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EXCERPT FROM **CUBISM**, 1912

To understand Cézanne is to foresee cubism. Henceforth we are justified in saying that between this school and previous manifestations there is only a difference of intensity, and that in order to assure ourselves of this we have only to study the methods of this realism, which, departing from the superficial reality of Courbet, plunges with Cézanne into profound reality, growing luminous as it forces the unknowable to retreat.

Some maintain that such a tendency distorts the curve of tradition. Do they derive their arguments from the future or the past? The future does not belong to them, as far as we are aware, and one be singularly ingenuous to seek to measure that which exists by that which exists no longer.

Unless we are to condemn all modern painting, we must regard cubism as legitimate, for it continues modern methods, and we should see in it the only conception of pictorial art now possible. In other words, at this moment cubism is painting.

Here we should like to demolish a very general misunderstanding to which we have already made allusion. Many consider that decorative considerations should govern the spirit of the new painters. They cannot see that a decorative work is the antithesis of the picture.

A decorative work exists only by virtue of its destination; it is animated only by the relationship existing between it and the given objects. Essentially dependent, necessarily incomplete, it must in the first place satisfy the mind so as not to distract it from the spectacle which justifies and completes it. It is an organ.

The true picture, on the other hand, bears its *raison d'être* within itself. It can be moved from a church to a drawing-room, from a museum to a study. Essentially independent, necessarily complete, it need not immediately satisfy the mind: on the contrary, it should lead it, little by little, towards the fictitious depths in which the co-ordinative light resides. It does not harmonize with this or that ensemble; it harmonizes with things in general, with the universe: it is an organism . . .

Dissociating, for convenience, things that we know to be indissolubly united, let us study, by means of form and colour, the integration of plastic consciousness.

To discern a form implies, besides the power to see and to be moved, a certain development of the mind; in the eyes of most people the external world is amorphous.

To discern a form is to verify against a pre-existing idea; this is an act that no one, save the man we call an artist, can accomplish without external assistance.

In the presence of some natural spectacle, a child, in order to co-ordinate his sensations and to subject them to mental control, compares them with his picture-book; a man, culture intervening, makes reference to works of art.

The artist, having discerned a form which presents a certain intensity or analogy with his pre-existing idea, prefers it to other forms, and consequently for we like to force our preferences on others -- he endeavours to enclose the quality of this form (the unmeasurable sum of the affinities perceived between the visible manifestation and the tendency of his mind) in symbol likely to affect others . . .

Let the picture imitate nothing; let it nakedly present its *raison d'être*. We should indeed be ungrateful were we to deplore the absence of all those things flowers, or landscape, or faces whose mere reflection it might have been. Nevertheless, let us admit that the reminiscence of natural forms cannot be absolutely banished; not yet, at all events. An art cannot be raised to the level of a pure effusion at the first step.

This is understood by the cubist painters, who indefatigably study pictorial form and the space which it engenders.

This space we have negligently confounded with pure visual space or with Euclidian space.

Euclid, in one of his postulates, speaks of the indeformability of figures in movement, so we need not insist upon this point.

If we wished to relate the space of the painters to geometry, we should have to refer it to the non-Euclidian mathematicians; we should have to study, at some length, certain of Riemann's theorems.

As for visual space, we know that it results from the agreement of the sensations of convergence and "accommodation" in the eye.

For the picture, a plane surface, the "accommodation" is useless. The convergence which perspective teaches us to represent cannot evoke the idea of depth. Moreover, we know that even the most serious infractions of the rules of perspective by no means detract from the spatiality of a painting. The Chinese painters evoke space, although they exhibit a strong partiality for *divergence*.

To establish pictorial space, we must have recourse to tactile and motor sensations, indeed to all our

faculties. It is our whole personality, contracting or dilating, that transforms the plane of the picture. Since in reaction this plane reflects the viewer's personality back upon his understanding, pictorial space may be defined as a sensible passage between two subjective spaces.

The forms which are situated within this space spring from a dynamism which we profess to command. In order that our intelligence may possess it, let us first exercise our sensibility. There are only *nuances*; form appears endowed with properties identical with those of colour. It can be tempered or augmented by contact with another form; it can be destroyed or emphasized; it is multiplied or it disappears. An ellipse may change its circumference because it is inscribed in a polygon. A form which is more emphatic than the surrounding forms may govern the whole picture, may imprint its own effigy upon everything. Those picture-makers who minutely imitate one or two leaves in order that all the leaves of a tree may seem to be painted, show in a clumsy fashion that they suspect this truth. An illusion, perhaps, but we must take it into account. The eye quickly interests the mind in its errors. These analogies and contrasts are capable of all good and all evil; the masters felt this when they tried to compose with pyramids, crosses, circles, semicircles, etc.

To compose, to construct, to design, reduces itself to this: to determine by our own activity the dynamism of form.

Some, and they are not the least intelligent, see the aim of our technique in the exclusive study of volumes. If they were to add that it suffices, surfaces being the limits of volumes and lines those of surfaces, to imitate a contour in order to represent a volume, we might agree with them; but they are thinking only of the sensation of *relief*, which we hold to be insufficient. We are neither geometers nor sculptors: for us lines, surfaces, and volumes are only modifications of the notion of fullness. To imitate volumes only would be to deny these modifications for the benefit of a monotonous intensity. As well renounce at once our desire for variety.

Between reliefs indicated sculpturally we must contrive to hint at those lesser features which are suggested but not defined. Certain forms should remain implicit, so that the mind of the spectator may be the chosen place of their concrete birth.

We must also contrive to break up, by large restful surfaces, all regions in which activity is exaggerated by excessive contiguities.

In short, the science of design consists of instituting relations between straight lines and curves. A picture which contained only straight lines or curves would not express existence.

It would be the same with a picture in which curves and straight lines exactly compensated one another, for exact equivalence is equal to zero.

The diversity of the relations of line to line must be indefinite; on this condition it incorporates the quality, the unmeasurable sum, of the affinities perceived between what we discern and what pre-exists within us: on this condition a work of art moves us.

What the curve is to the straight line the cold tone is to the warm tone in the domain of colour . . .

The law of contrast, old as the human eye, and on which Seurat judiciously insisted, was promulgated with much clamor, and none of those who flattered themselves the most on their sensitivity had enough of it to perceive that to apply the law of complementaries without tact is to deny it. It is only of value by the fact of automatic application, and only demands a delicate handling of values.

It was then that the cubists taught a new manner of regarding light.

According to them, to illuminate is to reveal; to colour is to specify the mode of revelation. They call luminous that which strikes the imagination, and dark that which the imagination has to penetrate.

We do not mechanically connect the sensation of white with the idea of light, any more than we connect the sensation of black with the idea of darkness. We admit that a black jewel, even if of a dead black, may be more luminous than the white or pink satin of its case. Loving light, we refuse to measure it, and we avoid the geometrical ideas of the focus and the ray, which imply the repetition-contrary to the principle of variety which guides us-of bright planes and sombre intervals in a given direction. Loving colour, we refuse to limit it, and subdued or dazzling, fresh or muddy, we accept all the possibilities contained between the two extreme points of the spectrum, between the cold and the warm tone.

Here are a thousand tints which issue from the prism, and hasten to range themselves in the lucid region forbidden to those who are blinded by the immediate . . .

If we consider only the bare fact of painting, we attain a common ground of understanding.

Who will deny that this fact consists in dividing the surface of the canvas and investing each part with a quality which must not be excluded by the nature of the whole?

Taste immediately dictates a rule: we must paint so that no two portions of similar extent are to be found in the picture. Common sense approves, and explains: let one portion repeat another, and the whole becomes measurable; the work, ceasing to be an expression of our personality (which cannot be measured, as nothing in it ever repeats itself), fails to do what is expected of it.

The inequality of parts being granted as a prime condition, there are two methods of regarding the division of the canvas. According to the first, all the parts are connected by a rhythmic convention which is

determined by one of them. This-its position on the canvas matters little-gives the painting a centre from which the gradations of colour proceed, or towards which they tend, according as the maximum or minimum of intensity resides there.

According to the second method, in order that the spectator, himself free to establish unity, may apprehend all the elements in the order assigned to them by creative intuition, the properties of each portion must be left independent, and the plastic continuum must be broken into a thousand surprises of light and shade.

Hence two methods apparently inimical.

However little we know of the history of art, we can readily mention names to illustrate either method. The interesting point is to reconcile the two.

The Cubist painters endeavour to do so, and whether they partially break the tie proclaimed by the first method, or confine one of those forces which the second method would leave free, they achieve that superior disequilibrium without which we cannot conceive lyrical art.

Both methods are based on the kinship of colour and form.

Although of a hundred thousand living painters only four or five appear to perceive it, a law here asserts itself which is to be neither discussed nor interpreted, but rigorously followed.

Every inflection of form is accompanied by a modification of colour, and every modification of colour gives birth to a form.

There are tints which refuse to wed certain lines; there are surfaces which cannot support certain colours, repelling them to a distance or sinking under them as under too heavy a weight.

To simple forms the fundamental hues of the spectrum are allied, and fragmentary forms should assume shimmering colours.

Nothing surprises us so greatly as to hear someone praising the colour of a picture and finding fault with the drawing. The impressionists afford no excuse for such absurdity. Although in their case we may have deplored the poverty of form and at the same time praised the beauties of their colouring, it was because we confined ourselves to regarding them as precursors.

In any other case we flatly refuse to perpetuate a division contrary to the vital forces of the painter's art.

Only those who are conscious of the impossibility of imagining form and colour separately can usefully contemplate conventional reality.

There is nothing real outside ourselves; there is nothing real except the coincidence of a sensation and an individual mental direction. Far be it from us to throw any doubts upon the existence of the objects which strike our senses; but, rationally speaking, we can only have certitude with regard to the images which they produce in the mind.

It therefore amazes us when well-meaning critics try to explain the remarkable difference between the forms attributed to nature and those of modern painting by a desire to represent things not as they appear, but as they are. As they are! How are they, what are they? According to them, the object possesses an absolute form, an essential form, and we should suppress chiaroscuro and traditional perspective in order to present it. What simplicity! An object has not one absolute form; it has many. It has as many as there are planes in the region of perception. What these writers say is marvelously applicable to geometrical form. Geometry is a science; painting is an art. The geometer measures; the painter savours. The absolute of the one is necessarily the relative of the other; if logic takes fright at this idea, so much the worse! Will logic ever prevent a wine from being different in the retort of the chemist and in the glass of the drinker?

We are frankly amused to think that many a novice may perhaps pay for his too literal comprehension of the remarks of one cubist, and his faith in the existence of an Absolute Truth, by painfully juxtaposing the six faces of a cube or the two ears of a model seen in profile.

Does it ensue from this that we should follow the example of the impressionists and rely upon the senses alone? By no means. We seek the essential, but we seek it in our personality and not in a sort of eternity, laboriously divided by mathematicians and philosophers.

Moreover, as we have said, the only difference between the impressionists and ourselves is a difference of intensity, and we do not wish it to be otherwise.

There are as many images of an object as there are eyes which look at it; there are as many essential images of it as there are minds which comprehend it.

But we cannot enjoy in isolation; we wish to dazzle others with that which we daily snatch from the world of sense, and in return we wish others to show us their trophies. From a reciprocity of concessions arise those mixed images, which we hasten to confront with artistic creations in order to compute what they contain of the objective; that is of the purely conventional.