



RICHARD WOLLHEIM

Painting as an Art

THE A.W. MELLON LECTURES
IN THE FINE ARTS, 1984

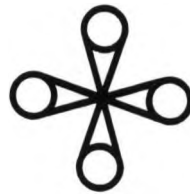
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I

What the artist does

1. The title that I have chosen for these lectures, 'Painting as an Art', draws its sense from the other contrasting ways in which people can, and do, paint. Let us take stock of them. So, there are house-painters: there are Sunday painters: there are world-politicians who paint for distraction, and distraught business-men who paint to relax. There are forgers – an interesting group. There are chimpanzees who have brush and colour put invitingly within their reach: there are psychotic patients who enter art therapy, and madmen who set down their visions: there are little children of three, four, five, six, in art class, who produce work of explosive beauty: and then there are the innumerable painters of street-scenes, painters of Mediterranean ports, still-life painters, painters of mammoth abstractions, whose works hang in old-fashioned restaurants or modern banks, in the foyers of international hotels and the offices of exorbitant lawyers, and who once, probably, were artists, but who now paint exclusively for money and the pleasure of others. None of them are artists, though they fall short of being so to varying degrees, but they are all painters. And then there are the painters who are artists. Where does the difference lie, and why? What does one lot do which the other lot doesn't? When is painting an art, and why?

2. But to pose the question in these terms shows that we are already some distance into the subject, into pictorial aesthetics or the philosophy of painting: and it would be useful to see how this could be so, and just where we are.

The question that is the usual starting-point for an inquiry into the nature of pictorial art is not, What makes painting an art? It is, What makes a painting a work of art? What ordinarily initiates the inquiry, is, in other words, a question not about an activity, but about a thing, and to this question many many different answers have been proposed. Into this variety order may be introduced by thinking of these answers as either *externalist* answers or *internalist* answers.

I start with one particular answer, which is an externalist answer, and, through understanding it, we can come to see how externalist and internalist answers differ. But the answer enjoys a popularity in its own right, and that is another reason for starting with it. Its popularity is not exclusively with philosophers of art: it may not even be largely so. It is popular with art-critics, with administrators and impresarios of art, with successful dealers, and (it must be said) with artists too. Small wonder, as we shall see: small wonder despite its fundamental implausibility.

3. I start with the answer given by the *Institutional theory of art*, as it calls itself.¹ The Institutional theory comes in various grades of refinement or sophistication, but I shall consider it in its simplest form. I believe that the theory is at its best at its simplest, and that refinement only obscures what it has to offer us without reducing any of the very serious difficulties that attach to it.

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The core of the theory is this: A painting is a work of art just in case certain people occupying certain socially identified positions – the theory calls them ‘the representatives of the art-world’ – confer this status upon it. Another way of putting the theory is to say that for a painting to be a work of art the representatives of the art-world must recognize it to be one: and, with the theory put this way, the trick is to grasp how we are supposed to understand ‘recognition’. What ‘recognition’ does not mean in this context is that, before the representatives of the art-world appear on the scene, the painting already is a work of art and this fact about it leads them, being so knowledgeable or so discriminating or both, to see it, and think of it, as one. On the contrary: what the theory tells us is that, first, the representatives of the art-world must think of and see the painting as a work of art, and, then, in consequence of this fact – this fact about them – the painting becomes a work of art. Recognition, in so far as this notion occurs in the expression of the theory, isn’t like the botanist’s recognition of a plant, or an aircraft-spotter’s recognition of an enemy plane: it is closest to the recognition that a nation state gives to, or withholds from, a foreign government after the violent overthrow of its predecessor.

And here we have what explains the popularity that the Institutional theory enjoys in certain circles. For what the theory manifestly does is that, by laying upon them legendary powers, it grossly enlarges the self-esteem of those tempted to think of themselves as representatives of the art-world. Painters make paintings, but it takes a representative of the art-world to make a work of art.

Can this really be so?, we might wonder. To particularize: In the 1950s and the 1960s, when Clement Greenberg was able, before our eyes, to make and unmake the reputations and prices of works of art, could he also make and unmake that they were works of art? If he could, how did he do it? And, if he couldn’t, who in the history of painting was likelier to have been able to do so?

A question to put to the theory, which nicely divides its supporters into the faint-hearted and the bold, is this: Do the representatives of the art-world have to have, or do they not have to have, reasons for what they do if what they do is to stick? Is their status enough for them to be able to confer status upon what they pick out, or must they additionally exercise judgment, or taste, or critical acumen, so that it is only if the paintings they pick out satisfy certain criteria or meet certain conditions that status is transferred?

Suppose that an Institutionalist says, Yes, a representative of the art-world must have reasons if he is to be effective, then one immediate response to him would be that the theory – at any rate, as he conceives it – is incompletely before us. We need to know what those reasons are. Until we are told what they are, we have only part of the theory.

That we should not put up with part of a theory when the theory is supposed to answer a question that troubles us is a standard response. But, in the present case, there is more to the response than that. For it is possible that, once we are told what reasons the representatives of the art-world have to have for declaring a painting to be a work of art, these reasons will turn out to be all that we need to know. They will provide us with a total account of what it is for a painting to be a work of art. For, if it is necessary that paintings, to be works of art, should satisfy certain criteria, why isn’t the satisfaction of these criteria sufficient in itself, and what is the further need for there to be representatives of the art-world who first apply these criteria to paintings and then announce to the world which paintings satisfy them? Such socially identified persons seem to have no contribution to make to the account of art, they belong only to the presentation of the account: rather as though an account of disease were to try to characterize disease in terms of what doctors do and say about it. In its faint-hearted form, in which it insists upon reasons, the theory we have been offered seems certainly not to be wholly, and only dubiously to be in part, an Institutional theory. For what appeared to earn the theory that

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description – the reference to the art-world and its representatives – looks to be no more than a decorative flourish in its formulation.

So I turn now to the bold form of the theory, in which the representatives of the art-world are absolved from having to produce reasons for the pronouncements they make. In this pared-down form the theory really is an Institutional theory, and the objections to which it is exposed, which are of two broad kinds, are out in the open.

Let us look at them in turn.

The intellectual appeal of the theory, as opposed to its self-serving attractions, is its hard-headedness. It offers to demystify art by reducing it to certain ascertainable social facts. However, once we appreciate this aspect of the theory, we must then start wondering whether there really are such facts as those in terms of which it professes to explain art and which it wants us to take for granted. If we are not prepared to take these facts on trust, we shall have to ask ourselves such questions as, Does the art-world really nominate representatives? If it does, when, where, and how, do these nominations take place? Do the representatives, if they exist, pass in review all candidates for the status of art, and do they then, while conferring this status on some, deny it to others? What record is kept of these conferrals, and is the status itself subject to revision? If so, at what intervals, how, and by whom? And, last but not least, Is there really such a thing as the art-world, with the coherence of a social group, capable of having representatives, who are in turn capable of carrying out acts that society is bound to endorse? In another context these questions might strike us as niggling, and we might be ready to take the existence of the art-world as, if not a fact, then a reasonable *façon de parler*. But in the present context, where whatever the theory has to offer us in the way of explanation it offers us in terms of this art-world, we cannot do this, and there must be precise, specific answers to each of the questions I have raised. It would be, for instance, totally inadequate for upholders of the theory to pick out some social act whose existence no one would deny – say, the purchase of a painting by a museum – and then tell us that we could regard that act as the art-world in action, or that we could interpret it as the conferral of the status of art. Of course we *could*. But, if we did, that would not show anything about how, up to that moment, the status of art had been grounded. Unless there is a convention accepted in our society whereby the purchase of a painting counts as the conferral of status, and unless, when paintings are bought by museums, this convention is knowingly and appropriately invoked, the theory has failed to come up with what it promised. In the absence of hard social facts of this tenor, the theory has not shown that the status of art is an appearance, which social reality explains.

So much for the first kind of objection. The second kind of objection latches onto the very feature of the theory that has introduced it into the present discussion. It also helps us to understand that feature. The objection is then that the theory gives an externalist answer to the question, What makes a painting a work of art? In other words, it answers the question by picking out a property of the painting that has nothing to do with its being a painting, with its paintingness. The mere say-so of certain socially identified persons is clearly such a property. And this is so even when we include amongst representatives of the art-world the artist himself and make his say-so a major determinant of the status of what he produces. For what makes a painting a painting is what the artist does, not what he says. It is what he does that matters. What the artist says is, in this context as in many others, merely evidence, and tainted evidence at that, for what he has done or will do. At best it is one remove away from what matters.

So we must ask, What is wrong with an externalist answer? The characterization I have offered of externalism gives us all the materials we need for answering this question. What is wrong with any externalist answer is, basically, its intuitive unacceptability. Any such answer goes against what is surely one of the few intuitions that we have on this

topic: that is, that we cannot, having judged that a painting has as a painting a certain character, then, when we come to determine whether the painting is or isn't a work of art, treat this character as totally irrelevant. If a painting is a work of art, this must be because of being the kind of painting that it is, of having the kind of pictorial character that it has. A pictorial work of art cannot be only coincidentally a painting.

A characteristic defence of the Institutional theory against this second objection is revealing just because it shows how far the theory is willing to distance itself from natural considerations.² The defence is this: If the Institutional theory appears to trivialize the question, What makes a painting a work of art?, this cannot be pressed as an objection to the theory. For the question is indeed trivial, and the only reason why anyone might think otherwise is through confusing it with the altogether different and certainly non-trivial question which is, What makes a painting a good work of art? Now this defence, so far from reconciling the Institutional theory to our natural assumptions, only brings it into conflict with another intuition that we have in this area: for now, in addition to severing the question, What is a work of art?, from, What is a painting?, the theory also severs the question, What is a good work of art?, from, What is a work of art? Surely it is counter-intuitive to think that a totally different body of material has to be introduced in order to establish the value of a work of art from what has proved pertinent to fixing its status as a work of art. Admittedly the two questions are not the same. Admittedly there are foolish ways of relating them: for instance, to hold that a good work of art is something that is a work of art to a high degree. But, just as obviously, to divorce the two questions, or, having conceded that the value of a work of art introduces internalist issues, still to insist that the status of art can be settled on purely externalist grounds, makes nonsense of our intuitive thinking.

At this stage we naturally turn from an externalist answer to the question, What makes a painting a work of art?, to an internalist answer, knowing by now that this will be an answer that picks upon a property that is essentially connected with the painting being a painting. It cannot, of course, be the property of being a painting, nor one that follows from it, for that would make all paintings works of art: but it must be a property that presupposes, and in some substantial fashion, that the work to be considered is a painting.

Externalist answers to our question vary greatly, but internalist answers, or internalist answers that have stood the test of time, seem to be only two in number, though each answer consists in a fairly tight-knit cluster of variants.

The first of the two answers insists that the criterion of art lies in some directly perceptible property that the painting has, and then different variants of this answer record the different properties that different theorists favour. The favoured property is invariably an overall property: like goodness of form as Gestalt theory defines it, or spirituality, or Significant Form. As these examples show, the particular theories can be more, or less, formalist.³

But so long as the theory insists that the criterial property is perceptible, or that a pictorial work of art must not merely have this property but must be perceived to have it, it runs into a difficulty. The difficulty arises from the fact that – perhaps the very simplest cases apart – whether a painting can be perceived to have a certain property always depends on what else the spectator knows or believes either about that painting or generally. This indeed is a general truth about perception, which one of my most distinguished predecessors in this series, for many years a colleague and whom I count as a friend, Ernst Gombrich, likes to put by saying that there is no such thing as 'the innocent eye'.⁴ One immediate implication of this truth is that it appears to put the theory we are now considering in exactly the same position as the Institutional theory proved to be in at a certain point in its exposition: the theory is incompletely before us. The theory is incomplete until we attach to it some specification of the background knowledge and

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belief, the *cognitive stock* as I shall call it, upon which the spectator can and must draw in determining whether the painting satisfies the criterion of art.

For, once we start to reflect upon what should go into the spectator's cognitive stock, an obvious contender – obvious if only because its presence or absence is bound to make a vast difference to the overall properties that the picture can be perceived to have – is how the painting came to be made, or the nature of the process that terminated on the picture. However, once we admit how the work came to be made as required background information for determining the properties that the painting has, we have on our hands the makings of an alternative internalist account: an answer that holds in effect that a painting is a work of art in virtue of the activity from which it issues – more precisely, in virtue of the way in which this activity is practised. Admit the activity and how it is practised as relevant background information for determining the criterial property of art, and it edges its way forward into the position of the criterial. And that is because any motive that we might have for subscribing to an account that makes properties of the work criterial has justice done to it and more within an account that makes the activity from which paintings issue and how it is practised criterial, whereas the converse is not true. The reason for this is simple. It is that two paintings could have the same property, indeed they could have the same overall property, or general look, and this might have been brought about in the two cases in significantly different ways or with radically different intentions.⁵

And now it is time to pause and take stock. For since the activity from which paintings issue is *painting*, and since the way in which painting has to be practised if it is to give rise to works of art can only be *as an art* – however uninformative it may be to say this at this stage – here we are back to the title of these lectures and with some understanding of why this is, as I put it, some distance into the subject. To make this the starting-point assumes that certain ideas which are initially plausible have been superseded.

So, How is painting to be practised if it is to be an art?

4. Let us, in trying to get an answer to this question, focus not on the activity of painting as such but on particular acts of painting: on acts, that is to say, out of which individual paintings come into being.

Now any particular act of painting can be described truly in a very large number of different ways, and, in the ordinary course of events, which description or descriptions we offer will depend upon our interests. However out of all these true descriptions of just one act there is a sub-set of descriptions that are privileged. (I say, 'sub-set', but these privileged descriptions can with ingenuity can be compressed into one description, most likely of great complexity.) Now what makes these descriptions privileged is that they are those under which the act is intentional, and, though I shall spend the rest of this section trying to explain this very special feature, I can here and now say that, in trying to isolate the special way in which acts of painting have to be undertaken in order to be art, we can, for a start, disregard all but the privileged descriptions true of them.

That an intentional action is so always relative to a description true of it is a very general point about human behaviour,⁶ and that this not only holds for painting but has significance for it places painting firmly within the domain of the theory of action. But to clarify the point itself I take an example well outside painting, well outside art.

So we look out of the window, and we see a man across the street. We watch him. We follow what he does with great care, and we find that we can truly describe his action in the following ways: (one) that he walks up and down, (two) that he attracts the attention of the police, (three) that he is wearing out the soles of his shoes, (four) that he is preventing the children of the neighbourhood from playing their midday game of hopscotch, (five) that he casts a sharp shadow on the pavement, and (six) that he has

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disturbed the old lady who lives in the front room across the street and usually sleeps late, and made her rise from her bed and pull down the blind.

But, though the man certainly does all these things, he does not do them all intentionally. All he does intentionally, let us say (for, after all, the case is made up, and we can say what we choose), is to walk up and down. The only description under which his action is intentional is the first on my list. Or, vary the case a little, and what he does intentionally is now something more complex: he walks up and down so as to arouse the suspicions of the police – while his friend robs the pawnshop round the corner. Now his action is intentional under a description built up out of the first and second on my list. And in different cases, with different narratives, it would be different things he does intentionally – a real Scrooge, he has set his heart on spoiling the game to which the children look forward every morning – and consequently there would be different descriptions under which his action is intentional. Of the descriptions I listed it is highly improbable that his action would be intentional under all of them. It is highly improbable, though possible, that his action would be intentional under the description 'wearing out the soles of his shoes'. However the crucial point to note is that correlated with each change in the narrative, with each shift in the privileged description, there is a real difference, a difference in what actually goes on.

But how are we to characterize these differences? To put it another way: Why is one description of the man's action privileged, or how do we select out of the many many descriptions true of it that under which it is intentional?

The answer I propose is this: Corresponding to each description of an action is a thought, and an action is intentional under a certain description if what guides the person's action is the corresponding thought. A thought guides an action when it both causes it and forms its character. So, in our example, the man acts intentionally under the description 'walking up and down' if a thought expressible as 'Keep on walking, keep on walking up and down' is what guides his action. Other thoughts – thoughts of the police, of the soles of his shoes, of the children and their midday game, of the insomniac old lady – may, may not, enter his head. But so long as it is true that his action is not intentional under the corresponding description, any such thought exists in his head idly. It doesn't cause him to act. It floats there. Once it ceases to float there, then there is, of course, a different description under which his action is intentional, and a different narrative to tell about what he does intentionally.

To the question, How do we select the description under which he acts intentionally, a short answer would be, We don't. He does. It isn't we who select the description, it is he who does. Everything depends on what goes on in his head.

5. If we are to give an account of the special way in which painting must be practised so as to be an art, we need to concentrate on the descriptions under which specific acts of painting are intentional. We may ignore the descriptions that are merely true of such acts. This is so because, painting being an intentional activity, particular ways in which it is practised must equate with particular descriptions under which it is intentional. Ways of painting pair with kinds of intention.

However, in recognizing this, we must be on our guard. Few words have caused such barren discussion in aesthetics as the word 'intention'.⁷ One reason is that the word has been used by philosophers of art either far more narrowly or far more broadly than seems reasonable elsewhere. On the excessively narrow understanding, intention is equated with a mere volition or optative thought on the part of the artist that the work should look a certain way or that the spectator should have a certain response to it. More specifically, it is envisaged as a kind of internal command addressed to himself, telling him to paint in such a way that the spectator will identify what he has done in some required

fashion. On the excessively broad understanding, intention is equated with just about everything that goes on in the artist's head as he paints. A way through is needed. 'Intention' best picks out just those desires, thoughts, beliefs, experiences, emotions, commitments, which cause the artist to paint as he does. A further cause of error has been to think that these mental phenomena, in order to exercise causal power, have to be assembled into some inner picture which is a complete facsimile of the picture to be.⁸ No total preconception of the picture that is independent of all engagement with the medium is a serious possibility. In Lecture V I shall consider the pathological as opposed to the purely philosophical attractions of this idea. And I shall also at some point need to make a distinction within intentions between those which are realized or fulfilled in the work and those which, though they contributed to the making of the work, are not realized in it.

And there is a further respect in which we need to be on our guard. I may seem to have encouraged the view that whether painting is practised as an art depends upon the specific intentions that motivate it, so that, if it is intentional under this or that description, it is an art, if it is intentional under any other descriptions, it isn't. But things are not as simple as that. What is relevant turns out to be something a bit different and quite a bit more complex. It is more a matter of the way the intentions are formed, or the way one intention gives rise to another. It is a matter of how the descriptions under which the activity is intentional are arrived at, and how they interrelate. I shall try to familiarize this idea by tracing the development, the imaginary development, of an activity that isn't painting but is like it, though more primitive.

6. I call this activity *Ur-painting*.

My account of *Ur-painting* is, in spirit, rather like those seventeenth- and eighteenth-century accounts of how civil society emerged out of the State of Nature. I don't even entertain the thought that I am reconstructing an actual historical process. I tell a myth to illuminate some part of reality.⁹

The story of *Ur-painting* begins like this: An agent – he is as yet no artist – holding a charged instrument places himself next to a support and deposits marks. That is all there is to it: he deposits marks. And by saying that that is all there is to it, I mean that that is the total privileged description: that is *the* description under which the action is intentional. The thought of the mark enjoys a monopoly in the agent's head when it comes to the guidance of his action. Though there may well be other thoughts floating around there.

But, although depositing a mark is the only description under which the action is intentional, there are lots of other descriptions true of it. For instance this: that, as the marks are deposited on the support, there will be one part of its surface that is obscured by the marks and another part – an ever-decreasing part – that is unmarked and contrasts with the marks. But our agent is indifferent to this fact: except to the extent that it tells him where he can put the next mark if he wants it to show up.

Then, I ask you to imagine, the agent ceases to be indifferent to this fact. He takes stock of it, and in such a way that now not merely does the thought of the surface occupy a place in his head but it joins the thought of the mark in guiding his action. What this comes to in practice is that, in placing marks on the surface, he will now be influenced by the contrast between mark and what lies around the mark.

But, once again, over and above the description under which the agent's action is intentional – that of 'depositing marks on a surface', or (a more explicit formulation) 'covering some parts of the surface with marks while leaving other parts uncovered' – there will be other, many other, descriptions true of what he does. For instance, it will be true that, the surface on which the marks are deposited being bounded, each time a mark is deposited, it will lie at a certain distance from each of the various edges. But, once again, this is a fact to which our agent is indifferent.

But now we are to imagine that the agent takes stock of this fact and in such a way that the thought of the edge not merely enters his head – and, of course, it may have been there already – but it joins thoughts of the mark and of the surface in guiding his action. And what this comes to in practice is that those aspects of the mark which gain visual prominence when the edge of the surface registers itself with the eye receive attention.

For this process by which the agent abstracts some hitherto unconsidered, hence unintentional, aspect of what he is doing or what he is working on, and makes the thought of this feature contribute to guiding his future activity, I use the term '*thematization*'.¹⁰ So far our agent has successively thematized the *mark*, the *surface*, and the *edge*.

Thematization is, I believe, crucial to the way in which painting must be carried out if it is to be an art. However just how the two are related must be left until thematization itself is further clarified. There are two ways in which the phenomenon needs to be filled out.

From the examples of thematization that I have chosen, it would be easy to go away with a one-sided idea of what can be thematized. And from what I have found to say about the chosen examples, it would be easy to go away with an over-simplified idea of what thematization itself amounts to. My account is exposed to the twin hazards of one-sidedness and over-simplification: one a misunderstanding of the thematized feature, the other a misunderstanding of the thematizing process.

What I propose to do is to imagine the activity of our agent taken a few stages further forward: three, to be precise. By doing so, we shall be able to avoid these two dangers, and also to have thematization more clearly, more fully, more accurately, before us. Then, and only then, will it be possible to examine the significance of thematization for the art of painting.

7. So, first, against one-sidedness.

One-sidedness might arise because in all three cases so far considered – mark, surface, edge – what is thematized pre-exists its thematization. Mark, surface, and edge, are all, we might say, facts of the matter. But it doesn't have to be like this. In certain cases thematization, along with (of course) the facts of the matter, brings about what is thematized. An example: As the agent places his marks on a surface with an edge – doing all this intentionally – he notices something. He notices that the marked surface looks better one way up than another. Then the thought that one way up is the right way up and the other ways up are wrong helps to guide what he does: and, when this happens, he thematizes what I shall call *orientation*, and, as he does so, orientation comes into existence. Just what this comes to in practice, or how the thought of a right and a wrong way up can influence an agent's action, I leave to be filled in, but I have introduced orientation to make the point that orientation doesn't pre-exist thematization of orientation. All that does, the only fact of the matter, is that any marked surface, any surface humanly marked, will look different different ways up, so that between those different ways up preferences can form.

Secondly, against incompleteness, and the two further steps forward which should help remove incompleteness from the account.

As the agent continues to mark the canvas – now the thoughts of mark, surface, edge, orientation, all active in his mind – he notices that some of these marks, because of how they have landed on the surface, coalesce. Perceptually they form wholes or units. Groups of them are seen as one. And, if we now imagine that the agent, having noticed this fact, lets the thoughts of these units not merely colour the perception of what he has already done but guide what he goes on to do, he has made another step forward in thematization. He has thematized the *motif*. Once again, what this amounts to in practice I shall leave to you.

But now, having done this, as the agent proceeds to construct motifs intentionally, he

notices a new fact. He notices that quite often, as he steps back and looks at one of these motifs, he will have a special kind of perceptual experience. As well as continuing to see the marks as they have fallen on the surface, he will also, at the same time, within the same experience though as another aspect of it, see something in front of, standing out ahead of, something else. This special kind of experience, which I call *seeing-in*, marked by this strange duality – of seeing the marked surface, and of seeing something in the surface – which I call *twofoldness*, is not something altogether new to our agent.¹¹ He has had such experiences before. He has had them looking at differentiated surfaces which owe nothing to the action of an agent. He has had them on looking at stained walls or at clouds and seeing in them fighting horsemen, or whales, or camels. But now we are to imagine that the thought of things that can, through such experiences, be seen in front of other things comes to guide the way he marks the surface. He now marks the surface, he forms motifs, so as to produce such experiences, so that, when the surface is looked at, something will be seen in front of something else. In doing so, he thematizes the *image*.

It is important to recognize that thematizing the image is a step beyond thematizing the motif.¹² For, though the front edge of the deposited motif, or the edge closest to the agent, will indeed be raised above the surface on which it lies, this is far too fine a point for the agent to notice, at any rate standardly. No, what he sees in front of something else is something that he sees through, as a result of, looking at the motif. And it is this which I call the image.

If the story I have been telling of the evolution of Ur-painting had been an historical account, which it isn't, the step we have reached would correspond to a momentous event in its development. It would correspond to the discovery of *representation*. Thematization of the image ushers in representation: representation, not *figuration*, which is a specific form of representation, in which we identify the thing we see in front of something else as, say, a man, a horse, a bowl of fruit, the sky, the death of an animal.¹³ All that representation requires is that we see in the marked surface things three-dimensionally related.

In my next lecture I shall have something further to say about representation and the special kind of visual experience in which it is grounded: seeing-in. But I have taken the argument up to the image in order, you may recall, to remove an incompleteness, a radical incompleteness, in my account of what thematization is. The point which has not so far been made but which can best be made in the context of the image is this: Thematization is always for an end. The agent thematizes in pursuit of a purpose. Thematization belongs to an instrumental, or means-end, way of using the materials of painting, and it is this imposition of an end upon the materials that converts them into a medium.

To some of you this fact about thematization will come as no revelation, and others will have already given it implicit recognition. You will have smuggled some end into your understanding of my account of Ur-painting and its development. You may, for instance, have assumed that the Ur-painter sought pleasure: giving pleasure, or getting pleasure. I say this because, in the absence of attributing some end – some one end or some multiplicity of ends – to the agent, it seems that you could not have followed me when I suggested, or when I asked you to fill in, what thematization of this or that aspect of the painting would (as I put it) come to, or would come to in practice. It is only in conjunction with some end that it becomes intelligible how the agent's thought that he has the surface, or the edge, or orientation, or the motif, to work with could guide him in how he marks the surface, or could lead him to place the mark here rather than there, or to give it this size or shape or texture, or to bring it into concatenation with these rather than those other marks.

But now, with thematization of the image, all this is out into the open. The presence of a purpose or an end is now manifest, and that is because an end is built into the very

concept of an image. An image necessarily represents: though – to repeat a point, which bears repetition – it isn't necessarily figurative.

At this point, a small revision is needed.¹⁴ What I suggested as the starting-point for the process of thematization – that is, when the thought of the mark alone guides the agent's action – is an impossibility. An agent cannot be guided solely by the thought of the mark. He cannot be guided solely by the thought of any one thematized feature: or, for that matter, by a set of such thoughts. Additionally there must be operative in his mind the thought of an end, which the thematized feature or features then advance. In the absence of such a thought thematization is inert. This is true of Ur-painting, and it must be truer of painting practised as an art.

8. But, if thematization is always for an end, is there anything that can be said very generally about the end or ends for which it is pursued? Is there a broad formula under which the ends of Ur-painting, and so in time and with luck the ends of painting, and then of painting as an art, can be subsumed? I suggest that the broadest obtainable formula is this: the acquisition of *content* or *meaning*. Thematization is by and large pursued so as to endow the resultant surface with meaning. And meaning may in turn be glossed as that which we grasp when we understand a painting: when we understand, not some fact about the painting, but the painting itself. But for all its breadth, this formula about the ends of painting cannot be regarded as all-inclusive. It omits at least one end to which Ur-painting, as also the art of painting, has a powerful commitment. This is the end already referred to as the giving and getting of pleasure.

Pictorial meaning is diverse, and it is a separate task, to which subsequent lectures will be given over, to codify the varieties of pictorial meaning. But without anticipating what I shall say then, I want to indicate the type of account that I believe is appropriate to pictorial meaning. It is an account that runs counter to a number of views widely held today of what it is for a picture to have meaning. These views include structuralism, iconography, semiotics, and various breeds of cultural relativism, which, while widely diverging amongst themselves, have in common the belief, explicit or implicit, that pictorial meaning is primarily determined by rules, or by codes, or by conventions, or by the symbol system to which the meaningful picture belongs. I reject this belief. I do not deny that such factors can have a role to play in shaping, modifying, extending, meaning in certain cases, but I do deny that they are primary determinants of meaning.

Another way of putting the account that I am against is to say that it is one that assimilates the kind of meaning that pictures have to the kind of meaning that language has. For it is right to think that, very broadly speaking, linguistic meaning can be explained within some such set of terms as rules, codes, conventions, symbol systems. But pictures and their meaning cannot be.

What kind of account of pictorial meaning do I substitute for that furnished by the linguistic model? The proper account of pictorial meaning is, I believe, a psychological account. The kind of account that has quite rightly been chased out of the field of language, most notably through the influence of Wittgenstein,¹⁵ is at home in painting. On such an account what a painting means rests upon the experience induced in an adequately sensitive, adequately informed, spectator by looking at the surface of the painting as the intentions of the artist led him to mark it. The marked surface must be the conduit along which the mental state of the artist makes itself felt within the mind of the spectator if the result is to be that the spectator grasps the meaning of the picture.

This triad of factors upon which pictorial meaning is dependent – the mental state of the artist, the way this causes him to mark the surface, and the mental state that the marked surface sets up in the sensitive and informed spectator – will never be far away from these lectures, but a more general point that has clearly emerged from the preceding

discussion, and which we must now take stock of, is that any adequate account even of Ur-painting – let alone of painting as an art – must have two parts to it. And these two parts are interlocking and ultimately inextricable one from another. One part is dedicated to the medium of painting, the other part to meaning in painting. There must be an account of how the brute materials of painting are converted into a medium, and there must be an account of how the medium is used to generate meaning and of the different varieties of meaning in which this can issue. And now I return to the account of the medium, which is what thematization introduces us to.

9. There is yet another possible misunderstanding about thematization to remove. This time it is not a misunderstanding about what can be thematized (like that removed by considering orientation), nor is it a misunderstanding about what thematization is (like that removed by considering the image). It is a misunderstanding about the implications of thematization for painting. The misunderstanding would be about how thematization affects the look of the marked surface. For so far, in sketching the development of Ur-painting, I have countenanced the view that, as the thought of a certain pictorial feature comes to guide what the agent does, so that feature will gain in prominence on the surface. Indeed I have drawn on such a view – that is, I have drawn on your entertaining such a view – each time I suggested what thematization of this or that feature is likely to come to, to come to in practice.

Now in the vast majority of cases it works just like that. Prominence on the surface ensues upon thematization in the head. But it need not. Sometimes it doesn't, and, when it doesn't, this is because a process of *deletion* has been at work.¹⁶ When deletion operates, what happens is that an agent thematizes some feature of the work and then goes on to ensure that this feature of the work does not show up on the surface or shows up only in an attenuated fashion. An agent thematizes, say, the edge, and the way the thought of the edge guides the way he works is that the marks are now placed in studied indifference to their relationship to the edge. The constraints that the thematized edge would normally impose upon the artist's activity are deliberately flouted. But flouting such constraints presupposes, no less than respecting them, that the edge has been thematized.

If we now ask, Why is deletion ever practised?, What motivates its employment?, the answer is interesting for where it takes us. For the likeliest reason why an agent will want to attenuate a certain feature which he has thematized is his sense that this feature has become a distracting, or an insipid, or an anodyne, or – to put it at its most general – a meaningless, presence in the work of his contemporaries and his predecessors.

Two things about this explanation are interesting. First, there is the way in which it further rivets together thematization and the generation of meaning. Indeed it connects thematization and meaning conceived as I maintain it should be: that is, psychologically. It is just because there are no rules or conventions of pictorial meaning, it is just because pictorial meaning has constantly to be re-created, that deletion comes into its own as a method for ensuring meaningfulness. Deletion gets rid of what once had, but no longer has, meaning. Secondly, for the agent to think in these terms, or to take account of other people's work while working on his own, it looks as though the enterprise in which he is engaged must already be an historical phenomenon. That is to say, it must now be an enterprise in which tradition, or a sense of the past as providing a starting-point for the present, constrains – constrains and encourages – what those who undertake it do.

10. Thematization has not gone totally unrecognized by theorists of painting, though it has not been much discussed as such. However in one well-known, much publicized, account of how contemporary painting came to be as it is, the concept of thematization

has been heavily used.¹⁷ I do not intend to confront directly the issue of the historical truth of this account, I want to consider only the way in which it understands thematization. I single out this account because I believe that it completely traduces thematization.

The premiss of the account is that, over the last hundred years or so, advanced artists have tended to thematize not just the surface but the flatness of the surface and to do so emphatically. ('Emphatically', as used here, conveniently reminds us that, when several features are simultaneously thematized, there must be a pull between them, and so there will be a difference in weighting.) From this premiss the account concludes that thematization of flatness can be used to identify mainstream modernism. Whether this is a correct identification of mainstream modernism, and whether there is such a thing as mainstream modernism, is the issue of historical truth, which I do not want to confront, but in establishing this developmental thesis the account has built into it a view of what thematization is. For in this account what happens, progressively, in the work of, say, Cézanne, Matisse, Barnett Newman, is that – and these are supposed to be interchangeable ways of saying the same thing – the flatness of the surface is asserted by the picture, alternatively the picture makes reference to its flatness, alternatively the flat surface is about itself. Now all these ways of putting the matter, taken, that is, as descriptions of thematization of flatness, are, I believe, wrong. They are wrong because of what they assume thematization to be. Let us look at what is wrong about them.

In the first place, the view of thematization that emerges does nothing, as far as I can see, to establish the interest of the resultant paintings. What does a painting that has a flat surface have further to offer us by telling us that its surface is flat – and so on for any thematized feature? I am aware of no serious attempt to confront this issue.

Secondly, the view presents thematization as fundamentally a hermetic process. For, on this view, as a feature is thematized, so it is turned round upon itself and it becomes the mouthpiece of its own existence. Such a view obviously goes against what I have been insisting upon: that is, that as a feature becomes thematized, so it becomes available to the agent as a means to some end. Of course, it is not inconsistent with my view that sometimes this end might turn out to be the assertion of that feature's existence. But surely this must be a rare case, and, above all, it cannot be taken as definitive of thematization as such.

Thirdly, the view connects thematization and reflexiveness: it is inviting to do so: the two phenomena seem to go together. But where the view goes wrong lies in the particular way in which it connects the two terms. Specifically it picks on, and associates thematization with, the wrong kind of reflexiveness. There are two stages to this process. First, the view holds that what is reflexive is the thematized feature itself, and, secondly, it holds that the way in which the thematized feature is reflexive is the way in which a sentence is reflexive when it refers to itself – as, for instance, does the sentence, 'This sentence has five words'. This kind of reflexiveness has much attracted the attention of logicians because in certain circumstances, which therefore reward investigation, it can generate paradoxes: that is, sentences such that, if we assume them to be true, it follows that they are false, and, if we assume them to be false, it follows that they are true. An example of such a paradoxical sentence is 'This sentence is false'. But this kind of reflexiveness, which we may call 'self-referentiality', has, I believe, nothing to do with thematization. The correct way of connecting thematization and reflexiveness is surely this: First, it is the agent (not some part of the surface that he marks) that is reflexive, and, secondly, the agent is reflexive in that he thinks over what he has done, brings to light inadvertent features of his action, decides on how these features could be made to count for something, and resolves next time and onwards to put this into practice. The relevant reflexiveness is of a psychological not a semantic order.

What is the importance of this issue? Why does it matter whether we get right the kind of reflexiveness that is integral to thematization?

The answer is simple.

If thematization has built into it the kind of reflexiveness that I suggest, then we can see how thematization invariably ties in with that process which I have introduced in connection with deletion: the dissatisfaction with the over-familiar, the desire for new resources, and the need to renew, to refresh, the roots of pictorial meaning. By contrast, if thematization involved reflexiveness in the sense of self-referentiality, this would deny any role to thematization in the generation of meaning. Indeed, since self-referentiality, or being about oneself, is a form of meaning, thematization on this view would presuppose meaning.

11. It is now time to return to painting, and to the way it has to be practised if it is to be an art. This, I said, could be regarded as a matter of the descriptions under which it is intentional. But, if it is, this, I also said, must not be understood simplistically. For I am not saying that painting is an art if it is intentional under this description, but that it is not an art if it is intentional under some other description. Painting does not acquire the status of art as a direct reward for the intentions that cause it. The position is rather this: For painting to become an art, it is a matter not of the specific descriptions under which it is intentional, but of how the descriptions under which it is intentional come to be adopted, and how one such description gives rise to, or gives way to, another. I have introduced thematization into the discussion to suggest how this can happen: and also to suggest why it should happen. Thematization arises out of the agent's attempt to organize an inherently inert material so that it will become serviceable for the carriage of meaning.

However there are still some further ways in which the account that I have produced, or that thematization has suggested, needs to be enriched if it is to be in any way adequate to what is distinctive of painting as an art.

In the first place, I have considered thematization only of the grosser aspects of painting. From mark all the way to image the thematized aspects I have isolated have been aspects of the painting that readily get captured in words. But thematization by an artist must reach to aspects of painting too fine-grained for language to follow it. These will include minute aspects, and overall aspects, and relational aspects.

Secondly, I have talked so far about thematization as one might about, say, addition or inference, as though it were a purely abstract or intellectual process. But this is not right. For in real life, or when painting is conducted as an art, thematization occurs within that fragment of our psychology which is essentially embodied. And this turns out to be crucial. Thematization requires an eye. It requires an eye that can make fine distinctions within the thematized feature. And it requires a hand. It requires a hand that can generate fine differences within the thematized feature. If the demands that thematization makes either upon the eye or upon the hand turn out to be more strenuous than the organs or muscles of our body can meet, even after arduous apprenticeship, thematization stops in its tracks.

And, thirdly, it is not the case, as, once again, my account of Ur-painting may suggest, that the conversion of unintentional aspects of the painting into intentional aspects is a continuing, let alone a continuous, process, or that it proceeds at a uniform pace throughout the career of the artist. At a certain stage in the artist's career, important advances, once made, are banked. In saying this I have in mind a phenomenon which the more traditional modes of art-history have always rightly recognized to be at the very centre of their subject: *style*. They have recognized it to be at the core of painting practised as an art, even if they have not recognized what it is. Failure to recognize what style is persists, I believe, into current theory.

12. When we talk of style in painting, there are two different ways in which we may talk about it.¹⁸ There are two different conceptions of style. There is the conception that we use when we talk of *general style*, and there is the conception that we use when we talk of *individual style*, and the difference between the two conceptions is greater, much greater, than meets the eye.

General style comes in different forms. There are the *universal styles*: like classicism, or the painterly style, or the geometrical style. There are the *period or historical styles*: like neo-classicism, or International Gothic, or art nouveau, or (on one understanding of the term) the baroque. And there are the *school styles*, like the Giottesque, or the Norwich School, or the style of the Nazarenes. Universal style, period style, school style – all this is general style, and general style contrasts with individual style, which comes in only one form. Individual style is the style of an individual painter. But not just of any individual painter: only of an individual painter who has one. It is, in other words, a real question, or a question about the world, whether a given painter has a style of his own – though I believe it is a condition that must be met by any painter who is also an artist.

The claim that not every painter has a style of his own is a claim that it is possible to appreciate only when we have fully mastered what individual style is. To do this we must return to the contrast between individual and general style.

When we talk about a general style and apply it to a body of work – and it is all the same for these purposes whether it is a universal, a period, or a school, style – what we are in effect doing is employing some kind of shorthand for a set of characteristics which we and those who share our outlook find particularly interesting, arresting, innovatory, in that stretch of painting. It picks out what we find distinctive of that painting. So, for instance, when we, we nowadays, use the term 'baroque' in the sense of a period style, we are likely to be referring in that body of work to which we apply it to some number of the following characteristics: strong chiaroscuro, forceful movement, liveliness of touch, recession, diagonal composition, deletion of defined volume, heady emotionalism, sensitivity to represented texture. Significantly they are a mixed bag of characteristics. However at different moments, there will be different historical interests, different contemporary concerns, that will make different characteristics, though still a mixed lot, seem distinctive of a particular stretch of art and, as this happens, the characteristics associated with a given general style will alter. The new characteristics will replace the old characteristics in fixing for us and our contemporaries the nature of the baroque. General styles form and reform according to the shifting perspectives of art-history, and some methodologists, not unreasonably, have seen in these shifts the perennial vitality of the subject.

In the case of individual style too, there is a set of characteristics associated with each style. And at this point the resemblance between the two conceptions of style stops, and the differences begin. Let us look at them.

In the first place, the characteristics associated with individual styles do not alter. They are fixed immutably, though inevitably, art-historians, struggling towards the correct formulation of these characteristics, will come up with formulations that fall short of this ideal and thus differ amongst themselves. Secondly, to talk of an individual style is not to employ a shorthand for those characteristics. The style itself is distinct from the characteristics associated with it, and it is it that causes them to be as they are. Individual style is in the artist who has it, and though, in the present state of knowledge, it must be a matter of speculation precisely how it is stored in the mind, style has psychological reality. These two distinctive marks of individual style are linked. It is just because the characteristics associated with individual style are characteristics caused by something that is different from them and is in the artist that it is not up to us to decide what they are, settling now for this set, now for that set.

And now an analogy may bring out the kind of thing individual style is. Style, pictorial style, is not at all like language, though some have claimed that it is. The two have, for a start, totally different structures. So my analogy is not one between style and language (the two things), it is between having a style and knowing a language (the two competences).

(Of course there are differences too between the two competences, reflecting, in part, the differences between the things. A person knows a language because he has learnt it, an artist has a style because he has formed it. Another difference is that, though both knowledge of a language and possession of a style are inconceivable except in an embodied creature, style reaches deeper into the body to find its moorings. It modifies – something we have already seen with thematization – innervations to the limbs and muscles, and it imposes discriminations upon the eye. Individual style has not only psychological reality, it has psycho-motor reality. Though this is true to some degree, it is true to a lesser degree, of knowledge of a language.)

The burden of the analogy is that both knowing a language and having a style, being competences, are deep-seated in the person, and they manifest themselves in output: in uttering words, in marking a surface. In response to different stimuli or different problems, the same competence will manifest itself in bewilderingly different solutions, though in each case the manifestation will fall within precisely defined boundaries. Diversity of output is, given variety in circumstance, not merely perfectly compatible with, it is to be predicted from, identity of competence. And a further fact to be noted about both these competences is that they, like the creatures in whom they are embodied, have a natural history. They arise, they persist, they develop, they are responsive to internal and external influences, and, in unfavourable circumstances, they may decline or decay. But the basic idea that this analogy fosters is that individual style has great explanatory power. Subsumption of an artist's work under a general style has no explanatory power, though it may sharpen our eyes to characteristics, even individual stylistic characteristics, which we should otherwise have overlooked. If general style dropped out of our thinking, we should lose a tool of classification. If individual style dropped out of our thinking, we should lose a form of explanation – as well as losing sight of a piece of reality.

Let us look briefly at the variety of ways in which we may invoke individual style explanatorily.

In the first place, and this is the simplest case, we may invoke style to explain how a given painting by a painter who has a style of his own looks the way it does, or, for that matter, how two paintings by him, painted sufficiently close together, look alike. It is barely an extension of this point that we can also invoke style to explain how two paintings by different painters, each with a style of his own, look unlike.

Of course, since not all the characteristics that an artist gives his paintings are stylistic characteristics, we shall not be able through invoking style to explain all the peculiarities of the single picture, or all the similarities between the first pair of pictures, or all the dissimilarities between the second pair of pictures. We shall be able to explain only the peculiarities, the similarities, the dissimilarities, that have style as their origin. And, if we want to know how such characteristics can be demarcated, or what stylistic characteristics have in common, I suspect that, until we have knowledge on a topic about which I have suggested we are almost totally ignorant – namely, how style is stored in the mind – we ought not to hazard a guess. To say, for instance, that stylistic characteristics are always formal characteristics is – unless 'formal' is simply being used to mean stylistic – in excess of what we know or have any good reason to believe.

All the preceding cases in which style is invoked to explain how paintings look do not involve what I have said is an essential fact about individual style: that it has a history.

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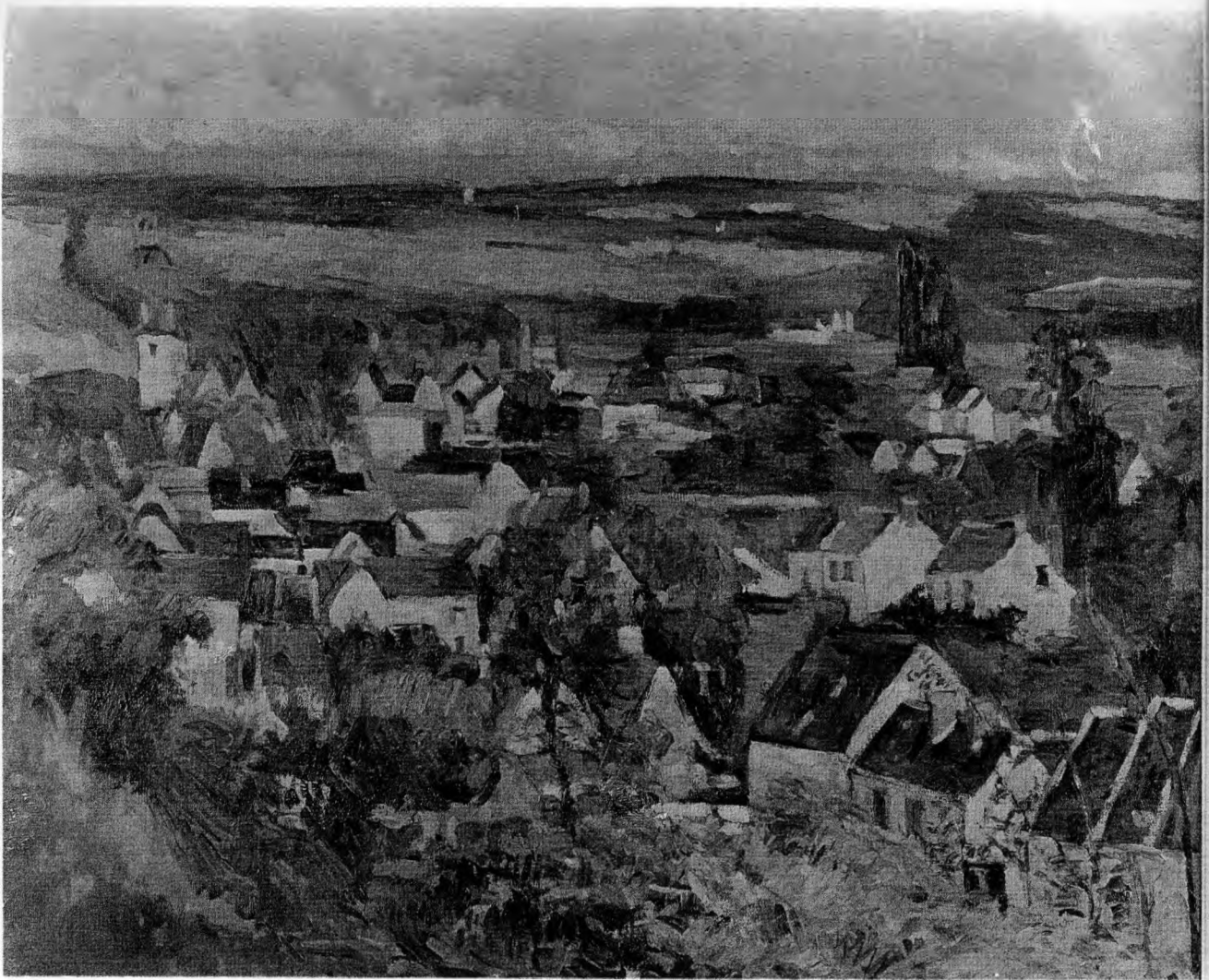
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1 Paul Cézanne
View of Auvers c. 1874

From the point of view of style these explanations are synchronic explanations.

Next in line then are explanations that do make use of the fact that style has a history. The simplest case of such diachronic explanation is one in which we take two paintings by the same artist painted at different periods, and we then explain how they look unlike by invoking developments or modifications in the style. It is the same style, but the style has changed.

However there are more complex ways in which diachronic explanation that invokes style can be structured. These ways are often overlooked by art-history, and sometimes they are, implicitly at any rate, denied. The ways I have in mind explain the difference between two paintings by the same artist by invoking, not changes within the style, but changes between style and non-style. They appeal to the fact that one painting is stylistic and the other painting is non-stylistic. Or, as a variant upon this, the peculiarities of a single painting can be explained by the fact that it is non-stylistic.

Once we recognize that style can be employed in explanation in this way – and that it can be employed in this way is made possible only by taking a substantial or realist view

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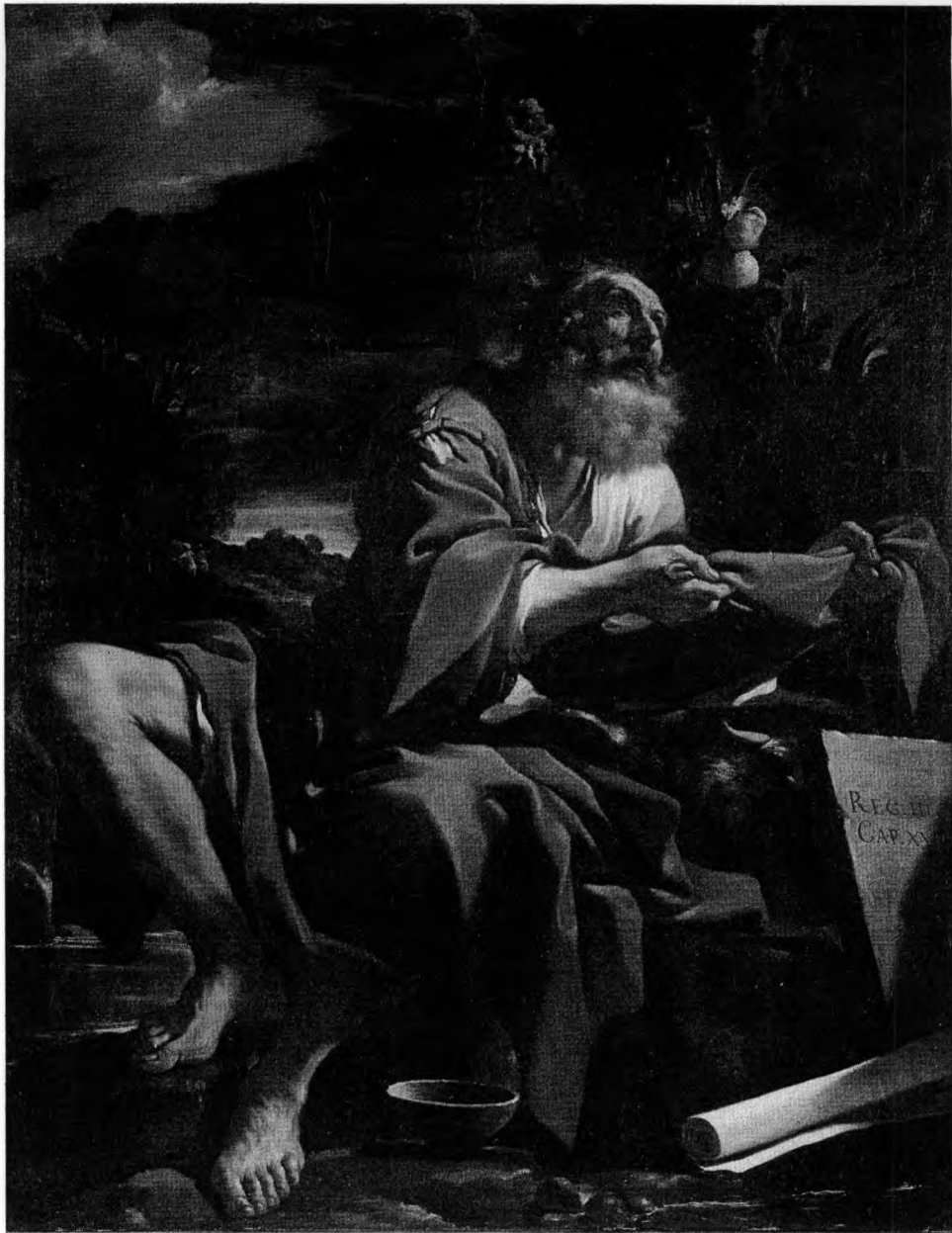


2 Paul Cézanne
View of Médan c.1880

of what style is – it should also be apparent that this explanation comes in different forms. It comes in as many forms as there are ways for a painting to be non-stylistic: ways intrinsic to the natural history of style.

The first and most obvious way in which a painting can be non-stylistic is that it can be *pre-stylistic*. It happens to all except those whose lives have become enfolded in myth – myth of their own or of others' making, Picasso or Giotto – that their work passes through a phase before their style is formed. However, as a corollary of this, it is only with an artist whose style is formed late that it is illuminating to recognize that some of his work is pre-stylistic. And then it is. A striking case is Cézanne, whose work may be regarded as pre-stylistic right up until the mid 1870s. Recognizing this fact allows us to see what a triumph it was for Cézanne when he could allow his work to be tentative. A lack of confidence, which a lack of style induced in him, had forced him, up until that moment, to be emphatic. The point becomes clear when we compare, say, the pre-stylistic *View of Auvers* (Art Institute, Chicago), of c.1874 with the fully stylistic *View of Médan* (Burrell Collection, Glasgow Museums and Art Galleries, Glasgow), of c.1880.

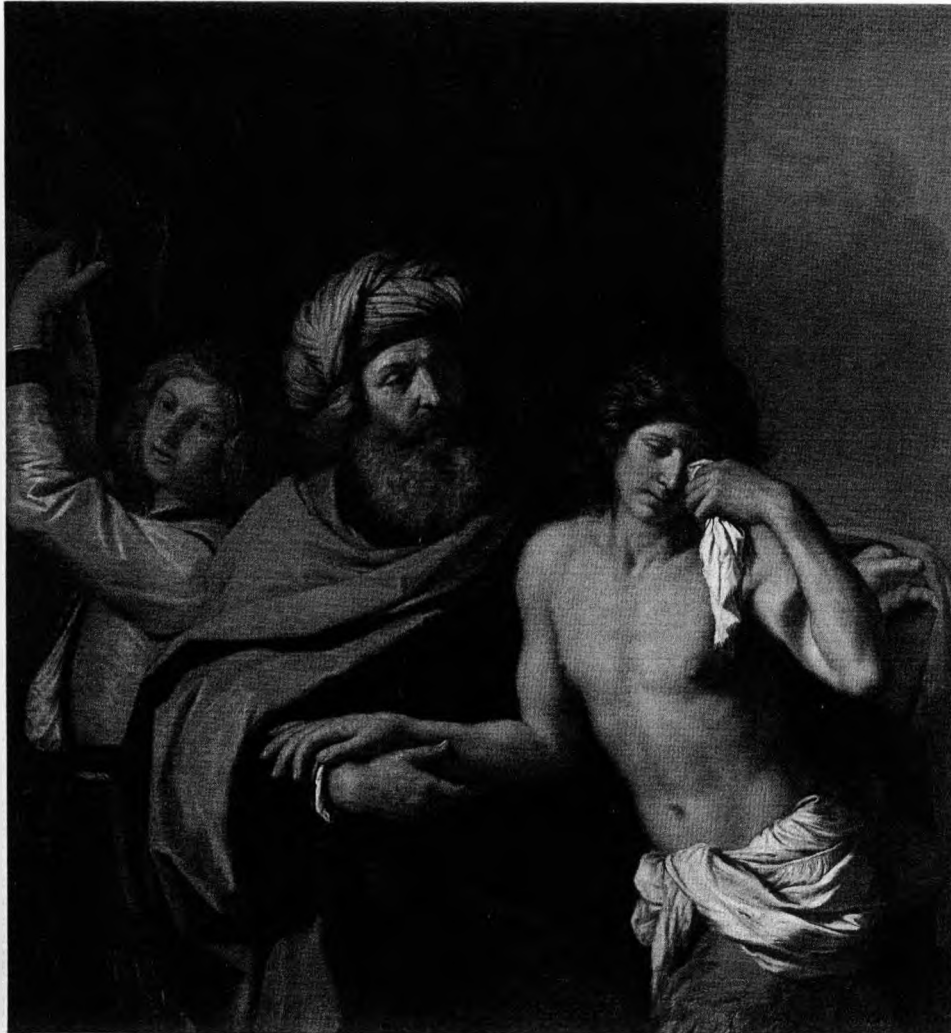
What the artist does



3 Guercino
Elijah fed by Ravens
 1620

Another variety of the non-stylistic, which is to be found only amongst the less than fortunate artists, is the *post-stylistic*, or work done in the years after their style had collapsed. It has been plausibly argued, though not in these very terms, that the seventeenth-century Emilian artist Guercino lost his style after he came under what was for him the baneful influence of Domenichino and Roman classicism.¹⁹ After his conversion he worked in a style, in a school style, but he ceased to have a style of his own, and the inflexibility of his work, beautiful though much of it is, and the inertness of so many aspects of his painting, may then be understood in terms of this fact. A relevant comparison would be between the stylistic *Elijah fed by Ravens* (collection Sir Denis 3

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4 Mahon, London), of 1620, and the post-stylistic *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (Timken Art Gallery, San Diego, California), of the mid-1650s.

4 Guercino
The Return of the Prodigal Son 1654-5

A third variety of the non-stylistic is the *extra-stylistic*, or work done by an artist who has formed a style, not lost it, but is confronted by a challenge that he cannot meet. He does not decline the challenge, he takes it on, but his style will not reach to the new assignment: the work he does bypasses his style. A false or idealized view of the psychology of the artist has led traditional connoisseurship, or the science of attribution, to deny the extra-stylistic. It has done so as though to concede the point that an artist might ever work outside the boundaries of his style would put all the findings of connoisseurship in jeopardy. But such cases clearly exist, and they do nothing to dispute the validity of connoisseurship provided that only we can in turn explain how these anomalous cases occur, or how style can be inoperative. One example of the extra-stylistic is provided by Hogarth, *Moses brought to Pharaoh's Daughter* (Thomas Coram Foundation, London): in this painting Hogarth reaches outside his normal subject-matter, attempts allegory, but cannot get his style to negotiate the new demands. This emerges

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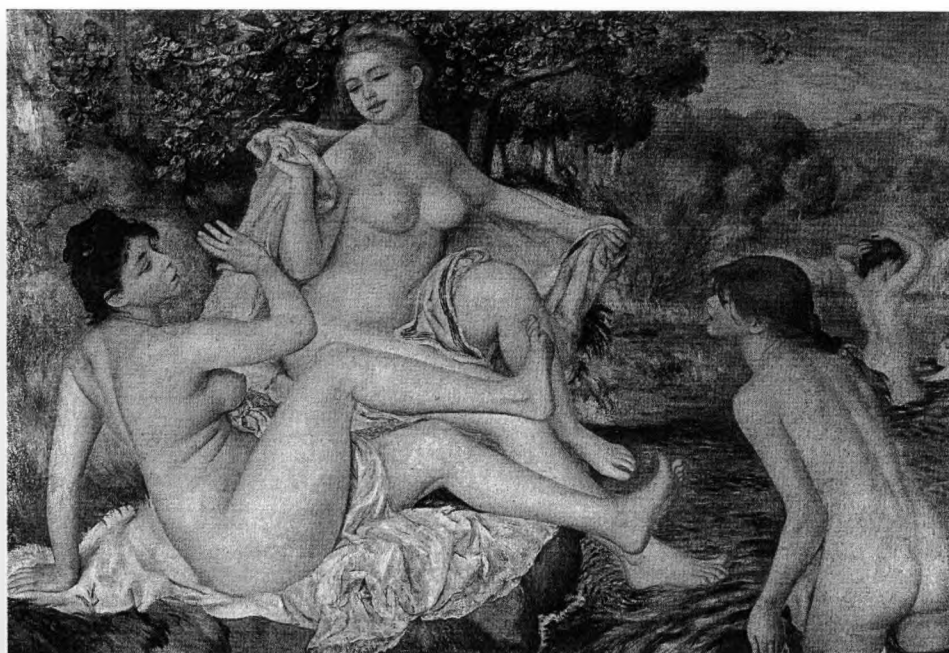


5 William Hogarth
*Moses brought to
 Pharaoh's Daughter* 1746

6 William Hogarth
*Scene from 'The Beggar's
 Opera'* 1728



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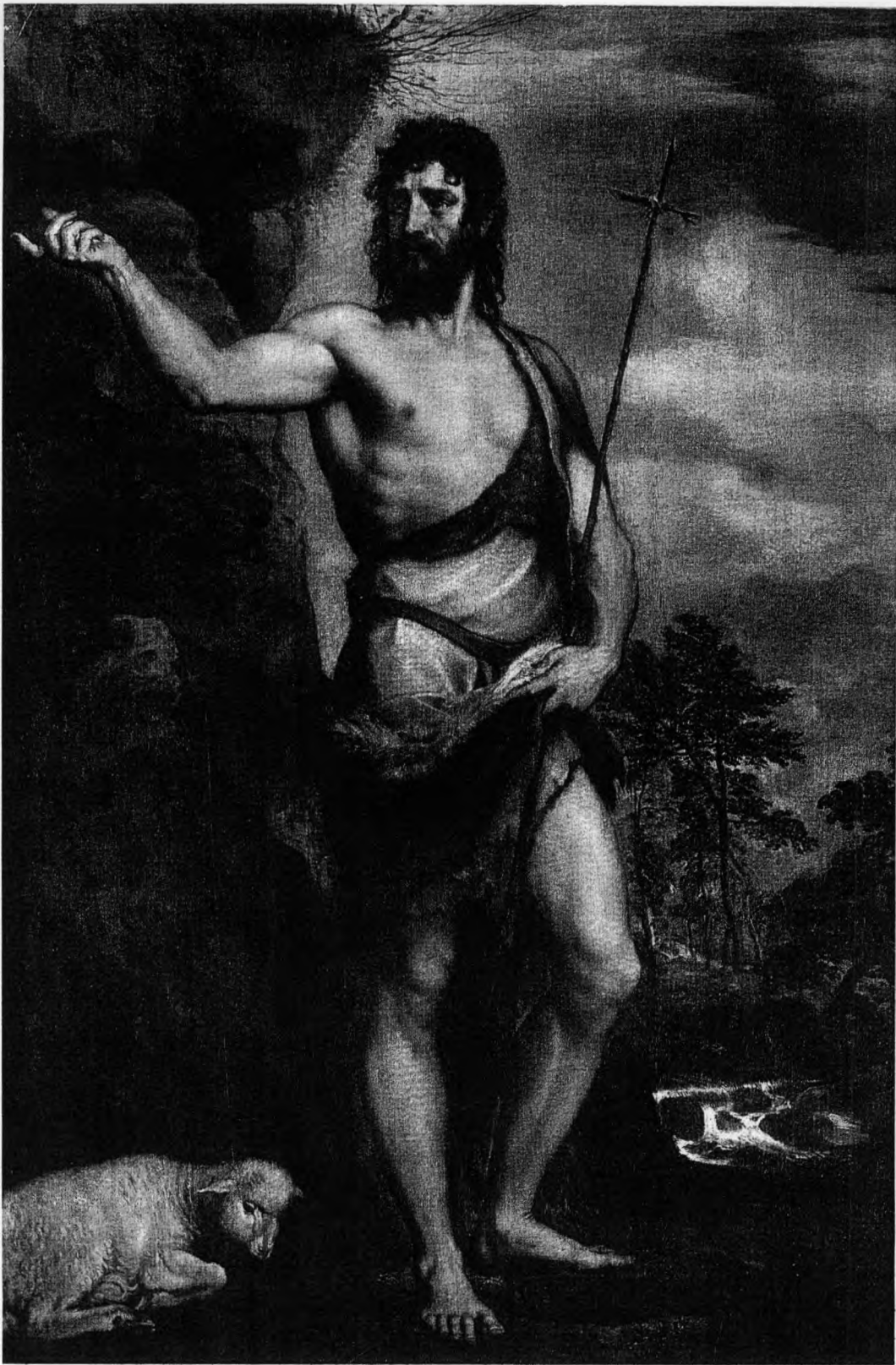
7 Auguste Renoir
Bathers 1887



8 Auguste Renoir
The Luncheon of the Boating Party 1881

clearly when we compare *Moses brought to Pharaoh's Daughter* with the highly stylistic
 6 *Scene from 'The Beggar's Opera'* (Tate Gallery, London). A yet more striking example of the
 extra-stylistic is provided by certain works of Renoir executed in the 1880s, when out of
 deference to the High Renaissance and in pursuit of Ingres, he hardened his contours and
 7 simplified the paint surface. We see the consequences in a work like the extended *Bathers*
 (Museum of Art, Philadelphia), when we set it beside a fully stylistic masterpiece like *The*
 8 *Luncheon of the Boating Party* (Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.).

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9 Titian *St John the Baptist* early 1540s(?)



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9, 10 But the most intriguing, most disturbing, case of the extra-stylistic, which tells us something new about style, occurs in the work of an artist unexcelled in genius, about whom I shall be talking later on in these lectures: Titian. For with Titian style has some of the structure of a personality. Confronted by a rival, whose name may be Pordenone or Michelangelo, Titian responds by engorging him. He appropriates his opponent's style, or some part of it, which remains, for a brief moment, undigested within his own. We can see this in the *St John the Baptist* (Accademia, Venice), or the *St John the Evangelist on Patmos* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.). The result is not, as with Hogarth or Renoir, disappointing: it is harrowing, and short-lived. Titian works through the challenge, and his style reasserts itself.

It will be noted that, in talking of these more complex ways in which style-explanation can be diachronic, I said that in such cases we invoke, not changes within a style, as we do in the simpler cases, but changes between style and non-style. I did not speak of explanation that invokes change from one style to another style. I did not do so because I believe that, only in exceptional circumstances, should we concede that such a thing can happen. It isn't a strict consequence of, but it goes along very well with, the view of individual style as something real, hence explanatory, that we should be extremely reluctant, without evidence of massive psychological disturbance, to multiply styles by departing from the maxim, One artist, one style. The cottage industry which has subdivided Picasso's work into a proliferating plurality of styles should serve as a

10 Titian
St John the Evangelist on Patmos probably 1544

cautionary example. If we cannot discern the common processes that underlie paintings only a limited number of years apart, then we should ask ourselves, first, whether we have not confused what is not style with style, and, secondly, whether we have not identified stylistic characteristics in ways that are too superficial or too narrow to reveal their roots in underlying processes. Surely an artist's style should be no more thought of as susceptible to fragmentation or fission than his personality.

13. To bring the issue of style into sharper focus it is necessary to make the distinction, missing from many discussions of the issue, between *style* and *signature*.²⁰ By signature what is meant are those features of a particular artist's work which are singled out because, like the artist's signature itself, they are found to be the surest guides to establishing the authorship of individual pictures.

Obviously signature is a relativized notion: relativized, that is, to the connoisseur who is attempting to establish the corpus of a given artist's work. It depends on the methods and instruments that the connoisseur has at his disposal, as well as on the nature of the cognitive stock upon which he can draw, which features of the artist's work will be evidentially valuable for him. For that matter the condition of the pictures he is considering will affect what it is appropriate or efficient for him to take as signature. It will be of little use for him to know that the artist in question used certain pigments and not others if he lacks the means of chemically analyzing the paint surface. It will be of even less use to him to be told that the artist characteristically made frequent microscopic changes of direction in his line if he has no access to the magnification necessary to discern this. It will be worthless to him to know that his artist used certain glazes if a zealous restorer removed them twenty years earlier.

But the most important fact to recognize about the style versus signature distinction is that it is a conceptual distinction. There is no a priori reason why the style-characteristics of a given artist and those features of his work which best reveal his hand to someone with a specific body of expertise should not be identical: it might be that the most practical way of reconstructing the corpus of an artist's work is on what are purely stylistic grounds. But the crucial point is that, even if there is a complete overlap of style-characteristics and features of signature, the grounds on which aspects of an artist's work will be classified as style and those on which they will be classified as signature will differ. Aspects belong to signature if they play a significant role in a certain kind of scholarly inquiry. Aspects belong to style if they derive from an underlying competence deep in the artist's psychology.

Once this distinction is grasped it will come as no surprise to learn that often style and signature do not coincide. For very few artists indeed will they completely coincide. Signature will often be compiled out of superficial mannerisms which repeat themselves across a wide variety of works: rather in the way in which a graphologist – the poor man's connoisseur – may recognize a piece of handwriting on the basis of certain twists and curlicues rather than on the fundamental way in which the letters are formed, or what has been called the *Formniveau*.²¹ It is a defect in traditional connoisseurship that the distinction between style and signature has not always been recognized: either explicitly, or in practice.

14. Throughout this lecture I have been claiming that, if we are to understand when and why painting is an art, we must consider it in the perspective of the artist. But I should make the same claim about how we should proceed if we were not interested in the question of painting as an art, but were simply interested in painting and were prepared to take its status as art for granted. If we are interested in understanding either painting as such or individual paintings, we must start from the artist.

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The considerations that would be needed to establish this point are more inclusive than any I have so far introduced, just as the point itself is more general, but the prime consideration in such an argument would be the by now familiar claim that painting is an intentional activity. Indeed, given that this is the case, the burden of proof would seem to fall upon those who think that the perspective of the artist, which means in effect seeing the art and the artist's activity in the light of his intentions, is not the proper starting point for any attempt to understand painting. For it is they who break with the standard patterns of explanation in which understanding is preserved.²²

To gain an overview of the issue, let us try to imagine how someone could maintain that, for the purposes of understanding painting, painting either in general or in particular, we do not have to retrieve the intentions that motivate the artist. Roughly there are two strategies that might be adopted so as to secure this position. The first strategy is to insist that, if we are interested in understanding painting, at any rate painting in particular, then all we have to concern ourselves with is the things themselves: the activity from which the things result, hence the intentions that motivate this activity, are of no concern to us. The second strategy compromises on this last point. It allows that understanding painting does require us to concern ourselves with the activity from which the things result as well as with the things themselves, but it goes on to insist that this concern does not stretch to the intentions that motivate the activity. So the first strategy says that we do not have to bother ourselves with what the artist does, whereas the second strategy says that we do not have to do so in the artist's perspective.

The first strategy as we have it before us is far too limited for the argument to reach its objective. For it should be a matter of common agreement that, when we try to understand at any rate particular paintings, it is things on which we must concentrate. That is because particular paintings are things. But the question remains whether, in concentrating on these things, we have to appeal to the activity from which they result if we are to understand them. There is obviously no inconsistency, and quite a lot of plausibility, in claiming that, when paintings, the things, are the *explicanda*, painting, the activity, has to come in as the *explicans*. Explanation requires – the claim would go – that we appeal from paintings to painting.

The success of the first strategy depends, then, upon its ability to block this appeal, and to show that consideration of the activity is unnecessary. To do this, it must generate a subsidiary tactic, and the tactic will be to pick out some other property that paintings have, a property which has nothing to do with how they are made, and which yet suffices to explain them. Their meaning can be understood – the tactic claims – through a grasp of this property. There are two, perhaps three, candidate properties. One candidate is the place that the painting occupies within a general symbol system. The other candidate is a function that the painting fulfils within a social system. A third variant of the tactic is to identify the property with what has been said in interpretation of the painting by some favoured institution. The institution may be the academy, it may be the professoriate, it may be the body of *avant-garde* artists. On this variant, we do not have to appeal to what the artist did in order to understand the painting, because what these people say goes. Once again we have an Institutional theory, though this time it is a theory not of what art is but of what art means. This variant of the tactic is however a variant of despair because it does not deliver what it promises. It allows us to say what a painting means, but it does not allow the painting itself to have meaning. For it makes meaning something inherently unstable. Hence it offers us not understanding, but the illusion of understanding.

The first two variants of the tactic would clearly do better than the third if there were such a property as that on behalf of which it is claimed that it can give us the meaning of the painting without appeal to how the painting was made. But is there really such a property as either variant picks out? Does every pictorial work of art occupy a place in a



11 Jan Vermeer
Allegory of Painting 1665

symbol system? Does every work of art fulfil a social function? In the next lecture I shall consider the first of these issues. As to the second I think it is manifest that the answer is, No, there is no one social function, there is not even a limited set of social functions, that all pictorial works of art necessarily discharge. What is certainly true is that *some* pictorial works of art, like altarpieces or dynastic cycles, do have a social function – though I would insist that it is extraneous to their being pictorial works of art. However in each case the work of art's function clearly underdetermines its meaning. Once we know the programme or the commission, our curiosity remains massively unsatisfied about what the work of art means. So, even if every pictorial work of art had a social function, it is unlikely that appeal to this function would suffice for interpretation.²³

Accordingly I now turn to the second strategy, which comes into operation when the first has failed. It tells us that, though, in understanding paintings, we may have to concern ourselves with the activity from which they result, this concern does not extend to the intentions that motivate the activity. We must now ask, How could this be? What reason could we have for taking account of the activity but ignoring the intentions that motivate it? For, as we have already seen, in the ordinary course of events we appeal to intention even to *describe* an action or activity that we are talking about. How then can it be claimed that the reference to intention is gratuitous? As far as I can see, there is only one set of circumstances in which such a claim could be justified, and that would be when the activity has been so fully choreographed that it unfolds according to a pattern in which the agent has no hand: for then the progress of the activity would be exactly the same no matter what the agent thought or felt. And this means, it must be stressed, not only that the agent would be unable to alter the drill, but that he would have no say in initiating it. He would have to act rather in the way in which an operative in a fully automated factory (but without robots) makes a machine part: for, in such a case, though

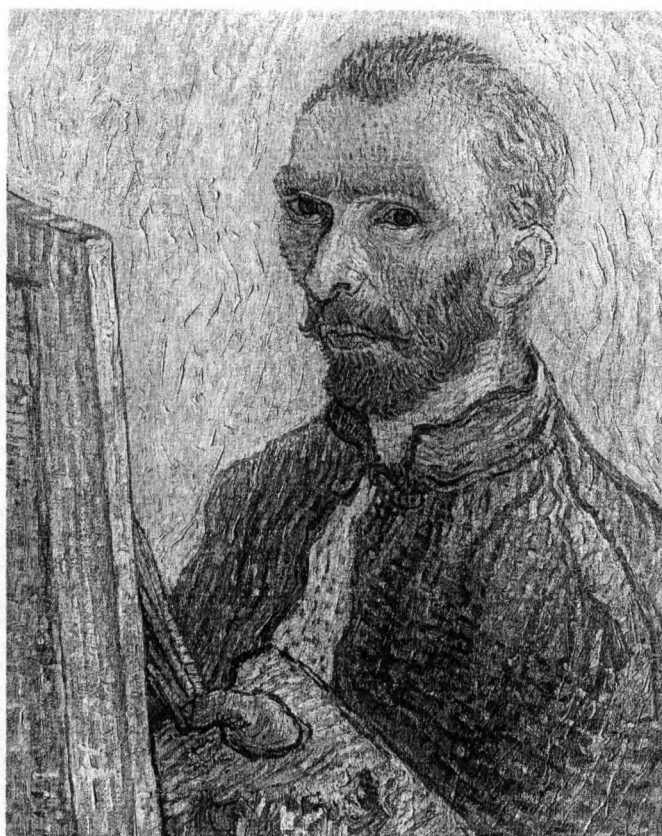
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12 Vincent van Gogh
Self-Portrait 1889

the operative's activity will be cited to explain the product, his intentions will not be. It seems to me clear that this is not how the painter, the painter as an artist, acts.

But it is crucial to recognize that, though adopting the perspective of the artist requires us to give pride of place to what the agent does, it does not require us to stop there. Above all, it does not require us to ignore or reject the point of view of the spectator. It requires us only to rethink it. And, if we start to rethink it, the first thing to strike us will be that the distinction between agent and spectator is primarily a distinction not between persons but between roles. And the second thing to strike us is that not merely can these different roles be adopted by the same person, but there is one person, one kind of agent, who must do so. That is the artist. The artist is essentially a spectator of his work. To understand why this should be so, I propose to raise, and leave you with, a question which, as far as I know, has not had much attention paid to it within aesthetics. It has not been found worth it. This question, long ignored, long despised, is, I believe, going to take us a good deal further into the philosophy of painting.

15. Over the centuries, there have been many many changes in the conditions of painting. There have been changes in the materials, in the physical scale of the work, in painting's social evaluation, in the presiding conventions, in the mutual expectations of painter and public, in myriad things. But, as painting's representation of painting makes clear to us, there has, amidst all this flux, been one noteworthy constancy, and that has been the posture, the bodily stance, that the painter adopts in the act of painting. It has been the practice for the painter to position himself in front of the support, on that side of it which he marks, facing it, with his eyes open and fixed upon it. Whether the representation aims at naturalism or at allegory, no matter what relocation of the painter it presupposes, to some fictional or distant scene, it conserves this posture. The

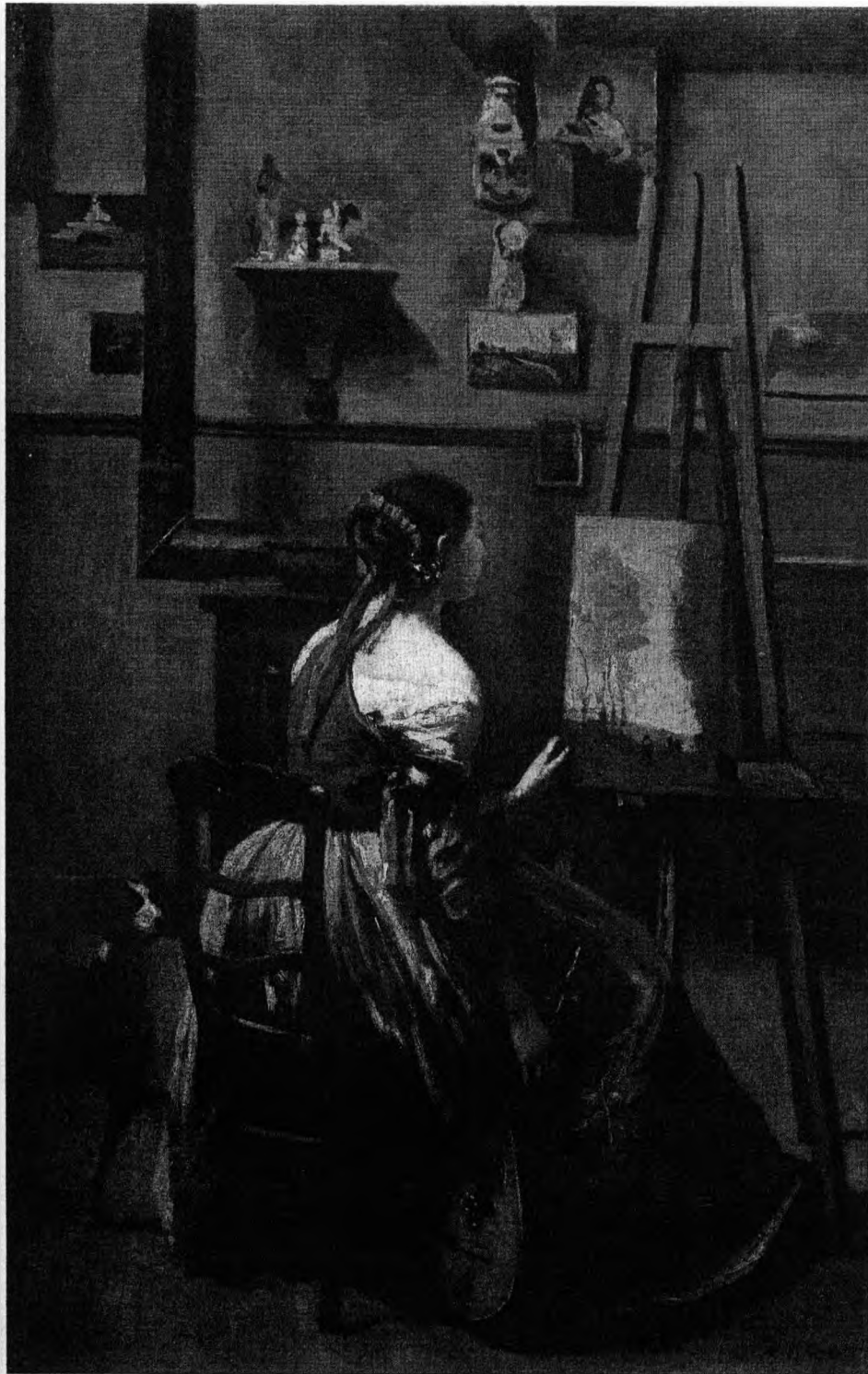
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13 Rogier van der Weyden
St Luke Painting the Virgin c. 1435, panel

testimonies of Vermeer and van Gogh, of Rogier van der Weyden and Corot, of a nineteenth-century artist and Jackson Pollock, concur in what they have to tell us about the deportment of the painter.

Why does the painter adopt this stance? What does he gain by it? What does its persistence show us about the nature of what he is doing? This seemingly dry and unpromising question takes us, I believe, to the heart of the question, Why must the artist be a spectator of his own work? It will be the starting-point of the next lecture.



14 Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot *The Artist's Studio* 1855-60, panel

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15 Greek, 9th century
*A Panel Painter copying a
Picture (Sacra parallela of
John of Damascus)*



16 Jackson Pollock
working, photograph

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