III

Introduction

By the outbreak of the First World War the channels of the avant-garde were open. Those channels mostly ran to Paris, from cities as diverse as Oslo and Milan, Moscow, Vienna and Barcelona. But sometimes the current ran the other way too, and on occasion scarcely touched Paris at all: a Russian-German axis grew strong, signalled by Kandinsky's presence in Munich. August 1914, however, put a stop to this mutual fertilization, and gave xenophobia a foothold in the avant-garde which it has never quite lost. The effect of the war was not simply a matter of travel ceasing. Willingly or unwillingly artists were drawn into the conflict. Many were wounded, died or suffered mental collapse. Others – or in some cases the same – became disenchanted with their societies to the extent of allying themselves with wider social forces devoted to their overthrow. As war was joined on the social agenda by revolution, the artistic avant-garde acquired a more forceful political dimension than hitherto. These years were apocalyptic. The Hapsburg, Hohernzollern, Ottoman and Romanov dynasties, repositories of power for centuries rather than mere decades, were overthrown. Mass political movements came to occupy the historical stage, Fascism and Communism foremost among them. Technology advanced, military technology furthest of all, taking with it the apparatus of social control. Death and devastation occurred on a scale unseen in Europe since the plagues. To regard a form of art as modern was to require of it that it respond in aesthetic kind to the demands imposed by the modern condition. It is scarcely to be wondered at, then, that the war years and their aftermath should have proved a traumatic period for the artistic avant-garde.

Two different and opposed responses are discernible among the various groups of artists, related to the different wartime circumstances of specific countries and cities. On the one side there was the belief that the war had been the result of a breakdown, particularly of a breakdown in shared values and social cohesion, of which the pre-war avant-garde was itself a symptom. In this light the war came to be viewed as a cleansing process, the 'great test', in Le Corbusier's phrase: a sacrifice required for the re-establishment of a civilized order (see IIIA *passim*). On the other stood a perception of the war as the quite specific outcome of that order's concealed barbarism: a perception that the war represented a heightened version of bourgeois society, or a limited version of its broader

priorities. In order to ensure that such a catastrophe never happened again, far from that order being re-established, what was required was that the social forces whose order in the last instance it was, be themselves swept away (see IIIB *passim*).

Paris had been the focal point of an international avant-garde. But the war led to a wave of nationalism in French culture which victory only intensified. French tradition was perceived as the legitimate descendant of the Renaissance and Classical tradition, and its re-establishment became the common coin of debate (IIIA2, 5, 7, 9). This voice had in fact been heard before the war (see IA,7 and 8). The difference now was that agreement came from broader sections of the avant-garde, which hitherto had in general tended to be identified by the distance it took from dominant values. The meaning of Cubism became a particular site of controversy. Cubism mattered because its status was incontestable as the paradigmatic modern movement. Its effect on the practice of art had been such that it could not now be ignored by those wishing to orientate art to the new circumstances. What was at issue was what Cubism meant. Pre-war Cubism had had bohemian, even anarchistic affiliations, not least in respect of the Spaniard Picasso: a far cry from the invocation of a national, classical tradition now being made by those such as Denis who occupied the right of the avant-garde spectrum. But the war had the effect of shifting this emphasis within avant-garde thought from its somewhat paradoxical and conservative margin to the centre. Cubism came to be redefined in terms consonant with the *rappel à l'ordre* (see IIIA1 and 5).

The classicizing tendency was not restricted to France. Italy, also on the winning side in the war, had been host to the most aggressively anti-classical pre-war avant-garde in the form of the Futurist movement. But the realities of the war – the reality at bottom of pitting men against machines – had disabled that rhetoric as effectively as it had maimed many of the flesh-and-blood individuals who had assented to it. There ensued a turn to the classical tradition with all that it was supposed to embody in terms of eternal, unchanging values (see IIIA4 and 6). In England, the pre-war Vorticist avant-garde had suffered a similar depletion and diversion of its energies. In 1921 Wyndham Lewis added an English voice to the endemic post-war call for reconnection to tradition (IIIA10).

There is a sense, then – or perhaps better a sector – in which the avant-garde stopped in its tracks. In a closely related but ultimately different sense, however, the avant-garde was also redefined: in terms which removed it from any oppositional locale, and established it as the modernized bearer of tradition, and as such as a candidate for a plausible culture of the modern bourgeoisie (see IIIA7).

Yet for some this was always going to be insufficient, if not indeed tantamount to a betrayal of the avant-garde's raison d'être. The alternative reading of the war as the fault of bourgeois society rather than of its opponents, involved an alternative and complementary reading of Cubism. Not accidentally these forces were initially focused in Zurich, that is to say in neutral Switzerland, surrounded by the warring capitalist powers – and as such both a whirlpool of intrigue and

a refuge for opponents of the war. Seen from this perspective, the avant-garde was far from appearing as a body which need only be smartened up to play its part in social restoration; rather, it appeared to be already complicit in the culture of the international bourgeoisie; it followed that it deserved to be finished off along with its sponsors (see IIIB1 and 3). Among its other targets, Dada mounted an onslaught on the sense which had been made of art. Marcel Duchamp had already left for America before the war, and was thus himself removed from the reach of the European conflict. But with his Readymades he essayed perhaps the most extreme refutation of the claim that there is some essential, or classical, property that is shared by all great art (see IIIB2).

Duchamp's was not a political critique in any strict sense, and by the same token neither was Picabia's (see IIIB14). Zurich Dada and perhaps even more so its descendants in Paris, Barcelona and New York, were cultural gestures with a broader ideological rather than a more narrowly political impact. It is in the light of this that Dada is commonly perceived as anti-art and irrationalist. It was both those things. But it was the Dada position that bourgeois art, bourgeois order and bourgeois rationalism had been implicated in the deaths of millions; that bourgeois culture was no more than a mask of civilization laid over a deeper barbarism. Cubism, as art, was no more worth saving than any of the other -isms. But before it went under, Cubism had hit upon a device whose potential transcended the circumscribed circle of an artistic avant-garde, tied ultimately to its haut-bourgeois sponsors. This was collage. Developed into photomontage it became the main weapon in the critical artist's armoury against convention. Nowhere was this transition from a more or less hermetic art, through cultural contestation, to an explicitly politically motivated intervention, more evident than in the inflection given to Dada, late in the war, in Berlin (see IIIB4–6).

From the foregoing it may at first appear that there is a direct correlation to be made between artistic form and political standpoint. It may seem, that is to say, that a search for underlying principles, let alone a reinstatement of figuration, signifies a conservative politics; whereas a technically radical practice grounded in devices for the scrambling of sense – be they verbal or pictorial – automatically implies a politically radical stance. There is indeed some truth in this. But it does not hold for all instances, let alone in all places. This issue of place is important, for much here concerns the question of context. Before the First World War ended it had brought in its train an event which, put simply, changed the context for the art of succeeding decades, until the Second World War, and beyond. The Russian Revolution of October 1917 set an agenda for both art and politics which only at the very end of the century may seem to have receded into history. Then, at the moment of its occurrence, its effect was electrifying. The socialist revolution against the entire bourgeois order rendered the field of problems and possibilities significantly different. In Europe there was no area of human endeavour which escaped its influence. Art was no exception.

The problem may be put like this. The *rappel à l'ordre* was fundamentally restorative, as its name implies. It was not necessarily altogether reactionary.

For example, it did not characteristically result in calls for the restoration of the monarchies. But what it did set out to restore, in fact to stimulate anew, was the order of bourgeois capitalism organized around the form of the nation-state. It was this which culture in general and art in particular was called upon to support. By contrast Dadaism in its various forms was an oppositional force committed to the overthrow of that damaged but resilient status quo. The point which arises here, it goes almost without saying, is that what in fact the Dadaists could not do, the Bolsheviks did. The rules of the game were effectively changed by the success of the Communist revolution in what was to become the Soviet Union. For the prospect of positive participation in the building of a new life rapidly came on the agenda of radical art practice. Intervention in daily life was no longer opposition to an entrenched status quo. Equally rapidly, the types of attitude and practice evolved to cope with that situation fed back to influence radical artists in the West, who were hopeful of achieving similar successes against their own restored forms of bourgeois capitalism (IIID2 and 4). In this situation there is no direct equivalence between art and politics, nothing to say that a conservatively formed poem or painting may not be fuelled by Bolshevik political desire (see IIIB13); nothing either to say that the technically radical artwork may not be predicated upon an idealist cosmology to which socialism, or even democracy, is anathema (see IIIC11). And the uniquely expressive 'I', at one moment the cutting-edge of the avant-garde and scourge of bourgeois conformity, could at the next stand for petty-bourgeois reaction and self-indulgence, in its refusal of the collectivity required to defend the revolution and build the new world (see IIIB11–12).

These currents are vividly represented in Germany in the wake of the revolution of November 1918, not least in that alliance of Expressionists and Dadaists which was the Novembergruppe (see IIIB8). But this fragile avant-garde coalition was pulled apart by the failure of the German revolution and the setting up of the bourgeois Weimar Republic. The turn to a 'new objectivity' was the somewhat paradoxical outcome for many of those who had been most closely identified with Berlin Dada – a move which was underwritten for artists like Grosz, Heartfield and Schlichter by membership of the newly formed German Communist Party (see IIIB9 and 13). The tendency among left-wing artists to turn again to objective forms of figuration is dealt with more fully in the next section (see IVB *passim*). What pertains here is to note the diversity of aims underlying the technically not dissimilar practices of Carrà, de Chirico and Derain, and of Grosz and other members of the Novembergruppe Left opposition.

There was another kind of order emergent in the post-war West European avant-garde which had relations of a different kind with the art practice evolving in the Soviet Union. Dadaists and artists of the new objectivity shared a broad political perspective with the post-revolutionary avant-garde, but little in the way of techniques. Others, however, while sharing relatively little in terms of political sympathies seemed to employ very nearly identical technical procedures.

The war years saw the achievement of a vision which had possessed the avant-garde since the turn of the century: an abstract art. Although often

credited with having painted the first abstract picture as early as 1910, Kandinsky was in fact still doubtful as to the feasibility of an abstract art in 1914 (see IB8). In the conditions of relative isolation imposed by the war two remarkably similar forms of geometric abstraction were achieved almost simultaneously at opposite ends of the continent. Close scrutiny either of the paintings themselves or of the theories underlying them would have revealed clear distinctions. None the less, in the long view there are obvious similarities between the painting of Mondrian, advanced under the rubric of the 'new plastic' in Holland, and the painting of Malevich, who called his work 'Suprematism', in Russia (see IIIC5–7). While no less idiosyncratic than Kandinsky, Malevich and Mondrian had both passed through Cubism, and thus shared a technical resource which both marked their art off from his, and offered a greater promise of development to other artists. Cubism was always at bottom a representational art, but in its autonomization of the picture surface and in its animation of that surface as a series of shifting planes, it seems to have offered the technical device which enabled theories of abstraction to be realized in practice. It is moreover a key feature of this abstract art that it was advanced as a relevant response to social as well as to aesthetic demands. In Holland, Mondrian joined with Van Doesburg and others in the De Stijl group to advertise abstract art as the spiritual precursor of a utopian social harmony (see IIIC3–4). In Russia the revolution led Malevich to transform his Suprematism into the collective UNOVIS – Supporters of the New Art – the more effectively to propagandize abstraction as the revolutionary art appropriate to the new revolutionary society (see IIIC8 and 10).

Both of these approaches remain resolutely idealist. In response to the Marxist materialism of the Bolsheviks however, other Russian artists developed an austere form of technical inquiry, a so-called 'laboratory art', under the overall name of Constructivism (see IIID3, 5 and 6). That there are clear overlaps between these developments has often been taken as justifying claims for the existence of an 'international constructive tendency'. Russian Constructivism however, remains, distinct, politically and theoretically, if not always technically and formally; distinguished by its post-revolutionary situation from comparable practices in the bourgeois societies of Western Europe. Such 'utilitarian' constructivism in Russia stood at the high-water mark of a frequently voiced avant-garde aspiration: the ultimate dissolution of art into life. In their social dimension, Western forms of constructive abstraction proceeded by a similar route to the opposite destination: the aestheticization of life itself. If their hopes were fulfilled, art as it was currently practised would cease, not because it had been subsumed into life but because the whole of life would have been rendered artistic.

The former claim proceeds from Marxist historical materialism, and it committed those making it to the construction of a new life here and now within the real history of the revolution. For the latter, historical reality, let alone the contingencies of political organization, seems at times to have been viewed as impeding a utopian vision. The materialism of the one was as much opposed to the idealism of the other as any Dadaist would have been to demands to reinstate the classical.

There are, then, moments of unusual proximity as well as deep divergence across the spectrum of the European avant-garde in the years after the First World War, years given their peculiar and lasting character by the impact of the Russian Revolution and the response it drew from artists. No one template or pattern will do to describe these relations, as technical and contextual factors form first into one constellation only to dissolve into another. There is an elusive but significant distinction to be made between one sense of order which is predicated on a reinstatement of the classical tradition, and another which aspires to a kind of modernization of the universal, a geometric Modernist utopianism. This latter in its turn, though, must be distinguished from yet a third kind of order built upon a sense of historical contingency and rupture, rather than any conviction of eternal verities and forms of continuity. We may speak of three tendencies in Classicism, Rationalism and Constructivism. These are at the same time *both* responses to war and revolution, *and* responses to previous avant-garde work. Neither side of that triangle makes any sense without the other. Nor does the impulse to a kind of avant-garde *dis*order which also infuses the period, and which exists in symbiosis with its apparent opposites. What is being contested, culturally and technically, is a social space. The kinds of society which might emerge, and the kinds of art which might therefore be possible, seemed uniquely open in the approximate decade 1916/17 to 1926/27. The old world had gone down like Atlantis in the maelstrom of world war, and the shape of the new one had not yet been defined.

IIIA

Neo-Classicism and the Call to Order

1 Amédée Ozenfant (1886–1966) 'Notes on Cubism'

The author was a Cubist painter as well as a prolific writer. This essay is an early statement of the desire, in the changed circumstances of the war and its aftermath, to clean up Cubism: to 'rationalize' and 'purify' it. Not least, this involved separating it from any supposed German associations and explicitly formulating a relation to the French classical tradition. Originally published as 'Notes sur le Cubisme' in *L'Elan*, no. 10, Paris, December 1916, from which the present translation is made. (This was the final edition of a journal founded by Ozenfant in April 1915.)

The campaign of *Elan* has shown that Cubism owes nothing to the Germans: since the insults about this issue were killed off in Paris, they have become rare in the provinces.

But none the less Cubism is widely discussed.

The literary world shows us that intelligent amateurs of art are interested in our pursuits, and most of this world shows a certain good will and an understanding of Cubism; nevertheless, an important part of this same public continues to look down on Cubists and feel that the Cubists do the same to them. The public happily scoffs at that which is beyond its understanding. Moreover, certain artists have been led to adopt an abstruse and disdainful attitude to the public, judging them to be fools.

For many, Cubism has remained an art of the clique or coterie: it is useless to harp on the dangers art runs when it shuts itself in an ivory tower.

Certain Cubists, mimicking Picasso, have thought it possible to rebuild the pretentious and trivial ivory tower of the Romantics and to top it off with a cap brought down from Montmartre.

Others, neither artists nor intellectuals but true ignoramuses, have worn out the public with a pseudo-scientific pathos, discrediting the works of the true Cubists.

This interest in Cubism is quite evident today, so that from now on it will be possible to speak of it reasonably, of its truth and of its errors.

Cubism is assured a genuine importance in the history of the plastic arts, because it has already partly realized its purist plan of cleansing the language

of the plastic arts of parasitic expressions, just as Mallarmé tried to do in verbal language.

Cubism is a Movement of Purism

Following the experiments of Ingres, Cézanne, Seurat, Matisse on the essential properties of visible matter, Cubism has pointed out that optical effects count formally, beyond all description or representation, by the power of their harmonies and dissonances.

Cubism was to fuse the regeneration of contemporary art with the great tradition of the formalists: Assyrians, Greeks, Chinese and the admirable anonymous 'Negro' artists.

Eliminating all literal representation, the Picassos, Braques and Archipenkos showed once again the essential elements in the works of a Claude Lorrain or a Negro painter: *the optical relations of matter.* Despite the interest of its experiments, Cubism went through a crisis. This was the fault of certain major artists who, tempted by the commodity that Cubism had made from itself, turned in upon themselves and lapsed into the automatic use of the same forms over and over. This threatened to ossify Cubism into a formula of angles, the repetition of handles, spouts, to stand for pitchers and so on.

This was a crisis because true Cubists, renouncing the charm of living curves, used the line and the square in a Socratic manner; whereas the mediocrities (having successively abandoned pointillism, then Matisse-ism, as old hat), decided that Cubism was the last fashionable bandwagon. Their latest delight is to impose parts of a square on women's faces; this is to turn Cubism into a machine-tool.

A crisis, because some ignoramuses, contrary to all reason, banished the third dimension as out of date, and replaced it by a new fourth dimension. As this fourth dimension is purely hypothetical (the formal sense of man remains conditioned by his perceptions, which are purely three-dimensional) what do they do? They suppress the third dimension. So in effect they reduce to just two dimensions, forgetting that it is ludicrous to pretend, *with the help of the two dimensions, to create from them a fourth.*

The third dimension (depth) is never absent from any plastic work, even in a simple drawing, since this drawing *suggests on one plane the limits of different planes.* It is never absent, even in a canvas covered with patches of colour, since formally the diverse colours appear to be on different planes.

The only painting in two dimensions would be *a surface plane painted in a single colour.*

If in a plastic work the third dimension is *necessarily perspectival*, one can argue, as a necessary corollary, that there are no plastic works *which lack perspective.*

However, there are Cubists who declare they have depicted the fourth dimension and abolished the third, in the process supplanting perspective. As if you could play around with perspective, and the volume of substantial objects, just on the basis of fashion or some decree!

This just proves that formalists, being architects of matter and working with the properties of this matter in space, should in the interests of both Cubism and Art, know as much as possible about the laws that govern them, to avoid making free with these same laws.

The artist has a right to unlimited poetic licence if his sensibility guides him, but such a licence can only ever serve to confirm the existence of these laws.

There is also a crisis because the *faux naïfs*, followers of Rousseau, believe in the indispensability of the trivial. They are accompanied by a group of poets, pale imitations of Max Jacob, and of grotesque musicians who prattle, whistle and tinkle. There is a crisis, finally, because certain artists, enamoured of strength, forget that strength without flexibility is brutality; a manifestation of weakness, certainly a form of sickliness.

One of the most highly prized achievements in Cubism is, first, to have succeeded in introducing into art new harmonies of matter, form and tone. Second, to have shown, as it seems to me, that everything is beautiful from a certain angle.

Cubism knew how to change accepted angles.

Contributing a new way of attuning our eyes (though sometimes perversely), it revealed new beauties to the eye, thereby diminishing ugliness by getting us used to its artistic taste.

Finally, it seems that Cubism too often forgets that its value does not depend on the absence of representation, but from the beauty of harmony. If it is true that the interest of a form is independent of meaningfulness, the opposite is true; that meaning takes nothing from formal beauty.

If it seems just to class Braque amongst the great formal artists, this is not because his art is non-representational. If it seems certain that Segonzac is a great formal artist, this is not because his art is representational.

However, it seems probable that the representationality of forms, far from damaging their shape, may be a source of formal strength (because the emotion of plastic art is not solely an optical phenomenon). The intellect reacts to the optical sensation, and enriches or deforms it, according to whether one has used it appropriately or not.

Remember that this intervention by the intelligence would allow one to make use of the resources of natural association: and thus Cubism would avoid the danger of ossifying its forms into 'decorative' formulae. (This is something that the Persians, the Cretans, the Arabs, etc. did not avoid when they organized the interplay of form beyond all representation.)

We will indulge those followers who constitute a school because in spite of everything, they have use of the forms of the masters; they can exaggerate them, quickly make them unbearable, set free the liberty that their genius holds in chains.

2 Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918) 'The New Spirit and the Poets'

Apollinaire stresses the return to discipline and to order demanded of the post-war avant-garde. This involved a rejection of romanticism, which is seen as tainted by

German associations, and the invocation of classicism, rooted in a sense of the nation. Originally published as 'L'Esprit Nouveau et les Poètes', Mercure de France, Paris, 1 December 1918. The present extract is taken from R. Shattuck (ed.), *Selected Writings of Guillaume Apollinaire*, New York, 1971.

The new spirit which will dominate the poetry of the entire world has nowhere come to light as it has in France. The strong intellectual discipline which the French have always imposed on themselves permits them, as well as their spiritual kin, to have a conception of life, of the arts and of letters, which, without being simply the recollection of antiquity, is also not the counterpart of romantic prettiness.

The new spirit which is making itself heard strives above all to inherit from the classics a sound good sense, a sure critical spirit, perspectives on the universe and on the soul of man, and the sense of duty which lays bare our feelings and limits or rather contains their manifestations.

It strives further to inherit from the romantics a curiosity which will incite it to explore all the domains suitable for furnishing literary subject matter which will permit life to be exalted in whatever form it occurs.

To explore truth, to search for it, as much in the ethnic domain, for example, as in that of the imagination – those are the principal characteristics of the new spirit.

This tendency, moreover, has always had its bold proponents, although they were unaware of it; for a long time it has been taking shape and making progress.

However, this is the first time that it has appeared fully conscious of itself. [. . .]

* * *

It would have been strange if in an epoch when the popular art *par excellence*, the cinema, is a book of pictures, the poets had not tried to compose pictures for meditative and refined minds which are not content with the crude imaginings of the makers of films. These last will become more perceptive, and one can predict the day when, the photograph and the cinema having become the only form of publication in use, the poet will have a freedom heretofore unknown.

One should not be astonished if, with only the means they have now at their disposal, they set themselves to preparing this new art (vaster than the plain art of words) in which, like conductors of an orchestra of unbelievable scope, they will have at their disposition the entire world, its noises and its appearances, the thought and language of man, song, dance, all the arts and all the artifices, still more mirages than Morgane could summon up on the hill of Gibel, with which to compose the visible and unfolded book of the future.

But generally you will not find in France the 'words at liberty' which have been reached by the excesses of the Italian and Russian futurists, the extravagant offspring of the new spirit, for France abhors disorder. She readily questions fundamentals, but she has a horror of chaos.

* * *

Do not believe that this new spirit is complicated, slack, artificial, and frozen. In keeping with the very order of nature, the poet puts aside any high-flown

purpose. There is no longer any Wagnerianism in us, and the young authors have cast far away all the enchanted clothing of the mighty romanticism of Germany and Wagner, just as they have rejected the rustic tinsel of our early evaluations of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

I do not believe that social developments will ever go so far that one will not be able to speak of national literature. On the contrary, however far one advances on the path of new freedoms, they will only reinforce most of the ancient disciplines and bring out new ones which will not be less demanding than the old. This is why I think that, whatever happens, art increasingly has a country. Furthermore, poets must always express a milieu, a nation; and artists, just as poets, just as philosophers, form a social estate which belongs doubtless to all humanity, but as the expression of a race, of one given environment.

Art will only cease being national the day that the whole universe, living in the same climate, in houses built in the same style, speaks the same language with the same accent – that is to say never. From ethnic and national differences are born the variety of literary expressions, and it is that very variety which must be preserved.

A cosmopolitan lyric expression would only yield shapeless works without character or individual structure, which would have the value of the commonplaces of international parliamentary rhetoric. And notice that the cinema, which is the perfect cosmopolitan art, already shows ethnic differences immediately apparent to everyone, and film enthusiasts immediately distinguish between an American and an Italian film. Likewise the new spirit, which has the ambition of manifesting a universal spirit and which does not intend to limit its activity, is none the less, and claims to respect the fact, a particular and lyric expression of the French nation, just as the classic spirit is, *par excellence*, a sublime expression of the same nation.

It must not be forgotten that it is perhaps more dangerous for a nation to allow itself to be conquered intellectually than by arms. That is why the new spirit asserts above all an order and a duty which are the great classic qualities manifested by French genius; and to them it adds liberty. This liberty and this order, which combine in the new spirit, are its characteristic and its strength.

3 Oswald Spengler (1880–1936) from *The Decline of the West*

Spengler's massive work became a benchmark of the conservative response to the modern world in general and the upheaval wrought by the First World War in particular. Although its cultural pessimism had an effect on Nazism, the work also had an influence upon figures as diverse as El Lissitsky, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and much later, Clement Greenberg. In this extract Spengler charts the decline of Western art from the Renaissance to Expressionism. Originally published as *Der Untergang Des Abendlandes, Gestalt und Wirklichkeit*, Munich, 1918. English translation by C. F. Atkinson, London, 1926. The present extract is taken from Chapter VIII, 'Music and Plastic (2) Act and Portrait'.

[. . .] The sign of all living art, the pure harmony of 'will', 'must' and 'can', the self-evidence of the aim, the un-self-consciousness of the execution, the unity of the art and the Culture – all that is past and gone. In Corot and Tiepolo, Mozart and Cimarosa, there is still a real mastery of the mother-tongue. After them, the process of mutilation begins, but no one is conscious of it because no one now can speak it fluently. Once upon a time, Freedom and Necessity were identical; but now what is understood by freedom is in fact indiscipline. In the time of Rembrandt or Bach the 'failures' that we know only too well were quite unthinkable. The Destiny of the form lay in the race or the school, not in the private tendencies of the individual. Under the spell of a great tradition full achievement is possible even to a minor artist, because the living art brings him in touch with his task and the task with him. To-day, these artists can no longer perform what they intend, for intellectual operations are a poor substitute for the trained instinct that has died out. [. . .]

Between Wagner and Manet there is a deep relationship, which is not, indeed, obvious to everyone but which Baudelaire with his unerring flair for the decadent detected at once. For the Impressionists, the end and the culmination of art was the conjuring up of a world in space out of strokes and patches of colour, and this was just what Wagner achieved with three bars. A whole world of soul could crowd into these three bars. Colours of starry midnight, of sweeping clouds, of autumn, of the day dawning in fear and sorrow, sudden glimpses of sunlit distances, world-fear, impending doom, despair and its fierce effort, hopeless hope – all these impressions which no composer before him had thought it possible to catch, he could paint with entire distinctness in the few tones of a motive. Here the contrast of Western music with Greek plastic has reached its maximum. Everything merges in bodiless infinity, no longer even does a linear melody wrestle itself clear of the vague tone-masses that in strange surgings challenge an imaginary space. The motive comes up out of dark terrible deeps. It is flooded for an instant by a flash of hard bright sun. Then, suddenly, it is so close upon us that we shrink. It laughs, it coaxes, it threatens, and anon it vanishes into the domain of the strings, only to return again out of endless distances, faintly modified and in the voice of a single oboe, to pour out a fresh cornucopia of spiritual colours. Whatever this is, it is neither painting nor music, in any sense of these words that attaches to previous work in the strict style. [. . .]

All that Nietzsche says of Wagner is applicable, also, to Manet. Ostensibly a return to the elemental, to Nature, as against contemplation-painting (Inhaltsmalerei) and abstract music, their art really signifies a concession to the barbarism of the Megalopolis, the beginning of dissolution sensibly manifested in a mixture of brutality and refinement. As a step, it is necessarily the last step. An artificial art has no further organic future, it is the mark of the end.

And the bitter conclusion is that it is all irretrievably over with the arts of form of the West. The crisis of the 19th Century was the death-struggle. Like the Apollinian, the Egyptian and every other, the Faustian art dies of senility, having actualized its inward possibilities and fulfilled its mission within the course of its Culture.

What is practised as art to-day – be it music after Wagner or painting after Cézanne, Leibl and Menzel – is impotence and falsehood. Look where one will, can one find the great personalities that would justify the claim that there is still an art of determinate necessity? Look where one will, can one find the *self-evidently necessary* task that awaits such an artist? We go through all the exhibitions, the concerts, the theatres, and find only industrious cobblers and noisy fools, who delight to produce something for the market, something that will 'catch on' with a public for whom art and music and drama have long ceased to be spiritual necessities. At what a level of inward and outward dignity stand to-day that which is called art and those who are called artists! In the shareholders' meeting of any limited company, or in the technical staff of any first-rate engineering works there is more intelligence, taste, character and capacity than in the whole music and painting of present-day Europe. There have always been, for one great artist, a hundred superfluities who practised art, but so long as a great tradition (and *therefore* great art) endured even these achieved something worthy. We can forgive this hundred for existing, for in the ensemble of the tradition they were the footing for the individual great man. But to-day we have only these superfluities, and ten thousand of them, working art 'for a living' (as if that were a justification!). One thing is quite certain, that to-day every single art-school could be shut down without art being affected in the slightest. We can learn all we wish to know about the art-clamour which a megalopolis sets up in order to forget that its art is dead from the Alexandria of the year 200. There, as here in our world-cities, we find a pursuit of illusions of artistic progress, of personal peculiarity, of 'the new style', of 'unsuspected possibilities', theoretical babble, pretentious fashionable artists, weight-lifters with cardboard dumb-bells – the 'Literary Man' in the Poet's place, the unabashed farce of Expressionism which the art-trade has organized as a 'phase of art-history', thinking and feeling and forming as industrial art. Alexandria, too, had problem-dramatists and box-office artists whom it preferred to Sophocles, and painters who invented new tendencies and successfully bluffed their public. What do we possess to-day as 'art'? A faked music, filled with artificial noisiness of massed instruments; a faked painting, full of idiotic, exotic and showcard effects, that every ten years or so concocts out of the form-wealth of millennia some new 'style' which is in fact no style at all since everyone does as he pleases; a lying plastic that steals from Assyria, Egypt and Mexico indifferently. Yet this and only this, the taste of the 'man of the world', can be accepted as the expression and sign of the age. [. . .]

4 Carlo Carrà (1881–1966) 'Our Antiquity'

Originally a Futurist painter, Carrà came to reject the avant-garde vehemently, embracing instead a notion of the persistence of eternal values embodied in the classical tradition in art. After a meeting with de Chirico in 1917 he was involved in the promotion of a 'Metaphysical School' of Italian painters. Composed between 1916 and 1918, this essay was originally published in Carrà's *Pittura Metafisica*, Florence, 1919. The present translation by C. Tisdall is taken from M. Carrà, *Metaphysical Art*, New York 1971.

Whatever else will our contemporaries find to reproach us with! And yet, if we too had forgotten our origins we would certainly be praised, but we would no longer be fit to carry out works of uncontaminated will.

Our ancient character is firmly rooted in severe law, almost as if to vegetate more comfortably in modern reality without destroying it.

Admittedly, it would at times be pleasant to leave this state of inebriation in which we live, were it not for the magic link which holds us bound to our poor 'savage gods'.

The hot winds of history arouse this spiritual disposition for new and profound things. They hint of calm music. The game becomes serious, my friends, and to sing this music too freely could also be dangerous.

We never knew 'indifference', but now our spasmodic passions have ceased to preach. We prefer to conceal ourselves from the eyes of the profane. We are alone in the profundity of our epoch, alone with our sin, and with our study.

By a strange anarchical paradox we have returned, almost without wishing to do so, to pure classicism.

What was it that breathed in our ears the sound of so many things we believed to be dead?

The truth is that we know of no greater happiness than that of listening to ourselves.

What is this feeling that provokes in us the jealousy that a thought of ours may tomorrow belong to many men, a jealousy greater than that provoked by the thought that our woman may cease to be ours?

If we too had reduced the spirit of art to a convenient calculation of algebra and daily bread, we would perhaps feel more secure, but also more mortified than we do. The enjoyments of easily-conquered paradises always leave us indifferent.

We too have sung the praise of the western orgies; then we felt it permissible to receive our brothers' indecision with the tenderness befitting our democratic habits. But now we have become more cautious, and no longer tolerate the riots which ambitious and disturbed people denominate 'artistic movements'. These villains always ensnare incautious youth, which, eager to make itself felt, fails to realize that its youthful adventurousness is prone to malevolence and ungrateful obduracy.

From this it can be discerned that we no longer wish to see ourselves confronted with uncertain premises. If it is not a sin of pride to do so, let us claim to have thrown overboard a good part of our corruptibility, or at least of our own belief in lying prophecies.

We have become aware of the truths that are said to be serious, and we do not accept that the veils have been lifted for the delight of the unworthy. It is an illusion that one can force this on those who do not wish it, and he who tries to do so, demonstrates such candour that he is pardonable because the need to give vent to the passions that torment him is manifest. He is unlike us, for with experience we have lost this candour and believe most firmly that that which is particular to the individual can never belong to a generation.

* * *

The chameleon-like reproduction of visible reality is another ugly thing that has been imported from outside. In places where painters were not used to condensation of the elements of the body, they could now surrender, with deceitful ardour, as if it were a liberation, to theories that were born and resolved without being completed. And it was thus that the painting of so-called effects of light (which really concern only highly-strung stage electricians) came to be accepted.

What was needed was a return to the Italian idea of the original solidity of things, so that men would recognize the well-disguised deceit of the astute philosophies which are put into circulation with all the publicity necessary for the triumph of an industrial product.

But now that the inevitable intoxication has been slept off, matters are returning to a more determined state. In this way, linear delights will no longer be disrupted by ecstatic rotations of colour and we will no longer be pushed towards trivial and trembling mobility and tumultuous surfaces.

The appearance of even the smallest bodies is no longer changed by ephemeral distractions, our ends are no longer resolved in light which cannot celebrate weight.

The aims will change and by means of a second, richer, more diffuse and conscious transposition, reality will again be conceived with an inextinguishable spiritual ardour which will comply more persuasively with form. After this, colour, and the picture.

Combinations of the module will return in valiant opposition, and with them, the golden section, giving a more ample spatial breath.

Tonal matter will be assembled homogeneously in all its immanent weight.

Internal discipline brings us to a more fulfilled significance, to a cubature pregnant with poetry.

And this is how we initiated the second period of our artistic development after having confronted the public in the Italian theatres, and brawled in the squares, for the advent of a new art.

* * *

Much water has flowed under the bridges of art, but the proprieties that preside over painting are yet to be clarified. They can be summarized in the following impulses of the spirit:

a) line (straight and curved in contrast) in proportional arrangements of individual forces,

b) the local tone of aspects of reality (simultaneous relationship of chiaroscuro and chromatic colour),

c) the first stage of the form having been attained, to find the balance of the volumes; that is, the synthesis which constitutes the definitive order within the painting. Let us not forget that art cannot be only the immediate reflection of a sensation; neither must forms remain as merely raw external expressions of the reality that surrounds us, or be limited to arresting the shadows of vibratory movement.

* * *

Let us have creation, not the imitation of phenomena. Certain slight nervous stimuli make us smile; we can no longer mistake them for real spiritual joy.

The mislaid necessities of style are returning, or rather are reborn; and the artist, with greater purity than before, proclaims them irrefutably present.

Never has this problem been felt to be so important as it is today by those who are exponents of the collective spirit. It is the law of realization that presides over artistic representation. And so, say what you will, to reduce painting to a realistic recognition of human and natural appearances is almost equivalent to a disregard of the superior aims of art.

Artistic creation involves a watchful, diligent and attentive will, and demands a continued effort to prevent the 'apparitions' from being overlooked. Artistic creation, which is satisfaction of the imagination and intellect, is destined to stimulate in the beholder a particular meaning and a repetition of that satisfaction felt by the artist.

* * *

Let it not be thought, however, that we wish to isolate the problem of national art from the finality of European – universal – order, on which every artistic problem is directly dependent. We will dwell in detail on the task that the young are called to perform, a grave responsibility for anyone conscious of the situation in which Italian art, for various reasons, finds itself. To try to analyse these reasons could be to fall into the error of a man dissecting the human body in the hope of discovering not only the law of life but also that of human emotion.

On the other hand, to run joyously towards certain intoxications, shouting 'long live' or 'down with' according to one's sympathies or antipathies, is to lose contact with the concreteness of things. It therefore follows, if one cannot reasonably isolate the examination of a single part without considering the idea imparted by the parts, that one cannot form a general idea without considering its particular effects. Whether one proceeds from the general to the particular, or vice versa, whether one proceeds by synthesis or analysis, every artistic problem must be seen as connected in all its parts and with its necessary unity.

But we know that in the sum of experiences there arise so many new and unforeseen elements that unity either cannot be attained, or makes itself manifest in unexpected ways.

In aesthetic activity more than in any other human activity, one never attains the end one sets out to reach. But in days of great aesthetic disorganization, any support is good. Today, for men of imagination, tendencies of equal falsity contend for supremacy at the crossroads of obscure directions.

Light as a fountain, spiritualization slowly comes; but those who wish to understand are not intimidated by adverse forces.

We are no longer constrained by physical illuminations to play at blind man's buff with our thoughts. This is the theory of the card players who when they want spades and see clubs turn up, change their tactics.

It is easy to throw hurried accents into a mess of hypotheses of doubtful taste, or to outline improvised figures without clarity, precision or control. But even if there are infinite ways of erring, there is only one way to work correctly.

* * *

We are not concerned with an intimate and objective examination of a definitive form, because nothing is definitive, but with a form of art as yet scarcely sketched in, simple and elementary. And rather than a norm we set out to provide a suggestion in generic terms.

Nevertheless, the choice of new criteria and postulates is already a guarantee of seriousness and probity, if not yet a demonstration of new constructions of forms hitherto sought and imagined and invoked in vain.

But one could already demonstrate with readily accessible facts that metaphysical painting is nothing but an intuitive development of that which preceded it, and in actual fact it perhaps represents the first, imprecise, ideal projection; the first steps on intractable soil; an uncontrollable desire to go beyond purely sensory and materialistic forms, however superfluous it may seem to us to claim the roots of this form of art in the Italian tradition. We do not wish to base any claim on the future, because art, like history, passes through successive stages, though this does not alter its profound essence, and it carries the future within it.

As can be seen, we do not rest our case on originality, but rather on the discovery of origins which will lead to the achievement of rigorous and immutable forms.

* * *

[. . .] Perhaps this word [originality] constitutes the greatest and most disquieting misunderstanding to emerge from the workshops of the artistic peasantry in these recent years.

It is bitter for the sensitive man to see how arrogance, ostentation, frivolity, vacuity, wantonness and every excess nowadays are the most positive characteristics of today's artists.

From this arises the reciprocal concern shown by today's painters for surpassing each other in the incessant invention of new styles, supposing that they can capture the admiration of the public by such artifice, and neglecting the improvement of their real creative faculty; their output is consequently closer to bizarre eccentricity than to the real imagination which neither tires the mind nor diverts the attention from the substantial aims of art.

And it is precisely this pitiful mania for seeming original that prevents contemporary painters from realizing the varied graces of linear relationships, so essential in the production of that magic enchantment which used to be familiar to the painter.

So it happens that, while on the one hand we consider irksome the closed orders, the arthritic systems and the dead forms which the good old Academy's rules seek to put back into circulation, on the other we must rebuke the young painters who are neglecting the most elementary awareness and absolutely every necessity of study to follow their own fatuous whims; because in the last resort we should never forget that he who refrains from study of the great masters through fear of losing his native sensibility, will only succeed in creating a form of art without roots and without real excellence.

It would be as if someone claimed that it is possible to become a great poet without having any appreciation at all of language.

Even the earth would produce only wild plants, if the farmer's care and toil

did not put it in condition to receive the seeds and participate in the nourishment of delicate produce.

This is what happens to the painter as long as he ignores the precious contribution made by the great masters over the centuries. He who fears to lose his native poetic sense should not devote himself to art or poetry, since these presuppose a knowledge of historical development and of the informative laws of expression.

5 Léonce Rosenberg (1881–1947) 'Tradition and Cubism'

Rosenberg replaced Kahnweiler as the principal dealer involved in Cubism. He particularly supported the 'rationalized' developments of the Parisian avant-garde in the post-war period through his gallery, the Galerie de l'Effort Moderne, and the accompanying publication, the *Bulletin de l'Effort Moderne*. The present text was originally published in the organ of the Metaphysical School, *Valori Plastici*, Rome, February–March 1919. This translation is from E. Fry (ed.), *Cubism*, New York and London, 1966.

Taking no account of accident, pushing aside anecdote, neglecting the particular, the 'cubist' artists tend towards the constant and the absolute. Instead of reconstituting an aspect of nature, they seek to construct the plastic equivalents of natural objects, and the pictorial fact so constituted becomes an aspect created by the mind. The construction realised in this way has not a comparative value but a strictly intrinsic value, or, to use a Platonic phrase, is 'beautiful in itself'. There is nothing arbitrary in its architecture; on the contrary, everything in it is the consequence of a feeling, and is subject to the eternal laws of equilibrium.

To make a picture, the artist begins by choosing and grouping certain elements from external reality; in other words by synthesis he draws from some object the *elements* – forms and colours – necessary to the assembling of his subject. The transition from object to subject constitutes his aesthetic, which is governed by the mind. After this, to pass from the subject to the work, he employs a variety of *means* proper to the expression of his subject; this process constitutes his technique, and it is inspired by emotion. This effort defies analysis; it carries within itself all the mystery of Art. The final result is the *picture*, whose emanation is Beauty.

6 Giorgio de Chirico (1888–1978) 'The Return to the Craft'

De Chirico suffered a breakdown during the war. After a one-man show in Rome in 1919 he became increasingly preoccupied with the technical methods of earlier Italian painting. This essay, concluding with an affirmation in Latin of his status as a classical painter, was first published as 'Il ritorno al mestiere' in *Valori Plastici*, Rome, November–

December 1919. The present extract is taken from the translation in Carrà, op. cit.

By now it is quite apparent: the painters who have been agitating for half a century, who have been racking their brains to invent schools and systems, who have sweated with the continual effort of seeming original, of presenting their personalities, now hide like rabbits behind the banner of multifarious fancy-work, and press ahead the latest defence of their ignorance and impotence: the pretence of spirituality. (This is an uncontrollable phenomenon, but only for the majority, including the writers on art; a few intelligent men, whom you and I know, are capable of understanding of what this spirituality consists and of esteeming it for what it is worth.) These painters, then, are returning prudently, with outstretched hands like men walking in the dark, towards an art less obstructed by fancy-work, towards clearer and more concrete forms, and towards surfaces that can testify without too many equivocations, just what one knows and what one can do. In my opinion this is a good sign. Such a turn of events was inevitable.

It is curious to note how this return came about. It was effectuated with prudence, or to be plain, with fear. It seems that the painters feared that in going back, they would stumble and fall into the same snares and traps that they themselves had laid during the previous advance. Such fear is justified by the fact that they are unarmed, vulnerable and weak. While returning it is necessary, too, that they grasp hold of a few of those same fancy tricks: that they make use of the shields they used during the advance. And so the great problem that terrifies them most in this return is that of the human figure.

Man who with his canons rises again like a spectre in front of man.

The neglect of anthropomorphic representation, and the deformation of it, encouraged entire legions of painters to turn out stupid and facile reproductions. With its return the problem of animal-man looms larger and more terrible than ever, since, this time, the right weapons to confront it are lacking, or rather they are in existence, but they are blunt, and many have forgotten how to use them.

These painters can no longer hide behind the excuse of primitive artifice.

The case of the penitent painter of today is tragic, but amidst such puerile confusion there is also a comic side to it that encourages an ironic smile from beneath the observer's moustache.

* * *

To return to the craft! This will not be easy and will demand time and toil. The schools and the masters are deficient, or rather they are vilified by the colouristic riot that has invaded Europe in this half-century. The academies exist, full of methods and systems, but, alas, what results they produce! What on earth would the weakest student of 1600 say if he could see a masterpiece by a *professore* of an Italian academy, or by a *cher maître* of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts of Paris? [. . .]

* * *

[. . .] This is the point we have reached. This is the state of confusion, ignorance and overwhelming stupidity in the midst of which the very few painters whose brains are clear and whose eyes are clean are preparing to return to pictorial science following the principles and teachings of our old masters.

Their first lesson was drawing; drawing, the divine art, the foundation of every plastic construction, skeleton of every good work, eternal law that every artifice must follow. Drawing, ignored, neglected and deformed by all modern painters (I say all, including the decorators of parliamentary halls and the various professors of the realm), drawing, I say, will return not as a *fashion* as those who talk of artistic events are accustomed to say, but as an inevitable necessity, as a condition *sine qua non* of good creation. '*Un tableau bien dessiné est toujours assez bien peint*', said Jean Dominique Ingres, and I think he knew more about it than all the modern painters. Just as in elections voters are exhorted to go to the polls, we, who were the first to set a good example in painting, summon those painters who have been or can be redeemed to *go to the statues*. Yes, to the statues to learn the nobility and the religion of drawing, to the statues to dehumanize you a little, you who in spite of all your puerile devilries were still *too human*. If you lack the time and the means to go and copy in the sculpture museums, if the academies have not yet adopted the system of shutting the future painter up for at least five years in a room in which there is nothing but marble and plaster statues, if the dawn of laws and canons has not yet arisen, have patience; and meanwhile, so as not to lose time, buy a plaster copy – thought it need not be a reproduction of an antique masterpiece. Buy your plaster copy, and then in the silence of your room copy it ten, twenty, a hundred times. Copy it until you manage to produce a satisfying work, to draw a hand or a foot in such a way that if they were to come alive miraculously, the bones, muscles, nerves and tendons would all be correct.

To return to the craft, our painters must be extremely diligent in the perfection of their means: canvas, colours, brushes, oils and varnishes must be of the highest quality. Colours, unfortunately, are of very poor quality nowadays because the roguery and immorality of the manufacturers and the modern painters' mania for speed have encouraged the distribution of very poor products, since no painter was likely to protest. It would be a good thing if painters again took up the habit of making their own canvas and colours. Rather more patience and effort is necessary: but, when the painter has understood once and for all that the execution of a painting is not a thing to be carried out in the shortest possible time, a thing merely to be exhibited or sold to a dealer; when he has understood that the same painting should be worked on for months, even years, until it is completely smooth and polished; and until the painter's conscience is completely clear; when he has understood this he will not find it difficult to sacrifice a few hours a day to the preparation of his own canvases and colours. He will do it with care and with love, it will cost him less, and will provide him with safer and more consistent colours.

When this transformation comes about, the finest painters, who will be considered the *masters*, will be able to exert control and act as judges and inspectors for the minor painters. It would be wise to adopt the discipline current in the era of the great Flemish painters who, united in societies, used to elect a president who had the power to inflict punishments, to impose fines and even to expel from the society a painter who was guilty of negligence or who had used inferior materials.

When Ingres painted, he had within reach one hundred paintbrushes of the finest quality, perfectly washed and dried and ready for use the moment the artist needed them. Today our avant-garde boasts of using a couple of rough decorator's brushes, clogged with dried paint, hard and never washed. [. . .]

* * *

As far as material and craft are concerned, futurism dealt the final blow to Italian painting. Even before the advent of futurism it was navigating murky waters, but the futurist revels made the bucket overflow.

Now night falls on everything. We have reached the second half of the parabola. Hysteria and roguery are condemned. I think that by now we are all satiated with roguery, whether it be political, literary, or painterly. With the sunset of hysteria more than one painter will return to the craft, and those who have already done so can work with freer hands, and their work will be more adequately recognized and recompensed.

As for me, I am calm, and I decorate myself with three words that I wish to be the seal of all my work: *Pictor classicus sum.*

7 Charles Edouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier) (1887–1965) and Amédée Ozenfant (1886–1966) 'Purism'

The authors met in late 1917 whereupon Jeanneret, trained as an architect and draughtsman, also took up painting. In November 1918 they jointly published *After Cubism* (*Après le Cubisme*), developing the ideas broached in Ozenfant's 'Notes on Cubism' of 1916. In 1920 they founded the review *L'Esprit Nouveau* to promote a return, within the avant-garde, to principles of classical order. 'Purism', a comprehensive statement of these principles, was published in the fourth issue of 1920, pp. 369–86. The present extracts are taken from the first English translation in R. L. Herbert, *Modern Artists on Art*, New York, 1964.

Introduction

Logic, born of human constants and without which nothing is human, is an instrument of control and, for he who is inventive, a guide toward discovery; it controls and corrects the sometimes capricious march of intuition and permits one to go ahead with certainty.

It is the guide that sometimes precedes and sometimes follows the explorer; but without intuition it is a sterile device; nourished by intuition, it allows one 'to dance in his fetters.'

Nothing is worthwhile which is not general, nothing is worthwhile which is not transmittable. We have attempted to establish an esthetic that is rational, and therefore human. [. . .]

The Work of Art

The work of art is an artificial object which permits the creator to place the

spectator in the state he wishes; later we will study the means the creator has at his disposal to attain this result.

With regard to man, esthetic sensations are not all of the same degree of intensity or quality; we might say that there is a hierarchy.

The highest level of this hierarchy seems to us to be that special state of a mathematical sort to which we are raised, for example, by the clear perception of a great general law (the state of mathematical lyricism, one might say); it is superior to the brute pleasure of the senses; the senses are involved, however, because every being in this state is as if in a state of beatitude.

The goal of art is not simple pleasure, rather it partakes of *the nature of happiness.*

It is true that plastic art has to address itself more directly to the senses than pure mathematics which only acts by symbols, these symbols sufficing to trigger in the mind consequences of a superior order; in plastic art, the senses should be strongly moved in order to predispose the mind to the release into play of subjective reactions without which there is no work of art. But there is no art worth having without this excitement of an intellectual order, of a mathematical order; architecture is the art which up until now has most strongly induced the states of this category. The reason is that everything in architecture is expressed by order and economy.

The means of executing a work of art is a transmittable and universal language.

One of the highest delights of the human mind is to perceive the order of nature and to measure its own participation in the scheme of things; the work of art seems to us to be a labor of putting into order, a masterpiece of human order.

Now the world only appears to man from the human vantage point, that is, the world seems to obey the laws man has been able to assign to it; when man creates a work of art, he has the feeling of acting as a 'god '

Now a law is nothing other than the verification of an order.

In summary, a work of art should induce a sensation of a mathematical order, and the means of inducing this mathematical order should be sought among universal means.

System

* * *

Man and organized beings are products of *natural selection.* In every evolution on earth, the organs of beings are more and more adapted and purified, and the entire forward march of evolution is a function of purification. The human body seems to be the highest product of natural selection.

When examining these selected forms, one finds a tendency toward certain identical aspects, corresponding to constant functions, functions which are of maximum efficiency, maximum strength, maximum capacity, etc., that is, maximum economy. ECONOMY is the law of natural selection.

It is easy to calculate that it is also the great law which governs what we will call 'mechanical selection.'

Mechanical selection began with the earliest times and from those times provided objects whose general laws have endured; only the means of making them changed, the rules endured.

In all ages and with all people, man has created for his use objects of prime necessity which responded to his imperative needs; these objects were associated with his organism and helped complete it. In all ages, for example, man has created containers: vases, glasses, bottles, plates, which were built to suit the needs of maximum capacity, maximum strength, maximum economy of materials, maximum economy of effort. In all ages, man has created objects of transport: boats, cars; objects of defense: arms; objects of pleasure: musical instruments, etc., all of which have always obeyed the law of selection: economy.

One discovers that all these objects are true extensions of human limbs and are, for this reason, of human scale, harmonizing both among themselves and with man.

The machine was born in the last century. The problem of selection was posed more imperatively than ever (commercial rivalry, cost price); one might say that the machine has led fatally to the strictest respect for, and application of, the laws of economy. [. . .]

Modern mechanization would appear to have created objects decidedly remote from what man had hitherto known and practiced. It was believed that he had thus retreated from natural products and entered into an arbitrary order; our epoch decries the misdeeds of mechanization. We must not be mistaken, this is a complete error: the machine has applied with a rigor greater than ever the physical laws of the world's structure. [. . .]

From all this comes a fundamental conclusion: that respect for the laws of physics and of economy has in every age created highly selected objects; that these objects contain analogous mathematical curves with deep resonances; that these artificial objects obey the same laws as the products of natural selection and that, consequently, there thus reigns a total harmony, bringing together the only two things that interest the human being: himself and what he makes.

Both natural selection and mechanical selection are manifestations of purification.

From this it would be easy to conclude that the artist will again find elitist themes in the objects of natural and mechanical selection. As it happens, artists of our period have taken pleasure in ornamental art and have chosen ornamented objects.

A work of art is an association, a symphony of consonant and architectured forms, in architecture and sculpture as well as in painting.

To use as theme anything other than the objects of selection, for example, objects of decorative art, is to introduce a second symphony into the first; it would be redundant, surcharged, it would diminish the intensity and adulterate the quality of the emotion.

Of all recent schools of painting, only Cubism foresaw the advantages of choosing selected objects, and of their inevitable associations. But, by a paradoxical error, instead of sifting out the general laws of these objects, Cubism only showed their accidental aspects, to such an extent that on the basis of this

erroneous idea it even re-created arbitrary and fantastic forms. Cubism made square pipes to associate with matchboxes, and triangular bottles to associate with conical glasses.

From this critique and all the foregoing analyses, one comes logically to the necessity of a reform, the necessity of a logical choice of themes, and the necessity of their association not by deformation, but *by formation.*

If the Cubists were mistaken, it is because they did not seek out the invariable constituents of their chosen themes, which could have formed a universal, transmittable language.

* * *

Purism

The highest delectation of the human mind is the perception of order, and the greatest human satisfaction is the feeling of collaboration or participation in this order. The work of art is an artificial object which lets the spectator be placed in the state desired by the creator. The sensation of order is of a mathematical quality. The creation of a work of art should utilize means for specified results. Here is how we have tried to create a language possessing these means:

Primary forms and colors have standard properties (universal properties which permit the creation of a transmittable plastic language). But the utilization of primary forms does not suffice to place the spectator in the sought-for state of mathematical order. For that one must bring to bear the associations of natural or artificial forms, and the criterion for their choice is the degree of selection at which certain elements have arrived (natural selection and mechanical selection). The Purist element issued from the purification of standard forms is not a copy, but a creation whose end is to materialize the object in all its generality and its invariability. Purist elements are thus comparable to words of carefully defined meaning; Purist syntax is the application of constructive and modular means; it is the application of the laws which control pictorial space. A painting is a whole (unity); a painting is an artificial formation which, by appropriate means, should lead to the objectification of an entire 'world.' One could make an art of allusions, an art of fashion, based upon surprise and the conventions of the initiated. Purism strives for an art free of conventions which will utilize plastic constants and address itself above all to the universal properties of the senses and the mind.

8 Albert Gleizes (1881–1953) 'The Dada Case'

The author's pre-war Cubism was affected by the post-war 'call to order'. He represents here a response to the criticism mounted by Dada of the classical principles and the bourgeois social order from which they were held to derive. Notably, however, his response is made as a defence, not of that social order, but of eternal principles. To its adherents it was 'L'esprit nouveau' that was progressive, Dada a manifestation of the decay of bourgeois society. Originally published in *Action*, no. 3, Paris, April 1920.

The present translation is taken from R. Motherwell (ed.), *The Dada Painters and Poets*, New York, 1951.

[...] It cannot for one moment be denied that we are now at a great turning-point in the history of mankind. In every country a hierarchy, the hierarchy of bourgeois capitalism, is crumbling, powerless to recapture the reins of power. Events have proved stronger than men, and men are being tossed this way and that, with very little idea of what is happening. The political parties from the extreme right to the extreme left continue to accuse one another of every crime. They cannot get it into their heads that responsibility is an idle word when applied to man, and that superior forces which scientific investigations have not succeeded in fathoming act upon the species far more strongly than any supposed individual will. This bourgeois hierarchy which has organized the economic system on a material plane sees nothing but its threatened class interests. It has reached such a degree of impotence that it can no longer conceive of a system which might provide a safety valve for the ever-mounting pressure in the lower parts of its organism. On the contrary, it constantly increases the pressure, having lost all conception of a possible breaking-point.

On the material plane this bourgeois hierarchy is already dead; what we see now is the decomposition of its corpse. The movement with which it still seems to be endowed is merely the wriggling of the worms that are devouring it, and the glow which prevents the night from being complete is the phosphorescence that we know as the will-o'-the-wisp.

Here let it be understood that 'bourgeois hierarchy' is not meant in any demagogic sense. The mania for classification has created certain distinctions whose reality is purely an appearance, and our demagogues use them as a basis for telling the lower classes that they have nothing in common with the upper classes. If they do this for reasons of strategy, it is understandable, but if they are simple-minded enough to believe what they say, it's too bad for them. The bourgeoisie is the expression of a human leaning towards the bestial enjoyment of material realities. And as the division of wealth – an economic conception – is based on money, it is to the power of money that the goods of this world belong. In the human struggle, those who have this power are on top, those who do not possess it but who have the same desire to possess it for the same ends, are on the bottom. Consequently the bourgeois spirit is not peculiar to any special class, but is common to the whole of society. The last scavenger of cigarette butts has the same impulses as the financier who makes peace or war, all that separates them is a simple matter of realization.

The collapse of the money-base and the increasing shortage of goods – these are the factors that are undermining the whole social organism. The cataclysm seems inevitable. There will be nothing ideological about it. From the point of view of the human consciousness, it will be quite simply a rebellion of the stomach and an exasperation of the desire to enjoy life. And indeed, every class of our decomposing society is characterized by an urge toward the satisfaction of every physical desire, and by a total lack of constructiveness or organization.

This engulfing materialism, which is so typical of our bourgeois society, quite naturally prevents us from paying serious attention to the disintegration on the spiritual plane, since spiritual values are what count least in a regime of this sort and the word spiritual has taken on an air of waggish insignificance, living on services rendered and on jokes.

However, it is by juxtaposing the rot on the material plane with the rot on the spiritual plane that we shall gain an accurate understanding of the Dada movement. I am even prepared to say that it is easier to follow the course of this movement than that of the material crisis. Its organism is simpler than the complex of material forces.

The decomposing material body of the bourgeois hierarchy has its counterpart in the decomposition of its spiritual values. The material body returns to dust, the spirit returns to the void. The Dada movement is not the voluntary work of individuals; it is the fatal product of a state of affairs.

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At the source of the Dada spirit, we find an adroit utilization of spiritual values once combatted, but now grown fashionable. Then various new impulses brought a sudden revelation. The need to be first became a dogmatic tenet, bringing with it further madness. And to these diverse psychological states correspond a series of pathological states. The abuse of pleasures of all sorts brings the search for artificial stimulation of the senses, to the lashing of the nervous system with liquor and drugs. Result: the total loss of control over the physical organism.

Prior to this stage, what does the individual offer? An intellectual suppleness, yes, but no extraordinary sensibility; a certain *savoir-faire* but nothing to suggest any latent constructive temperament. During this stage and after, he has the illusion of being liberated from the physical laws that govern us. This is a familiar adjunct of the hypnosis induced by drugs, but it is more serious when the illusion is prolonged past the crisis. It is at this moment that the domain of Dada opens. The impossibility of constructing, of organizing anything whatsoever, the absence of even the most confused notion of any such construction, has led Dada to decree that there is no such thing and that the only solution is to do anything, no matter what, under the guise of instinct.

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Their only certainties derive from an exasperation of the bourgeois conception of art, essentially individualistic and hence reserved for a few of the initiate. Carrying this principle to its absurd conclusion, they shut themselves up in themselves. The presentation of the Dada work is always full of taste, the paintings reveal charming colors, all very fashionable, the books and magazines are always delightfully made up and rather recall the catalogues of perfume manufacturers. There is nothing in the outward aspect of these productions to offend anyone at all; all is correctness, good form, delicate shading, etc. . . .

The forms in their art work are likewise inoffensive, the *grafitti* they draw are quite proper. The texts are so impenetrable that there can be no possible ground for indignation. Sometimes a choice of words creates a lively and felicitous image. What they call instinct is anything that passes through their

heads, and from time to time something quite nice passes through their heads. This is no more surprising than to find a certain suggestion of organization in accidental cloud formations.

But very soon we become aware of the dominants, the *leit-motivs* which recur in their artistic and literary works. And then the pathological case becomes brutally evident. Their minds are forever haunted by a sexual delirium and a scatalogical frenzy. Their morbid fantasy runs riot around the genital apparatus of either sex. There is real joy in their discovery of their own sex and the feminine sex. Though they deny everything *a priori*, we must, in spite of that denial, which strikes me as somewhat premature, recognize that they are full of conviction when it comes to those ornaments with which babies are made and which they so love to toy with. They are obsessed with the organs of reproduction to such a degree that those of their works which may possibly reveal genius are inevitably of a genital character. Moreover, by lingering in these domains, they have found, perhaps without seeking it, another source of instinctive inspiration. They have discovered the anus and the by-products of intestinal activity. And their joy, already great, was further augmented. Progressing from one discovery to another, they announce their triumph to all comers. They make marbles with fecal matter, they gallop over it, they run probing fingers through it. This is a phenomenon well known to psychiatrists. They confuse excrement with the products of the mind. They use the same word to designate two different things.

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Dada claims to discredit art by its agitation. But one can no more discredit art, which is the manifestation of an imperious impulsion of the instinct, than one can discredit human society, which also springs from an imperious impulsion of the instinct. One can no more discredit art by systematically destroying its values, than one can discredit society by a fraudulent international bankruptcy. What Dada destroys, without assuming responsibility for its acts, is certain notions of servitude which would vanish very nicely without its help; since what is destroying the bourgeois hierarchy on the material plane is its false conception of the distribution of social wealth. And that is why Dada, in the last analysis, represents merely the ultimate decomposition of the spiritual values of that decomposed bourgeois hierarchy. [. . .]

9 André Derain (1880–1954) 'On Raphael'

Though Derain had been a leading member of the pre-war avant-garde, like many other artists he turned increasingly to classicism during and after the war. His affirmation of this conservative commitment appears in a statement originally published as 'Sur Raphael' in *L'Esprit Nouveau*, no. 3, Paris, December 1920, from which the present translation is made.

Raphael is the most widely misunderstood of artists! Raphael is not a master for the young: he cannot be the founder of a school made up of beginners. The

only way to approach Raphael is after many disappointments. If one departs from him, it is a disaster; he is a genius capable of spoiling the greatest. There are distressing examples of this. Besides, his influence was non-existent for more than a century; we are just emerging from a period in which one only sought direction from masters of the Dutch school. The recent reorganization of the Louvre is the happy proof that this time is past. Raphael is above da Vinci, who is a sound test of worth, and far from being divine has a taste for corruption. Raphael alone is divine!

10 Percy Wyndham Lewis (1882–1957) 'The Children of the New Epoch'

The author perceives that the war has put an end to 'blasting and bombardiering', to Vorticism, indeed to the apparent anarchy of the pre-war avant-garde *tout court*. In its place he alludes to 'robustness', 'hygiene' and 'authority': terms which were to become familiar in conservative rhetoric, not least in the 'call to order' so influential in sections of the avant-garde. Originally published in *The Tyro*, no. 1, London, 1921.

We are at the beginning of a new epoch, fresh to it, the first babes of a new, and certainly a better, day. The advocates of the order that we supersede are still in a great majority. The obsequies of the dead period will be protracted, and wastefully expensive. But it is nevertheless nailed down, cold, but with none of the calm and dignity of death. The post-mortem has shown it to be suffering from every conceivable malady.

No time has ever been more carefully demarcated from the one it succeeds than the time we have entered on has been by the Great War of 1914–18. It is built solidly behind us. All the conflicts and changes of the last ten years, intellectual and other, are terribly symbolized by it. To us, in its immense meaningless shadow, it appears like a mountain range that has suddenly risen as a barrier, which should be interpreted as an indication of our path. There is no passage back across that to the lands of yesterday. Those for whom that yesterday means anything, whose interests and credentials are on the other side of that barrier, exhort us dully or frantically to scale that obstacle (largely built by their blunders and egotisms) and return to the Past. On the other hand, those *whose interests lie all ahead*, whose credentials are in the future, move in this abrupt shadow with satisfaction, forward, and away from the sealed and obstructed past.

So we, then, are the creatures of a new state of human life, as different from nineteenth-century England, say, as the Renaissance was from the Middle Ages. We are, however, weak in numbers as yet, and to some extent, uncertain and untried. What steps are being taken for our welfare, how are we provided for? Are the next few generations going to produce a rickety crop of Newcomers, or is the new epoch to have a robust and hygienic start-off?

A phenomenon we meet, and are bound to meet for some time, is the existence of a sort of No Man's Land atmosphere. The dead never rise up, and men will not return to the Past, whatever else they may do. But as yet there is Nothing,

or rather the corpse of the past age, and the sprinkling of children of the new. There is no mature authority, outside of creative and active individual men, to support the new and delicate forces bursting forth everywhere today.

So we have sometimes to entrench ourselves; but we do it with rage: and it is our desire to press constantly on to realization of what is, after all, our destined life.

11 Juan Gris (1887–1927) Reply to a Questionnaire

A leading member of the pre-war Cubist avant-garde, Gris here stresses the rational bases of his art and its continuity with the classical tradition enshrined in the Louvre. These typically post-war claims were made in response to a questionnaire circulated by the editors of *L'Esprit Nouveau*, Jeanneret and Ozenfant. Originally published in *L'Esprit Nouveau*, no. 5, Paris, February 1921, pp. 533–4.

His aesthetic system: 'I work with elements of the spirit, with the imagination. I try to concretize that which is abstract. I go from the general to the particular; that is to say, I depart from an abstraction to arrive at a real fact. My art is an art of synthesis, a deductive art, as Raynal says.'

'I want to attain a new description. I want to be able to create special individuals by departing from a general type.'

'I consider that the architectural side of painting is mathematical, the abstract side; I want to humanize it. Cézanne created a cylinder from a bottle; for my part, I depart from the cylinder to create a special type of individual; I create a bottle from a cylinder, a certain bottle. Cézanne heads towards architecture, whereas I depart from it. It's for this reason that I compose with abstractions (colours) and I determine when these colours have become objects; for example, I compose with black and white and I determine when the white has become a paper and the black a shadow; I mean that I fix the white so that it becomes a paper, and the black to turn it into a shadow. This type of painting is to the other type what poetry is to prose.'

His method: 'If in the *system* I distance myself from all idealist and naturalist art, in method I do not want to escape from the Louvre. My method is the perennial method, that which the masters used; these are the *means*, they are constant.'