André Chastel

CURRENT PROBLEMS IN THE HISTORY OF ART

Perhaps nothing is more indicative of an advanced civilisation than informed interest in the arts. There have always been connoisseurs and persons of taste; more recent, however—it goes back only two or three generations—is the academic discipline which has brought the serious historian into a domain which had long been reserved for the enthusiast, the lover of *virtu*, and the artist. When Nietzsche noted Burckhardt's and Taine's success in combining the history of art with that of civilisations, he wondered whether this was a symptom of decadence. Little inclined to propose easy tasks to modern man, he perceived a mortal danger in 'pedantic' simplifications and did not doubt that the need for 'scientific' explanations in matters of art would have as its counterpart a growing paralysis of the creative faculties. To the extent that this meant hypertrophy of memory it would gradually enervate the fecundity of talent; was it even certain that it always favoured the development of sure and keen taste?

The twentieth century seems to have given the lie to these portentous omens: a period of remarkable artistic intensity has coincided with the

advent of great historians—following one another between 1900 and 1930, Wölfflin, Riegl, Berenson, Dvořák, and Focillon—and thanks to their teachings and publications the group of amateurs worthy of the name continues to grow and improve. Perseverence in such optimism, however, would be warranted only if the situation in 1950 were still as gratifying as it was twenty or thirty years ago and if the development of taste had kept pace with the progress of learning. In fact, it is now that the real difficulties begin, since the history of art has only very recently reached what is called the great public: a persistent demand has brought forth a spate of hasty popularisations, sugar-coated sentimentalisations, and more or less conscientious collections of reproductions. The coming decades will disclose the consequences of this uneven artistic 'culture'; but it is already clear why the history of art is in a delicate and strained phase: for, considered as a scientific discipline, it has just now overcome the period—always a bit primitive—of 'systems', and, preferring severity to effect, is less and less receptive to wishful generalisations.

1. *Correction of Data*

The Second World War entailed for the history of art upsets almost as remarkable as those for physics or the geography of transport; it involved the modification of certain aspects of nomenclature, which in turn affected interpretation.

As usual, organised pillage of public and especially private collections was one of the direct consequences of the conflict; expositions organised in Paris and Rome immediately after the war showed the extent of the greed for art.[1] The recovery commissions set up files which collected or accumulated information while violating the secrecy of private property.

For the first time in military history, it seems, headquarter staffs included special fine-arts sections. At certain times these performed a kind of police service, setting up a watch over certain buildings and thus forestalling their destruction; at other times they functioned like a health service, in order to limit and repair damages. The history of the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives Section (MFAA) of the Fifth Allied Army has been told in detail.[2] Never has the destruction—unavoidable or not—of old

[1] *Les chefs d'œuvre des collections françaises retrouvés en Allemagne*, Paris: Orangerie, July–August, 1946; *Mostra delle opere d'arte recuperate in Germania*, Rome: Palais de Venise, 1948; *Seconda Mostra, ibid.*, 1950.

[2] F. Hart, *Florentine Art under Fire*, Princeton, N.J., 1949.

monuments had more attentive observers. A photographic inventory of ruined or damaged buildings in Europe appeared in 1946, which recorded, though in insufficient detail, the catastrophies of Novgorod, Monte Cassino, Padua, Cologne, Dresden, Caën, and Saint-Malo.[3] During the fall of 1945 a British mission conducted an investigation of the paintings of the Berlin Museum which had been destroyed during the fire of the 'Flakturm Friedrichshain'. After some futile attempts to obtain from the Soviet authorities precise information on the circumstances of the disaster (May 5–8, 1945) and on what had survived, the catalogue of the cruel loss was finally made public.[4] It has already been observed that the only precedent to this disaster is the destruction of the Alcazar of Madrid in 1734. Nearly all the masters of all the schools are on the list—Rubens, Tintoretto, Botticelli, Chardin. Since the Russian Government has never issued a precise statement, it is not known whether some part of the collections of the Dresden Museum has survived or whether, as is more probable, another irreparable calamity is to be added to that of Berlin.

These events have made a profound impression. Obviously many works of art had been jeopardised by the lack of proper attention, protection, and appreciation. By a kind of compensatory reflex, which was in fact appropriate to the resumption of peaceful relations, expositions multiplied at a rate never before seen. Italy took the lead with several memorable exhibitions in Venice and Milan; the most famous pieces evacuated from the great museums of Central Europe were shown in the capitals of the two hemispheres with a success hardly to be exaggerated. Vast retrospectives of contemporary masters in New York, Berne, Amsterdam, and Paris conferred upon the twentieth century the benefits of this intense interest. The procession of masterpieces has been quite without precedent.[5] But as the fashion waxes, attention must be drawn to the danger of insufficiently worked out expositions which misinform the spectator, and, above all, to the inadmissible regime of to-and-fro to which too many fragile works have been subjected at the very time when museums are being perfected

[3] H. La Farge, *Lost Treasures of Europe*, New York, 1946.

[4] C. Norris, 'The Disaster at Flakturm Friedrichshain; A Chronicle and List of Paintings', *The Burlington Magazine*, Dec. 1952; 'Berliner Museen Berichte', *N.F.*, II (1952).

[5] The division and regrouping of European collections was conducted for the first time on a grand scale by the Republic and the Empire of France; it coincided with the completely new idea of a national museum. From 1794 to 1815 Paris had the most sumptuous museum which had ever existed. Cf. H. van der Tun, *Les Vieux peintres des Pays-Bas et la critique artistique en France de la première moitié du XIX^e siècle* (Publications de la Faculté des Lettres de Lille, IX), Paris, 1948.

everywhere to assure the best conditions for their conservation. The International Commission of Museums (ICOM) has been called upon to consider the question and was to debate it last summer: as yet an adjustment has by no means been found.

The works which engage the historian's study thus have no inviolable refuge from crime, disaster, stupidity, or disorder. But the loss of buildings and paintings and the disputes about them have had a compensation in the bringing to light of a rather surprising number of unknown or forgotten objects and pictures. In the more active provinces of France and Italy programmes have been set up for the cleaning, clearing away, and correct presentation of quantities of material which had been more or less completely neglected.[6] We live in an era of discovery: in addition to the finding of paleolithic 'frescoes' at Lascaux in the Dordogne, which is undoubtedly one of the events of the century, there is not a year when a new Duccio, La Tour, or Rembrandt is not announced. An unknown Masolino has just been acquired by the National Gallery of London. An archaic Greek (or Greco-Etruscan) vase of the sixth century, of exceptional dimensions and surprising quality was found a few months ago at Chatillon-sur-Seine, and has been the marvel of archeologists. In Greece, Syria, and North Africa, works of art buried at the bottom of the sea and sites hidden by the sands of the desert have lately been discovered by submarine or aerial exploration, which have become useful archaeological techniques.[7] Study of mural paintings of the Middle Ages has made more progress in the last ten years than in any previous half century; numerous remains in the west of France, and, above all, the remarkable ensembles of Münster in the Grisons and of Castelseprio to the north of Milan have recently been brought to light. The abrupt appearance of so many works of high quality has upset accepted chronologies, imposed new historical relations, and called for different interpretations; and so it is quite understandable that scholars are more cautious with regard to peremptory surveys which do not sufficiently account for missing information; synthesis has descended to the more modest rank of a working hypothesis.

The material condition of works of art, on the other hand, requires new

[6] For example, *Peintures méconnues des églises de Paris*, Paris: Musée Galliéra, 1946.

[7] R. Demangel, 'Recherches sous-marines en Grèce', *C.R. Acad. Inscr. et Belles Lettres*, 1950, p. 322; A. Poiderard and J. Lauffray, *Sidon, aménagements antiques du port de Saida*, Beyrouth, 1951; J. Baradez, *Forsatum Africae, Recherches Aériennes sur l'organisation des confins sahariens à l'époque romaine*, Algiers, 1949; R. Bloch, in *Annales, économies, sociétés, civilisations*, July–Sept. 1952.

attention. Paintings which have been recovered under whitewash, often in buildings in bad repair, have suffered. Is it better to treat them in place or detach them for transportation to a museum? The systematic 'detachment' of frescoes is indicated in all cases in which they are far from the great centres and likely to suffer from depredation or neglect. It has also been debated whether it would not be better to replace all works of this type *in situ* with copies to ensure the conservation of the originals. In fact, usually the inverse practice has prevailed; methodical production expeditions have made possible exhibitions of 'copies' of, e.g., the frescoes of Yugoslavia, and the establishment in Paris of a museum devoted entirely to casts and facsimiles. But the problem remains unsolved. Important precedents exist in the field of sculpture. No visitor is surprised to find a copy of Michelangelo's 'David' in the Piazza Signoria or casts of the prophets of Donatello in the niches of the Campanile, the originals having been transferred long since to museums. The dangers of alteration are much more alarming in the case of paintings. As long as forty years ago, Émile Mâle noted reproachfully that the frescoes in churches he visited at the end of the last century had often become unreadable. At the prehistoric grotto Font de Gaume, discovered in 1901, the sweating of the stalactites, accelerated by the movement of air, will soon obliterate the paintings. Each time that a work of this type has been made accessible, even with such approved precautions as grates and double doors, the process of deterioration is hastened. Finally, how can we ignore the outrages committed almost everywhere by stupid visitors? We may even ask ourselves whether the curiosity stimulated by the historians is not sometimes fatal to its object. In any case, one of the urgent tasks of science is to invent new devices for protection and regular control.

The various activities which might be characterised as textual criticism, the commonest form of which is the *expertise*, have also been restrained by a constantly increasing severity of discipline. These methods become stricter in proportion to the number of works which have been tampered with or which in any case are highly dubious if not wholly worthless. But much as they depend upon the techniques of analysis, these activities are no less dependent upon the catalogues and other reference literature, and upon the techniques of comparison which they facilitate. The primary scientific duty of a museum is the setting up of a consistent and regularly re-edited catalogue. The severity of present-day requirements demands the revision of all items and their references; such a work as Martin Davies's recently published catalogue of the Italian

paintings of the National Gallery in London is a model of precise and uncompromising erudition.[8] But it would be an understatement to point out that such a work lies beyond the reach of the average public. Instead of gratifying the taste for anecdote and indulging in brilliant commentary, the author undertakes the classification of the information about each picture in such a spirit of criticism—indeed of scepticism—as suits the historian and disappoints the layman.[9] The divergence of old and new is rather harshly underscored by a passage which establishes that an artistic personality, glorified and even popularised fifty years ago, is nothing more than a convenient fiction. Such legends, which have been accepted and continue to be repeated in the literature of art, are exploded one by one. Thus the nomenclature of works of art, in a general way, is undergoing serious modifications which concern the historian. But the appearance of the works themselves, whether architecture, sculpture, painting, or the minor arts, is also often in the process of drastic change: I am referring to 'restorations' which are now very much in the news. A heated controversy broke out in England during the years 1936–7 on the occasion of a thorough cleaning of Velasquez's great portrait of 'Philip IV in Brown and Gold'; it was revived ten years later when the partial reorganisation of British collections led to a renewal of the 'cleaning' campaign, now applied to works of great value—the 'Flora' of Rembrandt, the 'Chapeau de Paille' of Rubens, and Botticelli's 'Mars and Venus'—where the suddenly revivified epidermis was rather disconcerting.[10] The accumulation of old varnish which stifles so many paintings is a source of illusion, and there is no reason to perpetuate last century's insipid taste for these wretched uniform colours; but it is also an illusion to believe in mechanical cleaning methods, and probably there is no museum in the world which has not committed really irreparable errors during the sudden vogue for cleaning. Everybody admits that 'disincrustation' in the case of the 'Night Watch' was justified. It signifies a decisive operation of historical criticism. But there is reason to believe that the taste of the 1950s for bright colours and raw effects is itself only an episode.

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[8] Martin Davies, *The Earlier Italian Schools*, London: National Gallery, 1951. On the exemplary value and certain dangers of this work, see R. Longhi, *Paragone*, No. 27, March, 1952.

[9] All the same, precise norms ought to be established for exhibition catalogues; a good example is the catalogue published in connexion with the exhibition of Vitraux français du XIIème au XVIème siècles, Paris: Pavillion de Marsan, May–Oct., 1953.

[10] *An Exhibition of Cleaned Pictures (1936–47)*, London: The National Gallery, 1947. Preface by Philip Hendy.

Cleaning and restoration are related. Brilliant results have been obtained by specialised institutes, notably in Italy, where wonders have been accomplished in the restoring of collapsing structures like San Francesco in Rimini or the frescoes in Viterbo.[11] The progress of technique facilitates ever more daring manipulations, but the idea of authenticity has become more fluid, and it is not without concern that we note how, in the past, theories could be distorted because of the imprudence of restorers. Particular attention should be paid therefore to the precautions observed in Brussels during the treatment of the Ghent Altar-piece. The afflictions suffered by this crucial work had accelerated its deterioration. In 1948 an international commission established the standards for restoration; in no case was the full thickness of the layers of old varnish removed, while the portions in danger of peeling were made adherent by an impregnation of wax and resin. The restored polyptich was exhibited in October, 1951, and a complete record of the work of restoration has just been published.[12] It will be epoch-making; in particular, it establishes what can reasonably be expected of examination by X-ray. Its conclusions confirm the reservations of the Louvre laboratory, which, the year before, had devoted its entire resources to an examination of the case of Leonardo da Vinci.[13] Technical means alone are never the decisive factor: valid judgment always depends upon the sensibility of the technician, who, in turn, must refer to the historian.

Finally, a confused and picturesque note is added to the situation by certain unpleasant practices. The entry of art into the common culture during the last fifty years has brought with it an extraordinary development of commerce in art objects and paintings.[14] It has naturally increased since the war, and for the first time the great hereditary collections have been opened to the experts. But the traffic in works of art does not proceed on the level of morality which might be desired; in changing hands, such works are too often exposed to manipulations which allow attributions as empty as they are flattering. The avidity and *naïvité* of innumerable

[11] *La Mostra del Restauro*, Vicenza, 1949, should be mentioned for its clarity in the exposition of principles.

[12] P. B. Coremans, *L'Agneau mystique au laboratoire, examen et traitement* ('Les Primitifs flamands', III, Contribution à l'étude, 2), Antwerp, 1953.

[13] 'It must be definitely acknowledged that the paintings of Leonardo da Vinci resist and elude radiographic examination.' M. Hours, 'La peinture de Leonard vu au laboratoire', *L'Amour de l'art*, No. 67–69, Spring, 1953.

[14] Histories of collectors of the last century have begun to appear: F. Steegmüller, *The Two-Lives of J. J. Jarves*, New Haven, Conn., 1951; also histories of the great dealers: S. N. Behrmann, *Duveen*, New York, 1951.

collectors, who bother about details with an intensity which is in inverse proportion to their competence, would be amusing if it did not favour an atmosphere of sham and artifice. It is indeed significant that the most sensational postwar event has been the discovery of faked Vermeers.[15] The history of 'fakers' is no longer a negligible aspect of the history of art.[16] The connoisseur finds them most illuminating, and indeed they are a singularly sensitive gauge of the vagaries of taste. According to Max. J. Friedländer, the only authority on this matter is time. The successful faker of Donatellos of 1870 would find his limitations easily exposed by the experts of 1930. We laugh at the blunders of our fathers: our descendants will laugh at ours.[17] Thus the historian sees the cornerstones of his serenely objective study crumble one after another, and he must give up ready-made notions, among which the wholly modern—and all too often merely commercial—idea of the 'autograph work' is not the least. Nowadays it dominates *expertise*, but it can hardly be applied to all old works of art. By this reckoning, as Robert de la Sizeranne noted a half-century ago, nearly all 'antiques' ought to be considered spurious, since they are hotch-potches of heterogeneous parts. And what are we to think of masters who, like Philippe de Champaigne, developed by copying mediocre works until one fine day they produced something which surpassed the original? And in the case of the Renaissance and the classic age, it is a mistake to differentiate too hastily the masters from the shop.

The pseudo-scientific 'Morellinaism' of the nineteenth century, which purported to discover the infallible sign of the great master in such innocent and involuntary details as the forms of fingers, ears or nostrils is now completely bankrupt. The intelligence and sincerity of Bernard Berenson have reduced this science to the precise point where it destroys itself: the method of 'oto . . . rhinology' only sets out in detail the evidences of sentiment, which are implied in and proved by all thorough-going analysis.[18] The main fact of the present state of the history of art is that it has finally arrived, by a tortuous route, at this modest secret. This is

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[15] Cf. Coremans, *Van Meegeren's faked Vermeers and de Hooghs, a Scientific Examination*, London, 1950; and the attempt at discussion of J. Decoen, *Back to the Truth: Vermeer—Van Meegeren, Two Genuine Vermeers*, Amsterdam, 1951.

[16] *Magazine of Art*, vol. 41, May, 1948: special issue on forgeries; O. Kurz, *Fakers*, London, 1948; H. Tietze, *Copies, Imitations, Forgeries*, London, 1950; exposition of 'faux tableaux', Amsterdam, 1952; J. Rewald, 'Modern Fakes and Modern Pictures', *Art News*, vol. 52, March 1953.

[17] Max J. Friedländer, *Art and Connoisseurship*, London, 1952.

[18] B. Berenson, *Metodo e attribuzioni*, Florence, 1947.

demoralising only if we would treat this discipline as something more than a certain human order. In other words, it becomes more strict as it becomes more aware of its subjectivity. There are few artists more fashionable than Caravaggio. This master, like Piero della Francesca, has been revived by the twentieth century; the old school remains unenthusiastic and emphasises his 'incongruities' where the newer historians, attracted by a harsh and enigmatic personality, see only astonishing liberties. Nearly all of the best-known historians have been occupied with this study; an exhibition which attracted the attention of the public in general to this artist had an immense and unexpected success. The situation seems to be ideal: the devotion of the museums and the popularisation of the work are for once in accord with the exigencies of knowledge. Before the end of the 1951 exposition, a magnificent 'Judith Slaughtering Holophernes' was found in a Roman collection, and several months later, a 'Concert' of youths was discovered in England. Unprecedented numbers of X-ray photographs were made of the great canvases of San Luigi dei Francesi; 170 plates were required for the analysis of the complete surface of the Vocation and the Martyrdom of St. Matthew. The results have been completely baffling, and nothing remains of the chronology erected on the basis of stylistic evolution; the painter did not develop regularly, as it had seemed, toward a 'dark' manner, based on great contrasts of light and shade. The new data contradict the plausible order and the dating of the works. After all these discoveries, these 'scientific' tests and a formidable exchange of the most intelligent interpretations, one erudite scholar rather severely concludes that the study of Caravaggio, an extremely controversial subject, has hardly reached the stage of 'popularisation' except in crude form.[19]

This is today the crux of the problem. Like all other disciplines, the history of art is faced with the disturbing but irrecusable fact that it is largely responsible to its object. The work of art, however concrete or material it may be, evolves, changes and moves, takes part in the life of its time, and is even transformed by scientific information which brings about its discovery, its restoration, and its placement. But the moment we become aware of this situation, its gravity is increased out of all measure. With exhibits, books, reproductions, and even films, we have entered upon the decisive and necessarily rather short period which completes the

[19] Lionello Venturi, 'Studi radiografici sul Caravaggio', *Atti Acad. Naz. Lincei, Scienze Morali*, VIII, V (1952); R. Jullian and J. Bousquet, *Revue des Arts*, III (1953), No. 2; D. Mahon, *The Burlington Magazine*, June 1953 (from whom the above phrase is taken).

vulgarisation of the culture of art. Here it is not a question of the value of a scientific discipline but one of popular adaptation and simplification of its more or less superseded data. Within a few years 'general histories' of art have multiplied, and some have been accorded an enthusiastic reception.[20] The book collections, printed in large editions, have based their appeal on the illustration of engaging details and of colour reproduction which so easily makes its effect but the correct use of which is in need of definition.[21]

This whole development would be hard to explain without the prestige of the works of André Malraux, the theoretician of the revolution which has taken place. *Les Voix du Silence* both solemnises and analyses the entry of art-in-general into contemporary culture by virtue of new means of reproduction, which make of the history of art 'the history of the photographable'. Art now finds itself the centre of perspectives which seek man in history; 'man' has become the only value to which we still dare refer ourselves. Modern art, less submissive to mere physical appearance, is based upon premises comparable to those which sustained the Byzantine artist in his stylisations; we move in a new realm of the 'sacred' which establishes a new reverence for art and a new obsession with its history. However, we are not dealing here with 'science' but rather with a 'revival of the mythological' based on the idea that all creations of the human past participate in our destiny. Surely we have here, as E. R. Curtius observes, the first complete reaction of French thought to German 'historicism';[22] according to Malraux, we live in history as religious civilisations lived in God. But historicism is not a scientific theory, it is a spiritual attitude, a form of vision. The history of art is here apotheosised: Malraux imposes it on all present-day civilisation. In the general crises of systems, this extreme and fearless interpretation, which is based in fact on a deep fund of knowledge, has an inordinate weight, not as a methodology but as a metaphysics.

The preoccupation with the museum—imaginary or not—in effect aggravates the misunderstanding we have described. The works grouped and presented in the galleries—or collected in de luxe editions—are like a self-made millionaire in the last stage of his career, in which the marvellous

[20] E. M. Upjohn, P. Swingert, J. G. Mahler, *History of World Art*, New York, 1949; H. Leicht, *Kunstgeschichte der Welt*, Basle, 1951, English ed. London, 1952; E. H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, London, 1950, 2nd ed., 1952.

[21] M. Zahar, *L'Accord des œuvres d'art avec leurs justes procédés de reproduction en couleurs*, Paris, privately printed, 1953.

[22] E. R. Curtius, *Die Tat*, Zürich, July 5, 1952.

display of all his property is completed. A novelist with a fantastic bent might well describe the strange times to come when, all the antiques having been systematically absorbed by collections and the collections, in their turn, after a more or less long life, having been deposited in the museum, a monstrous organisation will have to be devised to conserve, divide, and present all the artistic creations of mankind and to furnish on demand copies of those things which can no longer be moved. The imaginary museum, where each pursues his errant way, is perhaps nothing more than a short stopover on the way to a formidable warehouse, where sham and boredom will hold sway. The history of art will thus have every opportunity for complete realisation. This, exactly, is the problem.

Mankind would often be better served by restoring works of art, under the historian's guidance, to those who created them and those whose uses they had served, than by allowing indefinitely their specious display in the enervating vistas of the imaginary museum or by contemplating them respectfully in the official conservatory. Far from serving as academic referee of such a development, the history of art should exercise a compensatory function with other standards and other ends. To repeat the words of a philosopher: The museum, transforming tentative but dynamic endeavours into static 'works' makes possible a history of painting . . . But it adds a false prestige to the real value of the works by detaching them from the natural milieu in which they were born and makes us believe that destiny has always guided the hand of the artist . . . The museum makes the painter as mysterious for us as an octopus or a lobster. It is the historicity of death. And there is a historicity of life, but in the museum its image is no more than a fallen idol.[23] Such are the difficulties of a discipline constrained to distrust its best instruments, photography and the museum, to disown those whom it inspires, and to offer resistance to its own prodigious success.

2. *Dissociation of Theories*

The art of mankind constitutes, from its beginnings and throughout the world, a kind of totality, where nothing is ever wholly lost, where everything is coloured by the play of interactions, rivalries, and influences, and where we seek to isolate the episodes interesting to us either because they are familiar or because, quite the contrary, they are strikingly unfamiliar.

[23] M. Merleau-Ponty, 'Les language indirect et les Voix du silence', *Les Temps Modernes*, June, 1952.

This rather theoretic idea is in the process of becoming one of the regulatory principles of history; the exploration of the planet is completed by a full picture of the civilisations which find expression in the practice of art in its various lands, and an analogous work has permitted a knowledge of their sequences, reducing gaps which were thought to be impassable, filling the many lacunas, strengthening in every way the bonds which we can discern everywhere in analogous phenomena, calculated borrowings, rivalry of skills, hidden survivals and 'renaissances'. 'Art is now one of the strongest evidences of the fundamental unity of mankind.'[24]

In some degree this unity is one of the attributes of art which has been eloquently confirmed by the discovery of the paintings at Lascaux. The fauna represented, bison, deer, cows, ponies, indicate a society belonging in part to the Aurignacian, in part to the Magdalenian, only very roughly datable between thirty and ten thousand years before our era. The high quality of these pictures is extraordinarily impressive, quite apart from the fact that we remain monumentally ignorant of the life or the beliefs of their authors: it is *homo artifex* rather than *homo faber* or *homo sapiens*, whose presence we sense. These murals underline the fact that, contrary to pseudo-scientific emphasis, art cannot be explained by any other thing; it can no more be deduced than life; at any rate; this problem should not embarrass the historian. It is his business to grasp and to characterise those systems of forms capable of meaning, which make of art a kind of language and which are called 'styles'. It is one of man's most valuable accomplishments. Ever since the time of the Lascaux paintings, they have been more complex and more varied than the conditions of life and their elementary needs would have required. Later generations have added animal figures with unforeseen nuances in colour and line; but certainly the most remarkable fact is the abrupt disappearance of this art. According to the Abbé Breuil, the appearance of 'abstract style' cannot be explained by a change in culture but by the arrival of another race. The first would have disappeared without posterity; consequently, mankind probably has two irreconcilable heredities in art.

In recent years serious efforts have been made to relate the history of art as closely as possible to that of societies. Indeed, it is clearly evident that they cannot be radically separated. But these systematic attempts have not been fortunate, and perhaps they will never be. For either they proceed from an adequately complete view of the society under consideration,

[24] Meyer Schapiro, 'Style', in *Anthropology Today*, Chicago, 1953, pp. 287–312.

including everything that we can know with exactness about it on the basis of its artistic manifestations, or else they limit themselves to only one fixed aspect, already known or knowable, of social life, including culture and religion, and thus run out of artifices to classify the variety of styles and the multiplicity of works according to this mechanism. For the Marxists, however, who have attempted demonstrations of this sort, this fixed aspect exists, the social motor force being by definition class struggle. The problem is clear enough—to find the unity inherent in an entire production which serves a precise liturgical and political end and whose characteristics are often fairly constant; but this method can only lead to the treatment of style as an entity related to another abstract idea, that of the behaviour pattern of a certain class, and the explanations thus obtained are nothing more than battles between abstractions; or, if the author is informed, admits the danger of hard and fast notions, and concedes that changes in style and in social structure are not necessarily contemporaneous—they lead to absurd and pointless labyrinths next to which the speculations of the late Scholastics seem almost simple. Nothing is 'explained' by pointing out that a hieratic art like that of sixth-century Greece is the product of an aristocratic and feudal society; nor is anything 'explained' by toying with the Marxist theory of 'internal contradictions' to the extent of insisting that in seventeenth-century France there occurred a *rapprochement* and curious interaction between classic (that is to say, rationalist, bourgeois . . .) and baroque (that is to say, emotional, aristocratic . . .) tendencies and in consequence a style which is self-contradictory, viz., a classic baroque.[25] One must proceed in exactly the opposite direction: solely concrete aspects of patronage, the action of groups of artists or art lovers, their needs and their customs, express the relations of art and society, and their unceasing mutual adaptation. The pronouncedly positive analyses get us the farthest.

Another theory of Marxist inspiration, that of 'mystification', according to which every work of art arises from an 'ideal' fraud while at the same time adjusting itself to a 'real' authority (manifest or to be discovered), may seem more opportune. It has inspired a treatise on Florentine art of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, a thesis which indeed is vigorous and erudite enough to make it obvious that it was a method, not an individual scholar, that was checkmate. Ruskin became naïvely ecstatic before the allegories of the Spanish Chapel, which celebrate the triumph

[25] A. Hauser, *The Social History of Art*, London, 1951.

of the Dominican order; the sociologist reveals that the painter received an order in 1366 from a rich merchant obedient to the dictates of the Prior. The Dominicans' assiduous cultivation of the upper middle class of drapers had almost ousted the Franciscans, and here they were anxious to keep an effectual hold on the 'masses'; hence these paintings whose 'cultural conservatism' demonstrates easy concessions to public taste without being 'properly speaking, art of the petty middle classes'. Sixty years later, it is this refusal to make concessions which characterises Masaccio: 'It was from his artistic freedom and his penultimate upper-middle-class mentality, much more pronounced in such a sensitive and progressive artist than in the bulk of the upper-middle-class themselves, that Masaccio was able to create an upper-bourgeois and rationalist style which his contemporaries could not in its totality comprehend.'[26] One no longer knows who is mystified, but this presentation of an unappreciated Masaccio is completely arbitrary, as is also the explanation of the decoration of Santa Maria Novella by means of the machinations of the authorities. Another recent study sheds more light on the course of Tuscan painting after 1350 by reintroducing the idea of the accidental, which the systems deny. One or two generations of the fourteenth century seem to have wanted to revert, to the extent that this was possible after Giotto, to the hieratic composition of the thirteenth century; 'humanist' curiosity seems to have been suspended, and the trend was rather in the direction of Byzantine art—Boccaccio, for example, renouncing his youth. Can this be explained as voluntary decline, or social crisis? There was, in fact, a crisis, which resulted from the premature disappearance of the masters who had died of the plague, and from the poisoned atmosphere of Florence and Siena after the unprecedented ravages of the Black Death.[27]

However, the latest and most interesting tendency in the sociology of art is to consider art not as an instrument of authority but as a kind of non-stop factory, where humanity, impatient to surpass itself, works out the forms and the myths which impose themselves on the entire society. For instance, the vision of perspective space as we know it in the art of the Renaissance is not an arbitrary given quantity or the result of a realistic translation of experience; but a veritable aesthetic synthesis; the elaboration of linear perspective, which was to become familiar to the entire Occident,

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[26] F. Antal, *Florentine Painting and Its Social Background*, London, 1948.

[27] Millard Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death*, Princeton, 1951.

coincides with the formation of a style and participates in its conventions.[28] There is no more impressive testimony to the profound function of art; but it is a mistake to seek here a 'sociological' explanation; the 'social' space of which Durkheim speaks has no relation to the mathematical speculation of Brunelleschi or Piero, who, as research has shown, did not aspire beyond 'the level of speculation of the studio'. The only similarity between the painting of 'primitives' and the beliefs of a 'primitive' society is the use of a word. Moreover, in rightly observing that 'the architecture of the Renaissance was painted before it was built', it is admitted that constructed space like imagined space is a conquest of the artist, and thus of man, but not that of a 'human group (in the sense of the whole of society) trying to forge a new system of signs and acts'; and that 'the new interpretation of the world' is collective. That amounts to a tacit assumption that the problem is solved.

The realm of collective representation where there is a constant contact with art is that of religion: man does not move in the world of the sacred without images, symbols, or temples. The grotto of Lascaux, never inhabited, seems indeed to have been for thousands of years a sanctuary dedicated to rite and magic. Archaic societies have long been reconstructed in terms of their buildings, statues, and liturgies, and it is undoubtedly in the cult of the image that the Christian Middle Ages conserved the most intimate link with the antique world. Many astonishing hagiographic legends are born of the need to explain and justify a statue or picture: a recent study of the cult of the Virgin, which merits further pursuit, has collected the extraordinary traditions about seventeen statues in a single French department.[29] And it is imprudent to suppose that all these sentiments disappeared leaving no trace; their attachment to symbols is often only a method of saving them.

One cannot investigate the arts of Asia without rediscovering and valuing them anew. As one of its later interpreters has written, in India all art, like all life, is dedicated to religion, and furthermore, one has only to consider the great variety of interpretations of a single theme of Hindu art, like the 'chola' series of images of the dancing Shiva, or, if you will,

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[28] P. Francastel, *Peinture et Société, Naissance et destruction d'un espace plastique: De la Renaissance au Cubisme*, Lyon, 1951.

[29] R. Lecotté, *Le culte populaire de la Vierge et des saints dans le diocèse actuel de Meaux*, Paris, 1951; H. R. Hahnloser, 'Du culte de l'image au moyen age', in *L'umanesimo e il demoniaco nell' arte*, Rome, 1953.

those of the Christ of the Apocalypse in Romanesque art, to comprehend that tradition permits works which express individual creative power.[30] Consequently it is not the caste system, complicated though it may be, which governs the interpretation of Indian sculpture; an inert and monotonous social structure allows free play to a whole range of complex experiences, in which subtle and vivid metaphysical dreams are reunited and fixed by art. Here the serious and the gay have an equal role, and from the outside it is only too easy to misunderstand the profane, ironic, or familiar aspect of certain works, just as it is possible to misunderstand the variety of minutely codified ritual gestures which, by assuming the identity of the human and the divine, of cosmos and human body, permits the consoling coincidence of the person and the All.[31] But we are not dealing with a civilisation fulfilled and superseded, and in any case, these creations of Asia would suffice to indicate how art is apt to constitute a reality by itself.

The attempt to reduce all manifestations of art to utility is thus hopeless, because art derives from an activity which obstinately tends to introduce into the practical forms of convenience or of custom an element which surpasses or alleviates function. To use for a moment the vocabulary of anthropology, this particular element, by means of which all that was summary in the sociological systems of the last century tends to be corrected, can be designated as *ludus*. This notion of 'play' introduces consideration of the *otium*, of a practice at the same time exact and disinterested; art has no use for dreamlike passivity, but requires festive energy, and is committed in advance to everything that enhances life and activity.[32] There is, in the modern world, an order of more or less distorted factors, ranging from a certain type of eroticism to a certain type of contemplation. It would be well to restore this order if we are to avoid being duped by external or merely convenient frameworks in which the historical explanation tends to compress the creations of the past.

A revision no less profound has taken place at the expense of so-called formalist systems, which seek to articulate the history of art by a kind of physiology of vision, fluctuating between one type of representation and another and developing thus analogous cycles. These doctrines have had the great merit of teaching how to see before pretending to explain. By

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[30] B. Rowland, *The Art and Architecture of India, Buddhist, Hindu and Jain* ('The Pelican History of Art'), London, 1953.

[31] J. Auboyer, 'Mudra et Hasta, ou le langage par gestes', *Oriental Art*, 1950.

[32] J. Huizinga, *Homo ludens*, Amsterdam, 1939. French ed., Paris, 1951; J. Pieper, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*, London, 1952.

concentrating on the 'how', on specific qualities, and on the organisation of a work, Wölfflin produced brilliant analyses of real worth to all; but the value of the schemes on which they rest is limited. Wölfflin had been struck by the fact that 'forms' tend to a coherent organisation, to a system; this is paramount in the order of the Gothic and in the calculated structures of the Renaissance; but they seek opposite poles of attraction. Wölfflin identifies two such poles, characterised by the predominance, respectively, of the linear or of the pictorial, of planes either parallel to the surface of the picture or oblique to and deepening it—in short, classic or baroque poles. But this antithesis was not only the result of analysis; it was a dialectic which had been realised in history itself; it is to be found fully deployed in the transition from the sixteenth century, dominated by the classic vision, to the seventeenth, secured to the baroque. The coercion which an exaggerated schematisation exercised upon the facts is only too evident; it is strange indeed that an historian, imprisoned within his own mechanism, had finally to ask himself, with some embarrassment, how, the evolution of forms being irreversible, a neo-classic phase could arise after the completion of the baroque in the rococo. Nevertheless these views have had an immense success and have served as models for historians of poetry, music, and religion, who in their turn have discovered the baroque aspect of the seventeenth century;[33] at the price of a transposition which made it signify something entirely different from what Wölfflin intended, this idea now designates an animated, emotional and highly coloured vision of the world rather than a certain organisation of effects. In this sense, the baroque can be found everywhere; the current tendency of the historian is therefore to avoid the term altogether in order not to be constrained to treat as exceptions the numerous manifestations which escape the mechanism of epochs. If it is to retain any historical usefulness at all, it should be used to label, for example, the style of the generation dominated by Rubens and Bernini.[34]

Reluctance to generalise seems to characterise the present state of the history of art. Does this indicate a general trend toward a third type of doctrine, like that of Benedetto Croce, according to whom the personality of the artist is the sole reality which could and ought to be grasped by the historian? In Italy, this is readily believed.[35] Croce has carried on, in the

[33] G. Weise, 'Considerazioni di storia dell' arte intorno al Barocco', in *Rivista della Letteratura Moderna*, 1952, pp. 5–14.

[34] G. Briganti, in *Paragone*, No. 1, Jan. 1950; No. 3, Mar. 1950; No. 13, Jan. 1951.

[35] Carlo L. Ragghianti, *L'arte e la critica*, Florence, 1951.

course of his long career, a sort of guerrilla warfare against schematisations and against the subjugation of the concrete to abstractions; he would bring all investigation back to an immediate consideration of the 'poetic act', to an understanding of this 'intuition carried to expression' which alone makes a work of art and which, in the long run, is what interests the spectator. Nothing is more stimulating and satisfying in principle, but Croce did not and could not establish anything resembling a history of art. The completely ideal identification of history and criticism takes us to the final stage, to the hour of the Last Judgment, where the absolute values are unravelled and become comprehensible, illuminating and justifying the whole development; but in the actual state of the world, the subjectivity which supports critical judgment is liable to lassitude and exhaustion, and the connexion between works is not often apparent except in a confused and sketchy way. It serves no purpose to say that intuition, being a kind of absolute in which the content discovers the form which realises it, exists or does not exist; and that, if it exists, technique and workmanship are of little importance. 'In fact, we do not see a painting with the eye, but we seize it with all the forces of the spirit'; one moves from one masterpiece to another only by descending to considerations of content, iconography, or technique, which depend on the prose, not the poetry, of a culture, not of its art. Unfortunately the history of art functions only in postulating and in exploiting everything that is ruled out here: the different purpose of each art, the value of the techniques of each, above all, the importance of the life history of the artist, his development, his discoveries, and his crises, and finally, the external radiance which characterises the masterpiece. In this way, the masters of the Italian school, while they remain faithful to the principles of 'Crocism', have allowed themselves the necessary latitude.[36]

The idea that the forms of art have a certain tendency to work on themselves and that, to a certain degree, its practitioners both great and small need only obey the forms, remains a fundamental acquisition: each style is relative to that which precedes it; the image is always created by the image. The finished work of art possesses powers which surpass it, but which the genius is able to control. In both Oriental and Occidental civilisations this view is particularly appropriate to the arts of the classic tradition. But the question today is to know how far it can be extended to all art. The answer is simple only for Bernard Berenson, who has just

[36] R. Longhi, *Proposti per una critica d'arte* (lecture at the P.E.N. Club), 1951.

set down the conclusions of his long experience as connoisseur and historian. The essential quality of the work of art is to intensify, by the agreement of representation and form, the vitality of the spectator; therefore it is necessary to preserve the sense of hierarchy among the arts. Painting and sculpture, which celebrate the beauty of the human body, ought to be placed rigorously above mere manufacture and ornament. Not only is it absurd to continue to prefer the curiosities of barbaric art, devoid of precise resonance, to the perfect humanity of classic creations, attentive to proportion, space, and a just feeling for form; but furthermore there is no other means of understanding the true order of history than to project oneself into these 'humanist' and 'naturalist' visions, and not—as scholars are too willing to do—remain outside of them. To the question of the proper place of archaic creations or indeed of the whole Middle Ages, the answer is self-evident; they have no place, or at least they have no meaning except on the waysides of the royal road that goes from Greece to Rome, from Rome to Florence, and on to the masters of the past century. The history of the arts ought to be that of their renaissance. Lately it has been imagined that modes of vision, all of them sincere and authentic, would succeed one another endlessly; this is the fiction of scholars who have not looked closely enough at the works: This point of view is still imposed on the study of the Dark Ages, but it would be easy to free ourselves from it.[37]

This thesis, which has no less malice than conviction, brilliantly and insolently puts on trial the entire effort of the history of contemporary art. Quite apart from the personal prestige of its author, it ought to be cited to show how, in the crisis of systems of analysis, the man of taste can make a system of his personal bias. But this throws history into a kind of dead centre at the very moment when it is imperative to encompass and understand the sequence, that is to say the gradual unfolding, of art in general.

Theoretical discussions on method are becoming more and more rare, not because unanimity has been reached but because interest in 'categories' and 'a priori notions' has dwindled to negligibility.[38] The theories which make art merely a subdivision of general history fail to take into account the most significant properties of the works; those theories, on the

[37] B. Berenson, *Aesthetics and History*, London, 1950; *L'arco di Costantino, o della decadenza della forma*, Florence, 1953.

[38] P. Frankl, *Das System der Kunstwissenschaft*, Brünn and Leipzig, 1938; D. Frey, 'Zur Wissenschaftlichen Lage der Kunstgeschichte', in *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundfragen*, Vienna, 1946.

other hand, which preserve their independence by admitting an immanent logic of form, find difficulty in relating it to history; those which consider only the spiritual accomplishment of the creative act fail to recognise its humility, its ambiguities, and its wholly human obscurities. Here again, after a long effort, we are confronted by a modest secret. The manner in which the artist explores the world of form and seeks to construct coherent unities was well defined at the beginning of this century by Alois Riegl. The artist's particular behaviour and the special way in which art participates in history received the attention of H. Focillon. The sinuosities of his virtuosity, and his disarming complacency to formulas, cannot conceal the strength of his example. His authority derives from the fact that he frees himself from system in order to reopen the investigation at the most intimate and concrete level. The technical fact is fundamental, for art 'creates a world that is complex, coherent, and concrete, and inasmuch as this world exists in space and matter, its measures and its laws are not exclusively those of the spirit'. These new ensembles which it raises in space have an existence no less definite in time. Styles which appear at first glance to be obsolete can always be given new contemporary actuality and abruptly upset the equilibrium; medieval art cannot be understood without the interaction of the great protohistoric art of the Germans, and of the art of the civilisations dominated by history. But in order to understand the birth of the West which was the consequence, we must look into the facts of architecture, since each form of art has in turn its form of actuality.[39]

The history of art must find the adjustment of methods of investigation which converge upon the works, the men, and the styles. It embraces several disciplines, all of which must collaborate. The widespread dissociation of systems permits the reduction of its theoretical needs to three fundamental postulates which result from the theories which we have been discussing: the artist is not at work outside the world, but often against ordinary obviousness; the order of forms tends to systematisation and at any given moment contains only limited possibilities; the course of the arts depends on the appearance or the absence of masterpieces.

3. *Extension of Problems*

Research and ready access to results are far from being conveniently organised on an international scale. The role of the great congress is limited; except in Italy and the United States, where annual meetings and publications

[39] H. Focillon, *Piero della Francesca*, Paris, 1951; *L'an mil*, Paris, 1952.

issued at appropriate intervals assure contact among the various sectors of scholarship, there is a general lack of mediums for the exchange of elementary information, such as bulletins concerned with degrees, theses and works-in-progress, which would prevent dispersion of effort. But this is not, in fact, so widespread as one might expect; in a great many specialised fields—classical archeology, Byzantine studies, art of the first millenium, and medieval archeology, for example—regular and effective meetings have lately taken place. But, as has been pointed out in various quarters, in spite of two most useful congresses and numerous partial expositions, the commemoration of the fifth centenary of Leonardo da Vinci in 1952 revealed above all the difficulty of arriving at serious international collaboration: and such a collaboration would be indispensible for a chronological classification and critical publication of the writings, as they are understood today, of Leonardo.[40] The new general history of art edited by N. Pevsner, of which thirty-six volumes have been entrusted to scholars of different countries, has, however, a symptomatic value.

On the other hand, the fact that the various specialities are related becomes more and more evident, in spite of the different traditions of the specialists' countries. This convergence can be noted in four fields, where new lines of orientation are clearly evident. In the first place, scholarship is no longer limited to observing the manner in which representation of man and the world evolved in painting and sculpture; the interaction of these major arts with the applied and minor arts is freely considered, and in their relations we find the key to misunderstood phenomena. Recently revived interest in tapestry (which is related to furniture and hence to function) and in stained glass (where technique and function so manifestly predominate) illustrates this curiosity and the advantages deriving from it. After the Paris exhibitions which have been so largely responsible for the spread of knowledge of medieval tapestries (1947) and stained glass (1953), it can no longer be sustained that the techniques of wool and of coloured glass simply adapted the resources of contemporary painting to decorative uses; it would be more correct to say that they often put them to new uses, and that at times, as in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, they actually outdistanced and stimulated painting. Even more, it can be shown that the taste for stained glass had remarkable consequences for the conception of the wall and of the window in the course of the Gothic

[40] L. H. Heydenreich, *Kunstchronik*, Dec. 1952; G. Nicco-Fasola, *Il Ponte*, Jan. 1953; A. Chastel, *Humanisme et Renaissance*, XV (1953), I.

revolution. Compared with the stained glass of the twelfth century at Saint Denis, Saint Rémi, at Rheims and at Vendôme, that of the thirteenth century at Angers, in the nave of Chartres and at Sens shows a clear tendency toward darkening by the use of dark blues and duller reds. Everything tends to show that the need was felt to enlarge the windows in order to conserve sufficient light with the less bright stained glass, and that 'the tendency of architecture between 1140 and 1260 was evidently a corollary of the tendency of the darkening of stained glass windows'.[41] All these considerations will suggest the importance of the coming *Corpus vitrearum medii aevi*, a co-operative undertaking of France, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, and Sweden.

A greater value than ever is attached, therefore, to what can be called the decorative principle in art—though it will be no longer possible in the future to confuse it with its purely ornamental function, which is secondary and subordinate. Decorative value is at its peak when architecture, painting, and ornament complement one another and contribute to maintain man in a milieu which enhances, satisfies, and inspires him. Certain styles do not have great decorative possibilities and find themselves naturally in conflict with other forces of art. Thus it was that the accomplishment of Caravaggio, in whose work one sees gloom pierced by insidious oblique illuminations, could not conquer other domains of art, and Rome developed the bright painting of the Baroque, which could be easily adapted to the wall, the ceiling, and to the articulation of buildings, and lends itself to the effects of perspective so often abused and so dear to the era. The virtuosos of decoration, such as the Bibienas or Pietro da Cortona, are again attracting attention. The French cabinet-makers and designers of interiors of the early eighteenth century finally reached the ultimate consequences of this taste in furniture and the arrangement of the house.[42] The painting of impressionism, free and imprecise, poetic and anti-solid, brings us back in a sense to the situation of Caravaggio, and it is possible to interpret the general reaction which, around 1890, opposed this current, in particular that of the friends of Gauguin and Maurice Denis, as inspired by the need to recover the decorative function and to work out a way of painting which would be capable of suscitating the entire milieu. This is what happened with Vuillard,[43] and again with Cubism it had a brief

[41] L. Grodecki, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1949, 2.

[42] F. Kimball, *Le style Louis XV*, Paris, 1950.

[43] C. Schweicher, *Die Bildraumgestaltung, das Dekorative und das Ornamentale im Werke von Edouard Vuillard* (Zürich Dissertation), Trier, 1949.

springtime of interest. But a total accord has not been found, and one of the major reservations we might have against the so-called functional architecture of our time is the uncertainty which has paralysed too long its faculty for integrating a complete style of decoration: 'Whether a decorative emphasis of structural members in the architecture of steel and concrete will emerge, comparable to the decoration of Greek columns or Gothic ribbed vaulting, only the future can reveal. . . . The twentieth century offers few indices.'[44]

We must then consider the interaction among the arts; at the same time we are less and less content with the framework of the national schools to account for the major facts of the history of styles. One follows as far as possible in the wake of the great creative schools, but without simplifying the problem in advance by a summary notion of influence. Those potent 'hybrids', the architecture and decoration of Latin America and pre-Columbian Mexico, have thus come to receive the appreciation they merit; this has brought out notable facts, interesting for a common history of the two hemispheres: the role of the Franciscans as builders, a role which in Europe had practically lapsed, and the vogue for churches without aisles, which perhaps marks the 'return to the Gothic' inherent in the meridional Baroque.[45]

The division into national schools seems natural and is well established for European painting; yet a multitude of recent attempts aim precisely at surpassing them. It had long been the custom to consider the West, starting from the year one thousand, as a linked whole, where Romanesque art and Gothic art, more or less well conceived and solidly entrenched in each province, create a history of episodes. As recent exhibitions have underlined, the going-and-coming of the masters, the exchanges and the borrowings, were multiplied in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; it is impossible to consider separately Antonello da Messina and Petrus Christus, Fouquet, Piero della Francesca, and Martorell.

Although they are often hidden and unknown, the contacts between the Asiatic and Mediterranean world have been too uninterrupted and too rich in consequence to remain on a secondary plane. It is not surprising to find in the Islamic world the key to certain traits of medieval architecture; Moslem military construction up until the end of the twelfth century

[44] A. Whittier, *European Architecture in the Twentieth Century*, Vol. II, London, 1953, p. 221.

[45] G. Kubler, *Mexican Architecture in the XVIIth century*, 2 vols.; New Haven (USA), 1948; Diego Angulo Iniguez, *Historia del Arte Hispanoamericano*, vol. I, Madrid, 1946, vol. II, 1950; P. Kelemer, *Baroque and Rococo in Latin America*, New York, 1951.

is much more advanced than that of the Occident, and machicolations were known in Syria four centuries before those of Château Gaillard.[46] A modest detail; but others go even further. In 1254, the Franciscan Guillaume de Rusbruck, the first European traveller in Mongol China, discovered a little colony of French goldsmiths and artisans at the court of Karakorum. Brought from Hungary, these Christians owed their safeguard and immunity to their technical skills. One of them had made a tree of silver with dragons at the ends of the branches, which served as a 'magic' fountain, thus combining the Byzantine automaton tradition and the Asiatic taste for the marvellous, demonstrating the analogy between the Gothic and the Chinese monster.[47]

It would require a kind of mental revolution to consider such different artistic worlds as poles to be associated in the same perspective. Now and then this is rewarded by the quick elimination of false problems which have harassed generations. This is clearly what has resulted with regard to the architecture of the late Empire, Byzantium and pre-Romanesque Europe: a brilliant essay[48] has pointed out that the only way to avoid the Orient–Rome dilemma is to consider the art of the Empire as the origin of all the innovations which multiplied from the fourth to the sixth century in this privileged atmosphere. Up to the time of the Empire, Rome is indebted to the Hellenistic tradition which had already realised a first fusion of Greek and Oriental forms; but with the *domus aurea* of Nero, Roman architecture gave a new importance to interiors: the concrete vault permitted massive and uninterrupted space, the sumptuousness of its decorations made it highly-coloured and scintillating, and the wall seems to dissolve in picturesque incident—niches, windows, exedras. Thus from Syria to Gaul we find one pervasive formula. The burst of power in numerous centres entailed identical solutions in widely separated locations ever since the advent of Christianity, which called for churches of grand style and thereby intensified the activity of the builders: the beautiful tetragonal plan of San Lorenzo in Milan thus shows similarities with Syrian edifices, without having derived from them nor they from it. It suffices to recall that Antioch and Milan were both capitals of the late Empire.

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[46] K. A. L. Cresswell, *The Art Bulletin*, XXXV (1953), I.

[47] L. Olschki, *Guillaume Boucher, a French Artist at the Court of the Khans*, Baltimore, 1946; to be completed by J. Baltrusaitis, *Reveils et Prodiges*, forthcoming.

[48] J. B. Ward Perkins, 'The Italian Element in Late Roman and Early Medieval Architecture', in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, XXXIII, 1947.

We are on the way to similar solutions for the ages which followed. In the complex studies which these require, we have to retrace the routes of artistic forms in regions already in the course of differentiation but without precise boundaries. The discoveries of the frescoes of Münster and Castelseprio, already mentioned, and those of textiles and precious objects in the tombs of Las Huelgas at Burgos, disclose the error of thinking that there could be gaps of many centuries or even many decades to the west of Byzantium: the current tendency to change the date of certain French murals to the ninth or tenth century is the consequence of this new evidence.[49] And it is not surprising to find *Moyen-Age* in the so-called Mozarabic art produced in Spain by contact with Islam, an example which makes us realise the perpetual contact and competition of systems of coherent form.[50]

Attention to the 'spiritual' value of form has entered into an analogous new phase. E. Mâle, for the Christian Middle Ages, and A. Warburg and his school, for the Renaissance, have established this under its most immediate aspect in the figure arts, elaborating on precise bases the science of iconography. Predominating over everything, nowadays, is the so-called 'iconography of architecture'; although not expressed in images, as in painting, the symbol is no less a vital, irreducible element of all the arts of building. This symbolic principle is directly linked to the function, religious or secular, of the edifice. A work of exceptional fecundity[51] has thus shown, in the central-planned 'reliquary buildings' or *martyria* of the Christian Orient, 'The Octogon of Antioch' and the 'Apostolion' of Constantinople, one of the principal factors in the evolution of religious architecture after Constantine. This indication suggested the theme of an exhibit on the role of 'Symbolism in Architecture'; from the Pyramids to the urban compositions of Frank Lloyd Wright, from the temples of Peking to St. Peters in Rome we can follow this preoccupation with plastic form and spatial design which are to 'realise' the meaning of those noble structures.[52]

This intention can be perceived better than ever at the inception of Gothic architecture. The convergence of various means—archeological

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[49] P. Deschamps and M. Thibout, *La peinture murale en France*, I, *Le haut Moyen-Age et l'époque romane*, Paris, 1951.

[50] M. Gomez-Moreno, '*El arte arabe español hasta los Almohades, Arte mozarabe*' (Ars Hispaniae, III) Madrid, 1951.

[51] A. Grabar, *Martyrium, Recherches sur le culte des reliques et l'art chrétien antique*, 2 vol., Paris, 1943–46; 'Christian Architecture, East and West', *Archaeology*, II, 1948.

[52] 'Le symbolisme cosmique dans l'architecture', Paris: Musée Guimet, July–Nov., 1953.

(excavations), philological (editing of texts) and biographical, and the comparisons which can be drawn between the modes of style and those of contemporary thought—resulted in the high level of the work of Suger at St. Denis. The royal character of the edifice is not unimportant—it restituted the church where in 754 Pope Etienne II anointed Pepin and his sons, thus legitimising the strongest dynasty of the West. When the ministry of Louis VII came to modernise it, his purpose was to erect the boldest and tallest edifice by the methodical use of ribbing, the use—very likely before Chartres—of a portal with statue-columns forming a gallery, by the adaptation to the whole of scholarly stained glass, that is, 'typological' or based on the concordance of the two Testaments. A completely original philosophy was not needed for this memorable work. Suger knew just how far to go to give the interior space of the church that precise articulation and that singular light which transports us, according to his own words, 'into a strange region of the universe which does not wholly exist in the dust of the earth nor in the purity of the heavens'.[53]

It has been customary to regard this aptitude of architecture to symbolism as terminated with the advent of the Renaissance. Its rationalism was beyond discussion. An important study[54] of the principles diffused by Alberti and Palladio, principles which are in accord with the neoplatonic thought of their time, questions the correctness of this view. The return to a central design, with combinations of the circle and the square or, in terms of space, of the sphere and the cube, which 'imitate' the structure of the cosmos, and the adoption of systems of proportions, which permit the determination of the principal *caesura* of an edifice in the same way as musical consonances, indubitably imbued their works with a new order of symbolism. The search for true beauty inspired them; but this is precisely felt to be the highest level of expressive power.

Historians of modern architecture cannot be indifferent to this kind of reflection, and the rules of method proposed by one of them has related this new trend to their particular field. Every building has a meaning, a content which one comprehends by interpreting the space which it is its purpose to create. This space-content does not show in photographs: it must be experienced, because it is linked to emotions, to the activities of

[53] Sumner McKnight Crosby, *L'abbaye royale de Saint Denis*, Paris, 1953. The return to symbolic interpretation goes so far as to become paradoxical in: J. Sedlmayr, *Die Entstehung der Kathedrale*, Zurich, 1950; more syncretic: G. Grabmann, *Mittelalterliche Architektur als Deutungsträger*, Berlin, 1951.

[54] R. Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* (Studies of the Warburg Institute, 19), London, 1949, 2nd ed., 1952.

the men who move in it; it exists by the manner in which it colours and transforms them.[55] This, without doubt, is getting as far away as possible from the purely archaeological inquiry and the objective inventory, but history moves perforce between the two poles of nomenclature and interpretation. And this is made abundantly evident in two bulky catalogues which have been compiled, one on the churches of Florence[56] and one on French classic architecture[57], both covering grave deficiencies of information.

More extensive interest in the interrelation of techniques, the contacts between the artistic 'worlds' of each period, and the place of architecture in the life of man, is naturally enough accompanied by a more lively curiosity in the precise ways for circulating and propagating form. One notes that at historical high-points the miniature was able, in the Orient as in the Occident, to diffuse widely the essential principles of style; studies of Irish manuscripts or of the Benedictine scrolls emphasise its predominant role in certain milieux. Organised exhibits undertaken in France and Italy and minutely detailed catalogues have revealed the unexpected abundance of the production of the miniature, its fidelity to types codified by the masterpieces and thus its educative power.[58] Among the 'circulating values', the drawing is for moderns the most developed and most explicit one; its testimony is constantly invoked, and the accurate publication of drawings as important as those of the British collections suffices to render them indispensable to study.[59] But it is only today that we seem finally to have realised the revolution provoked in the course of the arts by the invention of processes of graphic reproduction; their importance and their rapid diffusion to the north and to the south of the Alps after 1470 were not a trivial episode. The print, which with Marc-Antonio Raimondi became a means of transcribing and diffusing the compositions of the masters, completely upset the habits of the studios. Even more, it hastened exchanges between different cultures. Pontormo,

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[55] B. Zevi, *Saper veder l'architettura*, Turin, 1951; *Storia dell'architettura moderna*, 1st ed., 1950, 2nd ed., 1952.

[56] Walter and E. Paatz, *Die Kirchen von Florenz*, Frankfurt a.M., 5 vol., 1943–53.

[57] L. Hautecœur, *Histoire de l'architecture classique en France*, IV books of 6 vol., in publication, Paris, 1943–52.

[58] M. Salmi and D. Fava, *I manoscritti della biblioteca Estense di Modena*, 1st vol. published, Florence, 1950.

[59] A. E. Popham and J. Wilde, *The Italian Drawings of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century* (*The Italian Drawings at Windsor Castle*), London, 1949; A. E. Popham and P. Pouncey, *Italian Drawings in the British Museum in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century*, London, 1950.

the best draughtsman of the Florentine school, was inspired at Galuzzo by the Passion engravings of the master of Nuremberg, and Vasari saw in this an inexplicable betrayal of the 'Italian manner'.[60] The role played by the engraving during the eighteenth century in the formation of the neoclassic style is striking; it can explain its aridity, but, on the other hand, it also is responsible for the original place of the Venetian engravers or of a Piranesi, Venetian by origin, who prepared further developments.[61]

Taking all these contributions into consideration, it should be possible to write the history of modern art with a new precision: all epochs have had their 'imaginary museum', and if we understand them better, by accepting the particularities of our own, we shall come closer to an understanding of those epochs themselves, without claiming any privileged position with regard to them. This is still the first step of history.

[60] R. W. Kennedy, *The Art Bulletin*, XXXIII (1951); W. M. Ivins, Jr., *Prints and Visual Communication*, London, 1953.

[61] Mary Pittaluga, *Aquafortisti veneziani del Settecento*, Florence, 1953; A. Hyatt Major, *Giovanni Battista Piranesi*, New York 1952. Attention should again be directed to the important results achieved by the critical publication of the drawings of Poussin by W. Friedländer, vol. II, London, 1949, and the engravings of Rembrandt by L. Münz, 2 vol., London, 1953.