

Consciousness is like a melody, a song which exists only in going on, a melody which never repeats itself but which contains memories and allusions to what has gone before. Just as in a melody whatever is ongoing at the moment attains its meaning by virtue of what has led up to it and in anticipation of what is to come, so our consciousness is founded on the flowing of past experience through the present into the future. As long as we are naïve enough to believe in a world of things—a world where meaning is constant and stable and shared by all in the same way—then this fact is not noticed and only events flow; but when this illusion is shattered it is done with irrevocably, and meaning itself is unstable, and for some people finished with. It is at this point that the service of painting becomes crucial in that of all the arts it is the only perfectly static one, whose problems, means and values are bound up in the transfixing into pure and complete simultaneity that which we were only able to know because it was moving.

—Louis Finkelstein, "Painterly Representation," Ingber Gallery, 1975

THOUGHTS ABOUT PAINTERLY

By Louis Finkelstein

Painterly—a kind of slop or a kind of sloppiness; whether as a habit of mind or as a set of physical characteristics.

Also, the way in which a painting was good. Like the dealer who said (albeit some time ago): "If it's Abstract-Expressionist we know it's good." Sometime in the 1950's I came back from being away a while in Europe and a painter I knew spoke to me about something he called "New York paint." I was shocked at the idea that there was a certain kind of paint of New York. Later, of course, the same paint was seen in places like Warsaw, Rome, Tokyo and the University of California. Later it was replaced by acrylics.

Also the way a painting was bad. Like in Post-Painterly which meant you were supposed to have outgrown all that. This frequently had the smell of Great Renunciations, like all the people who never learned to draw in the first place giving up Nature. But this was no worse than the people who discovered that they *were* Nature and therefore didn't have to learn to draw.

Originally, in Wolfflin's usage, painterly was an art historical classificatory device which in his exposition carried with it the implication that in at least certain of its manifestations it was the working out of a kind of logic of historical development. Past a certain point in time, however, it may be that the

distinction has a different character and a different historical implication, more than anything else like the resistance to strict historical determination.

At a certain point painterly signified a kind of Dutch courage, which was, of course, originally an epithet for gin, but in this case was the courage of a particular Dutchman, namely de Kooning, as if you could put on his paint in the same way you could put on his clothes if you borrowed them or stole them.

Most of the difficulties with painterly stem from this borrowed clothes idea, otherwise the fallacy of misplaced concreteness, which is the mistaking of the nature of a thing for a few of its attributes.

In the case of painterly, the misplaced concreteness springs from four sources, but since everybody knows that real explanations are in threes, we will have to reduce the number by one. This is easy because one of the explanations is when the term is used as part of a sales pitch, as in "Abstract Expressionism is Good"; since in the long run (in the language of Ogden and Richards' *The Meaning of Meaning*, this comes out as that to which the user of a symbol would like to have somebody else believe he is referring) all words can be used in sales pitches, the distinction is neither here nor there and so we are back to three:

1. From the propensity of art historians to collect things on "objective" bases. This may help settle some of their problems, but it doesn't seem to help anyone else.
2. From the simplistic esthetics which holds that the basis of art is the unity of formal relations among our sense perceptions. This is properly referred to as a formalist position in spite of some people's objection to the term. It is sometimes disguised as the assertion that the only statements which can be made intelligibly about works of art are in terms of such unities; there is here enshrined a confusion as between intelligibility and adequacy as principles of explanation.
3. From the simplistic estimates of the nature of perception which explain it on the level of sense impressions, the elements of the retinal image, such as color and shape. Pedagogically such estimates are found from Ruskin's teaching of drawing all the way down to Bauhaus-inspired "design" or "visual fundamentals" courses which propose that they will teach people "how to see."

"Style" for the artist means something different than it does for the art historian. The claim by the latter that by standing aside from the particular confusions typical of the activity of the former he is somehow above the battle has the same cogency as the claims of military historians which Tolstoy derides as bestowing on events a greater degree of clarity than the events warrant.

For the historian, "style" is the constancy or regular change through time of tabulatable characteristics, including those of which the artist may not himself be aware. Whatever may be the attractions of this statistical approach it has the effect of making of the artist a layman, i.e. of denying a particularity to those functions *as artist*, and of making him then a kind of laborer in certain materials. (Given the recent expansion of the kinds of materials in vogue, this might have to be recast to a kind of laborer whose output is merchandized at certain kinds of outlets or under certain auspices.)

For the artist on the other hand, "style" represents the closure of a set of symbolizing or symbol-forming intentions. In the formative stages of a style, the painting elements are at the same time discrete technical solutions and glimmerings of possible meanings. Seeing further into the meanings provides the basis for relatively novel technical solutions. Such processes have a dual effect: one facing inward to the individual work where the possible efficacy of certain ways of symbolizing is tested by the kind of unification or corroboration of meaning which takes place in a given confluence, the other facing outward in the sense of expanding an available shared vocabulary. So that what was at issue in Gorky looking at Matta and saying, "Oh, thin paint," was not simply the picking up of a recipe (the borrowed clothes), so much as a revision of his understanding of the strategy of imaging, and consequently an uprooting and revaluation of all his modes of feeling, these being transvalued by their connection to new concrete terms.

That the transaction occurs on grounds of symbolizing (i.e., being tested by its meaning) rather than on "structural" grounds makes all the difference. There is no grammar of painting, but rather a plurality of rhetorics.

Painterly is and is not one thing, is and is not transmissible.

Between technique, vision, intention, design, expression there is no seam;

neither is one thing the cause and another the result.

Learning is not a bad thing either. Sometimes learning is represented as either not necessary or, more subtly, as to be taken for granted. That is, it is assumed that the artist possesses as much learning as he needs and that this is self-evident. Robert Goldwater has pointed out that this fallacy derives from Riegl's formulation of "will-to-form," which assumes the adequacy of technique. It is much more the case that the artist docs what he docs because he literally doesn't know (how to do) any better. But the separation of learning and intention is artificial. I am willing to take it à la Riegl, provided that the proposition is seen as a two-way street, i.e. that artists with rudimentary techniques are stupid in the sense that the undeveloped nature of their technical concerns prevents them from having a very developed will to form, indeed is a sanctification of their ignorance. I think there is much to confirm this view. Conceptual Art is, after all, mostly a matter of willingness to be satisfied with what(ever) one does.

One of the particular fascinations of the Prado is that it shows several cycles of learning, the works that painters learned from and the works which show what was learned. We see both the genealogy and the elaboration of an idea. Most particularly painterly.

That painterly idea we might represent to be the subordination of individual objects to the sense of the circumambient medium, or the rendering of optical values as distinct from tactile, or as giving weight through color rather than through modeling, or as a distinction of focus through variations of brushstroke, etc. Yet as clear and available as these notions are, they do not succeed in obviating the necessity for each artist to work it out for himself. In spite of the relations between the styles of Titian, Rubens, Velazquez, Goya, each painterly style is unmistakably the result of individual idiosyncratic development. Indeed the artist docs not appear deliberately to create the painterly style which is eventually his. Rather it is the result or realization of several successive kinds of reading into the way paint symbolizes air, matter, space, light, flesh. Anything we should call a formal structure is a by-product. Successive insights or projections of meaning take place like the cartoon idea of a lightbulb going on in one's head, each one click, discrete from what had gone before, supported by it yet novel, essentially about the meaning of paint. The same artist at different stages sees different meanings. Titian, when he begins to

twist and bend the voluptuous flesh and satin of his holy figures so that they swell and catch the light at different angles did not foresee that deep and rich and shimmering soup where all drawing disappears and bulk expands into the encircling void as in the late Entombments.

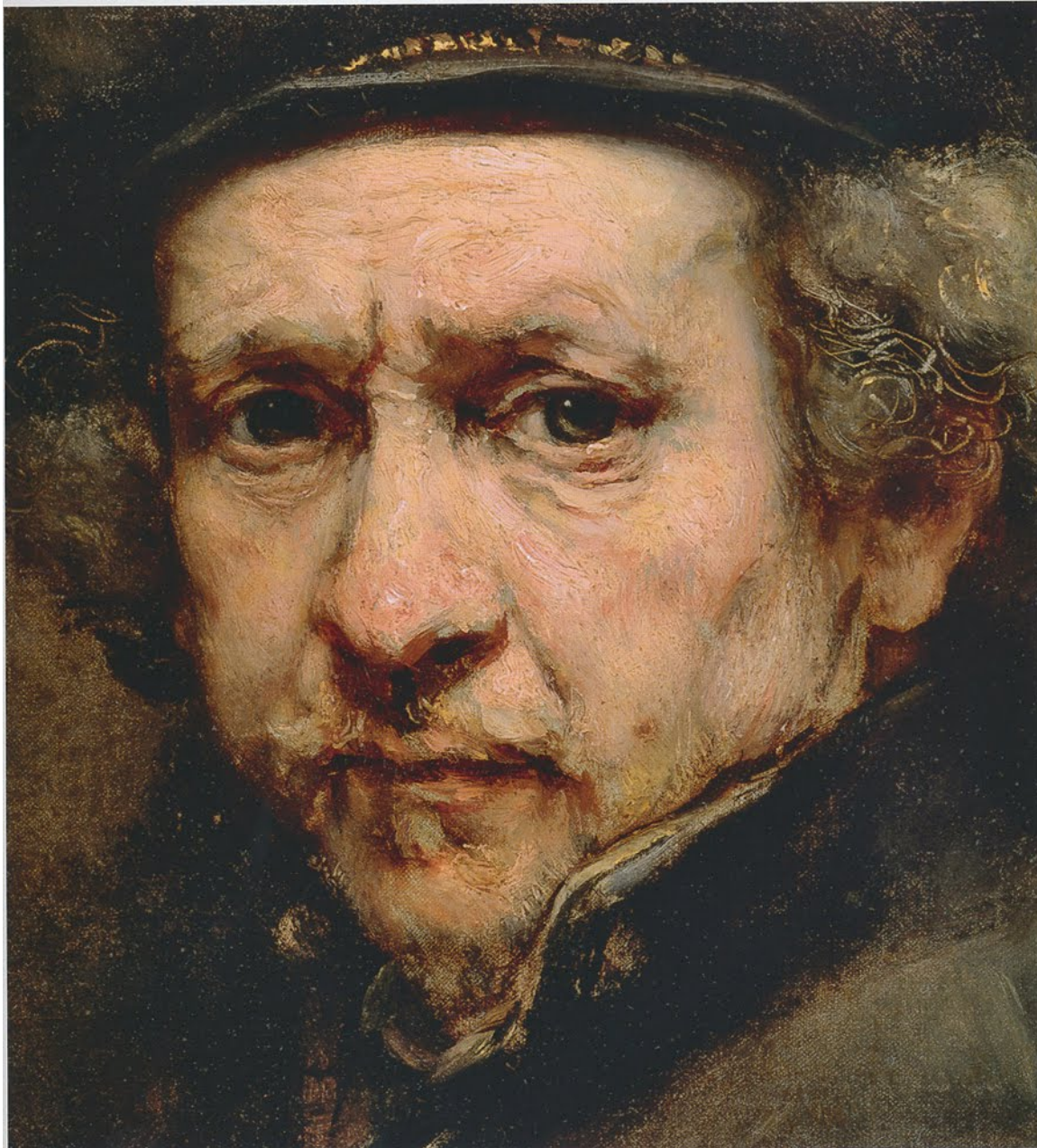


The Garden of Love Peter Paul Rubens 1638

Rubens, in *The Garden of Love* (or *Feast of Venus*), makes of paint an entirely different substance than in other of his works, a transformation of which his closest collaborators had not an inkling. Velazquez, in a late study of Philip as against when Philip was a young man is engaged in an entirely different projective activity as to the nature not only of paint but of flesh, bone, head, etc., which belies completely the stereotype of his "dispassionate objectivity."



In Rembrandt's *Self-Portrait in Washington*, the almost microscopic irregularities of the paint surface fade in and out of focus on the quality of fleshiness in a manner defying calculation and owing nothing at all to the whole entire remainder of the language of chiaroscuro painting whether in Rembrandt's work or elsewhere.



In a similar fashion in the work of middle Renoir to late Renoir, middle Monet to late Monet, the grounds of translation are completely changed. In and out of the work of Renoir with no apparent rule there is the occurrence of

monumental weightiness to forms, and these could be of figures, landscape or even still-life, produced by the sudden access of particular stridencies of color contrast.

In virtually every case, painterly seems an inherently, in principle, particularistic phenomenon, which receives new light or new definition of the meaning of means in terms of each instance, the important common feature being the kind of projective activity which is involved both for the painter and the viewer.

As for example when you first look at the *Syndics of the Cloth Guild* it seems as if all the figures are in a row (which is also the way Rivers paints it) and then you see that the space is actually deeper than it is wide, which changes light, gesture, characterization, all.



Rembrandt *Syndics of the Cloth Guild*

Such senses of discovery (which are of an altogether different nature than iconographic discovery and invoke an altogether different order of transformation) could not, it would seem, occur without a certain amount of what appears to be slop, since they move from the known to the unknown to

the known, unpredictably and unheralded.

Painterly can be, of course, a sort of indulgence, even self-indulgence, as, for example, when the bravura brushstroke provides a permission to insulate oneself from the demand of investigating further the symbolizing of experiences, that is when it stops short, when the meaning is limited *in an arbitrary way*. What constitutes arbitrary is a judgment which each observer must make for himself, and in so doing, pay for, in the sense of then permitting his own estimates of truth and value to be formed by the acceptance of that level of resolution (or not resolution.)

It would be unkind to point a finger; everyone succumbs to this to a degree. To return to the Prado for a moment, the ultimate dimension of what is learned, one painter from another, is just this sustaining of penetration so that the artist continually moves past a simply available solution to one which has greater depth. The high level of demand is the result of a high level of competition.

Painterly can consist simply in being charmed with one's own paint. I think this is what is involved in a comparison between Boldini and Manet; although it becomes apparent that Manet's paint simply as paint is actually better, it is on some other level of awareness that this takes place so that we do not say that he is charmed by it. This distinction may be no distinction, however, because at a certain moment one (whether it is the spectator or the artist himself would be irrelevant here) may be charmed and then at a later moment see into it, that is, beyond the merely charming, although that particular charm might remain as the talisman for a deeper dimension.

Philip Guston, it seems, has had a particularly bad time of it, having been attacked from all sides on this score. When his "painterly" works were first shown in the early 1950s he was charged with being charmed with his own paint (this was of course at a certain time considered reprehensible), then later of abandoning the sensuous quality of his earlier work, then later of having exploited the quality of sensibility and then, still later, of exploiting its abandonment.

Ad Reinhardt had a rule (among the many rules he had, which were mainly against things) against "wiggly lines." This was probably because at the period before he made the rule he put wiggly lines in his pictures, or rather what he put in his pictures was wiggly lines. On one occasion he aired this rule in the

presence of Guston who retorted that he never put wiggly lines in his pictures (more properly nothing which he ever put in his pictures was wiggly lines.)

One must distinguish that kind of painterliness (as well as that kind of response to painterliness) which is simply a matter of *delectation* over such things as loose edges, fused colors, open shapes, variations of substance, that is a purely hedonistic attitude, from those cases where possibly painterly attributes are present but serving other ends.



Jackson Pollock, *Lavender Mist*
1950; Oil on canvas, Oil, enamel, and aluminum on canvas; 221 x 300 cm National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Pollock for example in *Lavender Mist* seems a purely delectable painter, whereas he was not always. Manet is often portrayed as delectable whereas (in contradiction to the stereotyped image of detachment) he is at almost every point *penetratingly* psychological. There are many manifestations of the *Lavender Mist* type of delectableness (for example in Poons); the category of delectableness seems in its own way a larger category than painterly since it brings together works which have painterly characteristics and those which do not. Collect all works which appeal on a purely hedonistic basis; this will include things of diverse physical characteristics. One person derives pleasure from stroking something which is smooth, another from stroking something which has curly hair; this is all pleasure from stroking.

There is a kind of standard position to the effect that one cannot speak of the meaning or import of a work of art so much as its effect upon a particular

speaker. This may turn out to be the same thing. The effect may be that which I label delectation, but is by no means restricted to it. That is, delectation may carry with it other imports. That these will be neither uniformly received nor uniformly explicated is of no real matter. We should not expect our study to produce greater concreteness than the material itself warrants. It is probably the case that meaning is exactly that which means different things to different people; it is highly doubtful that it could be any other way. Not only can you not step into the same water twice, you cannot even step into it once. The union of academic and commercial requirements tends to suppress this (fact).

Pushers, pornographers and polluters talk about freedom to be oneself. Most freedoms in use turn out to be freedom to join some group or to be autistic. There is more freedom in oil paint than anybody is able to use. That is why people turn to acrylics, collages, plastics, collaboration with engineers or businessmen.

The notion of flatness in painting, the "integrity of the picture plane," is so much academic cant, the product not of reductive art but of minimum sensibility and maximum misunderstanding. Originally it was a half-truth, an inadequate explanation or an approximation of something far more complex. In its dogmatic form as the *sine qua non* of successful modernist painting it applies only to those people who have accepted it *a priori*, dogmatically from the mouths of critics as a recipe.

One of the more ingenious rationales for flatness in painting is that it is a characteristic which only painting possesses. How beautifully this epitomizes the halfway thinking into a problem so typical of contemporary value-scheming. In the same way as the good life is formed by an habituation to choose the good, the shallow life is formed by an habituation to choose the shallow. It is much more the case that since painting is done on a surface it possesses not only the potential, but virtually the imperative, to transform and by transforming, transform ways of feeling.

Example: the hair of the Infanta in *Las Meninas*. *Because* it is on a flat surface we experience more deeply not only hair but all the universe in which hair exists, the space, the matter and all that. To babble about illusionism in painting as an outworn end is to fail to make necessary distinctions, and to be

deliberately perverse.



The premiumization of handwriting for its own sake (again a failure to make distinctions-distinctions as to the imaginative depth of the handwriting being devoted to some end) led to a mistaken assumption that skill was a matter of dexterity only, and rather readily available. It was Analytic Cubism, through its standardization of rendering, that aimed at generalization of skill, i.e. the security, the insulation provided by a limitation of meaning and thereby produced the exaltation of will or willfulness.

Painterly gets involved with the ambiguous and the equivocal, the variously nuanced because these are problems of the real, problems of the structure of consciousness, problems of the interplay of public and private language and their possibilities All these are only too easy to trample underfoot for the sake of some other "efficiency." Non-painterly is always to some extent the result of an effort to suppress such factors, to feign obliviousness to them or to remain ignorant of them.

Painting wet-in-wet, which is associated with painterly, more importantly on the psychological than the mere manufacturing level, often has the look of just muddling. This is the same as to say that because there are no stops on a fiddle

the violinist is just faking it.

While we most often associate painterly with the optical, this is not always the case. Thus late Michelangelo is "incomplete," "open-formed," uneven, indistinct or distinct in unequal degree, not as "optical" translation as in the Impressionism of Rodin, but as a very precise statement of a particular state of mind. That is, there is an interchange between the sensuous and the conceptual where the concept itself takes on characteristics formerly thought to be the exclusive property of the sensuous.

It is in this way that we "resolve" the irresolutions in some kinds of late Beethoven. Or why does music at times tend to resemble speech but for the quality of gesture which it carries? Which is thus much more precisely explicative of states of consciousness. What is involved between *la la dee da DA da* and *la la dee da da DA*? Note that this is the reverse state of music from that condition to which the other arts supposedly aspire.

We ought to say several things about broken color since this is often associated with painterly.

Mr. Evans of Kodak has shown that what we would take to be the "same color" when it has a vague edge is perceived completely differently from when it has a defined edge. This is one kind of suggestion to the effect that our perception of color does not proceed passively, on a mechanistic, one-to-one basis between display and reception, but is projective and complex.

One approximation of broken-color usage, not necessarily the first in historical priority, is that it comes from a certain *goût* or delectation for an indivisible quality of experience, once found henceforth available as a useful symbol of a host of experienced properties or estimates of the world's potential. The complete iconography of Kandinsky's *Small Pleasures* would be one working out of this; several Pousette-Darts and a number of Resnicks, other ways.

One recalls vividly being smitten by the *expressiveness* of the charts for testing color-blindness in the army physical.

Broken color in Impressionism may proceed from painting leaves. It first appeal's in Monet's *Dejeuner sur l'Herbe*, 1865; the first glimmerings not

simply of broken color as a physical technique, but also of what seems to be a corollary situation, the dawning of personalized color transformations. What do I mean by "personalized color transformations"? It means seeing into the color in a certain access of penetration such that at another moment or in another state we would not say that those colors are there. This must be sharply distinguished from other classes of color modification such as the objectively verifiable case of color modification by reflected light and the statistically verifiable case of color modification by simultaneous contrast. The phenomenon I am referring to is much more gratuitous. Sometimes it manifests itself as seeing in one and the same place, with no changes in objective conditions, two different and contradictory colors, such as violet and yellow-green, or orange and blue, even though there is no possibility that a thing can be uniformly colored and be both violet and yellow-green. Such a color transformation is in some way a *movement of the mind*. There is no doubt that this exists. It is sometimes of piercing sharpness. It is in no way the result of color blindness, but rather of color acuteness; it is very possibly closely allied to Cezanne's "*petite sensation*."

Matisse touches on something related to this when, synesthetically, he speaks of a certain blue and a certain orange being like the sound of a gong. What blue; what orange; what gong?

Now if in painting leaves the processes involved urge or permit or require both the transformation and the *goût*, what shall we say is the cause of what, not in historical but in psychological priority? (Notice for upwards of 15 years after 1865 the *ad hoc* character of Monet's paint application; that is, he does not follow a consistent technique, but employs many different methods of symbolizing sensations,) Broken color involves several kinds of equivocation about such factors.

De Kooning has spoken very eloquently (and long before his own work became truly painterly) in criticism of Courbet's "realism," showing that it was not simply where his donkey stopped that he painted, but where the qualities of wetness and dappled light had just that propensity for translation into palette-knifed paint. So is it that the compulsion for a certain kind of paint leads one to the leaves, or do the habits imposed by the process promote a habit of mind which then transvaluates a technique?

Also, in squinting at something, we do not see *those* more vaguely but rather other colors more distinctly.

Broken color can in some cases be a calculus of opportunities for "personal transformations." That is, since the transformation is in essence about an inner state of receipt of meaning, the occasion of each dot, each separated increment is the occasion not simply for the analysis of previously known components but for testing the *unforeseen* consequences of expression which are just coming into being. (In the same spirit Freud, when he had to make vexing decisions, flipped a coin and then examined how he felt.) Example, the *Matisse divisionist Sideboard*. Also Matisse's, the related observations that the process was too complicated to proceed on any theoretical *a priori* basis, meaning that the only testing will be teleological (i.e. in the expressiveness). Middle and late Matisse must also be seen in the light of an evolution consisting of several series of painterly transformations. The results show in paintings which are not radical in their programmatic novelty, but in what I would call their radical depth, paintings of the middle

1920s such as the *Fruits and Flowers of Nice* of which Al Held so tellingly said that Matisse uses a brush like a blunt instrument, and the Lasker *Interior with Striped Tablecloth*. Both of these display a complexity and richness of color expression brought about by a grasp of perception as a poetic process, and in so doing provide some hints as to the reading of such mysterious late works as the non-painterly *Souvenir of Oceania*.

Painterly at its most effective (and here I mean something like the *that for which* Manet sacrificed the "rationality" of the study version of his *Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* for the "irrationality" and "mistakes" of the final version) is also a reduction of redundancy, which is an interesting principle in the analysis of vision. Edwin Land has shown that for many purposes the amount of visual information which is capable of being transmitted by optical arrangements is in excess of what we require. Selectivity is a focus on particular requirements. Since the requirement is teleological (except when it is deliberately channeled by a device, as in psychological experiments), based on expression, i.e., meaning which in itself will be a projection of individual needs, what we "see" in the sense of experience is "content" as distinguished from "form," if form is shape distributions of tone and color.

The notion of the Symbolist poet Gustave Kahn that the subjective response is

objectified onto the world is thus very close to the truth, but in a perhaps different sense than he realized. The Symbolists (as painters the least painterly and deliberately so) and the Surrealists after them worked this out as if the objects of knowledge were perfectly clear. Proust, more sophisticated, has his painter deal with the unresolved as the actual object of experience.

So painterly probably means not to be primitive.

One of the clearest examples of redundancy reduction is that found in Rembrandt's drawings, particularly the very sparse and quick ones. In these the discontinuity of clues, gestures, space, characterization is brought together by the *a priori* continuum of the paper as the containing space in the same way that our perception of visual clues takes place in the continuum of the lived-in world. There is no question but that this reduction creates and fortifies expression. This is because it acts out the way in which we find meaning in our living experiences.

Nobody likes to deal with this type of meaning which lies outside the Panofskian tables because it is not "scientific." Precisely. It is the little flickers of non-scientific meaning which are convincing and which abide, and the scientific meanings which are ephemeral.

Painting has a greater degree of sensuous concreteness than the quick sketch (note the different status of this in Oriental art), and it articulates the symbol structure in greater complexity. (Or maybe it is the other way around; that is, in virtue of a more ramified way of symbolizing, the kinds of awareness of which we are capable is actually greater. Example, the way fleshiness is symbolized in Rembrandt and de Kooning, but not in Chinese painting.) The time difference involved in such degrees of concretization demands different means of sustaining the projective activity. Perhaps the Rembrandt sketch acts as a kind of standard for the quality of discovery. In Manet, the pell-mell activity testified to by Mallarmé may be a variant method, whereas Titian's practice of turning pictures to the wall and working on them at very widely spaced intervals accomplishes a similar end by a different route.

Performance has something to do with it. Consider what is implied in a musical performance. In anyone performance the musician is permitted to pass through each indicated event but once. Every choice, every action which decides something about each event must be taken with a view to the longest structure

in time and sound which will give to the separate elements the most articulate meaning.

The view of brushstroke variation as serving merely variation of tone and therefore indicative only of modeling in representation misses the point. Maybe it wishes to mistake paintings for colored reproductions of paintings. There are more intentions in modulation of brushstroke than can be indicated by modulation of tone only. The ensemble of such intentions as in the musical performance are of too great a number and too complex and too unrepeatable in their exact concatenation for a "formal" analysis. They are explained only as providing the conditions for the artist to see into the whole work.

Painterly may be more appropriate to representational painting than to abstract, not because of producing tone variations, but rather because the fact of representation itself produces a convergence of meanings, a reduction of redundancy. (With the abstract painterly, assuming there is such a thing, there is the possibility of meanings detaching themselves and flying all around so that for the sake of some resolution one entertains the field relations, the continuum itself as the only available vehicle of meaning; and this becomes submerged in what I call delectation.)

Very small changes on the objective scale can produce large differences of meaning.

Compare J. L. David's gestures with Watteau's.



The Count-Duke of Olivares on Horseback
1634 Oil on canvas 313 × 239 cm Museo del Prado



Velázquez (Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez)
Don Gaspar de Guzmán (1587–1645), Count-Duke of Olivares
1635 Oil on canvas 127.63 x 104.14 cm Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC

Compare the two versions of the Duke of Olivares on horseback by Velázquez, one in the Metropolitan, one in the Prado. In the Met version, there is a little slatch of palette-knifed paint in the sky which creates a marvelous distance,

light, palpability to the space of military and political domination. In this delivery of a specific actual, it qualifies both the physical presence and rhythm of the foreground figure and at the same time the felt meaning of the human will imposing itself upon the world of dimensions, extensions, activities and substances, and provokes a unique reverie. Its poetry is that it is at the same time formal, descriptive, psychological, metaphysical. (There are other moments of this apparently off-hand transcendence of denotable ends and means; for instance the vibrant vague purple flutter in the upper right-hand corner-of the *Venus Blindfolding Cupid* by a follower of Titian in Washington.) This half-gram poem of paint does not occur in the Prado version; so it hangs, transfixed in time and space as a small witness to how every masterpiece is achieved by the skin of its teeth.



Detail from *Venus Blindfolding Cupid*