute a special and exclusive value to external success, for they judge them by outward results, thinking of material well-being. They hail some technical advance, which can help nothing but the body. Real spiritual gains are undervalued or ignored.

The love visionaries, the hungry of soul, are ridiculed or considered mental; abnormal. But the rare souls, who cannot be lulled into lethargy and who feel dark longings for spiritual life, knowledge and advancement, sound, amid the vulgar materialistic chorus, lamentful and disconsolate. The spiritual night falls deeper and deeper around such frightened souls; and their bearers, tortured and weakened by doubt and fear, often prefer complete obliteration to this gradual darkening.

In such periods art ministers to lower needs and is used for material ends. It seeks its content in crude substance, because it knows nothing fine. Objects remaining the same, their reproduction is thought to be the aim of art. The question "what?" disappears; only the question "how?" remains. By what method are these material objects reproduced? The method becomes a rationale. Art loses its soul.

The search for the "how" continues. Art becomes specialized, comprehensible only to artists, and they complain of public indifference to their work. For, since the artist in such times has no need to say much, but only to be notorious for some small originality among a small group of patrons and connoisseur (which incidentally is also profitable), many externally gifted and skilful people come forward, so easy does the conquest of art appear. In each "art center" there are thousands of such artists, of whom the majority seek only some new mannerism, producing millions of works of art, without enthusiasm,, with cold hearts and souls asleep.

Meanwhile competition grows. The savage battle for success becomes more and more material. Small groups who have fought their way to the top entrench themselves in the territory they have won. The public, left behind, looks on bewildered, loses interest and turns away.

Despite this confusion, this chaos, this wild hunt for notoriety, the spiritual triangle moves ahead, slowly but surely, with irresistible strength moving ever, forward and upward.

An invisible Moses descends from the mountain and sees the dancing around; the golden calf. But he brings to man fresh stores of wisdom.

His voice, inaudible to the crowd, is first heard by the artist. Almost unwittingly artists follow the voice. In the very question "how" lies a hidden seed of renaissance. Sterile though this "how" may be on the whole, there is always a possibility that the "difference" which we still call personal distinction may be able to see, in the objects about it, not only what is purely material, but also something less corporeal than was seen in the period of realism, when the universal aim was to reproduce things "as they really are," without indulging in fancies.

If the emotional power of the artist can overwhelm the "how" and give free scope to his feelings, then art has started on the path by which she will not fail to find the "what" she lost, the "what" which forms the spiritual necessity of the nascent awakening. This "what" will no longer be the material, objective "what" of a stagnant period, but an artistic substance, the soul of art, without which the body (i.e., the "how") can never be healthy, whether an individual or a whole people.

*This "what" is the substance which only art can comprise, which only art can clearly express by those means of expression that are proper to it.*

### 3. SPIRITUAL TURNING-POINT

The spiritual triangle moves slowly ahead. Today one of the largest of the lower segments has reached the point of using the first battle-cry of materialism: The inhabitants of this segment call themselves Jews, Catholics, Protestants, etc. Really they are atheists, and this a few of the boldest, or the narrowest, openly avow. "Heaven is empty," "God is dead:" In politics they are liberals or progressives. The fear and hatred which yesterday they felt for these political creeds they now direct against anarchism, of which they know nothing but its dread name.

In economics these people are socialists. They sharpen the sword of justice to slay the hydra of capitalism.

Because they have never solved any problem independently, but are dragged in a cart, as it were, by the noblest of their fellow-men, who have sacrificed themselves, they know nothing of toil, which they watch from a distance. Therefore they rate it lightly, putting their trust in unexceptionable precepts and infallible cures.

The men of the segment next below are blindly dragged higher by those just described. But they cling to their old position, full of dread of the unknown and of betrayal.

The higher segments are not only atheists but justify their godlessness with strange words; for example, those of Virchow - so unworthy of a scholar - "I have dissected many corpses, but never yet come upon a soul."

In politics they are generally leftists, with a knowledge of different parliamentary procedures; they read the political articles in the journals. In economics they are socialists of various shades and can support their "principles" with numerous quotations, passing from Schweitzer's *Emma* via Ricardo's *Iron Law of Wages*, to Marx's *Capital*, and still further.

In these higher segments other categories of ideas gradually begin to appear - science and art, literature and music.

In science these men are positivists, recognizing only what can be weighed and measured. Everything beyond they consider harmful nonsense, as they did yesterday the theories which are "proven" today.

In art they are realists, which means that they recognize and value the personality, individuality and temperament of the artist up to a certain definite point. This point has been fixed by others, and they believe in it without reserve.

Despite their patent and well-ordered security, despite their infallible principles, there lurks among these higher segments a hidden fear, a nervousness; a sense of insecurity like that in the minds of passengers on a large, solid, oceangoing liner on the high seas when, the continent left behind in mist, dark clouds gather, and the winds raise the water into black mountains. This is the result of their upbringing. They know that the philosophers, statesmen and artists whom they revere today were spurned as arrivistes, gangsters and frauds yesterday. The higher the segment in the triangle, the better-defined this fear, this modern sense of insecurity. Here and there are people with eyes that see, minds that correlate. They ask: "If the knowledge of day before yesterday was overturned by that of yesterday, and that of yesterday by that of today, is it not possible that what we call knowledge now will be overturned, by the knowledge of tomorrow?" And the bravest of them answer: "It's possible."

Then people appear who can discern matters which the science of today" has not yet "explained." They ask: "Will science, if it continues on the road" it has followed for so long, ever attain the solution of these questions? And if it does, will man be able to rely on its answers?" In these segments are professional men of learning who remember the time when facts now recognized by the

academies as firmly established were scorned. There are also aestheticians who write about an art which was condemned yesterday. In these books they remove the barriers over which art has most recently stepped and they set up new ones. They do not notice that they are erecting barriers: not in front of art, but behind it. If they do, they write fresh books and hastily set the barriers a little further on. This process will go on until it is realized that the most advanced principle of aesthetics can never be of value to the future, but only to the past. No theory can be laid down for those things that lie in the realm of the immaterial. That which has no material existence cannot be materially crystallized. That which belongs to the spirit of the future can only be realized in feeling, and the talent of the artist is the only road to feeling. Theory is the lamp which sheds light on the crystallized ideas of the past. As we rise higher in the triangle, we find that confusion increases, just as a city built on the most correct architectural plan may be shaken by the uncontrollable force of nature. Humanity is living in such a spiritual city, subject to sudden disturbances for which neither architects nor mathematicians have made allowance. In one place lies a great wall fallen down like a house of cards, in another are the ruins of a huge tower which: once stretched to the sky, built on presumably immortal spiritual pillars. The abandoned churchyard quakes, forgotten graves open, and from them rise forgotten ghosts. Spots appear on the sun, and the sun grows dark; and what power is left against the dark? In this city also live men who are dulled by false knowledge, who hear no crash, who are blinded by strange wisdom, so that they say "our sun shines brighter every day, and soon even the last spots will disappear." But even these people shall hear and see.

Still higher, we no longer find bewilderment. Their work is going on which boldly criticizes the pillars men have set up. There we find other professional men of learning who test matter again and again, who tremble before no problem, and who finally cast doubt on that very matter which was yesterday the foundation of everything, so that the whole universe rocks. The theory of the electrons, that is, of waves in motion, designed to replace matter completely, finds at this moment bold champions who overstep here and there the limits of caution and perish in the conquest of the new scientific fortress. They are like self-sacrificing soldiers making a desperate attack. But "no fort is unconquerable:"

Thus facts are being established which the science of yesterday dubbed frauds. Even newspapers, which are the most obsequious servants of worldly success and of the masses, which trim their sails to every wind, find themselves compelled to modify their ironical judgments on the "marvels" of science, and even to abandon them. Many learned men, among them ultramaterialists, are dedicating their strength to scientific research on obscure problems, which can no longer be lied about or passed over in silence."

... When religion, science and morality are shaken (the last by the strong hand of Nietzsche) and when outer supports threaten to fall, man withdraws his gaze from externals and turns it inwards. Literature, music and art, are the most sensitive spheres in which this spiritual revolution makes itself felt. They reflect the dark picture of the present time and show the importance of what was at first only a little point of light noticed by the fever. Perhaps they even grow dark in their turn, but they turn away from the soul, less life of the present toward those substances and ideas that give free scope; to the non-material strivings of the soul.

Such a poet in the realm of literature is Maeterlinck. He takes us into a world which may be called fantastic, or more justly transcendental. "La Princesse Maleine," "Les Sept Princesses," "Les Aveugles," etc., are not people of past times like the heroes in Shakespeare. They are souls lost in fog, threatened with asphyxiation, eternally menaced by some invisible and somber force.

Spiritual darkness, the insecurity of ignorance and fear pervade the world in which they move. Maeterlinck is perhaps one of the first prophets, one of the first reporters and clairvoyants of the decadence just described. The gloom of the spiritual atmosphere, the terrible but all-guiding hand, the sense of utter fear, the feeling of having strayed from the path, the absence of a guide; all these are clearly felt in his works.

Maeterlinck creates his atmosphere principally by artistic means. His material machinery (gloomy mountains, moonlight, marshes, wind, the cries of owls, etc.) really plays a symbolic role and helps to give the inner note. Maeterlinck's principal technical weapon is words. The word is an inner sound. It springs partly, perhaps principally, from the object denoted. But if the object is not seen, but only its name heard, the mind of the hearer receives an abstract impression only of the object dematerialized, and a corresponding vibration is immediately set up in the "heart." Thus a green, yellow, or red tree in a meadow are accidental realizations of the concept tree which we formed upon hearing the word.

The apt use of a word (in its poetical sense), its repetition, twice, three times, or even more frequently, according to the need of the poem, will not only tend to intensify the internal structure but also bring out unsuspected spiritual properties in the word itself. Further, frequent repetition of a word (a favorite game of children, forgotten in later life) deprives the word of its external reference. Similarly, the symbolic reference of a designated object tends to be forgotten and only the sound is retained. We hear this pure sound, unconsciously perhaps, in relation to the concrete or immaterial object. But in the latter case pure sound exercises a direct impression on the soul. The soul attains to an objectless vibration, even more complicated, I might say more transcendent, than the reverberations released by the sound of a bell, a stringed instrument, or a fallen board. In this direction lie great possibilities for the literature of the future. This verbal potency has already been used in an embryonic form in *Serres Chaudes*. An ostensibly neutral word in its felt quality will become somber as Maeterlinck uses it. A familiar word like "hair," used in a certain way, intensifies an atmosphere of sorrow or despair. This is Maeterlinck's method. He makes us realize that thunder, lightning and a moon behind driving clouds are external, material means, which on the stage, even more than in nature, resemble the bogey-man of childhood: imaginings.

Inner forces do not lose their strength and effect so easily." A word which has two meanings, the first direct, the second indirect, is the material of poetry and literature, which these arts alone can manipulate and through which they speak to the soul.

Something similar may be seen in the music of Wagner. His famous Leitmotiv is an attempt to give personality to his characters by something more than theatrical paraphernalia, makeup and light effects. His method of using a definite motiv is a musical method. It creates a spiritual atmosphere by means of a musical phrase which precedes the hero, which he seems radiate from any distance." The most modern musicians, like Debussy, create a spiritual impression, often taken from nature, but embodied in purely musical form. For this reason Debussy is often classed with the impressionist painters, on the ground that he resembles these painters in using natural phenomena for the purposes of art. Whatever truth there may be in this comparison merely accentuates the fact that the various arts of today learn from each other and often resemble each other. But it would be rash to say that this proposition is an exhaustive statement of Debussy's significance. Despite a certain similarity to the impressionists, he shows such a strong drive toward essential content that we recognize at once in his work the flawed, vocal soul of the present, with all its harassing anxiety and jangled nerves. Debussy, even in his impressionist tone-pictures, never uses the wholly material note characteristic of program music, but relies on the creation of an abstract impression.

Russian music (Moussorgsky) has had a great influence on Debussy. So it is not surprising that he stands in close relation to the young Russian composers, the chief of whom is Scriabin. There is an internal affinity in the compositions of the two men, and they have identical faults, which disturb the listener. He is often snatched from a series of modern discords into the charm of conventional beauty. He feels himself often insulted, tossed about like a ball between the internal and the external beauty. The internal beauty is achieved through necessity and renunciation of the conventionally beautiful. To those who are not accustomed to it, it appears as ugliness; humanity in general inclines to external beauty and knows nothing of internal beauty. Almost alone in abandoning conventional beauty and in sanctioning every means of expression is the Austrian composer, Arnold Schoenberg. This "publicity hound," "fraud," and "dilettante" says in his *Harmonielehre*: "Every combination of notes, every advance is possible, but I am beginning to feel that there are definite rules and conditions which incline me to the use of this or that dissonance."

In other words, Schoenberg realizes that the greatest freedom of all, the freedom of an unfettered art, can never be absolute. Every age achieves a certain measure of this freedom, but beyond the boundaries of its freedom the mightiest genius can never go. But this measure must in each instance be exhausted, let the stubborn resist as they may. Schoenberg is endeavoring to make complete use of his freedom and has already discovered mines of new beauty in his search for spiritual structure. His music leads us to where musical experience is a matter not of the ear, but of

## BAHR

*Hermann Bahr (1863-1934) was an Austrian novelist, journalist, essayist, and playwright whose varied career included the editorship of influential reviews in Vienna and Berlin, the directorship of the famous Vienna Burgtheater, and successive and intense flirtations with Naturalism, Impressionism, and Expressionism. His discussion*

of the latter, first published in 1914, reflects the *vague intensity of Expressionist ideas*, but also the road along which some came to hold them.

### Expressionism

This is the vital point-that man should find himself again. Schiller asks: "Can man have been destined, for any purpose whatever, to lose himself?" It is the inhuman attempt of our time to force this loss upon him against his own nature. We would turn him into a mere instrument; he has become the tool of his own work, and he has no more sense, since he serves the machine. It has stolen him away from his soul. And now the soul demands his return. This is the vital point. All that we experience is but the strenuous battle between the soul and the machine for the possession of man. We no longer live, we are lived; we have no freedom left, we may not decide for ourselves, we are finished, man is unsouled, nature is unmanned. A moment ago we boasted of being her lords and masters and now she has opened her wide jaws and swallowed us up. Unless a miracle happens! That is the vital point -whether a miracle can still rescue this soulless, sunken, buried humanity. Never yet has any period been so shaken by horror, by such a fear of death. Never has the world been so silent, silent as the grave. Never has man been more insignificant. Never has he felt so nervous. Never was happiness so unattainable and freedom so dead. Distress cries aloud; man cries out for his soul; this whole pregnant time is one great cry of anguish. Art too joins in, into the great darkness she too calls for help, she cries to the spirit: this is Expressionism.

Never has any period found a clearer, a stronger mode of self-expression than did the period of bourgeois dominance in impressionistic Art. This bourgeois rule was incapable of producing original music or poetry; all the music or poetry of its day is invariably either a mere echoing of the past, or a presentiment of the future; but in Impressionistic painting it has made for itself such a perfect symbol of its nature, of its disorder, that perhaps some day when humanity is quite freed from its trammels and has attained the serene perspective of historical contemplation, it may be forgiven, because of these shining tokens. Impressionism is the falling away of man from the spirit. Impressionism is man lowered to the position of a gramophone record of the outer world. Impressionists have been taken to task for not "carrying out" their pictures; they do not even carry out their "seeing," for man of the bourgeois period never "carries out," never fulfils life. He halts, breaks off midway in the process of seeing, midway in the process of life at the very point where man's participation in life begins. Halfway in the act of seeing these Impressionists stop, just where the eye, having been challenged, should make its reply: "The ear is dumb, the mouth is deaf," says Goethe; "but the eye both perceives and speaks." The eye of the Impressionist only beholds, it does not speak; it hears the question but makes no response. Instead of eyes, Impressionists have another set of ears, but no mouth, for a man of the bourgeois period is nothing but an ear, he listens to the world but does not breathe upon it. He has no mouth, he is incapable of expressing himself, incapable of pronouncing judgment upon the world, of uttering the law of the spirit. The Expressionist, on the contrary, tears open the mouth of humanity; the time of its silence, the time of its listening is over- once more it seeks to give the spirit's reply.

Expressionism is as yet but a gesture. It is not a question of this or that Expressionist, much less of any particular work of his. Nietzsche says: "The first and foremost duty of Art should be to beautify life .... Thereupon she must conceal or transmute all ugliness-and only after this gigantic task . has been achieved can she turn to the special so-called Art of Art-production, which is but the appendage. A man who is conscious of possessing a superfluity of these beautifying and concealing and transmuting powers, will finally seek to disburden himself of this superabundance in works of Art; the same under special conditions applies to a whole nation. But at present we generally start at the wrong end of Art, we cling to her tail and reiterate the tag, that works of Art contain the whole of Art, and that by these we may repair and transform life . . . simpletons that we are!" Under this bourgeois rule the whole of man has become an appendage. Impressionism makes a splendid tail! The Expressionist, however, does not throw out a peacock's wheel, he does not consider the single production, but seeks to restore man to his rightful position; only we have outgone Nietzsche-or, rather, we have retraced our steps and gone further back beyond him and have arrived at Goethe: Art is no longer only to "beautify" life for us and to "conceal or transmute ugliness," but Art must bring Life, produce Life from within, must fulfil the function of Life as man's most proper deed and action. Goethe says, "Painting sets before us that which a man could and should see, and which usually he does not see." If Expressionism at the moment behaves in an ungainly, violent manner, its excuse lies in the prevailing conditions it finds. These really are almost the conditions of crude and primitive

humanity. People little know, how near the truth they are when they jeer at these pictures and say they might be painted by savages. The bourgeois rule has turned us into savages. Barbarians, other than those feared by Rodbertus, threaten; we ourselves have to become barbarians to save the future of humanity from mankind as it now is. As primitive man, driven by fear of nature, sought refuge within himself, so we too have to adopt flight from a "civilization" which is out to devour our souls. The Savage discovered in himself the courage to become greater than the threat of nature, and in honour of this mysterious inner redeeming power of his, which, through all the alarms and terrors of storm and of ravening beasts and of unknown dangers, never deserted him, never let him give in-in honour of this he drew a circle of guardian signs around him, signs of defiance against the threat of nature, obstinate signs of demarcation to protect his possessions against the intrusion of nature and to safeguard his belief in spirit. So, brought very near the edge of destruction by "civilization," we discover in ourselves powers which cannot be destroyed. With the fear of death upon us, we muster these and use them as spells against "civilization." Expressionism is the symbol of the unknown in us in which we confide, hoping that it will save us. It is the token of the imprisoned spirit that endeavours to break out of the dungeon-a tocsin of alarm given out by all panic-stricken souls. This is what Expressionism is....

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Further resources:

Van Gogh's Letters: <http://www.vangoghgallery.com/letters/combined.htm>

