Raoul Ergmann

THE SHATTERED MIRROR

The knowledge of art is revealed, in the modern world, by a variety of mechanical and economic means, for which history had provided no parallel; the techniques of photography and of reproduction, working in concert with the opening of new markets for "cultural goods" lavish on an ever-increasing public reproductions of works of art. This revolution resembles that previously accomplished for the broadcasting of words and ideas, by the invention of printing; we do not yet know if it can be of the same importance in its field.

At least it is clear that the art book is already a "means of mass communication": the number of its possible users, the convenience of its circulation, gives it this character by comparison *with the civilization of yesterday. Fifty years ago the technical and economic organisation of Society offered a knowledge of art only to the happy few, through long and costly travels, and offered the masses only engravings of which the severity and the imperfections are evident. It is of little moment that today reproductions of art are distributed by monthly magazines to the general public, or by double spread repro-*

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ductions at Christmas and between suggestions for useful presents, of a Nativity by some great painter, or by expensive and, sometimes, almost cultured art books. All these means have in common the multiplication of encounters with art; they reach the individual in his own home. In this way they contribute to one and the same process of change.

The aim of this essay is to investigate the possibility of such a transformation taking place without involving a change in the meaning of those values and sentiments which but recently made up our idea of what art is.

I

One of the characteristics peculiar to the world today is that the circulation of reproductions outstrips and precedes that of originals. Formerly an immediate and definite relationship was established between those who manufactured objects and those who used them; everyone could see the producer, the product, and, equally, more often, the actual operation of manufacture; they conceived the need for goods through seeing them on the stall or in the workshop. Today publicity and channels of information, newspapers, magazines or the cinema pour out innumerable *likenesses* of the products; it is these images that provoke or fix desire. Because one sees them before articles themselves, without difficulty or search, it is they, on the contrary, that seek and provoke, as though anxious not to remain unnoticed, the desire of man.

Unprecedented in history, this situation is logical in the mass economy that is ours; alone, the solicitation of the reproductions allows the flow of endless production. But the same causes produce other effects; thus the world of art is now characterized by an analogous phenomenon, that gives birth to the multiplication of reproductions of works that are hawked in albums, books or periodicals, and not only on postal calendars.

At the origin of these two series of phenomena one finds obviously the same transformation, that of technique. It is by the photograph first of all, its reproduction following, more and more easy and more exact, and by the rapidly improving use of colour, that reproductions of pictures can be multiplied. But

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the changes of economy have contributed strongly to create this new situation, it is the development of individual incomes, their egalitarian distribution among a vast population of white collar workers, and of skilled workers, it is the accustoming of society to "miracles of technicality" and its appetite for culture, encouraged by scholarship, itself inseparable from economic development, that has thrown on the market the public for this production and made possible the enterprise, thus created by necessity. All technological evolution, and this is an example, seeks its outlets and creates them at the same time; all localised progress profits by the necessary and continuous support of a more general evolution. In the sphere that concerns us everything has evolved together: schools revealing admiration for the Fine Arts, the better-paid work and shorter hours create leisure, and also the spontaneous action for all means of information that has developed in the spirit the need *of absorbing art.*

So this new fact of diffusion, in innumerable copies, of reproductions of works appeared at first as an evident example of progress. Probably it is sacrilege to doubt that the question is in effect of a new influx of machines and merchants in the development of culture. Moreover, it must be stated that this novelty easily earns the most laudatory epithets in our vocabulary; it is a democratic and rational work to enable the obscure, the remote, the lowest types, to benefit from perfectly honourable substitutes for works of art. Moreover, again, the recourse to these reproductions benefits, in the public spirit, from the prestige attached to the technique; the profusion of the reproductions shows itself clearly to possess the evident characteristics that belong to the new machines; one does not doubt their value and their perfectibility any more than that of the speed or the range of cars or rockets It would be good to see in this sphere, no doubt more frivolous—although one only has the right to speak of it with deference—than of consumer goods, someone who would discuss or take up the question of this large-scale production that one believes is perhaps dearly acquired, and which dispenses art as others—of the same kind—do machines to save time and trouble.

Before evident unanimity—do artists themselves not produce some "multiples"? in face of the logic of evolution, and, perhaps,

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the sense of history, one fears that one's anxiety is due to ill-grace or a bad conscience. This cannot be helped; novelty must continue to amaze. This universe of easy knowledge is in truth hardly explored: the number of new users of art, their division among the social classes, their behaviour in respect of the old roads of knowledge have been less often described, and less well than the "habits of reading" of the newspapers. How many pairs of eyes have looked, in the last twenty years, on Vermeer's *Young girl in a turban*, multiplied to the infinite by reproduction? On the contrary how many have been able, since the work existed, to see it itself, to discover at Delft, afterwards at The Hague this "translucent pebble"? This simple arithmetical comparison, so often repeated for the classics of literature that appear on television, is not made here. Neither do we know what relations can be established between visits to museums and the circulation of albums. It remains to suppose, to compare, to deduce without certainty, but at least to reflect.

If some men of my generation didn't take risks something would perhaps be lost without anyone having made the effort to know and to say it.[1] When the *nouvelle vague* has acquired the habit of coming across these works through reproductions, they will forget perhaps the significance, in other times, of the discovery of unique examples protected in the sanctuaries of art. The multiplication of the loaves was a miracle only accomplished once; that of works of art continues desired and supported by merchants and their clients.

It is permitted already to imagine a new psychology of the relationship between spectators and works of art, born of an abundance of reproductions succeeding the rarity of things. Knowledge, culture—since one must needs describe by this term the understanding acquired by pleasure and leisure—must shortly alter in meaning; we are not here concerned with literature, which remains the same whatever the edition, be it a pocket edition or a luxury one, since it is only made of words. Scribbled, transcribed in Didot, on newspaper or vellum, words have in

[1] One doesn't claim here to be the only one or the first, and one doesn't forget, in particular, the remarkable reflections of J. F. Revel which appeared in *L'Express* of March 19th, 1964.

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themselves a complete permanence. But a picture, a statue, these things are cumbersome, it is not possible to say that they tolerate being replaced by images.[2]

II

In Paris alone more than a million people have seen the Picasso exhibition, as many more that of Bonnard; still more have thronged to the Petit Palais, to see the treasures of the Pharaohs. What a visible triumph for the knowledge and love of art! It would be very improbable that this sudden crowd flocking for the sole and pure pleasure of sight should be unrelated to the distribution of reproductions. This does not cease to make progress, after the highly priced albums the masterpieces appear in the monthly publications, available to all. There is no doubt that we are witnessing a very dialectic of progress: books, the mass-produced photographs, send the masses to the museums, which send them back to the books. That which the museum cannot do the album will do, the golden age of the Fine Arts for all is arrived.

Everyone, for the price of a shirt or a dinner, can add to his personal collection the entire works of Poussin or of Miro. Thus is formed "among ourselves, under our own roofs," a new and admirable equality in relation to our artistic culture. Everyone will put in his home a museum that will not only be imaginary, but authentic and, why not, real? And if one thinks that the function of the works is to ornament walls, many shops offer on paper, on canvas or on wood, the works of the most famous, conveniently brought down to the proportions suitable for a flat; it doesn't cost very much. People had ceased to believe in the progress of taste any more than in that of morals, that is a mistake, taste is already progressing, from the bourgeois house to the homes of the masses where Van Gogh, Breughel and Picasso take the place of lithographs, postal calendars, and even photographs of the family.

[2] For convenience—and although a painting can appear to some as an "image"—, one reserves this term here for reproductions of works of art.

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Let us consider then the dominant characteristics of this completely new situation; they indicate the coming of a culture at last democratic, logical and universal.

Democratic: that is evident. The distribution of the copies suppresses little by little *all class distinction*, but the evolution aided by education, leisure, the level of life, is rapid. Formerly it was necessary to travel, to own property, to wander; then, only the bourgeois, furnished with money, with habits and time, could have access to the luxury of the knowledge of masterpieces. The President of Brosse, the abbé of Saint-Non, the tax-collector Bergeret, the English aristocracy would spend some months in Italy, it was a question of money, as much as a type of life that naturally produced free time. All these privileged people kept for themselves both initiation to art and its usage. More, the bourgeois marked with the imprint of their particular nature the approach to works of art; one might say that they gave them a statute: outside of the pictures and sculptures preserved in public buildings, churches,[3] or more rarely, civilian monuments—art is made for appropriation. One admires the poverty of some great collectors of the last century: Walferdin, watchmaker; La Caze, doctor; Cigoux or Bonnat, painters. But who cannot see that these "poor ones" are merely less wealthy bourgeois than André and the Groult? La Caze was lent 25,000 francs a year; a small fortune, no doubt, but a fortune.

The facility of the books and photographs has put an end to this injustice. It is not simply that the price of the reproductions bears no comparison with that of the original, that their number allows and requires an egalitarian distribution. For centuries the possession of books has been the first step towards the cultured class: by its prestige, by the pressure of education, as Sartre has already seen so well, reading is a recompense, it marks the entry into the world of ideas. With this facility, the art albums have gained a new realm, hitherto even more closely reserved for the privileged; literature escaped the bourgeois as soon as learning ceased to be their privilege; very

[3] It has been noticed that the passage of the works of art from places of culture to private houses—princely acts, but also above all bourgeois—takes them away from the people.

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quickly there were teachers, academics and also printers. Art, on the contrary, remained a reserved sphere, perhaps that was why artistic culture continued to be more closely tied to snobbery. But our generation, with hope or regret, see the end of this situation, such is the first and most apparent effect born of a new technique of manufacture, of a new economic hope.

This consequence is the newer and stronger precisely in that teaching has always dispensed more ideas or words than reproductions or originals; schools and universities have a great deal more literary or scientific knowledge than familiarity with art. So the function of the school, conceived by politicians and intellectuals, allowed the privileges of art to survive. This was probably the effect of a rightful appreciation of urgence, but here the simple activity of the business completes the delay in the finishing of the work.

The publicity made to sell the now numerous collections that pour out likenesses of works of art is in this respect naively explicit; the ideas that are put out are that of a museum in one's house, of inaccessible masterpieces at the disposal of all. Taken to its limit this movement does not merely amount to restoring its rights to the public, but it helps us in the reversal of privileges; the new culture will be more complete and more perfect than the old one.

*

So, by the reproduction of works and, better still, by their inclusion in an album, artistic culture enters the home. These volumes that one can *handle*, contrary to the works themselves, take up and take up again, turn over the pages or leave them, buy or borrow, have over the originals the capital advantage of convenience, that is to say an advantage eminently egalitarian. Thanks to them, artistic culture, like reading, can be indulged in at home.

But that is not the only merit of the album: socially it is the first, intellectually it is only the second. On closer inspection one realizes that publication has realised in this sphere something that appeared impossible: the rational anthology. Certainly the

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museum offers a choice, this choice expresses a hierarchy of aesthetic and historical values, the work exhibited is *better* than that which has not found favour before the judgment of the guardians; "a museum piece" is used as an indication of quality. But this choice is always historical and contingent; the public collection is at the mercy of gifts, of legacies, or of forfeitures, the unequal exchange between the price of the works and the means of the museum. The Louvre is the taste of several kings of France, sanctioned by the Revolution, in addition the collection of Lenoir, the donation of Camondo, and a hundred circumstances where chance be it that of the market—had at least as much part as will and reason. To see the three great battles of Uccello, one must go to London, to Paris or to Florence. Even this is not an extreme example: the *Annunciation* of Aix is divided between a Provençal church, a museum and a private collection. Preliminary studies, drawings or sketches are separated from the final work, and this from several later interpretations. Nothing, in all this, satisfies the need for order and classification which is the beginning of all science and means of all reason.

On the contrary the book makes game of the risks that have scattered works of art; it reunites them according to pure logic. Let the series chosen be that of a theme, of an epoch or an artist, the album gathers together, without anxiety for the contingent localities, all the significant likenesses. *Scripta volant* and, the painting strayed to Melbourne, to Rio or to Budapest rejoins that which, logically, accompanies or completes it. Thus the album can legitimately claim to reproduce all that is essential touching on the subject. The classification is rational this time, and the order in which the reproductions are shown expresses a thought. This eminent quality, that without doubt no collection of original works offers, justifies the publicity that presents Treasures or masterpieces of art.[4] It justifies the titles which, more simply, but in a way even more significant, announce the *Poitou romance* or *Velasquez*, really meaning by that the reader will find all the characteristics of a creative personality, all the major works of an epoch or a country.

[4] And even the *Demi-Dieux* a fact that gives one cause to reflect.

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Comparison and reason are then possible, and even easy. Instead of memories and their weakness, the album offers simultaneous presence; it is then the perfect instrument of a culture. Better still, the choice proposed is that of the best professors, the most illustrious specialists. It is the best qualified, most responsible group that recommends the treasures of knowledge to that widespread group, the consumers. There is certainly, as in the case of all mass communication, diversity, indeed potential tension, between the group of the authors of the message and the groups who receive them, but this diversity operates precisely to the benefit of knowledge. Not only does the diffusion of culture become egalitarian, but the equality has every chance, for once, to work for the best and not for the worst, or by the worst. This is enough to make pessimists lose heart.

*

Besides, are there any left? Or must they be shown besides that the techniques of photography and of its reproduction, not content to abolish the frontiers of class, abolishes also those of politics, of civilization, of geography. Distances are not so long as they were, journeys are easier and less costly, leisure much greater. But the unknown would be again at our doors as the *terrae incognitae* of the old maps, if the album did not also open exotic worlds to us. Distance doesn't exist for photography, neither of time, of space, of society: India, Mexico, Byzantium, the arts of Africa and of Oceania are no longer reserved for specialists or explorers. Books bring into the home of the stranger, the "barbarians" of closed civilizations.

This fact alone has transformed our taste, that is to say our scale of values. Certainly the great artistic movements have proceeded by successive rehabilitations: those of antiquity by the Renaissance, those of the Middle Ages by Romanticism. Thus by a dialectic that Malraux has perceived one revives remote cultures in time or space, one admits them into a sort of Pantheon that every age builds and peoples according to its own ideas. But it is only in the last half-century that this addition, formerly restricted and timid, has become accumulation: the 19th century, inheritor

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of romantic historicism, had reintegrated mediaeval forms into a plastic civilization, beginning with those that were less remote in time. This seems insignificant compared with the immense regions of the artistic world that were unknown or were open, only to curiosity, as does the fact that, since Louis XIV, Chinese art was admired, more for the its technical perfection than for the style itself; or the discovery, following the Goncourts, of Japanese lacquer and *inrôs*.

The real spread of the barbarians did not take place in the fourth or the fifth century, but about 1900; then the West suddenly opened the frontiers of its artistic territory admitting to its freedom Africa, Oceania and Mexico, following in the past a quest that, after the Roman sculpture had made it adore the "regressive" art of Gaul and, again, as the barriers of time gave way at the same time as that of space, rejecting the idea of barbarism, one could not admit that it had a meaning for antiquity, Scythia and Sumeria, and one forgets it.

Thus, no doubt for the first time in history, and perhaps the only time, a civilisation was open to all the others, without having been constrained by force or by conquest; on the contrary it is at the height of its material strength that the West has recognised that it is not alone in the world, that the class of the values it has itself created is rivaled by others, that safety is neither in its own past nor in its present, but, perhaps, somewhere else, indefinite. This Copernican revolution—which is perhaps the only indisputable characteristic of the superiority of the West—does not derive its origins from the spread of reproductions, it is by travel, and ethnographical collection, on the one hand, and by lassitude in regard to tradition, on the other, that it began. But it has acquired all its force under the multiplying influence of the albums; it is by their omnipresence that negro art, the idols of the Cyclades and oceanic ornaments have entered into the familiarity of our daily life, and that the barbarian or remote arts have brought Classicism to disfavour.

So reproductions guide us to a knowledge that is not only egalitarian but also universal; the chauvinism of countries, that of the West itself, gives way and effaces itself before this advent on shiny paper of the outside world.

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III

Meanwhile, these reassuring conclusions only touch the outside and almost *measurable* characteristics of the new situation. They describe the conditions and the consequences of the circulation of reproductions as if they had not given birth to impressions, as if nothing had passed in the spirit. But the change, at the very least, is of the same nature as that which substituted written literature for poetry recited to an audience. It is a reading, this time, that takes the place of real perception. It remains to be judged if, by this new road, one can feel the same thing, in the same way, as before. The contemplation of the works themselves leaves certain traces in the spirit; does leafing through an album have the same effect? It remains then to consider the nature of the reproductions that are offered in place of the originals.

The function of these reproductions is to replace that which they are not: pictures, drawings, statues. Is their end, then, different from that of the publicity images which refer to things, only to offer satisfaction, but not to usurp utility? The photograph of a masterpiece, on the contrary, is intended to give pleasure. There is an evident truth, without doubt, in describing the reproductions as different from the works themselves. But the question is not here to repeat, with a sort of nostalgia for the old reserved culture, that they are numberless and repetitive as opposed to rarity and uniqueness. The distinction is not so abstract.

For the wealth of materials, the diversity of dimensions, the variety of supports, to the accidents of hand and material alike the copies substitute the standardization of format and the indifferent surface of paper. Certainly the copy respects the proportions of the work, but it betrays the dimensions. For a painting and a sculpture are not mathematical exchanges that remain the same when one modifies the terms according to the same system. They exist in a real dimension that explains two essential relations: a shape has been made by hand in a gesture of which the size or the exactness only make sense in their original proportions, we have looked at this shape from the height of our human stature. Neither Gulliver nor Micromegas had to judge art. A work registers itself in our own sight in its

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own size, that reminiscent at once of the whole area used by the artist and our own physical place in it. The great Rubens of Florence only assume their real impact by their size, which unfolds before our eyes the breadth of an inspiration and a movement. Without their dimensions the *sinopie* of the Campo Santo would not be such a surprise for the eye, struck by these gigantic graffiti. Between the fresco and the miniature, between the statue and the toy the photograph establishes illegitimate equalities; spontaneously—and necessarily—our observation in the face of the work itself qualifies the shape by comparison with our own height.

Let no-one oppose this simple observation by mentioning the effects of perspective, that reduces the dimensions of the work in relation to the distance separating it from the eye. Our glance knows well the part that distance plays in its appreciation of size. Still more, the possibility that we can move in front of a scene —this liberty of which the reproduction deprives us because it has already substituted in our vision the mechanism and the place of the objective, a perspective fixed and calculated to the living perspective of the eye carried by the possible movements of the whole body naturally affects our feelings for the work. We need to turn aside then to come closer; this mobility of the body and of the glance that now tries to take in all at once the whole surface painted, now isolates a fragment without cancelling the whole, the photograph destroys it completely. It puts us in front of a film of which the operator knew only the fixed dimension.[5] Representation of the whole or copy of a detail it substitutes surreptitiously for our physical liberty—which, perhaps, creates an aesthetic sentiment—the fixity of its choice.

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At least an important advance has been achieved; photograph and reproduction now reinstate the painting in its one

[5] The cinema in effect provokes the same transference of roles, since it replaces our mobile investigation of the world by the movements of the camera; when it takes painting for a subject, as in the *Van Gogh* of Alain Resnais, it works as we do, but in our place, to form a moving and ambiguous vision, since one doesn't know if the displacements of the objective are a figuration of our own possible attitudes or a silent commentary, deliberately conceived by the director with his own ends in mind.

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essential: colour. It would be ungracious to reproach them with some inaccuracy in the rendering of tones, but this is apparently unimportant. Techniques have not yet reached the final point, without doubt perfection is for tomorrow, but in a few years the richness and fidelity of the colours have already gained much. One must have faith then in the machines.

Without doubt photographs have today very richer and more transparent colours than the copper-plate engravings of fifty years ago. Progress is then evident if one compares the reproductions and if one avoids making a comparison with the original or with the memories they leave. The same picture shown in different books changes colour between two photographs, but one only looks at one of them and so illusion is created. Similarly it has been very seriously claimed that colour television, at last, will open to the disinherited public the world of painting: that is to forget only that the picture will necessarily find there a new colour, stranger to itself and that of the photograph.

All these affirmations repeat an ambiguous remark, and there one causes the same confusion as in identifying the apple in the fruit dish with a still life by Cézanne. That is mere talk, or at best a sham. All the colours of the photograph are not more those of nature than those of the picture. It doesn't matter as long as it is a question of other things than the works: let the screen or the proof show the colours altered, and sometimes cleverly, it is easy to know and to feel that the colouring such as is seen, belongs to the operator and not to the reality. The world picture is fixed or moved as the case may be, by an effect of art, and the very fact that the image does not detract from qualities gives more strength to this arbitrary check or to the release of the desired mobility. But the reproduction of a picture is another thing; the painting is neither the material nor the subject of an operation, or of a recreation; it is a work in itself and sufficient in itself. Photography cannot stop the gesture of the Saviour on the wall of the Sistine chapel, Michelangelo has done that already. It translates, it offers a system of equivalents, when it claims to show us an object in its truth.

The black and white reproduction betrays less because it claims less. Representing a coloured ensemble by a transcrip-

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tion of values, it is more abstract but does not hide this abstraction. It matters very little, in this sense, that the transposition of a system of colour in terms of black, grey and white is itself a convention, at least it is an acknowledged one.

When one sees again in one's memory the finesse of the harmonies of tints in painting—Venetian or Dutch, for example—the complexity of the preparations, of pigments and varnishes, that *is* the colour, one doubts that any technique could do other than betray such a chromatic harmony. But there is more, a colour does not exist without a material that supports it, or, rather, with something that is one with it. An oil painting with its density, with its highlights, its sudden thicknesses cut by a knife as in works by Rembrandt, cannot have the same colour values as a fresco with its matt, flat surfaces, as a watercolour with its whites left on the paper. If Vuillard used a painting with spirits it was not to create the same impressions of colour as with gouache. The variety of means utilised by painters only has meaning by virtue of the concrete unity between the tint and the material. All painting has a *visible* third dimension; it doesn't matter that it exists in a fine space, squeezed between two surfaces so close that they seem in the extreme to be mingled. The transparency of the watercolour leaves an infinitely fine thickness on the depth of the paper, but a thickness; the brush strokes, the varnishes create a colour-object, a colour-relief that the paper of the reproduction flattens like a laundry maid who presses crumpled linen.

It is enough to go back to the "decorative arts" to measure the deviations between the colours which it is pretended are alike, that is to say verify that in effect colour makes a consistence with the material; in a tapestry the nuances of the wool are not the same as those of silk; enamel, porcelain, make play with colours that belong to them. That is why one can compare with them the palette or the technique of certain painters: who speaks of comparison also means differences.

The techniques of reproduction necessarily change then, it doesn't matter that in certain cases one tries to reproduce a picture on a canvas because such is the backing of the original, in the real sense it is only a *trompe l'œil*, better, an illusion

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of the spirit. In the extreme a photograph appears to fulfil approximately the same function as language that *names* the colours.[6]

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No example of this form of vitiation of works by reproduction is more telling than that of the pictures where the painter has voluntarily used heterogeneous materials. For almost four centuries most of the pictorial intention has been expressed by oil paintings; at least this technique, particularly irreducible to the uniformity of the photograph, it is true, imposes on the pictures the coherence of the material. But then Gris, Picasso and Braque have stuck on their canvas a packet of tobacco, or a piece of gauze; at this moment the real object takes the value of the work because it is heterogeneous, but the photograph equalises this essential difference. Once more it reduces the original diversity of the picture.

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Again, explained under successive forms, a criticism of the new world of art will be considered impressionistic; one senses there, perhaps, the sign of the amateur, of the bourgeois. It is, after all, merely a catalogue of petty betrayals.

But it adds up to a total, to a capital and uneasy conclusion: once the thickness is destroyed, the material is destroyed, the system of colours is upset, the effect of size is reduced, the work ceases to be an *object*. It enters into a world of abstraction, in a system of pure significance, and if its effect differs again from that of language that is for an ultimate reason: it continues to be grasped instantly and not in a succession of terms. The techniques of reproduction introduce into art as a universal nomenclature a logic of identity, something resembling the anonymity of mathematical signs. Unique, the original work was a completely singular object in its material reality; multiplied it becomes a sign.

[6] It is true that certain painters, like Delacroix, have often noted on their sketches the names of the colours of such and such element of the future work; but this notation evidently had only sense for the painter himself.

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One only debates the disappearance, in contemporary aesthetiques, of all value linked with gesture, skill, the material act of the creation. Focillon could still speak *in praise of the hand*; one might search in vain in the reflections of Malraux[7] for the least reference to gesture, to the living intention of the concrete act.

The hazard of time, as in the meditation on the Sphynx, appears more important than the act of making. The artist has become a pure spirit, engaged certainly in history, but in a universal and dialectic history where fate and freedom are face to face; it is no more a question of daily evolution, of the struggle with the inert and contrary material, but only of the eternal protest of the conscience. Without doubt it is not by chance that Malraux has made so much game of reproductions.

Besides, the artists do not wish to stay still. One of the most remarkable traits of contemporary art is precisely the devaluation of manual activity. One looks in vain at pop art, at Martial Raysse, at Rauschenberg, at Calder or at César, for the warm stamp of gesture, such as exists, after centuries, in a drawing of Leonardo da Vinci, or of Poussin.[8]

*

Certainly, looking at reproductions instead of works themselves, throws into abeyance a certain measure of knowledge of art. One of the real characteristics of the "connoisseur" in traditional culture was to be able to identify the work exactly, that is to say, to recognise the author. But to formulate this judgment of attribution a reproduction is not sufficient; iconography is only one of the roads of this knowledge.

The choice of subject, its interpretation, are in this respect the "false friends" denounced by the professors of dialect, by definition all copies, even made after a print, reproduce at least these traits of the original. That which belongs without division to an artist is a "hand writing," that is to say a definite, unique composition of lines and colours, that the gesture of the same

[7] Or in Benedetto Croce, or even in Elie Faure.

[8] For a long time the drawing has revealed more intensely than the painting the direct connection between thought, gesture and the work of art.

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hand, animated by the same spirit attaches to the same historical individuality. The similitude of physical types, resemblances of composition, the taste for certain attitudes, the choice of a range of colours, the presence of certain accessories, the distribution of the light—all qualities that the photograph can restore after a fashion—are only the symptoms and only carry the mind towards a hypothesis; only the direct impression of the gesture, in its absolute particular circumstances establishes identification. Without this accent evidence is lacking and recognition would lose its meaning. Even the use of the term, "hand writing," shows exactly the nature of such a mental act, one learns to recognise the work itself in its absolute totality like a voice that has become familiar.[9]

But, destroyed as an object by reproduction, the work no longer carries this personal imprint which is that of a complete individuality. Through the reflection of the photograph all iconographical thought remains possible; only the characters of the image that the picture carries within itself are safe in the reproduction. Between the unfinished sculptures of Michelangelo and his drawings the eye is struck with a singular resemblance, the lines of the pen on the paper are traced like those of the chisel on the marble; looking at the photographs who could conceive the idea of this identity of gesture?[10]

On the contrary, familiarity with reproductions can only determine a step quite different from identification. What one recognises then are the characteristics that an artist has transmitted to his pupils, his followers, his copyists. The album has an egalitarian strength almost absurd: here photographs of a forgery equal those of the original work. The book of reproductions identifies by description, irrevocably, it is the quality of the rubric—worthy of confidence, doubtless—that guarantees identification, not that of sight. If the authors ever make a mistake the reproduction would find itself without redress classed under a false name.

[9] It goes without saying that this recognition is less sure than that of the voice; it seems to me, however, to be of the same nature.

[10] Certainly, the photograph furnishes conveniently the *demonstration* or rather the illustration—once the similarities have been observed in the works themselves.

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Again, the personal sentiment that results in recognition of the work is the privilege of a small number of people since it is the result of special experience; this form of judgment that mixes intuition with knowledge, can't be shared with the world, even in traditional culture. But reproductions dont restrict themselves to falsification, they introduce one to another world, where values, even, are no longer the same. Without doubt, they respect the iconography, but they betray the work because they reverse the hierarchy of power that they possess.

In the classic paintings reproduction retains the virtues of imagery. Poussin's profile of the woman with the Grecian nose, the perfect oval faces of the paintings by Piero della Francesca, the swarming people of Avercamp, all that one reads easily there. The figurative character of such art becomes then a sentimental trap: how one would love to be in that shady spot, what a chaming smile that young woman has, how touching is the smile of that child. But it is thus that the copies deceive, and build under our eyes an unjustifiable order of preferences. Because the nobility of the forms of plastic art, the development of mass and of movements in the imaginary space of the picture, that explain the modulations of line and of stroke, get lost in the uniformity of the photograph.

No doubt, the habit of meeting a painting through these faithless interpretations explains the luck of certain artists in public admiration. The grace of the gothic madonnas, the elegance of line and of feeling of the primitives, the abundance of flowers and of figures in the bouquets and the fetes of Breughel, are so many characteristics which, preserved and isolated by the reproduction please without giving pain. On the contrary, the inner tension of a Poussin, the heroic exaltation of the colours and shapes of Rubens are reduced on paper, to the attitudes of people fixed in a convention that one does not know how to distinguish the sculptural imagery and the contortions of women that are too fat. Even though the admiration inspired by the albums equals that borne by the work, it can hardly be for the same reason, nor the right one; it is the intimacy of Chardin, not the quality of his paintings, that models light and silence, that charms the new lovers of art.

That is so true that by a new paradox the photograph makes

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evident, in abstract art, purely ornamental or decorative characteristics: it happens as if, once reduced to flat images, normalised dimensions, the painting offered a repertoire of formal themes to the imagination, of arrangements of colours or shapes that only remain to be employed on walls, carpets or fabrics.

Thus, by the inescapable and mechanical effect of its own characteristics, the reproduction substitutes little by little the recognition of a group of signs that betray the work generally much more than they translate it, for the meeting of authenticity and the search for this interior and personal harmony that has been able to be, for generations of amateurs, the evidence of aesthetic judgment.

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The very term authenticity shows that one finds here one of the classic problems of the history of art and of aesthetics. What is an authentic work? What chance has one of recognising it? What unique and absolute quality distinguishes it finally from the false? So many questions that the recourse to reproductions poses in new terms.

Authenticity is, in itself, a complex idea, normally used without much thought. It applies to the actual work and signifies that this is in effect from the hand of an artist, it only has meaning by the relationship established between a thing and a man, both unique, linked by the creative act accomplished once. But the definition only carries sense by comparison between the original and the copy, the reproduction or the fake.

Certainly, our idea of authenticity would not be what it is if the economy had not given the work of art the status of worth, of value on a market. It is the bourgeois civilisations, those of private property and of patrimony that have, little by little, cultivated this idea. The authentic work[11] is more expensive, it is even, in the end, alone worthy of the price. The very vocabulary whether in conversations between amateurs or that of sale

[11] Or that which is recognised as such by a certain consensus of criticism and of opinion, sanctioned by the price.

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catalogues[12] ingenuously acknowledges this concordance; a work is qualified as "rare," "precious," "unique," one distinguishes with care, from the different conventions of language, the degrees of certainty, or more often of uncertainty, because this implies a judgment on the price of the thing. From that time it is a moral condemnation, and no longer an aesthetic one, that one must pronounce against the fake, in its capacity as dishonest merchandise, used to obtain money under false pretences. Reproductions of works that confess themselves such, and only deceive on the question of beauty, rest innocent of the capital sin.

But the distinction between the real work and the falsifications are not at first a protection against different swindles. It touches not only matters of money, but also of knowledge, of pleasure perhaps, and the severity of history. This judgment reaches more profound regions of our spirit, and its ambiguity is disquieting. It is a strange operation in effect, that of recognising the authenticity of work; if a point in history must be fixed, then the slow process of documentary research, attending to proofs, comparing accounts, is used. However, this necessary step does not detract from the meaning of the judgment that must be made: such an object has been made at such and such a moment by such a man. It is not so important, other events are more important. History, in addition, can be satisfied with knowing that a mediocre painting could be attributed to a minor painter. But aesthetic reflection requires that the judgment of authenticity be a judgment of value. The work must be qualified by the sentiment it inspires, outside of all dreaming on the facts. But, at the same time, the character of the work, which is a definite object, and thus unique, necessarily places it in history, in such a way that the appreciation unites, against all logic, in a single synthesis two quite different operations of the spirit.

Yet more: alone, I believe, the contemplation of a picture or of a statue can, in the space of a moment, or in a moment of consciousness, revive the past in our spirit, creating a communication between history and ourselves. Works of art, like the frozen words of Rabelais, survive their epoch and, to the extent that

[12] "Attributed to...", "Studio of...", "School of...", etc., signifies that the work is not by the artist named.

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we are able to understand, remain always something of that which they have been, of that which their author and their time have been. Only they open the real doors to the past. They don't talk, nor reconstruct anything; they use neither reason as intermediary, nor that of language. The Virgin of Chancellor Rollin doesn't describe the Middle Ages as do Augustin Thierry or Pirenne; she is satisfied to exist and seem to our eyes to give us a presence from beyond our understanding, our time, of the world where we are. Even impaired in their appearance by reason of age, impaired also in ourselves by the necessarily new road that takes our spirit to them, the works remain sufficiently like the long-past thoughts and deeds of a real man, taken in his own milieu, to give us a reality also live.

But, once multiplied and reduced to reproductions behind which there is no more than the other side of the page, they have lost this strength. They conjure up, they still speak of history, but they no longer open the windows of the past. They become anecdotes, they reveal costumes, accessories, some traits of collective opinion. They are still adequate to illustrate the history books for the classroom. They no longer offer the essential freshness of the encounter.

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It is not only the time of history that is considered, but also our experience. As they destroy the measure of the work in space, the copies alter the exchange of duration that establishes itself between the spectator and the thing seen.

In former experience the knowledge of the work is a meeting. Sometimes it is prepared and preceded by hope and imagination, sometimes it is a sudden apparition, at the end of a room, and it astonishes all the more vividly because it was not expected. Then the impression becomes a souvenir, one carries it with one even to another meeting, of the same work, or of another which, because it is by the same artist, or because it is tied to the first by a thread sometimes inexplicable, revives the first. Understanding, enriched from then on, opens up to future perception a more profound third dimension. What album can ever give us this time of waiting and of joy, this alternation between the vision

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and memory, this temporal and rhythmic web of which our relation with the work is made? The same commodity of the production changes thus against the users; the book recreates its own duration and accord in our life by the reading, but a picture only gains a temporary dimension in ourselves, and by the real rhythm of our successive impressions. Without this interior movement it only exists in the cold eternity of things.

Thus the pictures are delivered to us according to a choice and an order fixed in advance, once for all. And this choice and this order are not our doing, but that of someone else; it is not even certain that one is conscious of this intervention. Certainly the museum also suggests and imposes an anthology; but this is inseparable, for the spectator, from his slow passage through a forest of works where the glance is held, hesitates, and then returns.

On the contrary the uncertainties of the knowledge, the hesitations and the returns of intuition and of comparison, that fill the time of the familiarity slowly acquired are evaded by the regular unfolding of the pictures. These present themselves already baptised.[13] The reading of the catalogues of museums and exhibitions teach that the attribution or the dating of works is the result of research, that it is made of errors and of successive hypotheses. Our own judgment of an artist, a picture of a sculpture is built slowly, and the order of our preferences is never certain to last. For all these hesitations, successive revisions of knowledge and of taste, the albums slowly and surely substitute the assurance of their affirmations; they have rubbed out the effort of which they are the result. The generosity of the technique doesn't show only in the profusion of reproductions but also in the packaging under which they are released. Like industrial products the copies are provided with trade marks and instructions for use.

Without doubt the museum is not, or is not for everyone, this pure domain of freedom, this paradise lost of the state of nature where each feels himself strong enough to judge without restraint. How could the visitor to the Louvre not admire the *Gioconda*?

[13] Here the question is not, as goes without saying, of vulgarization. But historical work is not a means of diffusion.

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Impressed by the celebrity of the work, by the teaching, by a vague and strong collective tradition, seduced by the story itself, he comes *to* admire it. But the reproduction, full of prestige of printing and of the book, has much more power to discourage the personal judgment and fix a predetermined hierarchy in the spirit. It consecrates and hallows what it shows. The order and the equality that is imposed on the impressions, all born of the view of similar photographs, operate mechanically in this sense. There is nothing more to do, least of all to judge. The Pantheon of art, decently established on the shelves of the library is complete, one only has to give it one's devotion. For the admiration that comes with the birth of the meeting, the album substitutes a commanding admiration. What was judged good enough for the publication *must* be beautiful. This sentiment of compulsion is foreign to the aesthetic emotion.

In the end the book changes the artists into idols. Their work is known in relation to their lives. By a favourable chance this often offers exemplary traits—unjust suffering endured, individuality pushed to the point of folly. Then one catches a glimpse of a new and double way to the knowledge of art; on the one side the album pours out the reflections of the works, on the other, the caption tells the story of the life of the painters. It is not any more the painting of Van Gogh that is admired, but a destiny. *The Man with the ear cut off* is no more a picture but a slice of life; one sees it through the intermediary of the reproduction and the caption, for the satisfying of a certain need for compensation; it is easier to excite by the recital of a passionate existence than by the representation of the work of a creator. The order of values is once more touched; the artists without a history, or those of whom the history is unknown, like Poussin or Van Eyck, are sacrificed for the destiny of the romantic. Misunderstood, the genius is avenged by a posterity more avid for his unhappiness than for his work.

IV

Thus is born under our eyes a new knowledge of art. Our mistake is without doubt to compare it with the old. Very soon perhaps this knowledge will be as universal as writing. The new

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expert will find without trouble in his library the reflections of ten different civilizations, conveniently numbered and named by the efforts of a hundred editors. His spirit will have welcomed more reproductions than any traveller of the past, however rich and idle had been able to see works. He can see, as the result of a simple gesture, the breughels of Vienna, the frescoes of Ajanta, the idols of the Cyclades, the old stones of ancient America, that press higgledy-piggledy with Picasso and Renoir. Perhaps one day this amateur will take the trouble to visit in the museums and the churches the archetypes of his private museum. He will meet them then with satisfaction, they cannot trouble his certainties. So he will return happily to his familiar world.

Only the art that is installed, like a good democrat, in the new appartments in the suburbs, as in the bourgeois homes, is not the same any more. Besides, is it certain that the evolution will also be egalitarian? The privileges are still forbidden, almost mechanically, by the spontaneous dialectic of particularisms. The possession of reproduction prints was formerly a luxury. Now, if the library squanders reproductions, one perceives another division: for one, the pocket pictures, the fake books; for others—for the initiates, the experts or the rich—the various refinements of possession or knowledge.

It is true that there are more and more visitors to museums and exhibitions. But these newcomers who are controlled by the albums, or by the information pouring out of newspapers and magazines, only prove that they go to do that which has already been done beforehand. Gérard Bauër remarked that the crowd that thronged the Picasso exhibition was like that at the tomb of Lenin: one pays homage to the gods whose cult one normally practises at home.

Idols are only dead things. The museum is perhaps the place where the works sleep, as André Malraux says. But the album is their tomb; bourgeois tomb, family vault where they don't lack a plaque, but a tomb all the same.

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The artists of the past can do nothing; this new situation cannot change their work. Nearly all, at least from the

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Renaissance, worked and talked for posterity. They thought of the glory, that is to say, they hoped to touch, beyond the grave, the greatest possible number of spectators. The audience that they could not attain, living, because of the slowness and the difficulties of circulation of the works or of people, they sought it in time. This motive, kept alive by the tradition of historical literature and the stubbornness of the academies, certainly blended, like a heroic morale, to the satisfaction that the act of creation or the approbation of the great gave to the artists.

Today, on the contrary, this need to last is become foreign to the creative act. The work is often made of ephemerals: wire, electric bulbs, paper stuck on. It moves—as long as the energy that moves it lasts: it plays sometimes, it obeys mechanisms without which it would lose its meaning. Everything happens as if the artist did not take the trouble to assure himself of the perpetuity of his work, as if the perpetual renewal of things, of techniques and expression meant more than their power to last.

Nothing proves, it is true, that this change has been caused by the proliferation of reproductions. Doubtless, however, it is these that have made fashions and schools more precarious. The consumption of goods is ceaselessly accelerated in the economic world by the afflux of their representations, carried by newspapers, the cinema, television. It is necessary, from one season to the next, to create the appetite for novelty. It would be strange if the copies of works hadn't exercised a similar effect on the attitude in regard to art. Our epoch has put into circulation and consumed more of these reproductions than any other; this abundance operates like the proliferation of monetary signs: the system of representation and forms is gained by inflation. Like money, the quantity of these signs that goes through the market and the speed of their rotation depreciates their values. Then, to combat the lassitude of the users and the speedy devaluation of the reproductions "experiments" and "research" succeed each other. A style hardly has time to be born.

The freedom henceforth given to the artist to suggest to the public the least movement of his spirit or his humour, that guarantees a good welcome to all possible novelty, is only the obverse of necessity. For too long shapes have changed slowly

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and almost discretely, each generation, as though anxious to save appearances, disguising the revolution brought about out of respect for some tradition. The sky of the *Pietà* of Avignon is still the late Gothic gold background, but the fidelity to the past amounts to borrowing from an earlier style this precious casing. The same docility to the figurative principle, the continuity of a technique—that of the oil painting—for long years, up to the end of the last cenutry, limited all revolution. The impressionists themselves only claimed to give a more immediate representation and consequently more true to nature. But the interest in forms is now so rapid, the repertoire of known styles so rich, that it is necessary every moment to change the vocabulary and even the alphabet of artistic expression. If the old techniques are not sufficient, one uses polyesters, metals, cloth and paper stuck on; one replaces handmade works of art by mechanical processes, one composes by using again pictures already existing. Here again, it will be the function of the reproduction to reduce these unwonted products to a common module.

This uneasy art is perhaps witness of the confusion of present civilization; but one cannot refrain from thinking that it accompanies an evolution that by putting out millions of reproductions simultaneously has led to the saturation of forms. The rupture is achieved when the work has ceased to rest in the object in order to travel among the public in innumerable reflections, as if someone one day had shattered the mirror and multiplied to the infinite the image formerly unique.

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Certainly no epoch has voluntarily forgone the means of multiplying works of art. The print, the photograph, even horrible electroplating, have been greeted with enthusiasm. Copies of Greek statues, then hellenistic, have transported round the Mediterranean the plastic ideas of antique Greece, prints have spilled out into Europe the figures of the Italian Renaissance. The photograph is an instrument of work for the art historian, an *aide-memoire*, and sometimes an aid to imagination for the amateur. What is disputed now is not the existence of the techniques of reproduction, but their usage, but the illusion that attaches to

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their ubiquity. It would be fruitless and stupid to demand a going backwards; the auto-da-fé of the albums of reproduction would be hardly less odious than that of books.

But it is the power to judge from the truth of works and not from illusions that must be safeguarded. It is not enough to decry the reproductions with which the young propose to ornament their walls—real colour-prints, in spite of the ambitious descriptions and the luxury of the *trompe l'œil* that guarantees their facsimile of cloth or of wood. It must be repeated again that the albums themselves cannot take the place of experience in the museums and exhibitions nor lay the foundations of judgment or taste. To declare that one loves Hindu or Japanese art, that one prefers Gauguin to all, simply from art books, is to say nothing, like loving Morzart's *Don Juan* for the libretto. The reproduction opens the imagination, it opens the memory for those who have seen with their own eyes the work reproduced, or a similar work, then a sort of authentic impression can be built, in ourselves, by the bringing together of memories and the reproduction to people the void that is left all around the photograph. But without the wealth of knowledge and memory born of former visits, the kaleidoscope of the reproductions only uncovers a world of signs of half magic that have no more connection with the reality of the works than a fairy story for adults. If the question is of dreaming this opium would do as well as another, but the question here is of true and accessible feeling: the works exist, almost under our eyes, if we only care to go and see them.

Reproductions are made ceaselessly more pressing, colour photography with a richness and increasing renown convinces more and more that it is the *equivalent* of the real thing. Art is not alone in profiting from this progress: the sunny beaches, the decor of homes, familiar objects, faces themselves are seen more and more often in photographs. Memories and hopes are offered to our eyes through reproductions. We build ourselves by the medium of photographs, distributed in books, the cinema and television a certain representation of history. The adventurous days of the West, the Victorian crinolines, and equally, the foolish twenties appear across the images true or fictitious shown on the

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screens; their precision pierces at last the mist of the false souvenirs left by the stories.

But the works are not history, nor useful objects of which each can avail themselves after having seen the productions, nor desirable sites than one can sample for the price of a journey. The culture of reproductions alone is only fiction-culture.

However, it is no use to protest against the diffusion of reproductions; no condemnation has any value against a fact, and this bestows all the same a hope as at the same time as an illusion. But it matters that men exist attached to the ancient form of knowledge, that they challenge values known through reproductions alone, this artificial order of priorities that made one admire an artist on the faith of the printed paper; they refer back stubbornly and modestly, to the works alone. It is not sufficient to have specialists, they make history more than taste, but rather, they create taste like a bi-product of their activity, in making history. It is amateurs that one wishes for, even if one has to put up with their fads, their exclusiveness, and perhaps their dreams. This bygone attitude that caused several eccentrics to love the possession of works, to prefer the original drawing of a lesser master to a copy of a masterpiece; this need of the quest and the collection which had made men like Mariette, Gigoux and others, which has absolved mediocre painters because they were collectors of great discernment; it is this singular behaviour that can again help to bring to its senses contemporary society.

To make collections, it is true, is to capitalise art; the possession of works is only an extreme form and perhaps unhealthy of a taste for authenticity. But one can collect memories; one can be satisfied with the Louvre, the National Gallery, the museum one comes across. The essential is to preserve with the objects in which repose this strange power to explain in their texture and their form at once a thought and an act, fixed for ever in a unique assembly of concrete qualities, a truthful relation. The only mirror that doesn't change the meaning and the value is that of our own spirit; all reproductions interposed corrupt the order of our thoughts and at the same time a certain order of things.

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