

THOUGHTAUDIO



## CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

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# CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

## PART 1: ABOUT GENERAL AESTHETIC

Every work of art is the child of its age and, in many cases, the mother of our emotions. It follows that each period of culture produces an art of its own, which can never be repeated. Efforts to revive the art-principles of the past will at best produce an art that is still born. It is impossible for us to live and feel, as did the ancient Greeks. In the same way those who strive to follow the Greek methods in sculpture achieve only a similarity of form, the work remaining soulless for all time. Such imitation is mere aping. Externally the monkey completely resembles a human being; he will sit holding a book in front of his nose, and turn over the pages with a thoughtful aspect, but his actions have for him no real meaning.

There is, however, in art another kind of external similarity, which is founded on a fundamental truth. When there is a similarity of inner tendency in the whole moral and spiritual atmosphere, a similarity of ideals, at first closely pursued but later lost to sight, a similarity in the inner feeling of any one period to that of another, the logical result will be a revival of the external forms which served to express those inner feelings in an earlier age. An example of this today is our sympathy, our spiritual relationship, with the Primitives. Like ourselves, these artists sought to express in their work only internal truths, renouncing in consequence all consideration of external form.

This all-important spark of inner life today is at present only a spark. Our minds, which are even now only just awakening after years of materialism, are infected with the despair of unbelief, of lack of purpose and ideal. The nightmare of materialism, which has turned the life of the universe into an evil, useless game, is not yet past; it holds the awakening soul still in its grip.

## CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

Only a feeble light glimmers like a tiny star in a vast gulf of darkness. This feeble light is but a presentiment, and the soul, when it sees it, trembles in doubt whether the light is not a dream, and the gulf of darkness reality. This doubt, and the still harsh tyranny of the materialistic philosophy, divide our soul sharply from that of the Primitives. Our soul rings cracked when we seek to play upon it, as does a costly vase, long buried in the earth, which is found to have a flaw when it is dug up once more. For this reason, the Primitive phase, through which we are now passing, with its temporary similarity of form, can only be of short duration.

These two possible resemblances between the art forms of today and those of the past will be at once recognized as diametrically opposed to one another. The first, being purely external, has no future. The second, being internal, contains the seed of the future within itself. After the period of materialist effort, which held the soul in check until it was shaken off as evil, the soul is emerging, purged by trials and sufferings. Shapeless emotions such as fear, joy, grief, etc., which belonged to this time of effort, will no longer greatly attract the artist. He will endeavor to awake subtler emotions, as yet unnamed. Living himself a complicated and comparatively subtle life, his work will give to those observers capable of feeling them lofty emotions beyond the reach of words.

The observer of today, however, is seldom capable of feeling such emotions. He seeks in a work of art a mere imitation of nature which can serve some definite purpose (for example a portrait in the ordinary sense) or a presentiment of nature according to a certain convention ("impressionist" painting), or some inner feeling expressed in terms of natural form (as we say — a picture with Stimmung)

*[Footnote: Stimmung is almost untranslatable. It is almost "sentiment" in the best sense, and almost "feeling."*

## CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

*Many of Corot's twilight landscapes are full of a beautiful "Stimmung."  
Kandinsky uses the word later on to mean the "essential spirit" of nature.  
— M.T.H.S.J*

All those varieties of picture, when they are really art, fulfil their purpose and feed the spirit. Though this applies to the first case, it applies more strongly to the third, where the spectator does feel a corresponding thrill in himself. Such harmony or even contrast of emotion cannot be superficial or worthless; indeed the Stimmung of a picture can deepen and purify that of the spectator. Such works of art at least preserve the soul from coarseness; they "key it up," so to speak, to a certain height, as a tuning-key the strings of a musical instrument. But purification, and extension in duration and size of this sympathy of soul, remain one-sided, and the possibilities of the influence of art are not exerted to their utmost.

Imagine a building divided into many rooms. The building may be large or small. Every wall of every room is covered with pictures of various sizes; perhaps they number many thousands. They represent in color bits of nature — animals in sunlight or shadow, drinking, standing in water, lying on the grass; near to, a Crucifixion by a painter who does not believe in Christ; flowers; human figures sitting, standing, walking; often they are naked; many naked women, seen foreshortened from behind; apples and silver dishes; portrait of Councilor So and So; sunset; lady in red; flying duck; portrait of Lady X; flying geese; lady in white; calves in shadow flecked with brilliant yellow sunlight; portrait of Prince Y; lady in green.

All this is carefully printed in a book — name of artist — name of picture. People with these books in their hands go from wall to wall, turning over pages, reading the names. Then they go away, neither richer nor poorer than when they came, and are absorbed at

## CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

once in their business, which has nothing to do with art. Why did they come? In each picture is a whole lifetime imprisoned, a whole lifetime of fears, doubts, hopes, and joys.

Whither is this lifetime tending? What is the message of the competent artist? "To send light into the darkness of men's hearts — such is the duty of the artist," said Schumann. "An artist is a man who can draw and paint everything," said Tolstoy.

Of these two definitions of the artist's activity we must choose the second, if we think of the exhibition just described. On one canvas is a huddle of objects painted with varying degrees of skill, virtuosity and vigor, harshly or smoothly. To harmonize the whole is the task of art. With cold eyes and indifferent mind the spectators regard the work. Connoisseurs admire the "skill" (as one admires a tightrope walker), enjoy the "quality of painting" (as one enjoys a pasty). But hungry souls go hungry away.

The vulgar herd stroll through the rooms and pronounce the pictures "nice" or "splendid." Those who could speak have said nothing, those who could hear have heard nothing. This condition of art is called "art for art's sake." This neglect of inner meanings, which is the life of colors, this vain squandering of artistic power is called "art for art's sake."

The artist seeks for material reward for his dexterity, his power of vision and experience. His purpose becomes the satisfaction of vanity and greed. In place of the steady co-operation of artists is a scramble for good things. There are complaints of excessive competition, of over-production. Hatred, partisanship, cliques, jealousy, intrigues are the natural consequences of this aimless, materialist art.

*[Footnote: The few solitary exceptions do not destroy the truth of this sad and ominous picture, and even these exceptions are chiefly believers in the*

## CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

*doctrine of art for art's sake. They serve, therefore, a higher ideal, but one which is ultimately a useless waste of their strength. External beauty is one element of a spiritual atmosphere. But beyond this positive fact (that what is beautiful is good) it has the weakness of a talent not used to the full. (The word talent is employed in the biblical sense.)]*

The onlooker turns away from the artist who has higher ideals and who cannot see his life purpose in an art without aims.

Sympathy is the education of the spectator from the point of view of the artist. It has been said above that art is the child of its age. Such an art can only create an artistic feeling which is already clearly felt. This art, which has no power for the future, which is only a child of the age and cannot become a mother of the future, is a barren art. She is transitory and to all intent dies the moment the atmosphere alters which nourished her.

The other art, that which is capable of educating further, springs equally from contemporary feeling, but is at the same time not only echo and mirror of it, but also has a deep and powerful prophetic strength.

The spiritual life, to which art belongs and of which she is one of the mightiest elements, is a complicated but definite and easily definable movement forwards and upwards. This movement is the movement of experience. It may take different forms, but it holds at bottom to the same inner thought and purpose.

Veiled in obscurity are the causes of this need to move ever upwards and forwards, by sweat of the brow, through sufferings and fears. When one stage has been accomplished, and many evil stones cleared from the road, some unseen and wicked hand scatters new

## CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

obstacles in the way, so that the path often seems blocked and totally obliterated. But there never fails to come to the rescue some human being, like ourselves in everything except that he has in him a secret power of vision.

He sees and points the way. The power to do this he would sometimes fain lay aside, for it is a bitter cross to bear. But he cannot do so. Scorned and hated, he drags after him over the stones the heavy chariot of a divided humanity, ever forwards and upwards.

Often, many years after his body has vanished from the earth, men try by every means to recreate this body in marble, iron, bronze, or stone, on an enormous scale. As if there were any intrinsic value in the bodily existence of such divine martyrs and servants of humanity, who despised the flesh and lived only for the spirit! But at least such setting up of marble is a proof that a great number of men have reached the point where once the being they would now honor, stood alone.

# CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

## II. THE MOVEMENT OF THE TRIANGLE

The life of the spirit may be fairly represented in diagram as a large acute-angled triangle divided horizontally into unequal parts with the narrowest segment uppermost. The lower the segment the greater it is in breadth, depth, and area.

The whole triangle is moving slowly, almost invisibly forwards and upwards. Where the apex was today the second segment is tomorrow; what today can be understood only by the apex and to the rest of the triangle is an incomprehensible gibberish, forms tomorrow the true thought and feeling of the second segment.

At the apex of the top segment stands often one man, and only one. His joyful vision cloaks a vast sorrow. Even those who are nearest to him in sympathy do not understand him. Angrily they abuse him as charlatan or madman. So in his lifetime stood Beethoven, solitary and insulted.

*[Footnote: Weber, composer of Der Freischutz, said of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony: "The extravagances of genius have reached the limit; Beethoven is now ripe for an asylum." Of the opening phrase, on a reiterated "e," the Abbe Stadler said to his neighbor, when first he heard it: "Always that miserable 'e'; he seems to be deaf to it himself, the idiot!"]*

How many years will it be before a greater segment of the triangle reaches the spot where he once stood alone? Despite memorials and statues, are they really many who have risen to his level?



## CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

*[Footnote 2: Are not many monuments in themselves answers to that question?]*

In every segment of the triangle are artists. Each one of them who can see beyond the limits of his segment is a prophet to those about him, and helps the advance of the obstinate whole. But those who are blind, or those who retard the movement of the triangle for baser reasons, are fully understood by their fellows and acclaimed for their genius. The greater the segment (which is the same as saying the lower it lies in the triangle) so the greater the number who understand the words of the artist. Every segment hungers consciously or, much more often, unconsciously for their corresponding spiritual food. This food is offered by the artists, and for this food the segment immediately below will tomorrow be stretching out eager hands.

This simile of the triangle cannot be said to express every aspect of the spiritual life. For instance, there is never an absolute shadow-side to the picture, never a piece of unrelieved gloom. Even too often, it happens that one level of spiritual food suffices for the nourishment of those who are already in a higher segment. But for them this food is poison; in small quantities it depresses their souls gradually into a lower segment; in large quantities it hurls them suddenly into the depths ever lower and lower. Sienkiewicz, in one of his novels, compares the spiritual life to swimming; for the man who does not strive tirelessly, who does not fight continually against sinking, will mentally and morally go under.

In this strait, a man's talent (again in the biblical sense) becomes a curse — and not only the talent of the artist, but also of those who eat this poisoned food. The artist uses his strength to flatter his lower needs; in an ostensibly artistic form he presents what is impure, draws the weaker elements to him, mixes them with evil, betrays men and helps

## CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

them to betray themselves, while they convince themselves and others that they are spiritually thirsty, and that from this pure spring they may quench their thirst. Such art does not help the forward movement, but hinders it, dragging back those who are striving to press onward, and spreading pestilence abroad.

Such periods, during which art has no noble champion, during which the true spiritual food is wanting, are periods of retrogression in the spiritual world. Ceaselessly souls fall from the higher to the lower segments of the triangle, and the whole seems motionless, or even to move down and backwards. Men attribute to these blind and dumb periods a special value, for they judge them by outward results, thinking only of material well-being. They hail some technical advance, which can help nothing but the body, as a great achievement. Real spiritual gains are at best under-valued, at worst entirely ignored.

The solitary visionaries are despised or regarded as abnormal and eccentric. Those who are not wrapped in lethargy and who feel vague longings for spiritual life and knowledge and progress, cry in harsh chorus, without any to comfort them. The night of the spirit falls more and more darkly. Deeper becomes the misery of these blind and terrified guides, and their followers, tormented and unnerved by fear and doubt, prefer to this gradual darkening the final sudden leap into the blackness.

At such a time, art ministers to lower needs, and is used for material ends. She seeks her substance in hard realities because she knows of nothing nobler. Objects, the reproduction of which is considered her sole aim, remain monotonously the same. The question "what?" disappears from art; only the question "how?" remains. By what method are these material objects to be reproduced? The word becomes a creed. Art has lost her soul.

## CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

In the search for method, the artist goes still further. Art becomes so specialized as to be comprehensible only to artists, and they complain bitterly of public indifference to their work. For since the artist in such times has no need to say much, but only to be notorious for some small originality and consequently lauded by a small group of patrons and connoisseurs (which incidentally is also a very profitable business for him), there arise a crowd of gifted and skillful painters, so easy does the conquest of art appear. In each artistic circle are thousands of such artists, of whom the majority seek only for some new technical manner, and who produce millions of works of art without enthusiasm, with cold hearts and souls asleep.

Competition arises. The wild battle for success becomes more and more material. Small groups who have fought their way to the top of the chaotic world of art and picture making entrench themselves in the territory they have won. The public, left far behind, looks on bewildered, loses interest, and turns away.

But despite all this confusion, this chaos, this wild hunt for notoriety, the spiritual triangle, slowly but surely, with irresistible strength, moves onwards and upwards.

The invisible Moses descends from the mountain and sees the dance round the golden calf. But he brings with him fresh stores of wisdom to man.

First by the artist is heard his voice, the voice that is inaudible to the crowd. Almost unknowingly the artist follows the call. Already in that very question "how?" lies a hidden seed of renaissance. For when this "how?" remains without any fruitful answer, there is always a possibility that the same "something" (which we call personality today) may be able to see in the objects about it not only what is purely material but also something less solid; something less "bodily" than was seen in the period of realism,

## CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

when the universal aim was to reproduce anything "as it really is" and without fantastic imagination.

*[Footnote: Frequent use is made here of the terms "material" and "non-material," and of the intermediate phrases "more" or "less material." Is everything material? or is EVERYTHING spiritual? Can the distinctions we make between matter and spirit be nothing but relative modifications of one or the other? Thought which, although a product of the spirit, can be defined with positive science, is matter, but of fine and not coarse substance. Is whatever cannot be touched with the hand, spiritual? The discussion lies beyond the scope of this little book; all that matters here is that the boundaries drawn should not be too definite.]*

If the emotional power of the artist can overwhelm the "how?" and can give free scope to his finer feelings, then art is on the crest of the road by which she will not fail later on to find the "what" she has lost, the "what" which will show the way to the spiritual food of the newly awakened spiritual life. This "what?" will no longer be the material, objective "what" of the former period, but the internal truth of art, the soul without which the body (i.e. the "how") can never be healthy, whether in an individual or in a whole people.

*This "what" is the internal truth which only art can divine, which only art can express by those means of expression, which are hers alone*

# CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

## III. SPIRITUAL REVOLUTION

The spiritual triangle moves slowly onwards and upwards. Today one of the largest of the lower segments has reached the point of using the first battle cry of the materialist creed. The dwellers in this segment group themselves round various banners in religion. They call themselves Jews, Catholics, Protestants, etc. But they are really atheists, and this a few either of the boldest or the narrowest openly avow. "Heaven is empty," "God is dead." In politics, these people are democrats and republicans. The fear, horror and hatred which yesterday they felt for these political creeds they now direct against anarchism, of which they know nothing, but its much dreaded name.

In economics, these people are Socialists. They make sharp the sword of justice with which to slay the hydra of capitalism and to hew off the head of evil.

Because the inhabitants of this great segment of the triangle have never solved any problem independently, but are dragged as it were in a cart by those the noblest of their fellowmen who have sacrificed themselves, they know nothing of the vital impulse of life which they regard always vaguely from a great distance. They rate this impulse lightly, putting their trust in purposeless theory and in the working of some logical method.

The men of the segment next below are dragged slowly higher, blindly, by those just described. But they cling to their old position, full of dread of the unknown and of betrayal. The higher segments are not only blind atheists but can justify their godlessness with strange words; for example, those of Virchow — so unworthy of a learned man — "I have dissected many corpses, but never yet discovered a soul in any of them."

## CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

In politics, they are generally republican, with a knowledge of different parliamentary procedures; they read the political leading articles in the newspapers. In economics they are socialists of various grades, and can support their "principles" with numerous quotations, passing from Schweitzer's EMMA via Lasalle's IRON LAW OF WAGES, to Marx's CAPITAL, and still further.

In these loftier segments other categories of ideas, absent in these just described, begin gradually to appear — science and art, to which last belong also literature and music.

In science, these men are positivists, only recognizing those things that can be weighed and measured. Anything beyond that they consider as rather discreditable nonsense, that same nonsense about which they held yesterday the theories that today are proven.

In art they are naturalists, which means that they recognize and value the personality, individuality and temperament of the artist up to a certain definite point. This point has been fixed by others, and in it they believe unflinchingly.

But despite their patent and well-ordered security, despite their infallible principles, there lurks in these higher segments a hidden fear, a nervous trembling, a sense of insecurity. And this is due to their upbringing. They know that the sages, statesmen and artists whom today they revere, were yesterday spurned as swindlers and charlatans. And the higher the segment in the triangle, the better defined is this fear, this modern sense of insecurity. Here and there are people with eyes which can see, minds which can correlate. They say to themselves: "If the science of the day before yesterday is rejected by the people of yesterday, and that of yesterday by us of today, is it not possible that what we call science now will be rejected by the men of tomorrow?" And the bravest of them answer, "It is possible."

## CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

Then people appear who can distinguish those problems that the science of today has not yet explained. And they ask themselves: "Will science, if it continues on the road it has followed for so long, ever attain to the solution of these problems? And if it does so attain, will men be able to rely on its solution?" In these segments are also professional men of learning who can remember the time when facts now recognized by the Academies as firmly established, were scorned by those same Academies. There are also philosophers of aesthetic who write profound books about an art, which was yesterday condemned as nonsense.

In writing these books, they remove the barriers over which art has most recently stepped and set up new ones, which are to remain forever in the places they have chosen. They do not notice that they are busy erecting barriers, not in front of art, but behind it. And if they do notice this, on the morrow they merely write fresh books and hastily set their barriers a little further on. This performance will go on unaltered until it is realized that the most extreme principle of aesthetic can never be of value to the future, but only to the past. No such theory of principle can be laid down for those things which lie beyond, in the realm of the immaterial. That which has no material existence cannot be subjected to a material classification. That which belongs to the spirit of the future can only be realized in feeling, and to this feeling the talent of the artist is the only road. Theory is the lamp which sheds light on the petrified ideas of yesterday and of the more distant past.

*[Footnote: Cf. Chapter VII.]*

And as we rise higher in the triangle we find that the uneasiness increases, as a city built on the most correct architectural plan may be shaken suddenly by the uncontrollable force of nature. Humanity is living in such a spiritual city, subject to these sudden

## CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

disturbances for which neither architects nor mathematicians have made allowance. In one place lies a great wall crumbled to pieces like a card house, in another are the ruins of a huge tower which once stretched to heaven, built on many presumably immortal spiritual pillars. The abandoned churchyard quakes and forgotten graves open and from them rise forgotten ghosts. Spots appear on the sun and the sun grows dark, and what theory can fight with darkness? And in this city live also men deafened by false wisdom who hear no crash, and blinded by false wisdom, so that they say "our sun will shine more brightly than ever and soon the last spots will disappear." But sometime even these men will hear and see.

But when we get still higher there is no longer this bewilderment. There work is going on which boldly attacks those pillars which men have set up. There we find other professional men of learning who test matter again and again, who tremble before no problem, and who finally cast doubt on that very matter which was yesterday the foundation of everything, so that the whole universe is shaken. Every day another scientific theory finds bold discoverers who overstep the boundaries of prophecy and, forgetful of themselves, join the other soldiers in the conquest of some new summit and in the hopeless attack on some stubborn fortress. But "there is no fortress that man cannot overcome."

On the one hand, FACTS are being established which the science of yesterday dubbed swindles. Even newspapers, which are for the most part the most obsequious servants of worldly success and of the mob, and which trim their sails to every wind, find themselves compelled to modify their ironical judgements on the "marvels" of science and even to abandon them altogether. Various learned men, among them ultra-materialists, dedicate their strength to the scientific research of doubtful problems, which can no longer be lied about or passed over in silence.



## CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

*[Footnote: Zoller, Wagner, Butleroff (St. Petersburg), Crookes (London), etc.; later on, C. H. Richet, C. Flammarion. The Parisian paper Le Matin, published about two years ago the discoveries of the two last named under the title "Je le constate, mais je ne l'explique pas." Finally there are C. Lombroso, the inventor of the anthropological method of diagnosing crime, and Eusapio Palladino.]*

On the other hand, the number is increasing of those men who put no trust in the methods of materialistic science when it deals with those questions which have to do with "non-matter," or matter which is not accessible to our minds. Just as art is looking for help from the primitives, so these men are turning to half-forgotten times in order to get help from their half-forgotten methods. However, these very methods are still alive and in use among nations whom we, from the height of our knowledge, have been accustomed to regard with pity and scorn. To such nations belong the Indians, who from time to time confront those learned in our civilization with problems, which we have either passed by unnoticed or brushed aside with superficial words and explanations.

*[Footnote: Frequently in such cases, use is made of the word hypnotism; that same hypnotism, which, in its earlier form of mesmerism, was disdainfully put aside by various learned bodies.]*

Mme. Blavatsky was the first person, after a life of many years in India, to see a connection between these "savages" and our "civilization." From that moment there began a tremendous spiritual movement which today includes a large number of people and has even assumed a material form in the THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY. This society consists of groups who seek to approach the problem of the spirit by way of the INNER

## CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

knowledge. The theory of Theosophy which serves as the basis to this movement was set out by Blavatsky in the form of a catechism in which the pupil receives definite answers to his questions from the theosophical point of view.

*[Footnote: E. P. Blavatsky, The Key of Theosophy, London, 1889.]*

Theosophy, according to Blavatsky, is synonymous with ETERNAL TRUTH. "The new torchbearer of truth will find the minds of men prepared for his message, a language ready for him in which to clothe the new truths he brings, an organization awaiting his arrival, which will remove the merely mechanical, material obstacles and difficulties from his path." And then Blavatsky continues: "The earth will be a heaven in the twenty-first century in comparison with what it is now," and with these words ends her book.

When religion, science and morality are shaken, the two last by the strong hand of Nietzsche, and when the outer supports threaten to fall, man turns his gaze from externals in on to himself. Literature, music and art are the first and most sensitive spheres in which this spiritual revolution makes itself felt. They reflect the dark picture of the present time and show the importance of what at first was only a little point of light noticed by few and for the great majority non-existent. Perhaps they even grow dark in their turn, but on the other hand they turn away from the soulless life of the present towards those substances and ideas which give free scope to the non-material strivings of the soul.

A poet of this kind in the realm of literature is Maeterlinck. He takes us into a world which, rightly or wrongly, we term supernatural. La Princesse Maleine, Les Sept Princesses, Les Aveugles, etc., are not people of past times as are the heroes in

## CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

Shakespeare. They are merely souls lost in the clouds, threatened by them with death, eternally menaced by some invisible and somber power.

Spiritual darkness, the insecurity of ignorance and fear pervade the world in which they move. Maeterlinck is perhaps one of the first prophets, one of the first artistic reformers and seers to herald the end of the decadence just described. The gloom of the spiritual atmosphere, the terrible, but all-guiding hand, the sense of utter fear, the feeling of having strayed from the path, the confusion among the guides, all these are clearly felt in his works.

*[Footnote: To the front rank of such seers of the decadence belongs also Alfred Kubin. With irresistible force both Kubin's drawings and also his novel "Die Andere Seite" seem to engulf us in the terrible atmosphere of empty desolation.]*

This atmosphere Maeterlinck creates principally by purely artistic means. His material machinery (gloomy mountains, moonlight, marshes, wind, the cries of owls, etc.) plays really a symbolic role and helps to give the inner note.

*[Footnote: When one of Maeterlinck's plays was produced in St. Petersburg under his own guidance, he himself at one of the rehearsals had a tower represented by a plain piece of hanging linen. It was of no importance to him to have elaborate scenery prepared. He did as children, the greatest imaginers of all time, always do in their games; for they use a stick for a horse or create entire regiments of cavalry out of chinks. And in the same way a chalk with a notch in it is changed from a knight into a horse. On similar lines, the imagination of the spectator plays in the*

## CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

*modern theatre, and especially in that of Russia, an important part. And this is a notable element in the transition from the material to the spiritual in the theatre of the future.]*

Maeterlinck's principal technical weapon is his use of words. The word may express an inner harmony. This inner harmony springs partly, perhaps principally, from the object which it names. But if the object is not itself seen, but only its name heard, the mind of the hearer receives an abstract impression only, that is to say as of the object dematerialized, and a corresponding vibration is immediately set up in the HEART.

The apt use of a word (in its poetical meaning), repetition of this word, twice, three times or even more frequently, according to the need of the poem, will not only tend to intensify the inner harmony but also bring to light unsuspected spiritual properties of the word itself. Further than that, frequent repetition of a word (again a favorite game of children, which is forgotten in after life) deprives the word of its original external meaning. Similarly, in drawing, the abstract message of the object drawn tends to be forgotten and its meaning lost. Sometimes perhaps we unconsciously hear this real harmony sounding together with the material or later on with the non-material sense of the object.

But in the latter case, the true harmony exercises a direct impression on the soul. The soul undergoes an emotion, which has no relation to any definite object, an emotion more complicated, I might say more super-sensuous than the emotion caused by the sound of a bell or of a stringed instrument. This line of development offers great possibilities to the literature of the future. In an embryonic form this word-power has already been used in *SERRES CHAUDES*.

## CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

*[Footnote: SERRES CHAUDES, SUIVIES DE QUINZE CHANSONS, par Maurice Maeterlinck. Brussels. Lacomblez.]*

As Maeterlinck uses them, words which seem at first to create only a neutral impression have really a more subtle value. Even a familiar word like "hair," if used in a certain way can intensify an atmosphere of sorrow or despair. And this is Maeterlinck's method. He shows that thunder, lightning and a moon behind driving clouds, in themselves material means, can be used in the theatre to create a greater sense of terror than they do in nature.

The true inner forces do not lose their strength and effect so easily.

*[Footnote: A comparison between the work of Poe and Maeterlinck shows the course of artistic transition from the material to the abstract.]*

And the word which has two meanings, the first direct, the second indirect, is the pure material of poetry and of literature, the material which these arts alone can manipulate and through which they speak to the spirit.

Something similar may be noticed in the music of Wagner. His famous leitmotiv is an attempt to give personality to his characters by something beyond theatrical expedients and light effect. His method of using a definite motiv is a purely musical method. It creates a spiritual atmosphere by means of a musical phrase which precedes the hero, which he seems to radiate forth from any distance.

*[Footnote: Frequent attempts have shown that such a spiritual atmosphere can belong not only to heroes but to any human being. Sensitives cannot, for example, remain in a room in which a person has*

## CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

*been who is spiritually antagonistic to them, even though they know nothing of his existence.]*

The most modern musicians like Debussy create a spiritual impression, often taken from nature, but embodied in purely musical form. For this reason Debussy is often classed with the Impressionist painters on the ground that he resembles these painters in using natural phenomena for the purposes of his art. Whatever truth there may be in this comparison merely accentuates the fact that the various arts of today learn from each other and often resemble each other. But it would be rash to say that this definition is an exhaustive statement of Debussy's significance. Despite his similarity with the Impressionists this musician is deeply concerned with spiritual harmony, for in his works one hears the suffering and tortured nerves of the present time. And further Debussy never uses the wholly material note so characteristic of programme music, but trusts mainly in the creation of a more abstract impression. Debussy has been greatly influenced by Russian music, notably by Mussorgsky.

So it is not surprising that he stands in close relation to the young Russian composers, the chief of whom is Scriabin. The experience of the hearer is frequently the same during the performance of the works of these two musicians. He is often snatched quite suddenly from a series of modern discords into the charm of more or less conventional beauty. He feels himself often insulted, tossed about like a tennis ball over the net between the two parties of the outer and the inner beauty. To those who are not accustomed to it the inner beauty appears as ugliness because humanity in general inclines to the outer and knows nothing of the inner. Almost alone in severing himself from conventional beauty is the Austrian composer, Arnold Schonberg. He says in his *Harmonielehre*: "Every combination of notes, every advance is possible, but I am beginning to feel that there are also definite rules and conditions which incline me to the use of this or that dissonance."

## CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

*[Footnote: "Die Musik," p. 104, from the Harmonielehre (Verlag der Universal Edition).]*

This means that Schonberg realizes that the greatest freedom of all, the freedom of an unfettered art, can never be absolute. Every age achieves a certain measure of this freedom, but beyond the boundaries of its freedom the mightiest genius can never go. But the measure of freedom of each age must be constantly enlarged. Schonberg is endeavoring to make complete use of his freedom and has already discovered gold mines of new beauty in his search for spiritual harmony. His music leads us into a realm where musical experience is a matter not of the ear but of the soul alone — and from this point begins the music of the future.

A parallel course has been followed by the Impressionist movement in painting. It is seen in its dogmatic and most naturalistic form in so-called Neo-Impressionism. The theory of this is to put on the canvas the whole glitter and brilliance of nature, and not only an isolated aspect of her.

It is interesting to notice three practically contemporary and totally different groups in painting. They are (1) Rossetti and his pupil Burne-Jones, with their followers; (2) Bocklin and his school; (3) Segantini, with his unworthy following of photographic artists. I have chosen these three groups to illustrate the search for the abstract in art. Rossetti sought to revive the non-materialism of the pre-Raphaelites. Bocklin busied himself with the mythological scenes, but was in contrast to Rossetti in that he gave strongly material form to his legendary figures. Segantini, outwardly the most material of the three, selected the most ordinary objects (hills, stones, cattle, etc.) often painting them

## CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

with the minutest realism, but he never failed to create a spiritual as well as a material value, so that really he is the most non-material of the trio.

These men sought for the "inner" by way of the "outer."

By another road, and one more purely artistic, the great seeker after a new sense of form approached the same problem. Cezanne made a living thing out of a teacup, or rather in a teacup he realized the existence of something alive. He raised still life to such a point that it ceased to be inanimate.

He painted these things as he painted human beings, because he was endowed with the gift of divining the inner life in everything. His color and form are alike suitable to the spiritual harmony. A man, a tree, an apple, all were used by Cezanne in the creation of something that is called a "picture," and which is a piece of true inward and artistic harmony. The same intention actuates the work of one of the greatest of the young Frenchmen, Henri Matisse. He paints "pictures," and in these "pictures" endeavors to reproduce the divine.

*[Footnote: Cf. his article in KUNST UND KUNSTLER, 1909, No. 8.]*

To attain this end he requires as a starting point nothing but the object to be painted (human being or whatever it may be), and then the methods that belong to painting alone, color and form.

By personal inclination, because he is French and because he is specially gifted as a colourist, Matisse is apt to lay too much stress on the color. Like Debussy, he cannot always refrain from conventional beauty; Impressionism is in his blood. One sees



## CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

pictures of Matisse which are full of great inward vitality, produced by the stress of the inner need, and also pictures which possess only outer charm, because they were painted on an outer impulse. (How often one is reminded of Manet in this.) His work seems to be typical French painting, with its dainty sense of melody, raised from time to time to the summit of a great hill above the clouds.

But in the work of another great artist in Paris, the Spaniard Pablo Picasso, there is never any suspicion of this conventional beauty. Tossed hither and thither by the need for self-expression, Picasso hurries from one manner to another. At times a great gulf appears between consecutive manners, because Picasso leaps boldly and is found continually by his bewildered crowd of followers standing at a point very different from that at which they saw him last. No sooner do they think that they have reached him again than he has changed once more. In this way there arose Cubism, the latest of the French movements, which is treated in detail in Part II. Picasso is trying to arrive at constructiveness by way of proportion.

In his latest works (1911) he has achieved the logical destruction of matter, not, however, by dissolution but rather by a kind of a parceling out of its various divisions and a constructive scattering of these divisions about the canvas. But he seems in this most recent work distinctly desirous of keeping an appearance of matter. He shrinks from no innovation, and if color seems likely to balk him in his search for a pure artistic form, he throws it overboard and paints a picture in brown and white; and the problem of purely artistic form is the real problem of his life. In their pursuit of the same supreme end Matisse and Picasso stand side by side, Matisse representing color and Picasso form.

# CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

## IV. THE PYRAMID

And so at different points along the road are the different arts, saying what they are best able to say, and in the language which is peculiarly their own. Despite, or perhaps thanks to, the differences between them, there has never been a time when the arts approached each other more nearly than they do today, in this later phase of spiritual development.

In each manifestation is the seed of a striving towards the abstract, the non-material. Consciously or unconsciously, they are obeying Socrates' command — *KNOW THYSELF*. Consciously or unconsciously, artists are studying and proving their material, setting in the balance the spiritual value of those elements, with which it is their several privilege to work.

And the natural result of this striving is that the various arts are drawing together. They are finding in Music the best teacher. With few exceptions music has been for some centuries the art which has devoted itself not to the reproduction of natural phenomena, but rather to the expression of the artist's soul, in musical sound.

A painter, who finds no satisfaction in mere representation, however artistic, in his longing to express his inner life, cannot but envy the ease with which music, the most non-material of the arts today, achieves this end. He naturally seeks to apply the methods of music to his own art. And from this results that modern desire for rhythm in painting, for mathematical, abstract construction, for repeated notes of color, for setting color in motion.

This borrowing of method by one art from another can only be truly successful when the application of the borrowed methods is not superficial but fundamental. One art must

## CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

learn first how another uses its methods, so that the methods may afterwards be applied to the borrower's art from the beginning, and suitably. The artist must not forget that in him lies the power of true application of every method, but that that power must be developed.

In manipulation of form, music can achieve results, which are beyond the reach of painting. On the other hand, painting is ahead of music in several particulars. Music, for example, has at its disposal duration of time; while painting can present to the spectator the whole content of its message at one moment.

*[Footnote: These statements of difference are, of course, relative; for music can on occasions dispense with extension of time, and painting make use of it.]*

Music, which is outwardly unfettered by nature, needs no definite form for its expression.

*[Footnote: How miserably music fails when attempting to express material appearances is proved by the affected absurdity of programme music. Quite lately such experiments have been made. The imitation in sound of croaking frogs, of farmyard noises, of household duties, makes an excellent music hall turn and is amusing enough. But in serious music such attempts are merely warnings against any imitation of nature. Nature has her own language, and a powerful one; this language cannot be imitated. The sound of a farmyard in music is never successfully reproduced, and is unnecessary waste of time. The Stimmung of nature can be imparted by every art, not, however, by imitation, but by the artistic divination of its inner spirit.]*

## CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

Painting today is almost exclusively concerned with the reproduction of natural forms and phenomena. Her business is now to test her strength and methods, to know herself as music has done for a long time, and then to use her powers to a truly artistic end.

And so the arts are encroaching one upon another, and from a proper use of this encroachment will rise the art that is truly monumental. Every man who steepes himself in the spiritual possibilities of his art is a valuable helper in the building of the spiritual pyramid, which will someday reach to heaven.

**THE END**