CHAPTER V

THE EXPRESSIVE OBJECT

Expression, like construction, signifies both an action and its result. The last chapter considered it as an act. We are now concerned with the product, the object that is expressive, that says something to us. If the two meanings are separated, the object is viewed in isolation from the operation which produced it, and therefore apart from individuality of vision, since the act proceeds from an individual live creature. Theories which seize upon "expression," as if it denoted simply the object, always insist to the uttermost that the object of art is purely representative of other objects already in existence. They ignore the individual contribution which makes the object something new. They dwell upon its "universal" character, and upon its meaning—an ambiguous term, as we shall see. On the other hand, isolation of the act of expressing from the expressiveness possessed by the object leads to the notion that expression is merely a process of discharging personal emotion—the conception criticized in the last chapter.

The juice expressed by the wine press is what it is because of a prior act, and it is something new and distinctive. It does not merely represent other things. Yet it has something in common with other objects and it is made to appeal to other persons than the one who produced it. A poem and picture present material passed through the alembic of personal experience. They have no precedents in existence or in universal being. But, nonetheless, their material came from the public world and so has qualities in common with the material of other experiences, while the product awakens in other persons new perceptions of the meanings of the common world. The oppositions of individual and universal, of subjective and objective, of freedom and order, in which philosophers have reveled, have no place in the work of art. Expression as personal act and as objective result are organically connected with each other.
It is not necessary, therefore, to go into these metaphysical questions. We may approach the matter directly. What does it mean to say that a work of art is representative, since it must be representative in some sense if it is expressive? To say in general that a work of art is or is not representative is meaningless. For the word has many meanings. An affirmation of representative quality may be false in one sense and true in another. If literal reproduction is signified by “representative” then the work of art is not of that nature, for such a view ignores the uniqueness of the work due to the personal medium through which scenes and events have passed. Matisse said that the camera was a great boon to painters, since it relieved them from any apparent necessity of copying objects. But representation may also mean that the work of art tells something to those who enjoy it about the nature of their own experience of the world: that it presents the world in a new experience which they undergo.

A similar ambiguity attends the question of meaning in a work of art. Words are symbols which represent objects and actions in the sense of standing for them; in that sense they have meaning. A signboard has meaning when it says so many miles to such and such a place, with an arrow pointing the direction. But meaning in these two cases has a purely external reference; it stands for something by pointing to it. Meaning does not belong to the word and signboard of its own intrinsic right. They have meaning in the sense in which an algebraic formula or a cipher code has it. But there are other meanings that present themselves directly as possessions of objects which are experienced. Here there is no need for a code or convention of interpretation; the meaning is as inherent in immediate experience as is that of a flower garden. Denial of meaning to a work of art thus has two radically different significations. It may signify that a work of art has not the kind of meaning that belongs to signs and symbols in mathematics—a contention that is just. Or it may signify that the work of art is without meaning as nonsense is without it. The work of art certainly does not have that which is had by flags when used to signal another ship. But it does have that possessed by flags when they are used to decorate the deck of a ship for a dance.

Since there are presumably none who intend to assert that
works of art are without meaning in the sense of being senseless, it might seem as if they simply intended to exclude external meaning, meaning that resides outside the work of art itself. Unfortunately, however, the case is not so simple. The denial of meaning to art usually rests upon the assumption that the kind of value (and meaning) that a work of art possesses is so unique that it is without community or connection with the contents of other modes of experience than the esthetic. It is, in short, another way of upholding what I have called the esoteric idea of fine art. The conception implied in the treatment of esthetic experience set forth in the previous chapters is, indeed, that the work of art has a unique quality, but that it is that of clarifying and concentrating meanings contained in scattered and weakened ways in the material of other experiences.

The problem in hand may be approached by drawing a distinction between expression and statement. Science states meanings; art expresses them. It is possible that this remark will itself illustrate the difference I have in mind better than will any amount of explanatory comment. Yet I venture upon some degree of amplification. The instance of a signboard may help. It directs one's course to a place, say a city. It does not in any way supply experience of that city even in a vicarious way. What it does do is to set forth some of the conditions that must be fulfilled in order to procure that experience. What holds in this instance may be generalized. Statement sets forth the conditions under which an experience of an object or situation may be had. It is a good, that is, effective, statement in the degree in which these conditions are stated in such a way that they can be used as directions by which one may arrive at the experience. It is a bad statement, confused and false, if it sets forth these conditions in such a way that when they are used as directions, they mislead or take one to the object in a wasteful way.

"Science" signifies just that mode of statement that is most helpful as direction. To take the old standard case—which science today seems bent upon modifying—the statement that water is \( H_2O \) is primarily a statement of the conditions under which water comes into existence. But it is also for those who understand it a direction for producing pure water and for testing anything that is likely to be taken for water. It is a "better"
statement than popular and pre-scientific ones just because in stating the conditions for the existence of water comprehensively and exactly, it sets them forth in a way that gives direction concerning generation of water. Such, however, is the newness of scientific statement and its present prestige (due ultimately to its directive efficacy) that scientific statement is often thought to possess more than a signboard function and to disclose or be “expressive” of the inner nature of things. If it did, it would come into competition with art, and we should have to take sides and decide which of the two promulgates the more genuine revelation.

The poetic as distinct from the prosaic, esthetic art as distinct from scientific, expression as distinct from statement, does something different from leading to an experience. It constitutes one. A traveler who follows the statement or direction of a signboard finds himself in the city that has been pointed towards. He then may have in his own experience some of the meaning which the city possesses. We may have it to such an extent that the city has expressed itself to him—as Tintern Abbey expressed itself to Wordsworth in and through his poem. The city might, indeed, be trying to express itself in a celebration attended with pageantry and all other resources that would render its history and spirit perceptible. Then there is, if the visitor has himself the experience that permits him to participate, an expressive object, as different from the statements of a gazetteer, however full and correct they might be, as Wordsworth’s poem is different from the account of Tintern Abbey given by an antiquarian. The poem, or painting, does not operate in the dimension of correct descriptive statement but in that of experience itself. Poetry and prose, literal photograph and painting, operate in different media to distinct ends. Prose is set forth in propositions. The logic of poetry is super-propositional even when it uses what are, grammatically speaking, propositions. The latter have intent; art is an immediate realization of intent.

Van Gogh’s letters to his brother are filled with accounts of things he has observed and many of which he painted. I cite one of many instances. “I have a view of the Rhone—the iron bridge at Trinquetaille, in which sky and river are the color of absinthe, the quays a shade of lilac, the figures leaning on the parapet, blackish, the iron bridge an intense blue, with a note of
vivid orange in the background, and a note of intense malachite." Here is statement of a sort calculated to lead his brother to a like "view." But who, from the words alone—"I am trying to get something utterly heart-broken"—could infer the transition that Vincent himself makes to the particular expressiveness he desired to achieve in his picture? These words taken by themselves are not the expression; they only hint at it. The expressiveness, the esthetic meaning, is the picture itself. But the difference between the description of the scene and what he was striving for may remind us of the difference between statement and expression.

There may have been something accidental in the physical scene itself which left Van Gogh with the impression of utter desolation. Yet the meaning is there; it is there as something beyond the occasion of the painter's private experience, something that he takes to be there potentially for others. Its incorporation is the picture. Words cannot duplicate the expressiveness of the object. But words can point out that the picture is not "representative" of just a particular bridge over the Rhone River, nor yet of a broken heart, not even of Van Gogh's own emotion of desolation that happened somehow to be first excited and then absorbed by (and into) the scene. He aimed, through pictorial presentation of material that any one on the spot might "observe," that thousands had observed, to present a new object experienced as having its own unique meaning. Emotional turmoil and an external episode fused in an object which was "expressive" of neither of them separately nor yet of a mechanical junction of the two, but of just the meaning of the "utterly heart-broken." He did not pour forth the emotion of desolation; that was impossible. He selected and organized an external subject matter with a view to something quite different—an expression. And in the degree in which he succeeded the picture is, of necessity, expressive.

Roger Fry, in commenting upon the characteristic features of modern painting, has generalized as follows: "Almost any turn of the kaleidoscope of nature may set up in the artist a detached and esthetic vision, and, as he contemplates the particular field of vision, the (esthetically) chaotic and accidental contemplation of forms and colours begins to crystallize into a harmony; and, as this harmony becomes clear to the artist, his actual vision becomes distorted by the emphasis of the rhythm that is set up
within him. Certain relations of line become for him full of mean­ing; he apprehends them no longer curiously but passionately, and these lines begin to be so stressed and stand out so clearly from the rest that he sees them more distinctly than he did at first. Similarly, colours which in nature have almost always a cer­tain vagueness and elusiveness, become so definite and clear to him, owing to their now so necessary relation to other colours, that, if he chooses to paint his vision, he can state it positively and definitely. In such a creative vision, the objects as such tend to disappear, to lose their separate unities and to take their place as so many bits in the whole mosaic of vision.”

The passage seems to me an excellent account of the sort of thing that takes place in artistic perception and construction. It makes clear two things: Representation is not, if the vision has been artistic or constructive (creative), of “objects as such,” that is of items in the natural scene as they literally occur or are recalled. It is not the kind of representation that a camera would report if a detective, say, were preserving the scene for his own purpose. Moreover, the reason for this fact is clearly set forth. Certain relations of lines and colors become important, “full of meaning,” and everything else is subordi­nated to the evocation of what is implied in these relations, omitted, distorted, added to, transformed, to convey the relation­ships. One thing may be added to what is said. The painter did not approach the scene with an empty mind, but with a back­ground of experiences long ago funded into capacities and likes, or with a commotion due to more recent experiences. He comes with a mind waiting, patient, willing to be impressed and yet not without bias and tendency in vision. Hence lines and color crystallize in this harmony rather than in that. This especial mode of harmonization is not the exclusive result of the lines and colors. It is a function of what is in the actual scene in its interaction with what the beholder brings with him. Some subtle affinity with the current of his own experience as a live creature causes lines and colors to arrange themselves in one pattern and rhythm rather than in another. The passionateness that marks observation goes with the development of the new form—it is the distinctly esthetic emotion that has been spoken of. But it is not independent of some prior emotion that has stirred in the
If these considerations are borne in mind, a certain ambiguity that attaches to the passage quoted will be cleared up. He speaks of lines and their relations being full of meaning. But for anything explicitly stated, the meaning to which he refers might be *exclusively* of lines in their relations to one another. Then the meanings of lines and colors would completely replace all meanings that attach to this and any other experience of natural scene. In that case, the meaning of the esthetic object is unique in the sense of separation from meanings of everything else experienced. The work of art is then expressive only in the sense that it expresses something which belongs exclusively to art. That something of this kind is intended may be inferred from another statement of Mr. Fry's that is often quoted, to the effect that "subject matter" in a work of art is always irrelevant, if not actually detrimental.

Thus the passages quoted bring to a focus the problem of the nature of "representation" in art. The emphasis of the first passage upon emergence of new lines and colors in new relations is needed. It saves those who heed it from the assumption, usual in practice if not in theory especially in connection with painting, that representation signifies either imitation or agreeable reminiscence. But the statement that subject-matter is irrelevant commits those who accept it to a completely esoteric theory of art. Mr. Fry goes on to say: "In so far as the artist looks at objects only as parts of a whole field of vision which is his own potential theory, he can give no account of their esthetic value." And he adds: "... the artist is of all men the most constantly observant of his surroundings, and the least affected by their intrinsic esthetic value." Otherwise, how explain the tendency of the painter to turn away from scenes and objects that possess obvious esthetic value to things that stir him because of some oddity and form? Why is he more likely to paint Soho than St. Paul's?

The tendency to which Mr. Fry refers is an actual one, just as is the tendency of critics to condemn a picture on the ground that its subject matter is "sordid," or eccentric. But it is equally true, that any authentic artist will avoid material that
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has previously been esthetically exploited to the full and will seek out material in which his capacity for individual vision and rendering can have free play. He leaves it to lesser men to go on saying with slight variations what has already been said. Before we decide that such considerations as these do not explain the tendency to which Mr. Fry refers, before we draw the particular inference he draws, we must return to the force of a consideration already noted.

Mr. Fry is intent upon establishing a radical difference between esthetic values that are intrinsic to things of ordinary experience and the esthetic value with which the artist is concerned. His implication is that the former is directly connected with subject matter, the latter with form that is separated from any subject matter, save what is, esthetically, an accident. Were it possible for an artist to approach a scene with no interests and attitudes, no background of values, drawn from his prior experience, he might, theoretically, see lines and colors exclusively in terms of their relationships as lines and colors. But this is a condition impossible to fulfill. Moreover, in such a case there would be nothing for him to become passionate about. Before an artist can develop his reconstruction of the scene before him in terms of the relations of colors and lines characteristic of his picture, he observes the scene with meanings and values brought to his perception by prior experiences. These are indeed remade, transformed, as his new esthetic vision takes shape. But they cannot vanish and yet the artist continue to see an object. No matter how ardently the artist might desire it, he cannot divest himself, in his new perception, of meanings funded from his past intercourse with his surroundings, nor can he free himself from the influence they exert upon the substance and manner of his present seeing. If he could and did, there would be nothing left in the way of an object for him to see.

Aspects and states of his prior experience of varied subject-matters have been wrought into his being; they are the organs with which he perceives. Creative vision modifies these materials. They take their place in an unprecedented object of a new experience. Memories, not necessarily conscious but retentions that have been organically incorporated in the very structure of the self, feed present observation. They are the nutriment that gives
body to what is seen. As they are rewrought into the matter of the new experience, they give the newly created object expressiveness.

Suppose the artist wishes to portray by means of his medium the emotional state or the enduring character of some person. By the compelling force of his medium, he will, if an artist—that is, if a painter, with disciplined respect for his medium—modify the object present to him. He will resee the object in terms of lines, colors, light, space—relations that form a pictorial whole, that is, that create an object immediately enjoyed in perception. In denying that the artist attempts to represent in the sense of literal reproduction of colors, lines, etc., as they already exist in the object, Mr. Fry is admirably right. But the inference that there is no re-presentation of any meanings of any subject matter whatever, no presentation that is of a subject matter having a meaning of its own which clarifies and concentrates the diffused and dulled meanings of other experiences does not follow. Generalize Mr. Fry's contention regarding painting by extension to drama or poetry and the latter cease to be.

The difference between the two kinds of representation may be indicated by reference to drawing. A person with a knack can easily jot down lines that suggest fear, rage, amusement, and so on. He indicates elation by lines curved in one direction, sorrow by curves in the opposite direction. But the result is not an object of perception. What is seen passes at once over into the thing suggested. The drawing is similar in kind though not in its constituents to a signboard. The object indicates rather than contains meaning. Its value is like that of the signboard to the motorist in the direction it gives to further activity. The arrangement of lines and spaces is not enjoyed in perception because of its own experienced quality but because of what it reminds us of.

There is another great difference between expression and statement. The latter is generalized. An intellectual statement is valuable in the degree in which it conducts the mind to many things all of the same kind. It is effective in the extent to which, like an even pavement, it transports us easily to many places. The meaning of an expressive object, on the contrary, is individualized. The diagrammatic drawing that suggests grief does not convey the grief of an individual person; it exhibits the kind of
facial "expression" persons in general manifest when suffering grief. The esthetic portrayal of grief manifests the grief of a particular individual in connection with a particular event. It is that state of sorrow which is depicted, not depression unattached. It has a local habitation.

A state of beatitude is a common theme in religious paintings. Saints are presented as enjoying a condition of blissful happiness. But in most of the earlier religious paintings, this state is indicated rather than expressed. The lines that set it forth for identification are like propositional signs. They are almost as much of a set and generalized nature as the halo that surrounds the heads of saints. Information is conveyed of an edifying character by symbols as conventional as those which are brought in to distinguish various St. Catherines or to mark the different Marys at the foot of the cross. There is no necessary relation, but only an association cultivated in ecclesiastical circles between the generic state of bliss and the particular figure in question. It may arouse a similar emotion in persons who still cherish the same associations. But instead of being esthetic, it will be of the kind described by William James: "I remember seeing an English couple sit for more than an hour on a piercing February day in the Academy in Venice before the celebrated 'Assumption' by Titian; and when I, after being chased from room to room by the cold, concluded to get into the sunshine as fast as possible and let the pictures go, but before leaving drew reverently near to them to learn with what superior forms of susceptibility they might be endowed, all I overheard was the woman's voice murmuring: 'What a deprecatory expression her face wears! What self-abnegation! How unworthy she feels of the honor she is receiving.'"

The sentimental religiosity of Murillo's paintings affords a good example of what happens when a painter of undoubted talent subordinates his artistic sense to associated "meanings" that are artistically irrelevant. Before his paintings, the type of remark that was wholly out of place in the case of Titian would be pertinent. But it would carry with it a lack of esthetic fulfillment.

Giotto painted saints. But their faces are less conventional; they are more individual and hence more naturalistically por-
trayed. At the same time they are more esthetically presented. The artist now uses light, space, color and line, the media, to present an object that belongs of itself in an enjoyed perceptual experience. The distinctive human religious meaning and the distinctive esthetic value interpenetrate and fuse; the object is truly expressive. This part of the picture is as unmistakably a Giotto as the saints of Masaccio are Masaccios. Bliss is not a stencil transferable from one painter's work to that of another, but bears the marks of its individual creator, for it expresses his experience as well as that presumed to belong to a saint in general. Meaning is more fully expressed, even in its essential nature, in an individualized form than in a diagrammatic representation or in a literal copy. The latter contains too much that is irrelevant; the former is too indefinite. An artistic relationship between color, light, and space in a portrait is not only more enjoyable than is an outline stencil but it says more. In a portrait by Titian, Tintoretto, Rembrandt, or Goya, we seem to be in the presence of essential character. But the result is accomplished by strictly plastic means, while the very way in which backgrounds are handled gives us something more than personality. Distortion of lines and departures from actual color may not only add to esthetic effect but result in increased expressiveness. For then material is not subordinated to some particular and antecedent meaning entertained about the person in question (and a literal reproduction can give only a cross-section exhibited at a particular moment), but it is reconstructed and reorganized to express the artist's imaginative vision of the whole being of the person.

There is no more common misunderstanding of painting than attends the nature of drawing. The observer, who has learned to recognize but not to perceive esthetically, will stand before a Botticelli, an El Greco, or Cezanne and say "What a pity the painter has never learned to draw." Yet drawing may be the artist's forte. Dr. Barnes has pointed out the real function of drawing in pictures. It is not a means for securing expressiveness in general but a very special value of expression. It is not a means of assisting recognition by means of exact outline and definite shading. Drawing is drawing out; it is extraction of what the subject matter has to say in particular to the painter in his integrated experience. Because the painting is a unity of inter-
related parts, every designation of a particular figure has, moreover, to be drawn into a relation of mutual reinforcement with all other plastic means—color, light, the spatial planes and the placing of other parts. This integration may, and in fact does, involve what is, from the standpoint of the shape of the real thing, a physical distortion.*

Linear outlines that are used to reproduce with accuracy a particular shape are of necessity limited in expressiveness. They express either just one thing, "realistically" as it is sometimes said, or they express a generalized kind of thing by which we recognize the species—being a man, a tree, a saint, or whatever. Lines esthetically "drawn" fulfill many functions with corresponding increase of expressiveness. They embody the meaning of volume, of room and position; solidity and movement; they enter into the force of all other parts of the picture, and they serve to relate all parts together so that the value of the whole is energetically expressed. No mere skill in draughtsmanship can make lines that will fulfill all these functions. On the contrary, isolated skill in this respect is practically sure to end in a construction wherein linear outlines stand out by themselves, thus marring the expressiveness of the work as a whole. In the historical development of painting, the determination of shapes by drawing has steadily progressed from giving a pleasing indication of a particular object to become a relationship of planes and a harmonious merging of colors.

"Abstract" art may seem to be an exception to what has been said about expressiveness and meaning. Works of abstract art are asserted by some not to be works of art at all, and by others to be the very acme of art. The latter estimate them by their remoteness from representation in its literal sense; the former deny they have any expressiveness. The solution of the matter is found, I think, in the following statement of Dr. Barnes. "Reference to the real world does not disappear from art as forms cease to be those of actually existing things, any more than objectivity disappears from science when it ceases to talk in terms of earth, fire, air and water, and substitutes for these things the less easily recognizable 'hydrogen,' 'oxygen,' 'nitrogen,'

and 'carbon.'... When we cannot find in a picture representation of any particular object, what it represents may be the qualities which all particular objects share, such as color, extensity, solidity, movement, rhythm, etc. All particular things have these qualities; hence what serves, so to speak, as a paradigm of the visible essence of all things may hold in solution the emotions which individualized things provoke in a more specialized way."

Art does not, in short, cease to be expressive because it renders in visible form relations of things, without any more indication of the particulars that have the relations than is necessary to compose a whole. Every work of art "abstracts" in some degree from the particular traits of objects expressed. Otherwise, it would only, by means of exact imitation, create an illusion of the presence of the things themselves. The ultimate subject matter of still life painting is highly "realistic"—napery, pans, apples, bowls. But a still life by Chardin or Cezanne presents these materials in terms of relations of lines, planes and colors inherently enjoyed in perception. This re-ordering could not occur without some measure of "abstraction" from physical existence. Indeed, the very attempt to present three-dimensional objects on a two-dimensional plane demands abstraction from the usual conditions in which they exist. There is no a priori rule to decide how far abstraction may be carried. In a work of art the proof of the pudding is decidedly in the eating. There are still-lifes of Cezanne in which one of the objects is actually levitated. Yet the expressiveness of the whole to an observer with esthetic vision is enhanced not lowered. It carries further a trait which every one takes for granted in looking at a picture; namely, that no object in the picture is physically supported by any other. The support they give to one another lies in their respective contributions to the perceptual experience. Expression of the readiness of objects to move, although temporarily sustained in equilibrium, is intensified by abstraction from conditions that are physically and externally possible. "Abstraction" is usually associated with distinctively intellectual undertakings. Actually it is found in every work of art. The difference is the interest in which and purpose for which abstraction takes place in science and art respectively.

* "The Art in Painting," p. 52. The origin of the idea is referred to Dr. Buermeyer.
In science it occurs for the sake of effective statement, as that has been defined; in art, for the sake of expressiveness of the object, and the artist's own being and experience determine what shall be expressed and therefore the nature and extent of the abstraction that occurs.

It is everywhere accepted that art involves selection. Lack of selection or undirected attention results in unorganized miscellany. The directive source of selection is interest; an unconscious but organic bias toward certain aspects and values of the complex and variegated universe in which we live. In no case can a work of art rival the infinite concreteness of nature. An artist is ruthless, when he selects, in following the logic of his interest while he adds to his selective bent an efflorescence or "abounding" in the sense or direction in which he is drawn. The one limit that must not be overpassed is that some reference to the qualities and structure of things in environment remain. Otherwise, the artist works in a purely private frame of reference and the outcome is without sense, even if vivid colors or loud sounds are present. The distance between scientific forms and concrete objects shows the extent to which different arts may carry their selective transformations without losing reference to the objective frame of reference.

The nudes of Renoir give delight with no pornographic suggestion. The voluptuous qualities of flesh are retained, even accentuated. But conditions of the physical existence of nude bodies have been abstracted from. Through abstraction and by means of the medium of color, ordinary associations with bare bodies are transferred into a new realm, for these associations are practical stimuli which disappear in the work of art. The esthetic expels the physical, and the heightening of qualities common to flesh with flowers ejects the erotic. The conception that objects have fixed and unalterable values is precisely the prejudice from which art emancipates us. The intrinsic qualities of things come out with startling vigor and freshness just because conventional associations are removed.

The moot problem of the place of the ugly in works of art seems to me to receive its solution when its terms are seen in this context. That to which the word "ugly" is applied is the object in its customary associations, those which have come to
appear an inherent part of some object. It does not apply to what is present in the picture or drama. There is transformation because of emergence in an object having its own expressiveness: exactly as in the case of Renoir's nudes. Something which was ugly under other conditions, the usual ones, is extracted from the conditions in which it was repulsive and is transfigured in quality as it becomes a part of an expressive whole. In its new setting, the very contrast with a former ugliness adds piquancy, animation, and, in serious matters, increases depth of meaning in an almost incredible way.

The peculiar power of tragedy to leave us at the end with a sense of reconciliation rather than with one of horror forms the theme of one of the oldest discussions of literary art.* I quote one theory which is relevant to the present discussion. Samuel Johnson said: “The delight of tragedy proceeds from our consciousness of fiction; if we thought murders and treasons real they would please us no more.” This explanation seems to be constructed on the model of the small boy's statement that pins had saved many persons' lives “on account of their not swallowing them.” The absence of reality in the dramatic event is, indeed, a negative condition of the effect of tragedy. But fictitious killing is not therefore pleasant. The positive fact is that a particular subject matter in being removed from its practical context has entered into a new whole as an integral part of it. In its new relationships, it acquires a new expression. It becomes a qualitative part of a new qualitative design. Mr. Colvin after quoting from Johnson the passage just cited, adds: “So does our peculiar consciousness of pleasure in watching the fencing match in 'As You Like It,' depend on our consciousness of fiction.” Here, too, a negative condition is treated as a positive force. “Consciousness of fiction” is a backhanded way of expressing something that in

*I cannot but think that the amount of thought which has been devoted to finding ingenious explanations for the Aristotelian idea of catharsis is due rather to the fascination of the topic than to any subtlety on Aristotle's part. The sixty or more meanings that have been given to it seem unnecessary in view of his own literal statement that persons are given to excessive emotion, and that as religious music cures people in religious frenzy “like persons cured by a drug,” so the excessively timid and compassionate, and all suffering from over-intense emotions, are purged by melodies, and the relief is agreeable.
itself is intensely positive: the consciousness of an integral whole in which an incident gets a new qualitative value.

IN discussing the act of expression, we saw that the conversion of an act of immediate discharge into one of expression depends upon existence of conditions that impede direct manifestation and that switch it into a channel where it is coördinated with other impulsions. The inhibition of the original raw emotion is not a suppression of it; restraint is not, in art, identical with constraint. The impulsion is modified by collateral tendencies; the modification gives it added meaning—the meaning of the whole of which it is henceforth a constituent part. In esthetic perception, there are two modes of collateral and cooperative response which are involved in the change of direct discharge into an act of expression. These two ways of subordination and reinforcement explain the expressiveness of the perceived object. By their means, a particular incident ceases to be a stimulus to direct action and becomes a value of a perceived object.

The first of these collateral factors is the existence of motor dispositions previously formed. A surgeon, golfer, ball player, as well as a dancer, painter, or violin-player has at hand and under command certain motor sets of the body. Without them, no complex skilled act can be performed. An inexpert huntsman has buck fever when he suddenly comes upon the game he has been pursuing. He does not have effective lines of motor response ready and waiting. His tendencies to action therefore conflict and get in the way of one another, and the result is confusion, a whirl and blur. The old hand at the game may be emotionally stirred also. But he works off his emotion by directing his response along channels prepared in advance: steady holding of eye and hand, sighting of rifle, etc. If we substitute a painter or a poet in the circumstances of suddenly coming upon a graceful deer in a green and sun-specked forest, there is also diversion of immediate response into collateral channels. He does not get ready to shoot, but neither does he permit his response to diffuse itself at random through his whole body. The motor coördinations that are ready because of prior experience at once render his perception of the situation more acute and intense and incorporate
into it meanings that give it depth, while they also cause what is seen to fall into fitting rhythms.

I have been speaking from the standpoint of the one who acts. But precisely similar considerations hold from the side of the perceiver. There must be indirect and collateral channels of response prepared in advance in the case of one who really sees the picture or hears the music. This motor preparation is a large part of esthetic education in any particular line. To know what to look for and how to see it is an affair of readiness on the part of motor equipment. A skilled surgeon is the one who appreciates the artistry of another surgeon’s performance; he follows it sympathetically, though not overtly, in his own body. The one who knows something about the relation of the movements of the piano-player to the production of music from the piano will hear something the mere layman does not perceive—just as the expert performer “fingers” music while engaged in reading a score. One does not have to know much about mixing paints on a palette or about the brush-strokes that transfer pigments to canvas to see the picture in the painting. But it is necessary that there be ready defined channels of motor response, due in part to native constitution and in part to education through experience. Emotion may be stirred and yet be as irrelevant to the act of perception as it is to the action of the hunter seized by buck-fever. It is not too much to say that emotion that lacks proper motor lines of operation will be so undirected as to confuse and distort perception.

But something is needed to coöperate with defined motor lines of response. An unprepared person at the theater may be so ready to take an active part in what is going on—in helping the hero and foiling the villain as he would like to do in real life—as not to see the play. But a blasé critic may permit his trained modes of technical response—ultimately always motor—to control him to such an extent that, while he skillfully apprehends how things are done, he does not care for what is expressed. The other factor that is required in order that a work may be expressive to a percipient is meanings and values extracted from prior experiences and funded in such a way that they fuse with the qualities directly presented in the work of art. Technical responses, if not held in balance with such secondary supplied
material, are so purely technical that the expressiveness of the object is narrowly limited. But if the allied material of former experiences does not directly blend with the qualities of the poem or painting, they remain extraneous suggestions, not part of the expressiveness of the object itself.

I have avoided the use of the word “association” because traditional psychology supposes that associated material and the immediate color or sound that evokes it remain separate from one another. It does not admit of the possibility of a fusion so complete as to incorporate both members in a single whole. This psychology holds that direct sensuous quality is one thing, and an idea or image which it calls out or suggests is another distinct mental item. The esthetic theory based on this psychology cannot admit that the suggesting and the suggested may interpenetrate and form a unity in which present sense quality confers vividness of realization while the material evoked supplies content and depth.

The issue that is involved has a much greater import for the philosophy of esthetics than appears at first sight. The question of the relation that exists between direct sensuous matter and that which is incorporated with it because of prior experiences, goes to the heart of the expressiveness of an object. Failure to see that what takes place is not external “association” but is internal and intrinsic integration has led to two opposed and equally false conceptions of the nature of expression. According to one theory, esthetic expressiveness belongs to the direct sensuous qualities, what is added by suggestion only rendering the object more interesting but not becoming a part of its esthetic being. The other theory takes the opposite tack, and imputes expressiveness wholly to associated material.

The expressiveness of lines as mere lines is offered as proof that esthetic value belongs to sense qualities in and of themselves; their status may serve as a test of the theory. Different kinds of lines, straight and curved, and among the straight the horizontal and vertical, and among curves those that are closed and those that droop and rise, have different immediate esthetic qualities. Of this fact there is no doubt. But the theory under consideration holds that their peculiar expressiveness can be explained without any reference beyond the immediate sensory
apparatus directly involved. It is held that the dry stiffness of a straight line is due to the fact that the eye in seeing tends to change direction, to move in tangents, so that it acts under coercion when compelled to move straight on, so that, in consequence, the experienced result is unpleasant. Curved lines, on the other hand, are agreeable because they conform to the natural tendencies of the eye's own movements.

It is admitted that this factor probably does have something to do with the mere pleasantness or unpleasantness of the experience. But the problem of expressiveness is not touched. While the optical apparatus may be isolated in anatomical dissection, it never functions in isolation. It operates in connection with the hand in reaching for things and in exploring their surface, in guiding manipulation of things, in directing locomotion. This fact has for its consequence the other fact that the sense-qualities coming to us by means of the optical apparatus are simultaneously bound up with those that come to us from objects through collateral activities. The roundness seen is that of balls; angles perceived are the result not just of switches in the eye-movements but are properties of books and boxes handled; curves are the arch of the sky, the dome of a building; horizontal lines are seen as the spread of the ground, the edges of things around us. This factor is so continually and so unfailingly involved in every use of the eyes that the visually experienced qualities of lines cannot possibly be referred to the action of the eyes alone.

Nature, in other words, does not present us with lines in isolation. As experienced, they are the lines of objects; boundaries of things. They define the shapes by which we ordinarily recognize objects about us. Hence lines, even when we try to ignore everything else and gaze upon them in isolation, carry over the meaning of the objects of which they have been constituent parts. They are expressive of the natural scenes they have defined for us. While lines demarcate and define objects, they also assemble and connect. One who has run into a sharply projecting corner will appreciate the aptness of the term "acute" angle. Objects with widely spreading lines often have that gaping quality so stupid that we call it "obtuse." That is to say, lines express the ways in which things act upon one another and upon us; the ways in which, when objects act together, they reënforce
and interfere. For this reason, lines are wavering, upright, oblique, crooked, majestic; for this reason they seem in direct perception to have even moral expressiveness. They are earth-bound and aspiring; intimate and coldly aloof; enticing and repellent. They carry with them the properties of objects.

The habitual properties of lines cannot be got rid of even in an experiment that endeavors to isolate the experience of lines from everything else. The properties of objects that lines define and of movements they relate are too deeply embedded. These properties are resonances of a multitude of experiences in which, in our concern with objects, we are not even aware of lines as such. Different lines and different relations of lines have become subconsciously charged with all the values that result from what they have done in our experience in our every contact with the world about us. The expressiveness of lines and space relations in painting cannot be understood upon any other basis.

The other theory denies that immediate sense qualities have any expressiveness; it holds that sense serves merely as an external vehicle by which other meanings are conveyed to us. Vernon Lee, herself an artist of undoubted sensitiveness, has developed this theory most consistently, and in a way, which, while it has something in common with the German theory of Einfühlung or empathy, avoids the idea that our esthetic perception is a projection into objects of an internal mimicry of their properties, one which we dramatically enact when we look at them—a theory that, in turn, is hardly more than an animistic version of the classic theory of representation.

According to Vernon Lee, as well as to some other theorists in the field of esthetics, "art" signifies a group of activities that are, respectively, recording, constructive, logical and communicative. There is nothing esthetic about art itself. The products of these arts become esthetic "in response to a totally different desire having its own reasons, standard, imperative." This "totally different" desire is the desire for shapes, and this desire arises because of the need for satisfaction of congruous relations among our modes of motor imagery. Hence direct sensuous qualities like those of color and tone are irrelevant. The demand for shapes is satisfied when our motor imagery reënacts the relations em-
bodied in an object—as, for example, "the fan-like arrangement of sharply convergent lines and exquisitely phrased skyline of hills, picked up at intervals into sharp crests and dropping down merely to rush up again in long rapid concave curves."

Sensory qualities are said to be non-esthetic because, unlike the relations we actively enact, they are forced upon us and tend to overwhelm us. What counts is what we do, not what we receive. The essential thing esthetically is our own mental activity of starting, traveling, returning to a starting point, holding on to the past, carrying it along; the movement of attention backwards and forwards, as these acts are executed by the mechanism of motor imagery. The resulting relations define shape and shape is wholly a matter of relations. They "transform what would otherwise be meaningless juxtapositions or sequences of sensations into the significant entities which can be remembered and cognized even when their constituent sensations are completely altered, namely, into shapes." The outcome is empathy in its true meaning. It deals not "directly with mood and emotion but with dynamic conditions which enter into moods and emotions and take their names from them. . . . The various and variously combined dramas enacted by lines and curves and angles take place not in the marble or pigment embodying the contemplated shapes, but solely in ourselves. . . . And since we are their only real actors, these empathic dramas of lines are bound to affect us, whether as corroborating or as thwarting our vital needs and habits." (Italics not in the original text.)

The theory is significant in the thoroughness with which it separates sense and relations, matter and form, the active and the receptive, phases of experience, and in its logical statement of what happens when they are separated. The recognition of the rôles of relations and of activity on our part (the latter being physiologically mediated in all probability by our motor mechanisms) is welcome in contrast with theories that recognize only sense-qualities as they are passively received and undergone. But a theory that regards color in painting as esthetically irrelevant, that holds that tones in music are merely something upon which esthetic relations are superimposed, hardly seems to need refutation.

The two theories that have been criticized complement
each other. But the truth of esthetic theory cannot be arrived at by a mechanical addition of one theory to the other. The expressiveness of the object of art is due to the fact that it presents a thorough and complete interpenetration of the materials of undergoing and of action, the latter including a reorganization of matter brought with us from past experience. For, in the interpenetration, the latter is material not added by way of external association nor yet by way of superimposition upon sense qualities. The expressiveness of the object is the report and celebration of the complete fusion of what we undergo and what our activity of attentive perception brings into what we receive by means of the senses.

The reference to corroboration of our vital needs and habits deserves notice. Are these vital needs and habits purely formal? Can they be satisfied through relations alone, or do they demand to be fed by the matter of color and sound? That the latter is the case seems to be implicitly admitted when Vernon Lee goes on to say that "art so far from delivering us from the sense of really living, intensifies and amplifies those states of serenity of which we are given the sample, too rare, too small and too alloyed in the course of our normal practical life." Exactly so. But the experiences that art intensifies and amplifies neither exist solely inside ourselves, nor do they consist of relations apart from matter. The moments when the creature is both most alive and most composed and concentrated are those of fullest intercourse with the environment, in which sensuous material and relations are most completely merged. Art would not amplify experience if it withdrew the self into the self nor would the experience that results from such retirement be expressive.

BOTH of the theories considered separate the live creature from the world in which it lives; lives by interaction through a series of related doings and undergoings, which when they are schematized by psychology, are motor and sensory. The first theory finds in organic activity isolated from the events and scenes of the world a sufficient cause of the expressive nature of certain sensations. The other theory locates the esthetic element "solely in ourselves," through enacting of motor relations in "shapes."
But the process of living is continuous; it possesses continuity because it is an everlastingly renewed process of acting upon the environment and being acted upon by it, together with institution of relations between what is done and what is undergone. Hence experience is necessarily cumulative and its subject matter gains expressiveness because of cumulative continuity. The world we have experienced becomes an integral part of the self that acts and is acted upon in further experience. In their physical occurrence, things and events experienced pass and are gone. But something of their meaning and value is retained as an integral part of the self. Through habits formed in intercourse with the world, we also in-habit the world. It becomes a home and the home is part of our every experience.

How, then, can objects of experience avoid becoming expressive? Yet apathy and torpor conceal this expressiveness by building a shell about objects. Familiarity induces indifference, prejudice blinds us; conceit looks through the wrong end of a telescope and minimizes the significance possessed by objects in favor of the alleged importance of the self. Art throws off the covers that hide the expressiveness of experienced things; it quickens us from the slackness of routine and enables us to forget ourselves by finding ourselves in the delight of experiencing the world about us in its varied qualities and forms. It intercepts every shade of expressiveness found in objects and orders them in a new experience of life.

Because the objects of art are expressive, they communicate. I do not say that communication to others is the intent of an artist. But it is the consequence of his work—which indeed lives only in communication when it operates in the experience of others. If the artist desires to communicate a special message, he thereby tends to limit the expressiveness of his work to others—whether he wishes to communicate a moral lesson or a sense of his own cleverness. Indifference to response of the immediate audience is a necessary trait of all artists that have something new to say. But they are animated by a deep conviction that since they can only say what they have to say, the trouble is not with their work but those who, having eyes, see not, and having ears, hear not. Communicability has nothing to do with popularity.

I can but think that much of what Tolstoi says about
immediate contagion as a test of artistic quality is false, and what he says about the kind of material which can alone be communicated is narrow. But if the time span be extended, it is true that no man is eloquent save when some one is moved as he listens. Those who are moved feel, as Tolstoi says, that what the work expresses is as if it were something one had oneself been longing to express. Meantime, the artist works to create an audience to which he does communicate. In the end, works of art are the only media of complete and unhindered communication between man and man that can occur in a world full of gulfs and walls that limit community of experience.