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大阪大学21世紀COEプログラム「インターフェイスの人文学」研究報告書

越境／モダンアート Transboundary/Modern Art

Modernism and Central- and East-European Art & Culture



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序

越境する芸術への問いかけ

岡府寺 司

この報告書は2005年5月に開催した国際シンポジウム「越境／モダンアート Transboundary / Modern Art」ならびに「モダニズムと中東欧の藝術・文化」研究会（MCE）における研究発表を中心にまとめたものである。

「越境／モダンアート Transboundary / Modern Art」は、国立国際美術館（大阪）における展覧会「ゴッホ展 孤高の画家の原風景」の開会行事のひとつとして企画したもので、そこからファン・ゴッホに関する研究発表二編と、ロバート・ラウシェンバーグの《モノグラム》に関する論考を収録した。また、「モダニズムと中東欧の藝術・文化」研究会からは「中央ヨーロッパとモダニズムについての対論 ―ハンガリーを中心として―」と題する討論を収録した。基本テーマに関連するものとして拙稿「Hans Ludwig Cohn Jaffé 1915-1984: From the *Bildung* to the *Ethica* of De Stijl」も加えている。

テーマは多岐にわたるが、いずれも「越境する芸術への問いかけ」である点で共通する。かつて、国境は文化活動の範囲としては大きすぎ、経済活動の範囲としては小さすぎると言われたことがある。たしかに、経済活動が国境を越えることはかなり以前から自明のことであり、ひとつの文化を醸成する活動の多くは、都市や限られた地域に自然発生的にできあがった集団によって進められてきた。国民文化なるものは、国家主導で作られた政治的企図の結果であって、従来の芸術、文化研究はこの政治的企図に大きく支配されてきたように思える。

歌舞伎にしろ、アメリカ抽象表現主義にしろ、文化のコア自体は小さなコミュニティで発芽し、時には国家的支援を受けることになって国民文化として成長するが、そのような図式とは異なる成長の仕方もあるはずで、そのような非国家的、超国家的な現象をとらえる枠組みを探る必要がある。ここに収録した論考はいずれもそのような問題意識を共有しているといってよいだろう。

サイバースペースの拡張を待つまでもなく、芸術は越境し続けていた。ただ、それがあ

る種の「物語」に纏められるにあたって、しばしば強い国家的、政治的介入があったにすぎない。政治、経済、文化の絡み合いを解きほぐしつつ越境的動態として芸術を捉えること。この報告書はそのような試みのひとつである。

Vincent van Gogh in Search for a Place in the Art world

Evert van Uitert

Paris, nineteenth's century capital of art

In the nineteenth century Paris had pushed away at arm's length all other cities as the place where every painter had to be for quite some time. An artist who articulated this yearning was the Dutch painter Gerard Bilders (1838-1865). His letters and diary were published posthumously in 1876 by his mecenas Johannes Kneppelhout. Vincent van Gogh read the book in 1883 when residing in The Hague.[*1]

Gerard Bilders expressed the theme of longing for the enormous and inspiring city in a letter dated 1 July 1862. In Amsterdam he had met a Frenchman who had stressed in what Bilders called "affectionate conversations" that no place was more killing for an artist than sleepy Amsterdam. The Frenchman continued his journey to Rome, leaving Bilders behind full of dreams. So he wrote his mecenas that he would like to live in "a really big city", "an art centre in which art plays a prominent role" and, he admitted, he had Rome or Paris in mind. Kneppelhout's reaction was one of alarm and he discouraged Rome strongly, favouring Dresden instead.

Nota bene: References to van Gogh's letters are given in the form of two numbers, the first refers to *De brieven van Vincent van Gogh*, ed. Han van Crimpen en Monique Berends-Albert, 4 vols. The Hague 1990 and the second to *Verzamelde brieven van Vincent van Gogh*, ed. V.W. van Gogh, Amsterdam & Antwerpen, 2003. The letters in current English translations have numbers from de *Brieven* edited by V.W. van Gogh.

1 ——— A.G. Bilders, *Brieven en dagboek*, Ed. by Johannes Kneppelhout, Leiden 1876. To introduce his book, Kneppelhout cites a poem by Francois Ponsard (1814-67) from his volume *l'Homme et l'Argent*, II,5: "Je ne mets point du tout votre talent en doute./ Mais il est malaise de se frayer sa route:/ Il faut se signaler entre mille rivaux./ Et l'on n'acquiert un nom que par de longs travaux./ Encore que de dégoûts et de déconvenues!/ Les plus forts voient souvent leurs oeuvres mécon- nues./ Prud'hon et Gericault ont eu ce même sort". The strongest Pierre Paul Prud'hon (1758-1823 and Théodore Gericault (1791-1824), "often see their works misunderstood" and "shared the same lot". This romantic fate became a cliché for nearly all modern painters in later times, including Vincent van Gogh.

This was something Bilders on his turn was against, since when writing “an art centre of the art world” he really meant modern painters rather than museums. He defended the battle of the books- “le querelle des anciens et modernes” or the modern art against the classics – since he sympathised with his own time and all that happened right now. So he had not in mind cities like Düsseldorf, Munich, Antwerp or Brussels, but foremost Paris. For him, as for so many artists, the word “Paris” meant “the great magic sound” in his life. He then burst into a laudation on Paris: “There the torch of the modern art flames and enthusiasm and love of her dwells; there are her most ardent worshippers as well as her chosen favourites, there one finds good taste in her products, truth, understanding of the old masters, new inventions, greatness...also a bit of decadence, but all is united or is flowing to it (Paris)”.[*2]

In addition to the spiritual aspects Bilders mentioned the material problems by hinting at the role played by those buying art for whatever reason. They victimized the artist but could bring fame as well – and therefore an income. And again, Bilders summed up the positive points he would encounter in “a centre point” like Paris. “Old masters as basis truths, living modern painters busy explaining through their works and presence the first, pointing to the true schools, and inspiring and inflaming others, then many art buyers, dealers, sheenies, auctions, as means to live and becoming exploitative, and ultimately freedom to live and act as one can, and not as one is obliged, according to conventional rules of mistaken respectability, which one can not uphold and which is beyond our power, That is, it seems to me, what one finds in Paris, where moreover the modern school in art, is the one, for which I have the most feeling and the most sympathy”.[*3] That was Courbet’s Realism and the art of the School of Barbizon. The same masters in his beginnings inspired Vincent van Gogh.

Bilders foresaw that his bourgeois mecenas would object. And so he did. But that only stimulated the modernist Bilders on his turn, to highlight his own opinion. For him the old masterpieces were merely “solemn voices out of the grave, whereas one attends in the modern [...] the ambition and struggle, one sees this one stepping forwards an other stumbling and a third one passing a fourth. One witnesses this struggle from one to all and everybody, ...”[*4]

2 ——— Bilders (op. cit. note. 1) Letter dated 14 July 1862.

3 ——— Ibidem, p. 264.

4 ——— Bilders (op. cit. note 1) p. 274. Letter from 14 August 1862. For a picture of the French Art World in that time, see *The Second Empire 1852-1870 Art in France under Napoleon III*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Detroit Institute of Arts, Grand Palais, Paris 1978-9. Notable articles are: “The Second Empire: Art and Society”, “Art and Its Critics: A Crisis of Principle” and the introduction to the section dedicated to painting.

Vincent called it a witty book but also a melancholic one. Bilders, who died young, had never seen Paris and according to Vincent hadn't overcome his "romantic lost illusions". To (260 [227])[*5] the term 'illusions perdues', familiarized by the novel of the same name by Honoré Balzac (1837), was fairly often used for a handsome promising young man, who came to the capital to fail there miserably. Balzac's protagonist is a provincial poet with great expectations, coming to Paris to make a career. Finding no publisher, he sacrificed his poetic genius for a job as a corruptible theatre critic, denied his true friends and in the end went down and out. His failure must have been a nightmare for many an ambitious artist who was looking for success in Paris's art world.

In the correspondence between Bilders and his *mecenas* all aspects are touched upon which are so typical for artistic life, both with regard to the dominant centres like Paris as to the peripheral regions. The presence of art from the old masters in churches and museums – the Musée de Luxembourg with its contemporary collection was unknown to Bilders –, the official and private academies, the possibilities to exhibit one's work, the role played by the press to spread the artistic novelties, and last but not least, the art trade which had to satisfy various groups of art lovers and collectors: all were brought into the limelight in favour of Paris. For Bilders it proved all to be in vain: he died in 1865 before he could set his eyes on the fairy lights of the beloved city.

Bilders did not stand alone in his ardour for Paris. The city stimulated the creative competition between artists as well as the rivalry between collectors. It incited the ambition in artists to look over the borders of one's own city and country. Had a Grand Tour been an indispensable part of an artist's training in former centuries, since the nineteenth century when new schools and new visions had tumbled over each other in acceleration, Paris became more and more the crucial place to be. The French government did all to help to use the arts as means to propagate the French national interests, for example in the World Exhibitions of 1855, 1867, 1889 and 1900.[*6]

Articles in daily newspapers and journals with their black and white reproductions gained a

5 — Letter 20 August; Vincent wrote extensively on the book. As a type of artist he preferred Jean François Millet, who sometimes complained too, but contrary to Bilders, always worked on.

6 — *The Art of all Nations 1850-73 The Emerging Role of Exhibitions and Critics*. Selected and edited by Elizabeth Gilmore Holt, Garden City, New York 1981; *The Expanding World of Art 1874-1902, Universal Expositions and State-Sponsored Fine Arts Exhibitions*. Selected and edited by Elizabeth Gilmore Holt. New Haven and London 1988. See also Peter Watson, *From Manet to Manhattan. The rise of the Modern Art Market*, London 1992.

prominent position both in the life of those living inside and outside the centre. Artists having visited Paris told their stories once they were home, and newcomers came to listen to comrades who had been in Paris before. Also Vincent van Gogh had been in direct contact with the Parisian art world before he himself went to Paris as a painter since his brother Theo wrote him from Paris about the latest events.^[*7] Nevertheless, Vincent was in no way interested in Manet or Impressionism when he was working in the Netherlands, the reason of which will be discussed later.

Vincent van Gogh as an apprenticed art-dealer

In the years 1869-75, Vincent had made his earliest contacts with the art world when he was employed in various international branches of the mainstream commercial art gallery Goupil. He became well informed through the contacts that Dutch painters had kept with France. During these years, and in the following, religious period, Vincent admired the work of Ary Scheffer (1795-1858) who had settled in Paris already in 1819. Scheffer, after a toilsome start, developed into a popular artist. Later Johan Bartold Jongkind (1819-91) found his way to France. Although he returned to Holland for some years, it was in France that his views of towns, seashores and landscapes were his greatest success. From the Netherlands he wrote to his Parisian art dealer Martin in 1860: “Mon grand désir c’est de retourner à Paris, pour vous revoir et pour revoir mes bons et nobles amis, c’est aussi dans l’intérêt de mes affaires”. Jongkind saw France as “le pays où on sait le mieux apprécier les arts”.^[*8]

Vincent knew about the trials and tribulations of the brothers Jacob (1837-1899) and Matthijs Maris (1839-1917) in Paris, and, as far as Matthijs was concerned, also in London.^[*9] He was well

7—— Theo van Gogh sent his brother from Paris reviews of the exhibitions, held in the Salons of 1884 and '85. In his Dutch period, Vincent was a stickler for the older generation critics such as Théophile Gautier and Théophile Thoré and he admired the articles written by Paul Mantz. A name he mentioned frequently in his letters. Critics who supported the avant-garde, he didn't know, except Émile Zola.

8—— Victorine Hefting, *Jongkind d'après sa correspondance*, Utrecht 1969 letter 147, Rotterdam Januari 1860, p. 111 and letter 57, Rotterdam July 1857, p. 59; Nicolas Green, 'Circuits of production, circuits of consumption: the case of mid-nineteenth century French art dealing', *Art Journal* 48 (Spring 1989), pp. 29-34.

9—— See for the Maris brothers and other colleagues of Vincent van Gogh in The Hague: *The Hague School Dutch Masters of the 19th Century*. Edited by Ronald de Leeuw, John Sillevius, Charles Dumas, Paris (Grand Palais), London (Royal Academy of Arts), The Hague (Haags Gemeentemuseum), 1983. Catalogue in English, published in London.

aware of the role art dealers played in the production of both brothers. Commercially minded firms like Goupil largely prescribed the genres in which painters should excel. Jacob, for instance, should focus on sentimental ‘Italiennes’ and shepherdesses. (fig.1) Matthijs Maris found it much harder to meet the requests of the dealers, complaining that he had to produce “potboilers”. Jacob, on the other hand, as adviser of Goupil in the Hague, was less reluctant.[*10]

Vincent admired the *talent manqué* Matthijs greatly, and when he was himself in difficulties, remarked: “If one had made Thijs Maris not too miserable and not too melancholic to work, he might have found something astonishing. I so often think about that fellow”. (505 [408]). In his eyes, Thijs Maris could have become a centre of innovation of the Dutch School.[*11](fig.2)

The choice of a career in the art trade has not come as a surprise. Vincent had three uncles who held important positions in the art trade.[*12] The best respected was his Uncle Vincent, who associated himself with Goupil, the French dealer in art and reproductions. It is via this connection that both Vincent and Theo came to work with Goupil, in 1869 and 1873 respectively. When Theo joined Goupil Vincent wrote to his brother “I am so glad that you are in the

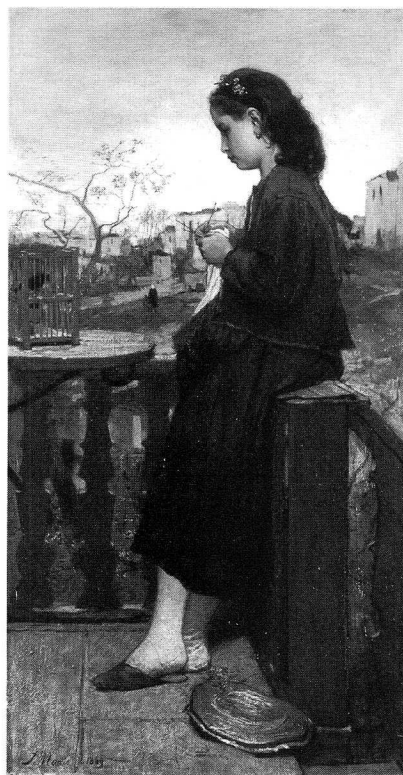


fig.1 Jacob Maris, *Girl Knitting on a Balcony, Montmartre*, 1869. (745×40cm) The Hague, Gemeentemuseum.

—This is an example of a popular genre Goupil promoted.

10 ——— Chris Stolwijk, ‘Een geslaagd kunstenaarschap Jacob Maris en de kunstmarkt, 1853-1940’, in Marjan van Heteren e.a., *Jacob Maris (1837-1899) Ik denk in mijn materie*. Zwolle 2003, pp. 57-67.

11 ——— Vincent van Gogh was provided right. For the next generation symbolists artists, the work of Van Gogh as well as that of Matthijs Maris, became an inspiring source. For Theo van Doesburg, the leading man of the avantgarde periodical *De Stijl*, Matthijs Maris was also valued as a forerunner of abstract art.

12 ——— See Jan Hulsker, *Vincent and Theo van Gogh. A Dual Biography*, Ann Arbor 1990; Chris Stolwijk, *Uit de schilderswereld. Nederlandse kunstschilders in de tweede helft van de negentiende eeuw*, Leiden 1998.

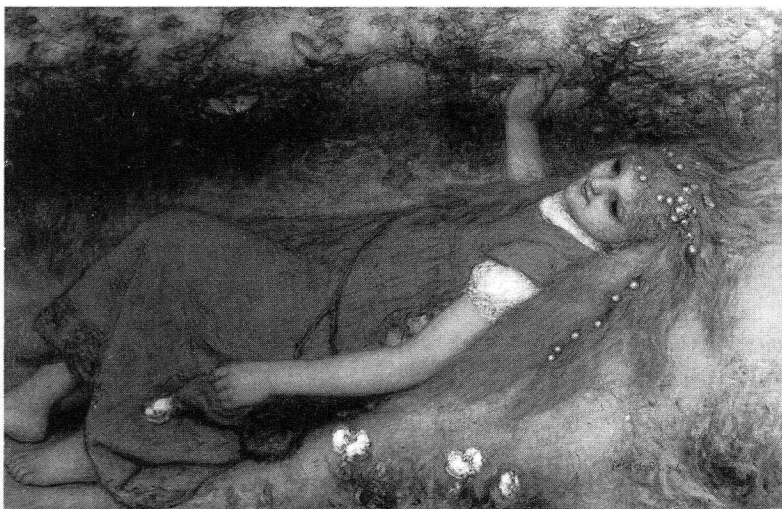


fig.2 Mattheijs Maris, *The Butterflies*, 1874 (64×97cm) Glasgow, The Burrell Collection in the Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum.

—Mattheijs was known for his dreamlike pictures. They are not so realistic as the pictures of his brother Jacob and other painters of the Hague School.

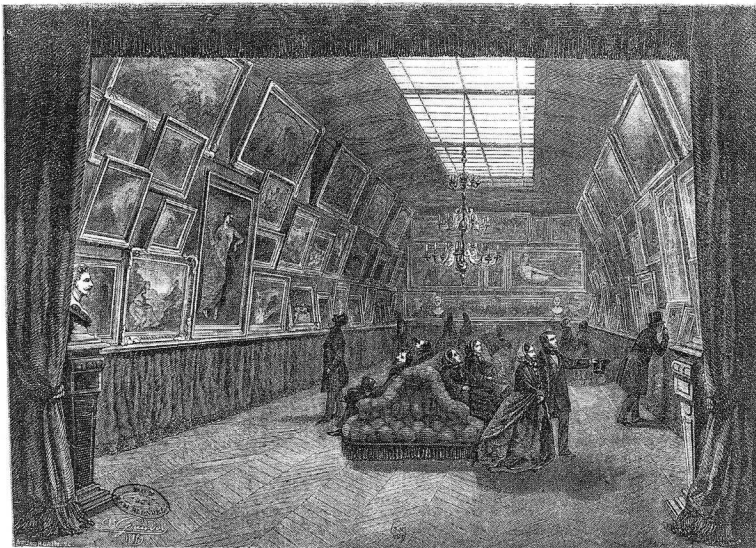
same firm. It is such a splendid house; the longer you are in, the more ambition it gives you”. (3 [3]) Vincent immediately acted as counsellor to his younger brother, pointing out numerous artists to be admired and recommending his reading the *Gazette des Beaux Arts* and *Les Musées de Hollande* by Thoré/Bürger.

However, it did not take long for Vincent’s love for the art trade to cool down. In the autumn of 1875 he advised Theo to: “Look for light and freedom, and do not ponder too deeply on the evils of life”. (55 [43]). Whether he meant this to refer to the art trade is not certain but plausible. This interpretation comes to mind on reading about an incident of which he told Theo in a letter. His uncle the art dealer C.M. van Gogh and Mr. Tersteeg, head of the branch in The Hague where Vincent had worked, visited the London branch of Goupil where Vincent was working at the time. (33 [26]) Vincent knew both gentlemen well and complained to his brother “In my opinion they went too often to the Crystal Palace and other places where they had nothing in particular to do”. Vincent added that they might easily have come to visit him and to see where he lived. When he himself had first

arrived in London he had visited neither Crystal Palace nor the Tower nor Madame Tussaud's. The museums and parks had been sufficient for him and had appealed to him more. (33 [26])

One cannot see Vincent's complaint as anything other than a criticism of the superficiality of his art-dealing managers. Particularly because of a profound saying from the French author Ernest Renan that he added to the letter in which he lectured his uncle and Tersteeg: "It is in realising great things for society, in attaining magnanimity and transcending vulgarity, that the existence of almost all individuals lingers on".[*13] In Vincent's eyes his Uncle and Tersteeg had not risen above 'vulgarity' and would contribute nothing of importance to society. Vincent on the other hand was possessed with a strong ambition to contribute to mankind inspired to a great extent by his religious fervour. (fig.3)

Vincent was transferred to the Paris branch in May 1875 and stayed there until his superiors



GALERIE DE TABLEAUX DE LA MAISON GOUPIL ET COMPAGNIE, ÉDITEURS D'ESTAMPES. Rue Chaptal 11/89

fig.3 Goupil & Cie's gallery in the Rue Chaptal in Paris, 1889. wood engraving.

—A view in the sumptuous gallery of Goupil, published in the popular, illustrated press.

13 ——— Letter (33 [26]) London 8 May 1875. "Il est pour réaliser de grandes choses par la société, pour arriver à la noblesse & dépasser la vulgarité où se traîne l'existence de Presque tous les individus". I was unable to find the precise source for this fragment. It is not in Renan's *Vie de Jésus*, the book he send to Theo in March 1875.

announced that his contract would not be renewed. This did not surprise Vincent. Unfortunately for us he did not explain the circumstances in detail, although a later testimony survives that can throw some light on the situation. An acquaintance with whom Vincent shared a room in Dordrecht, where he worked in a book shop, described the way he operated in the book shop. He sold prints [reproductions?] there occasionally in 1877. His room mate explained: "And when he had to give ladies and other customers information about the prints, exhibited by Mr. Braat, he paid no attention to his employer's interests, but said explicitly and unreservedly what he thought of their artistic value". Unsurprisingly, this eye-witness concluded that Vincent "was unfit for business". One can assume that the same can be said of his functioning in Goupils art galleries.[*14]

From about 1870 till 1880 a period followed in which he was seized by religious ideals, 'a sort of mysticism' as he himself described it. The obsession lasted until the beginning of his training as an artist-draughtsman. In an amazingly short time Vincent grew to aspire to measure himself against his contemporaries and to become versed in the different vocabularies of modern artists working in Paris. This required a fundamental turn-around in his relation to the art world. It appears that the writings of Émile Zola played a fundamental role in this process that has been underestimated until now.

Vincent van Gogh's objections to the modern way of art dealing.

When he set out as an artist there was every reason for Vincent van Gogh to worry about conquering a place in the art world. When he began he was nearly thirty years old, so he was in a hurry. A year-and-a-half after he had begun his training, and Vincent felt himself on firmer ground as an artist, the question also arose when he would produce saleable work. His thoughts turned again to the art trade, but this time seen from a different perspective.

In his letters, he was usually more outspoken to his artist friend Anton van Rappard than he was towards his brother, who worked in the art trade. In a letter to Van Rappard dated 1st November

14 ———— Recollections of P.C. Görlitz, who was Vincent's roommate in Dordrecht, published by M.J. Brusse in his column 'Onder de menschen' ('Among the People') in the *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant*, 26 May 26 and 2 June, 1914. See *Van Gogh A Retrospective*. Edited by Susan Alyson Stein, New York 1986, pp. 41-2. Görlitz has written a detailed letter to the writer Frederik van Eeden, in reaction to a laudatory article Van Eeden has published in the Dutch avant-garde periodical *De Nieuwe Gids*, 1 December 1890. The text of this letter slightly differs from the report Brusse made out of it.

1882 Vincent lamented: “I abhor words like Pleasing and Saleable”. He had never met a dealer who did not use those words. Dealers are the worst enemies of art, and “they are as bad as the plague” Vincent explained. Their managers have the reputation of protecting and promoting artists but they do not do so. Artists are forced to seek refuge with the dealers, since they stand in between the artist and the “Still, there is not a single artist,” wrote Vincent, “who does resent them, whether openly or silently”. Vincent concluded that this is because “they flatter the public, encouraging its worst, most barbaric inclinations and taste”. (280 [R17])

The well-informed writer George Moore wrote a little later, ironically: “On public taste - that is to say, on the educated eye - the dealer is a very fine authority”.[*15] Along the same lines, Vincent paraphrased the manner of speaking of the manager of the London branch of Goupil, named Obach, who used to comment on paintings shown to him: “And it works, yes, it works, yes, it will be listened to and admired”.

He came across the same opinions in the illustrated magazine *The Graphic* and artists infatuated with enriching themselves, like the master of seascapes from The Hague Willem Mesdag. To Vincent it all came to the same thing, “the material grandeur outweighs moral grand.” (294 [252])

Vincent’s litany places him in the tradition of artists of the Romantic era who had liberated themselves from their demanding patrons. However, working in a free market led to artists’ alienation not only in an economic and social, but also a psychological sense. The reaction of many nineteenth-century artists was to place their works on a sky-high pedestal and to flaunt themselves as geniuses. They build an ivory towers for themselves and were converted to the doctrine of ‘art for art sake’. To be misunderstood was acknowledged as an unavoidable period in an artist’s life.[*16] Vincent van Gogh repeatedly used the so-called, but greatly exaggerated, misjudgement of Delacroix, Millet and other Barbizon artists as a justification for his own lack of success. The modern and commercially led

15 ——— George Moore, *Modern Painting*, London 1893 (enlarged edition 1898), Chapter on Picture Dealers, p. 153. Vincent compares in this letter the commercial successful, with the broad path, leading to doom, and truly serious and honest art, with the narrow way, leading to heaven (Math. 7:13-14). He pointed to the wealthy painter of sea views, Mesdag, as a person who walked on the broad, commercial path.

16 ——— This is not just a nineteenth-century problem, as Rudolf and Margot Wittkower have demonstrated in their classic study *Born under Saturn*. The phenomenon has to do with the upgrading of the artisan to the level of an inspired, that is divine, artist in relation to the development of more or less free art markets.

art-trade was seen as the culprit. Still, all artists wanted to reach an understanding public.

In practice artists and dealers were entirely dependent on one another, which made the position of both parties rather ambiguous. This was true to a large extent of Vincent the painter and Theo the dealer. Theo had to play various roles at once; that of younger brother who looked up to the older brother, that of art dealer and of financier of Vincent and his family.[*17]

The discussion of the objectionable role of the art trade gathered momentum when Theo came into difficulties with his superiors at the end of 1883. Theo confessed: “The gentlemen made things almost impossible when I spoke to them this week.” (397 [332]) In response Vincent reminded him of the “the stony barren state of mind” that he had found himself during and after the time in which he had ended up in the art trade. He told of the art trade in America and dragged up a conversation with the Dutch dealer Eldert Jan Wisselingh (friend and protector of Matthijs Maris), who had told him about the history of the House of Goupil. Wisselingh had pointed out the difference “between the House G(oupil) & C(ompagnie) as it was (for instance when Uncle Vincent was still a partner, and not even during his last years there), and as it is now!” (396 [331])[*18] When making a great profit was not the one and only incentive, Vincent implied.

This refers to the years before 1870, because Uncle Vincent had withdrawn from Goupil in 1871. After that a change for the worse had taken place, according to Vincent. Now nitwits are in charge and Vincent feared “the triumph of mediocrity, incompetence and absurdity” that had caused havoc in the art trade. This embittered Vincent. He had no trust in the increasingly commercialised art trade and therefore wanted to convince Theo to become an artist. The same was true of Wisselingh, to whom he would have liked to have said: “You are much too honest for today’s art-dealing business, much too clever etc”. Theo continued to work in the art trade and Vincent later reformulated his opinion by claiming that Theo, as an art-dealer, really should also be an artist.

17 ——— See the exhibitioncatalogue *Theo van Gogh 1857-1891; art dealer, collector, and brother of Vincent*, Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum) 1999 and Paris (Musée d’Orsay) 2000. See also: the catalogue *Vincent & Theo van Gogh*, Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art 2002.

18 ——— See for the Van Wisselingh firm: J.H. Heijbroek en E.L. Wouthuysen, *Portret van een kunsthandel. De firma Van Wisselingh en zijn compagnons 1838-heden*, Zwolle 1999. Elbert Jan van Wisselingh (1848-1912) was employed in the Goupil branches in The Hague (1864-66) and Paris (1866-74). From 1874 till ’82 he worked for Cottier & Co in London and there he was the protector of Matthijs Maris. In 1882 he returned to Paris and in 1884 took over de firm of his father in The Hague.

Vincent outlined the development within the art trade as he had heard it described and as he himself had experienced it. His view was tinted by romantic ideals of being a true artist and by his reading of Émile Zola, the great naturalistic writer and critic of capitalism and French society during the Second Empire, and a variety of writers who reported on art. At the beginning of 1883 Vincent formulated his critical opinion: “All art business that remained in touch with real art began to flourish within a relatively few years. But it became too much an money speculation, and is so even now. I don’t say on the whole, I simply say much too much”. Vincent spoke compactly and forcefully of ‘speculation’. (411 [344]) He saw that “many rich people who buy expensive pictures, for some reason or another, do not do so because of the artistic value they find in them (...) they, the speculators and ‘pochards blasés (pompous drunkards)’”. They would buy paintings “if there were just an element of chic in them”. He himself would never be tempted to produce a fashionable painting. In line with the romantic tradition, Vincent counted on a small elite, the happy few, who “bought paintings truly for the love of art”. He did not believe that the high prices, paid for art on the speculative market, would hold out and wondered “how can the great houses make up for it, which yearly spend formidable sums on advances, etc.”.

His worries turned out to be well-founded. It was necessary to continue to invest large amounts of capital. Vincent characterised the great houses, such as Arnold & Trip, Goupil taken over by Boussod & Valadon, and Durand-Ruels rival Georges Petit as “insatiable Money-grabbers”, compared to which Theo was a sheep.^[*19] Better sheep than wolf, in Vincent’s opinion, but he did not see a rosy future, neither for himself and nor for Theo. Poverty would be his fate, “but, but, man or dog, I shall be a painter, in short a creature with feeling” he wrote, underlining the words man, dog and painter. (416 [347]) For Vincent it was personal engagement and belief in art that counted, both by the artist and dealer, and by the public. Although he was aware of the underlying social and political changes, this did not filter through into his strategy for achieving a place in the art world. In the literature of which Vincent was such an avid reader, the greedy, self-enriching bourgeoisie was the scapegoat

19 ——— For Durand-Ruel, see Pierre Assouline, *Grâces lui soient rendues. Paul Durand-Ruel, le marchand des impressionnistes*, Paris 2002. The chapter on 1885-1892 is ironically entitled: ‘Seul les artistes doivent vivre dans la crainte de n’être pas compris’. Only the artistes must live in fear of not being misunderstood.

A number of causes were identified for the difficult and unsatisfactory situation in painting in the second half of the nineteenth-century, for example by Émile Zola – firstly the ever increasing number of artists, secondly the Salons that expanded enormously as a result – the Salons almost became department store where mediocrity played the leading part – and thirdly, the position of power of the great art houses that was based on speculation. To make matters worse the 1880s were years of economic crisis, with the *Union Générale*, nicknamed the throne and the altar, going bankrupt in 1882. The financial crisis caused great difficulties to Paul Durand Ruel, who borrowed his money from the *Union Générale*, and later also put Theo's position into jeopardy.

The social criticism of Émile Zola

Vincent's analyses of society and commerce are in many ways remarkable like Zola's. According to Vincent Zola's novels depicted life as it really was. In the continuing discussion with Theo Vincent held up one of Zola's characters as an example, namely Octave Mouret. He was a fortune seeker from the provinces who was successful both with women and as a merchandising genius. He appears as a character in *Pot Bouille* (or the Bourgeois Stewpot), which appeared in book form on 29th April 1882, and as the main character in the novel *Au Bonheur des Dames* of the following year. Vincent read these almost as soon as they were published. Mouret played a somewhat dubious role in *Pot Bouille* but was given a better part in the more optimistic *Au Bonheur des Dames*. This tells the history of a *magasin des nouveautés*, or department store for novelties. Vincent showed an interest in both Octave Mouret's erotic and commercial activities. But it was particularly the Mouret the 'merchandising genius' that Vincent held up as an example to Theo. "I wish, for you, for myself and many others, that there would be Mourets in the art trade, who would know how to create a new and larger buying public". And he urged Theo "If you're not an artist who paints, then become an artist as a dealer, just like Mouret" (464 [379]).

A few weeks later he copied fragments from *Au Bonheur des Dames* for Theo, about "agir, créer" or to act, to create", and about "fighting the facts, to conquer or to be conquered by them". And also "I would much prefer to be worn out by passion than by spleen". (467 [378]) He rephrased this more clearly in May 1885, when he was even more keen for support of the art trade for his painting of *The Potato Eaters* (fig.6), one of the first paintings which he felt was truly saleable, and: "I mean that enthu-

siasm sometimes works out better than those cold heads who reckon themselves “above such things”. And instinct, inspiration, impulse, and conscience are better guides than many people think”.(505 [408]) But these were the precise qualities that he had attributed to an earlier generation of dealers.

Vincent knew also a speculating collector, albeit only from Guy de Maupassant’s novel *Bel – Ami* (1885). De Maupassant portrayed a newspaper tycoon named Walter, who showed his collection of generally accepted paintings to his guests. But he also showed works of younger, less known painters. He bought their paintings very cheap and kept them “en reserve dans les appartements intimes, en attendant le moment où les auteurs seront célèbres. Les peintres crèvent de faim. Ils n’ont pas le sou, pas le sou...”, mister Walter says in conclusion.[*20]

Millet, not Manet

Although Vincent admired Zola’s works enormously, he made an exception for *Mes Haines-Mon Salon*, a collection of writings that he read in 1883.[*21] He lent the book to his friend and colleague Van Rappard and when Van Rappard returned it to him by post Vincent answered with a letter that was almost a book review.(361 [R38]) He admired some pieces and quoted Zola’s hatred of mediocrity with approval. But “Zola has this much in common with Balzac that he knows little about painting”, was Vincent’s opinion, which is not entirely fair by the way. He decided with disapproval that Zola’s artists were “vague shadows of Manet, a kind of impressionist”. And worst of all, Zola not even mentioned Vincent’s champion Millet.[*22]

A few months later he expressed himself more strongly towards Theo about Zola’s depiction of Manet as a pioneer. He wrote that he did not agree with Zola’s conclusion, “as if Manet were a man who had unlocked a new future to modern ideas of art”. And he continued: “I consider Millet, not

20 ——— Vincent read *Bel-Ami* in 1886 in Paris. Later on he repeatedly mentioned this novel and expressed his sympathy for the main character George Duroy, a smart social climber, as he has done for the just as commercial minded and shrewd, amorous Octave Mouret, a personage in the novels of Zola.

21 ——— See also: Evert van Uiter, ‘Van Gogh’s Taste for Reality, on Earth as it is in Heaven’, in *Vincent’s Choice. The Musée imaginaire of Van Gogh*. Eds. Chris Stolwijk, Sjraar van Heugten, Leo Jansen and Andreas Blühm, Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum) 2003, pp. 73-86.

22 ——— Zola commented on 15 May 1866 as well on Millet as on Théodore. Rousseau in a positive way, although he expressed some criticism on Millet’s exhibits that year.

Manet, to be that essentially modern artist who opened up a new horizon to many.” (429 [355])

On the other hand Vincent agreed whole-heartedly with Zola’s famous definition and paraphrased: “Dans le tableau (l’oeuvre d’art) je cherche, j’aime l’homme – l’artiste” (In the picture (work of art) I seek, I love the man – the artist). (522 [418])[*23] Vincent cherished his old-fashioned preferences and knew nothing of Manet or the impressionists from personal observation, in contrast to Zola. Besides, as a painter-of-rural-life-to-be, he wasn’t interested in depicting modern life in the metropolis of Paris as practised by Manet.

Zola’s articles described the Salon of 1866 and Manet’s life and work. Vincent, and with him the Dutch artists of the The Hague School, was behind visually by about 15 years compared with Paris for the simple reason that there were very few paintings by Manet or the Impressionists to be seen in the Netherlands. Therefore he couldn’t fully understand Zola’s articles. Nor could he fully agree with Zola’s depiction of the Parisian art world in his novel *l’Oeuvre*(1886).[*24]

Feeling forced to seek support from art dealers

In 1883 Vincent sent six studies from Drenthe to his brother with the request to show them to Wisselingh. He doubted that they would be saleable. (408 [341]) (fig.4)[*25] Once he had moved to Nuenen, where he had returned to live with his parents, he continued to send work to the dealer Leurs in The Hague, again with the request that he should also show the works to Tersteeg, the local Goupil branch head, and Wisselingh. The answer was disappointing to Vincent; they did not find the works suited them. (545 [343]) Passionate as he was, he did not let this daunt him and asked Theo

23 ——— ‘Ce que je cherche surtout dans un tableau, c’est un home en non pas un tableaux’. Zola in his farewell article in his series on the 1866 Salon, printed in *L’Événement illustré* 20 May 1866. Collected in *Mon Salon*. Modern edition: *Mon Salon Manet Écrits sur l’Art*. Chronologie et préface par Antoinette Ehrard, Paris 1970, p. 87. See also: Henri Mitterrand, *Zola journaliste de l’affaire Manet à l’affaire Dreyfus*, Paris 1962.

24 ——— See the edition published by Garnier-Flammarion with an excellent introduction written by Antoinette Ehrard, Paris 1974. She discusses Zola’s ideas on speculation, art dealing and his moral attitude which Vincent van Gogh appreciated.

25 ——— These studies are now lost. Neither the art dealers in The Hague, nor Theo van Gogh could accept these studies as saleable work. See the Appendix in the museumcatalogue *Vincent van Gogh. paintings: Vol. 1: Dutch period*, Louis van Tilborgh, Marije Vellekoop, Amsterdam van Gogh Museum 1999, p. 239. The style of these studies must have liked the painting F 22 JH 421. It is one of largest studies in oil from the Drenthe period and it stayed in the family.



fig.4 Vincent van Gogh, *Farm with Piles of Peat*, November 1883. (37.5×55cm) Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum (F 22 JH 421)

—The studies Vincent send to the art dealers are lost. This is an example of his work from Drenthe were he tried to develop himself into a peasant painter.

to liaise for him in finding good business contacts, also in Paris. However, in 1884 Theo continued to tell him that his work was “nearly saleable”. This stimulated Vincent so much that he wrote to Theo in an embittered tone of voice: “You should train yourself carefully in that system of prudence and respectability and all the rest of it, then you’ll make great progress, precisely in the direction of mediocrity I mean. The one leads to the other directly”. Vincent called on his brother to ensure that “his work would be seen by those people who, if not now then later, must become its buyers in the future. To leave it lying around untouched as you do now is negligence”. (442 [363]) The works that Vincent referred to were drawings and painted studies of weavers. (fig.5, F 1121/JH 453)

Vincent was all the more irritated because his relationship with his parents, on whom he was dependent in Nuenen, was not good. He was keen to liberate himself from the odium of eating the bread of charity. That is why he had decided in 1884 that he deserved support, as payment for the drawings and paintings that he sent Theo and that would become Theo’s property. And so Theo was allocated the role of investor, speculator if you will, a role about which Vincent had mixed feelings.

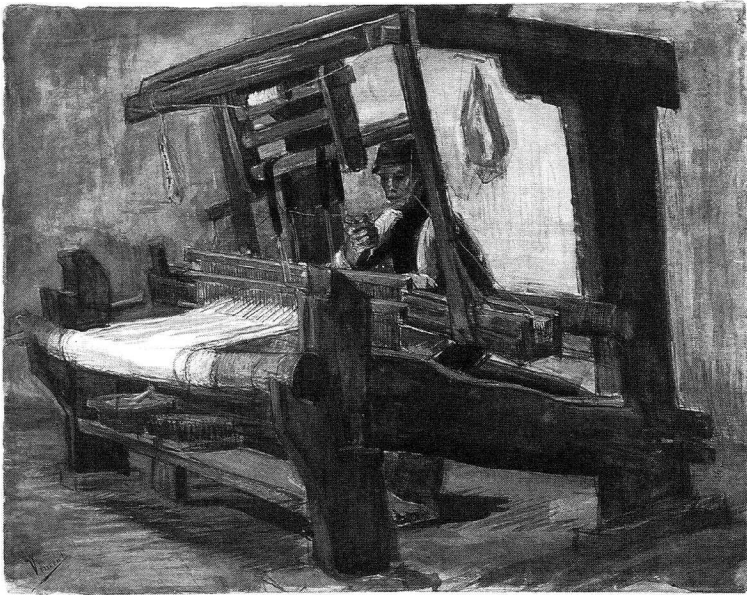


fig.5 Vincent van Gogh, *Weaver*, 1883-4. (35.7×45.1cm) water colour. Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum. (F 1114 JH 444)

— Vincent has a great affinity for the weavers. He may have seen this signed drawing as saleable.

But Vincent saw no alternative but to continue to produce and think about the art market. “It is not a bad idea that the French are decorating their town halls with scenes from rural life”, he told Theo. But he thought it would be even better “if the peasant paintings were to make it into the houses, into illustrations and other reproductions in circulation under the people”. (511 [412]) With opinions like these Vincent moved away from his earlier elitist conception of art. What he wanted in the end was to make stylish popular art. That was his dream.

As yet he had pinned his hope on one of the smaller art dealers in Paris, Portier who was one of the first to be interested in Impressionism at a time the Barbizon School became too expensive. However, his rival Paul Durand Ruel was quick in monopolising the trade in impressionist painting. Initially, Portier was reasonably positive about the works Vincent produced in Brabant, although this did not result in any sales. Theo may have softened Portier’s opinion, in order to not discourage Vincent too much.

But Theo also tried to make it clear to his brother that the time had passed for peasant scenes in the style of Millet, such as his almost monochrome *Potato Eaters*. (F 82/ JH 764) (fig.6) That bright paintings were preferred in the modern camp was something that did not penetrate into Vincent's mind. He defended his own opinions, based on the artistic generations of 1830 and 1848, with fervour. Vincent attempted to persuade his brother and confronted him with the image of the older generation of art dealers who was passionate about art and who believed in their artist.

To counterbalance his ideas, Theo kept his brother up to date on the Parisian art world. To understand this we must realise that at this time, in 1884-5, Theo's superiors did not yet allow him to deal Impressionist paintings, since they were playing safe in this period of economic uncertainty. There was an atmosphere of apprehension that had a negative effect on many careers besides Van Gogh's, as in the case of Camille Pissarro. In letters to his son Lucien from 1883 onwards, Camille



fig.6 Vincent van Gogh, *Potato Eaters*, April 1885. (81.5×114.5cm) Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum. (F 82 JH 764).

— The *Potato-Eaters* failed to attract favourable attention from Theo and Portier, the Parisian art dealer. Later on, in France. Vincent has had the intention to make a new version of his earliest 'masterpiece'.

Pissarro sketched a troublesome image of the Paris art world, especially the crisis in the art trade, “in an epoch dominated by commercialism”.^[*26]

Vincent was aware of the situation but he had no choice. His most important motive to deliver saleable works as soon as possible, must have been his wish to be financially independent of his younger brother Theo. Vincent didn't want ‘to eat the bread of charity’ but rather earn the money as payment for his drawings and paintings.

A stop in Antwerp on his way to Paris

In 1885, still in the Netherlands, Vincent began to make more and more allowance for the demands of the market as Theo saw them. He continued in a more scholarly vein, and with doubled energy. Something had to change in his work, and Vincent now understood that the effects of colouring were more important than tonality. He could no longer rely on his instincts as he had done until then, but needed to develop a “raison or science of painting”, as well. In order to attain his objectives he dived into the theory of colour, went to see the Old Masters in the recently opened Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and tackled technical problems. This led to his move to Antwerp in 1885, in order to continue his studies.

In Antwerp he not only visited the Academy and drew from plaster there, but he also made his way to the art galleries. He tried unsuccessfully to sell a townscape, and seriously thought about collaborating with photographers with the hope of securing portrait commissions together. (fig.7) His wish to focus on peasant scenes in the manner of Millet faded into the background. Manet is now mentioned several times in his letters. Following in the footsteps of Zola, he now wrote: “Manet and Courbet did not seem serious during their lives, yet how they proved themselves to be real painters!” (551 [440]). And he announced that “neither Manet nor Courbet” had not aimed at “the correctness of local colour, the narrow-minded exactness”.

26 ——— Camille Pissarro, *Letters to his son Lucien*. Edited with the assistance of Lucien Pissarro by John Rewald, Santa Barbara and Salt Lake City 1981 (1944). The citation is from a letter from May 2, 1883 (p. 13). In January 1886, shortly before Vincent van Gogh arrived in Paris, Camille wrote: “On every side I hear the bourgeois, the professors, the artists and the merchants saying that France is finished, decadent, that Germany holds the field, that artistic France must succumb to mathematics, that the future belongs to the mechanics and engineers, to the big German and American bankers”, p. 64.



fig.7 Vincent van Gogh, *Castle 'Het Steen'*, Antwerp 1885. drawing (13×21cm) Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum. (F 1351 JH 977).

—The topographical painting, explicit made for sale in the shop of an art dealer, is lost. The drawing can give us some idea. Townscapes were not a favourite genre for a peasant painter.

In Paris, where he arrived in 1886, he immediately started to work at the Academy of Cormon and became acquainted with young artists like Toulouse-Lautrec, Signac and Emile Bernard. He also organized small exhibitions, and dealt in Japanese prints. With the experience acquired in these two years he laid the foundations for his highly personal, expressive and colourful style.

Ella Hendriks and Louis van Tilborgh from the Van Gogh Museum, now extensively study this decisive period in his artistic career.^[*27] Together they have written the catalogue of Vincent's the paintings in the collection of the museum in Amsterdam. They analysed the works from a technical viewpoint as well as from an art historical one. In doing so a more correct chronology could be established, a new understanding of his stylistic development and a more precise knowledge of his

27 ——— Ella Hendriks and Louis van Tilborgh, *In Relation to Van Gogh. A Technical and Art Historical Study of his Antwerp and Paris Paintings in the Van Gogh Museum*, Amsterdam (dissertation University of Amsterdam) 2006. The book shall be published in a slightly different form by the Van Gogh Museum, probably in 2007.

sources of inspiration, besides impressionist painting, the neo-impressionists and Japanese prints. In a letter to his English friend from the Antwerp academy, H.M. Livens, he summarised: “In Antwerp I did not even know what the impressionists were; now I have seen them and though not being one of the club yet I have much admired certain impressionist’s pictures, Degas: nude figures, Claude Monet: landscape”. Once in Arles Vincent explained to his sister Willemien that one asks “nowadays in the pictures rather contrasts in colour and colours brightened up and with graduations, than a grey toned down”. (582 [W2]) That was what he learned in Paris. To Livens he praised Paris in a way similar to what Bilders has done: “There is but one Paris and however hard living may be here, and if it became worse and harder even- the French air clears up the brain and does good – a world of good”. (572 [459a])

Shortly after he arrived in Arles, Vincent tried, via Theo, to reach H.G. Tersteeg, the branch manager of Goupil in The Hague, who on his turn, must persuade his ex-colleague at Goupil’s, Eldert Wisselingh to let buy Alexander Reid impressionist paintings for the English market. “And”, he added, “Mesdag & others should stop for once, to ridicule the impressionists”. (581 [465]) Mesdag collected, in these years, his impressive ensemble French art from the period before impressionism, which is still to be seen in the Mesdag Museum in The Hague.

In Arles Vincent claimed that the painter of the future - a concept he borrowed from Wagner, through Zola - would be a colourist: “the like of which has never yet been seen”. And, he continued “Manet paved the way, but, as you know, the impressionists have already made use of stronger colour than Manet” (606 [482]). [*28] His new ideal was Claude Monet, already favoured in this role by Zola long before and, more important for Vincent, was favourably mentioned by Theo, who, in 1885 had bought a landscape-painting by Monet. Monet had specialised in landscape painting – a focus that was also somewhat restricting, whereas Vincent wanted to paint the human figure.

Later on, in 1888, he was delighted when he learned that Theo was organising a Monet exhibition in his gallery, much to the dismay of Durand Ruel who saw his monopoly broken. Thus he re-

28 ——— Art of the future was a well known concept in the nineteenth century through the articles and the operas of the German composer Richard Wagner (1813-1883). In France he had a strong supporter in Charles Baudelaire who wrote ‘Richard Wagner et *Tannhäuser* à Paris’ (1861).

fused to host a retrospective exhibition of Vincent van Gogh's works in 1890, something that would probably not have surprised Vincent himself. Shortly afterwards Vincent was recognised as a colourist and artist of the future by the entire modern art world.

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❖ Note to the illustrations. The F- and JH numbers are those given by J.-B. de la Faille and Jan Hulsker. See: J.-B. De la Faille *The Works of Vincent van Gogh His Paintings and Drawings*, Amsterdam 1970 and Jan Hulsker, *The New Complete Van Gogh Paintings, Drawings, Sketches. Revised and enlarged Edition of the Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of Vincent van Gogh*, Amsterdam/ Philadelphia 1996.

❖ The Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam has published the first 4 out of 8 catalogues of paintings and drawings in the collection of the Vincent van Gogh Foundation.

Van Gogh *als Erzieher*: Early Chapters in the Globalization of Conceptual Art

Robert Jensen

In 1891 a young German intellectual, Julius Langbehn, published an extravagant work of cultural criticism, *Rembrandt als Erzieher* [Rembrandt as Educator] in which he claimed the 17th-century Dutch painter Rembrandt van Rijn was the prototypical Germanic artist.^[*1] The book, without illustrations and generally having very little to do with the historical Rembrandt, nonetheless suggested that the study of Rembrandt would lead one to understand what was best and most essential about being German. The German public took the nationalist diatribe of *Rembrandt als Erzieher* quite seriously; the book went through multiple printings within a few years and was even positively reviewed by an important Rembrandt scholar.^[*2]

Less than a decade later, numerous German art critics would essentially repeat Langbehn's appropriation of a Dutch artist in the name of Germanic nationalism, but this time they made a Germanic hero of a heretofore virtually unknown artist: Vincent van Gogh. Langbehn had used the model of Rembrandt against what he perceived as the socially and culturally corrupting forces of modernization. These later critics often similarly invested van Gogh with an anti-modern naturalism. But van Gogh was a radically different artist than Rembrandt and his lessons, rather than reconfirming tradition against the forces of change, embodied the new in art. Van Gogh came to represent the paradigm of the modern artist as a tragically suffering and isolated hero, whose expressions of personal identity took the form of non-naturalistic color applied aggressively, almost brutally, to the canvas.

The extent of van Gogh's influence in Central Europe has been well documented. We

1——— J. Langbehn, *Rembrandt als Erzieher*, (Leipzig: Hirschfeld Verlag, 1891).

2——— For a discussion of Langbehn's book see Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963), esp. 121ff.

know when and where his work was exhibited and the nature of the criticism that greeted it.[*3] However, despite this considerable research, scholars tend to assume that the lessons taught by van Gogh's art are self-evident. I disagree. This paper reexamines the nature of van Gogh's influence and, more particularly, explores the question as to why van Gogh's work was so rapidly absorbed in Central Europe (and indeed around the world).

My arguments are centered around a comparison between the reception of van Gogh's work and that of his great French contemporary Paul Cézanne. I start therefore with two posthumous recollections, both involving van Gogh and Cézanne, both describing incidents reputed to have taken place in the Parisian art supply shop and tiny gallery belonging to *père* Julian Tanguy, and both mediated, albeit in different manners, by the young painter Émile Bernard, who at different times intimately knew both artists. The first recollection is that of Francis Jourdain, son of the prominent French architect, Franz Jourdain, published long after the incident in question was said to have taken place. Jourdain recalled that around 1893, when he was an aspiring young art student, he and some friends were taken to Tanguy's shop by Bernard, older than they, but still only about 24 years old. While turning over stacks of paintings Jourdain discovered a Cézanne landscape. "I must admit that we were much less moved by its majesty than we were by the agitated, exciting eloquence of our dear van Gogh, that madman whose 'moldy suns and putrefying skies' set ablaze the tiny shop on the rue Clauzel."[*4]

Bernard himself is the author of my second story, the only known account of Cézanne's opinion of van Gogh's work, which Bernard published in 1908, two years after Cézanne's death.[*5] Bernard recalled a casual encounter between Cézanne and van Gogh at Tanguy's, which, if it occurred, must have taken place in 1886 or 1887 (at the time Bernard would have been not much over eighteen years old). Following a general discussion about art, according to Bernard, van Gogh asked Cézanne for an opinion of his work. After looking over the paintings, Cézanne replied: "Truly,

3 — On van Gogh's reception in Germany see especially Walter Feilchenfeldt, *Vincent van Gogh & Paul Cassirer: the reception of van Gogh in Germany from 1901 to 1914* (Zwolle: Cahier Vincent, 1988) and Ron Manheim, "The 'Germanic' van Gogh: a case study in cultural annexation," *Simiolus* 19:4 (1989): 277-88.

4 — Francis Jourdain, *Cézanne*, excerpted in *Conversations with Cézanne*, ed. Michael Doran (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 80-83, esp. 81.

5 — E. Bernard, "Julien Tanguy, dit le 'Père Tanguy,'" *Mercure de France* (December 16, 1908): 600-16.

you paint like a madman.”[*6] Van Gogh, wrote Bernard, similarly understood nothing of Cézanne’s technique, but unlike Cézanne, he was willing to admire the older artist’s paintings.[*7]

It is not surprising that these two artists would demonstrate so little sympathy for the other’s work. They were very different kinds of painters and because of these differences later generations of artists responded to their work in very different ways. In the largest terms, during the early years of their fame, Cézanne’s “majesty” inspired in France what was argued as a return to French classical painting, whereas in Central Europe, van Gogh’s “agitated, exciting eloquence” inspired what came to be called expressionism. And because the connection between the two artists was not personal, did not occur in studios like van Gogh’s famously troubled involvement with Paul Gauguin, but rather in the context of commercial galleries and the *fin-de-siècle* art market, its significance for the history of early 20th-century art has not been recognized.

From the 1880s onward Cézanne and van Gogh were closely bound together in the Parisian picture market. Artists like Camille Pissarro and Émile Schuffenecker owned paintings by both, as did such critics as Théodore Duret and Octave Mirbeau. After Tanguy’s death in 1894, a more speculative market developed in which dealer/collectors such as Eugène Blot began to acquire both artists’ pictures with the apparent intention to sell them later at a high price. Blot made the only recorded purchase of a van Gogh at the Tanguy posthumous auction and by 1900 he also owned as many as twelve Cézannes. Collector interest inspired a new, more effective generation of dealers to become involved in this market, led foremost by Ambroise Vollard, who between 1895 and 1902 acquired a near monopoly over Cézanne’s oeuvre.[*8] Vollard tried but failed to wrest a comparably significant body of van Gogh paintings at an acceptable price from Johanna van Gogh.[*9] Before

6 ——— Bernard, “Julien Tanguy,” 607.

7 ——— In 1887 the relationship with van Gogh meant everything to Bernard. But in 1908, the much older and much more conservative artist had realigned himself with Cézanne. This anecdote, whether or not it records a real event, demonstrates the clear alternative the two artists’ work came to represent after 1900. In Bernard’s terms Cézanne’s classicism is defined against the “madness” of van Gogh’s technique.

8 ——— For a discussion of Vollard’s transactions with Cézanne see my forthcoming essay, “Cézanne and Vollard: An anatomy of a relationship,” in *Cézanne to Picasso: Ambroise Vollard, Patron of the Avant-Garde* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006).

9 ——— On the early competitors for van Gogh’s work inside Paris see especially Chris Stolwijk, Richard Thomson, and Sjaar van Heugten, *Theo Van Gogh: 1857-1891: Art Dealer, Collector, and Brother of Vincent* (Amsterdam and Zwolle: Van Gogh Museum and Waanders Publishers, 1999).

the end of the century the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune became Vollard's greatest rival (as well as occasional collaborator) in the growing market for these and other post-impressionist artists.

Vollard followed directly in the path forged by the Impressionists' dealer, Paul Durand-Ruel, who had early on recognized the commercial potential of artists much discussed by critics, who had exerted considerable influence over younger artists, and yet who were grossly undervalued by contemporary dealers and collectors. Yet Durand-Ruel only capitalized on his investment after many years, when, during the early 1890s, he successfully internationalized the impressionists' market, primarily by attracting numerous American collectors. Competition among collectors based in Boston, New York, Chicago, and Paris led to a dramatic escalation in their prices. Opening his gallery just as the impressionists were emerging as stars of an international art world, Vollard clearly recognized that similar market opportunities were presented by the work of Cézanne and van Gogh, as well as by such painters as Seurat and Gauguin. He knew that older prominent dealers, like Durand-Ruel himself, had been slow to realize the importance of the post-impressionists. Vollard knew too that these artists of the 1880s had been much discussed by critics and admired by even younger artists. Finally, few collectors had so far shown much interest in them, with the consequence that their prices were what one would expect of young painters, not of artists with very substantial and developed bodies of work.

Within five years of Vollard's initial involvement (circa 1894) — he and Bernheim-Jeune found an international clientele for the post-impressionists. This market expanded still further after 1900 with the assistance of the Berlin gallery of Paul Cassirer. Shown by Cassirer and other European dealers (who Cassirer or the Paris dealers supplied), van Gogh and Cézanne made their debuts in many places outside France almost at the same time as the impressionists' first exhibitions in the same cities. As a result, their pictures were placed before publics who knew as yet very little about the artists who painted them.

Given their shared commercial fate, why is it then that van Gogh and Cézanne's impact on the next generation of modern artists had such substantially different trajectories? Cézanne exerted his most immediate and perhaps greatest influence in Paris, whereas the primary artistic audience for van Gogh's work lay outside France. Of course, Parisian artists as diverse as Matisse and Picasso shared significant encounters with van Gogh's lessons, but unlike their obsession with Cézanne, they did not linger with the Dutch painter's work, but passed quickly through it. Much has been made of

van Gogh's influence on fauvism, but Matisse himself did not hold van Gogh in anywhere like the same esteem with which he regarded Cézanne.

Abroad the situation was reversed. Although we can find examples of *cézannisme* practiced by Central and Eastern European artists, their engagement was far less sustained than in Paris and with far less artistic consequence. Conversely, from Edvard Munch to the artists of the Brücke and beyond, van Gogh's work not only proved to be a decisive source of inspiration, it formed the basis of major artistic statements by a substantial number of artists.

Art historians typically pursue problems of artistic reception by emphasizing such forces as nationalism, which, for example, may well have minimized van Gogh's importance to artists in Paris and Cézanne's outside France. French artists and critics certainly had much to say in the post-1900 years regarding Cézanne's presumed Latin "classicism", just as van Gogh was hailed by Central European critics as "Germanic" as early as 1907. Yet, even the best scholarship on nationalism and artistic reception has been characteristically one-dimensional, or rather, one-directional in orientation. That is, art historians have sought to explain the receptivity of a culture, or an individual, to new ideas, to new art, without simultaneously considering the role the producers and their products play in determining these cultural transactions. As any economist will tell you, markets cannot be understood solely in reference to the consumers.

I want to make the case for a different kind of geography of art, one grounded in the close interrelationship between creative and market behavior, rather than the older geographies based on imagined racial, national, or local identities. Its object of study would be the movement of artists, their works and ideas across national, cultural, and linguistic borders. It is in this context that I propose to argue that there was something else at work in the different ways in which the two artists' lessons circulated during the post-1900 years, which was inherent to the respective artists' manner of working and results achieved.

My first claim is that some types of art (and artists) traverse these boundaries more rapidly than do others. Second, art with the greatest velocity manifests the highest degree of conceptualization. Third, such art tends to be bi-directional; that is, while the major contributors to the development of an artistic practice most often belong to an artistic capital, such as 19th-century Paris or Berlin during the 1920s, the outlying receivers of their innovations are able not only to grasp quickly the implications of these new practices, but are also able to contribute their own immediate and his-

torically significant innovations while using them. These in turn may also eventually affect further developments in the art of the capitals.

Let me illustrate these claims first with examples of art significantly less complex than van Gogh's and Cézanne's, before I turn back to a consideration of how van Gogh's art may be considered conceptual and also why Cézanne's is not, why van Gogh's work traveled so well and Cézanne's more slowly and less decisively.

Dada and geometric abstraction were both rapidly internationalized during the latter stages of the First World War and the immediate postwar period. The essentials of each practice were conveyed through simple reproductions and textual descriptions published in such magazines as the Zurich Dadaists' *Cabaret Voltaire*. Thus, learning to behave as a Dadaist or to paint or sculpt geometric abstract works did not require extensive periods of artistic instruction by the progenitors of the respective innovations. Further, artists from New York to Moscow were able to make their own significant and immediate contributions to these received innovations. Consider the specific practice of photomontage. The Berlin Dadaists apparently were the first to make extensive use of the technique, which they developed during the years 1919-1920. Very shortly thereafter, one finds its tentative use among young Soviet artists, such as in the photomontage designs by Gustav Klutsis, which scholars date to as early as 1920. That these near simultaneous eruptions of a new practice would occur in seeming isolation from each other might be explained by the fact that they shared a common source in pre-World War I Parisian cubist collage. Yet what was probably more decisive were art journals such as *MA*, produced by Hungarian artists and writers and published in Vienna. By reproducing, even in grainy black and white images, Dada photomontages, *MA* and comparable art publications introduced the technique to Eastern European artists. Once transmitted, Soviet artists significantly redefined photomontage's expressive potential. Whereas the Dadaists tended to exploit photomontage's ability to create dramatic contrasts between unrelated images for irrational effects, Soviet constructivist artists like Klutsis and El Lissitzky rationalized the technique by welding photomontage to the dynamic design elements of Soviet constructivism in order to convey powerful, easily grasped meanings. Enriched by these innovations, from 1922 onward, the lessons of Soviet photomontage flowed back into Western Europe, often carried by the Soviet artists themselves, so that, most notably, by 1925 these aesthetic features were a staple of the design vocabulary of the Dessau Bauhaus, and through the Bauhaus came to influence all of modern graphic design.

The example of the dissemination and adaptation of photomontage techniques leads me to my largest claim, which is that the speed and coherency with which highly conceptualized artistic ideas (like photomontage) can be communicated and the international circuit of contributors they generate have been fundamental to the steadily expanding globalization of modern art. Clearly this globalization has greatly accelerated in recent decades, but I would argue that important elements of this process are evident at least as early as the late 19th century.

A larger understanding of the communicative velocity of conceptual art practices may help us to reframe a number of basic problems repeatedly found in the art historical literature on van Gogh. Let me begin with the most prominent: the artist's accessibility, in fact, his unprecedented popularity. Many art historians who have written on van Gogh have been troubled by this popularity, which they have almost always discussed within a single frame of reference: the artist's biography, and its proper or improper role in accounting for the artist's work and hence his reputation. This, of course, is because the story of van Gogh's madness became, even before his suicide, an essential element of his celebrity identity, and because it led to the equally popular conclusion that the painter's "madness" explains the visual appearance of his work. A century of protesting by art history professionals that this is not the case has done little to shake this assumption among the lay public. Framing the question of van Gogh's popularity, however, only within the terms of the artist's perceived madness overlooks the fact that the issue of the artist's accessibility was featured in the critical response to his work long before he became a popular icon.

As in the Jourdain anecdote with which I began, van Gogh's accessibility was particularly addressed when the artist's work was specifically compared to Cézanne's. In 1907, for example, the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke wrote his wife a letter in which he contrasted van Gogh, whose letters he had just read in a German translation, with Cézanne, whose retrospective at the Paris Autumn Salon he frequently visited.

Ideally a painter [and here Rilke is referring to Cézanne]... should not become conscious of his insights: without taking the detour through his conscious reflection, his progressive steps, mysterious even to himself, should enter so swiftly into the work that he is unable to recognize them in the moment of transition... That van Gogh's letters are so readable, that they are so rich, basically argues against him, just as it argues against [him] (holding up Cézanne for

comparison) that he wanted or knew or experienced this and that; that blue called for orange and green for red... And so he painted pictures on the strength of a single contradiction, thinking, additionally, of the Japanese simplification of color... leading, in turn, to the drawn and explicit (i.e., invented) contour of the Japanese as a frame for the coordinated planes; leading, in other words, to a great deal of intentionality and arbitrariness — in short, to decoration. Cézanne, too, was provoked... to express himself on matters of painting; but when you see the few letters the old man wrote: how awkward this effort at self-explication remains, and how extremely repugnant it was to him. He was almost incapable of saying anything. [*10]

For Rilke, van Gogh's "decoration" meant not only the simplification of technique (the contrast of two colors) and of form (in the manner of Japanese woodblock prints), but that these results were the product of the artist's conscious intention to communicate a specific idea or emotion.

Rilke links van Gogh's accessibility not just to the visual qualities of his pictures, but also to the lucid discussion of his aims found in the artist's letters. He implies that the artist was too conscious, had too good an understanding of his artistic intentions, so that van Gogh's paintings become, in effect, mere illustrations of the artist's ideas. Conversely, Rilke links Cézanne's presumed inarticulateness in his letters with the painter's unresolved struggle to find the proper means to express himself, a struggle that acquired greater importance than any end the artist achieved. Cézanne, Rilke effectively argues, is to be admired because he struggles to find his painting in the act of painting. What makes Cézanne more admirable than van Gogh is that the artist does not know in advance what he will achieve in a given picture, but only achieves his goals in the process of executing the work.

Several decades later, the great English art critic, Roger Fry, began his monograph on Cézanne with a remarkably similar comparison between the two artists, even using the word "decorative" to describe van Gogh's work. Although the similarities between Fry and Rilke's observations are coincidental, they reflect a common understanding of the trajectory of the two painters' work. [*11] Fry observed that if we want to get close to what he called the "essential quality" of Cézanne, we must

10 ——— Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne*, trans. Joel Agee and ed. Clara Rilke (New York: North Point Press, 2002).

11 ——— It is unlikely that Fry had read Rilke's letters on Cézanne. The parallels are thus coincidental, or rather, reflect a common understanding.

first become aware that “we see not so much his expression as the distorted image of it which has gradually taken its place in our own minds. For Cézanne has not come to us directly; we have almost all of us approached him through some mediatory and more easily accessible personality such as Van Gogh’s.” [*12] Since he knew full well that van Gogh borrowed very little, if anything, from Cézanne, it is revealing that Fry should invoke his name here rather than some early 20th-century Parisian artist, such as Picasso, who were obviously inspired by the master from Aix. Van Gogh’s accessibility, for Fry, was bound up with his artistic personality, because he exemplifies artists who possess a clear conceptual understanding of their goals and paint only to illustrate them. Whereas Cézanne, Fry wrote, “is not decorative like so many of our most gifted contemporaries... he has not the gift to seize hold directly of an idea and express it with an emphasis which renders it immediately apparent; he seems indeed hardly to arrive at the comprehension of his theme till the very end of the work.” [*13] In other words, if we turn Fry’s argument around, van Gogh exemplifies an artist who seizes hold of an idea and expresses it in a way that renders that idea immediately understandable; therefore the public is more likely to develop a taste first for van Gogh before coming to terms, if at all, with the work of Cézanne; the public learns to expect of modern painting that it communicate specific meanings or emotions rather than, for Fry, the more important, but more difficult to appreciate, almost exclusively visual lessons offered by Cézanne.

Rilke and Fry described, without quite understanding, two fundamental types of creative individuals. Recently, the University of Chicago economist David Galenson has systematically articulated the differences they discovered between van Gogh and Cézanne. The former Galenson has described as a “conceptual” artist, the latter as an “experimental” painter.[*14] Galenson first discovered these two modes or poles of creative behavior while measuring when in an artist’s career we — art historians, historians, museum professionals, and those in the art trade — believe an artist to have contributed most to art history. Galenson’s work assumes an active codependence between tradition and innovation in artistic production. Art history most values artists who make the greatest

12 ——— Roger Fry, *Cézanne: A Study of His Development*, 2nd ed. (New York: Noonday, 1960), 1.

13 ——— Fry, *Cézanne*, 2.

14 ——— Among numerous publications on this and related subjects see especially D. Galenson, *Painting Outside the Lines: Patterns of Creativity in Modern Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001) and *Old Masters and Young Geniuses* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

innovations within a respective tradition. These innovations in turn acquire their value when they are taken up and applied in some fashion by subsequent generations of artists. The greater the innovation the more it resonates in the work of later artists. Thus it was, for example, that the use the cubists made of Cézanne's late work defined this period of his career as his most important. It does not matter that Cézanne himself would probably have regarded what the cubists made of his art as a profound distortion of his aims and practices. In this alone, Galenson has made an important contribution to art history, by defining artistic importance exclusively in terms of innovation, which allows us to view, at the very least, the history of Western art since the 15th century as a history of intellectual problems, their solutions, and the new problems they generate.

Using a variety of measurements, such as the comparative auction prices for an artist's work across an entire career — which produced the figures you seen on the screen — Galenson made the further, more revolutionary discovery that almost all canonical modern artists produced their most significant work either early in their careers or much later, but very rarely both. These auction prices are only important in that Galenson discovered them to parallel the consensus view of art history as to which period in an artist's career is deemed historically most significant. Cézanne's later works are more expensive relative to his earlier production, whereas the reverse is true of Picasso.

In thinking about why this is so, Galenson identified certain common characteristics that enabled some artists to make important contributions early on — an overarching conceptual approach to art making — whereas, he realized, late developing artists, such as Cézanne, have quite different characteristics — defined by an experimental approach. Conceptual artists are obviously more concerned with general ideas and principles whereas experimental artists ground their work in direct observation. The core impressionists, for example, were all experimental painters. There was no impressionist “theory” of painting as such; each artist arrived at his or her technique informally and made their paintings generally without much pre-planning (other than the selection of the motif). They developed their technique through a process of trial and error. Because experimental artists develop their craft over time, they are more likely than conceptual artists to make their major contributions later in their careers. Renoir painted his most celebrated works while he was in his mid-30s and older. Pissarro and Degas were in their mid-40s when they produced their most prized paintings. Most strikingly, Cézanne's most influential contributions to contemporary art were his last works, executed when the artist was in his 60s. Only Monet among the impressionists has been val-

ued most for work produced while still in his late 20s, and even in Monet's case, the artist went on to produce a body of late work prized almost as highly as his early production, paintings all executed after the age of 50. And because the impressionists privileged the act of perception over the results obtained, they indirectly promoted a growing uncertainty about their respective abilities to represent on canvas the world they saw. This often resulted in an increased visual complexity and indeterminacy of form in their later work, as one sees especially in the late paintings by Degas, Monet, and Cézanne. It is no wonder that Cézanne, in a 1906 interview with the German collector Karl Osthaus, expressed little interest in van Gogh, Gauguin, and the neo-impressionists, because "they make things easy for themselves."¹⁵

From the perspective of the international dispersion of impressionism, only the most readily conceptualized features of their practice traveled well. Thus the impressionists' bright palettes, open facture, and modern subject matter could be easily imitated. But at this conceptual level these practices could just as easily be reconciled with academic conventions. This is why the results obtained by an entire generation of European artists who altered their work after the late 1870s in order to encompass these innovations never fully reflected the canonical impressionists' actual techniques. It is also why most participants in the European art world failed to recognize who were the most important practitioners of impressionism until the very end of the nineteenth century. The subtleties of the impressionists' practices — their complex registration of physical phenomena through largely unsystematic color notations, executed with highly varied stroke application — were extremely difficult to imitate or to describe. The artists most successful in reproducing these effects were those who took direct instruction from an impressionist: such as Cézanne and Gauguin's tutelage under Pissarro or the Americans who flocked to Monet at Giverny.

It is striking to compare the slow diffusion of a fully realized impressionist technique with the remarkable speed by which artists from all over Europe took up the neoimpressionist technique pioneered by Seurat. The application of discreet dots of color, laid down through clearly articulated rules according to a well defined color theory, and placed uniformly across the painting's surface, was instantly accessible to other artists and did not require Seurat's direct tuition. And because the style was so easily conceptualized and spread so rapidly, it led to the curious historical phenomenon,

15 ——— K. Osthaus, "A Visit to Paul Cézanne," (1906) reprinted in *Conversations with Cézanne*, 96-99, esp. 97.

particularly in Central Europe, in which the appreciation for neoimpressionism actually preceded a comparable appreciation for the work of the core impressionists. In other words, even among well-informed critics such as Julius Meier-Graefe, Seurat was known and admired before Monet.

The post-impressionists, with the exception of Cézanne — who really modified impressionist practices rather than overturning them —, were very young when they made their most important contributions to modern art. In 1887, when these painters of the “petit boulevards” — as van Gogh called them — began to reach maturity, the impressionists were in their forties or older.^[*16] In contrast, the most prominent of the “petit boulevardiers”, Georges Seurat, was only 27 on the occasion of his exhibition of *La Grande Jatte* in 1886. And the artists within Vincent’s immediate circle of acquaintances, most notably Émile Bernard and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, were even younger. Bernard was 19 in 1887; he would paint all the works for which he is remembered before the age of 23. Toulouse-Lautrec was 23 in 1887; although he would be productive longer than Bernard, he too would make most of the work for which he is famous by the age of 30. The older artists in their circle, most notably Gauguin and van Gogh himself, entered the art profession at a later age. Van Gogh was 33 years old when he arrived in Paris in 1886, but if we consider that his first ambitious paintings date only to about 1884 when the painter reached maturity in 1888 he was but four years removed from the age at which he effectively became an artist and only two years removed from his first contact with modern French painting and Japanese woodblock prints.

In order for artists to produce significant work early in their creative lives, they generally share the following conceptual characteristics, among others. They must possess clear and usually quite specific ideas or emotional states that they want to communicate through their work. They often therefore anticipate their final results during the early stages of the work’s creation. This might be as explicit as making numerous preparatory studies, as Seurat did, in advance of the final painting, or it might consist, as it did with van Gogh after 1887 of simply having in his mind the kind of subject that he wanted to represent — which one often finds in his letters — and then executing them. It is one of the oddities of van Gogh’s descriptions of the ideas he attempted to illustrate that

16 ——— Van Gogh’s conception of the “petit boulevard” was meant to contrast with already established artists exhibiting in commercial galleries belonging to the grand boulevards of Paris. Both van Gogh’s ideas and the artists to which they are identified are thoroughly discussed in Cornelia Homburg, Elizabeth C. Childs, John House, and Richard Thomson, *Vincent Van Gogh and the Painters of the Petit Boulevard* (St. Louis: Saint Louis Art Museum, 2001).

they often have a greater intensity than the paintings said to represent them.

In order to anticipate one's final results, the artist must subordinate technique and visual observations to the desired ends. It doesn't mean that technique was unimportant to a Seurat or a van Gogh, but only that they sought the best means to express their intentions, rather than, as an experimental painter would, attempting to discover the underlying meaning of a work within the act of painting itself. Because conceptual artists are most often young in chronological age as well as new to the art profession, they have few life experiences upon which to draw. Consequently, they very often take their chief source of inspiration from other works of art, which they incorporate either directly or indirectly into their own production. Van Gogh, of course, is famous for his many copies after other artists' work — as well as his own — which he translated into the high-keyed color and facture of his post-1887 manner of painting. Since conceptual artists are primarily preoccupied with ideas rather than craft skills, they do not require long apprenticeship before they reach artistic maturity. They have the capacity to learn from a wide variety of artistic sources, because they do not seek necessarily to imitate a particular style as they do to borrow from the ideas embodied within that style. And because of their willingness and ability to subordinate style to the desired ends it is possible for their work to be quite varied in execution over very short periods of time.

Van Gogh's early struggle to master a serviceable technique is not surprising in someone largely self-taught, working in general isolation from other artists prior to his arrival in Paris. Yet, even in these early years his correspondence introduces many of the themes and artistic preoccupations that continued to manifest themselves in his post-Parisian paintings. We find him, for example, reflecting on his technique in April 1884: "Do you think that I do not care for technique? Certainly I do, but only in order that I may say what I have to say, and when I cannot yet do that satisfactorily, I try hard to correct myself."¹⁷ He also worried about his inability to give his canvases the polish that was standard among his Dutch contemporaries, but nonetheless self-consciously pursued what he called "ugly" painting, precisely because it best realized the emotional and intellectual ideas he wished to express. Thus it was that he later compared a work of his full maturity, the famous *Night Café* (1888) with his first major creative effort, *The Potato Eaters* (1885). In an often-quoted passage, van Gogh informed his brother "the painting is one of the ugliest I have done. It is similar to the Po-

17 ——— *The Letters of Vincent van Gogh*, ed. Ronald de Leeuw (London: Penguin Press, 1996): 412-16.

tato Eaters yet different. I have tried to depict man's terrible passions with red and green." [*18] Note both the continuity in conceptual approach he is describing and the extraordinary stylistic differences in two paintings created less than three years apart.

Once in Paris, van Gogh's artistic development was nothing short of astonishing. In effect, he had spent more than five years thinking about what he wanted to create, but would learn, within a space of less than a year, how he would do it. His meteoric trajectory through Parisian modernism and Japanese prints, his impressive ability to master such widely varied influences in such a short period of time, is more noteworthy than even the artist's most enthusiastic admirers usually credit. Because it is the only period in the artist's career basically unsupported by correspondence with his brother, we do not know exactly how it was that the artist so easily shed his identity as a Dutch painter to become the Parisian Vincent—as he would begin signing his work shortly after arriving in Paris. Nor do we know how he abandoned his persona as the isolated, struggling student to not only meet some of the most important young painters in Paris, but to become for a brief time the leader of an *école* and its entrepreneur, the organizer of exhibitions of his and his comrades' work, as well as shows of Japanese prints.

Vincent not only remade the appearance of his paintings, adding most importantly the color and varied facture of impressionism, which he quickly brought under discipline by adopting the neoimpressionist theory of producing color intensities through systematic contrasts of complements. Vincent understood that in order to be as modern as possible he had to achieve the greatest possible color intensities. Yet no sooner did he master those aspects from these sources he could readily use than he discarded the fundamental tenet on which they stood; that is, the impressionists and the neoimpressionists (before 1888) strove to reproduce the effects of light as precisely as possible, whereas van Gogh (like Bernard and others) would liberate color from its representational obligations, in favor of its expressive, symbolic possibilities. To take such an independent view of the communicative possibilities of color was not, as it might have been with other foreign artists working in Paris, an example of simply misunderstanding his sources. As his correspondence abundantly supports, Vincent was fully aware that he was breaking with the basic positivism that underlay impressionism.

18——— V. van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, 8 Sept. 1888, reprinted in *The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh* (New York: Bulfinch, 1991), no. 553.

What may be even more remarkable, however, is that once in Paris, Vincent began to paint in an entirely new manner. Before Paris, like many conceptual artists, Vincent had become accustomed to making careful preparatory studies before executing the final, larger canvas, as for example, in the production of the *Potato Eaters*. He wholly abandoned this practice in 1886, from then on working directly, like the impressionists, on the canvas. In fact, he shortly went beyond the impressionists, by mixing his colors, squeezed from the tube, directly on the canvas. Edvard Munch was even convinced that Vincent applied his paint entirely unmixed in this manner. Vincent himself described his newfound technique to Bernard in 1888 this way:

My brushstroke has no system at all. I hit the canvas with irregular touches of the brush, which I leave as they are. Patches of thickly laid-on color, spots of canvas left uncovered, here and there portions that are left absolutely unfinished, repetitions, savageries; in short, I am inclined to think that the result is so disquieting and irritating as to be a godsend to those people who have fixed preconceived ideas about technique.[*19]

Despite this apparent spontaneity rarely do van Gogh's paintings appear labored, which would result from extensive revision. Instead his paintings usually exhibit an extraordinary confidence and boldness in their execution — which again is an indication of how clear his objectives were prior to working up a canvas. It is no wonder too that his contemporaries judged Vincent to possess no one style, that as Maurice Beaubourg wrote in his obituary for the artist, Vincent used a style “when it pleases him to do so.”[*20]

Obviously, Vincent's flexibility and detached attitude toward his painterly practice is in striking contrast to Cézanne's hard-won mastery of his personal style and the remarkable consistency with which he pursued his ever-elusive effort to capture his sensations on canvas — a consistency so great that even a group of apples, perhaps cut from a larger canvas, were acquired by informed collectors, in this case Degas, because they understood that the least fragment, like the most finished painting by the artist was as representative of the artist's quest.

19 ——— V. van Gogh to Émile Bernard, 9 April, 1888, reprinted in *The Complete Letters*, no. B03.

20 ——— M. Beaubourg, “La Mort de Dubois-Pillet et Van Gogh,” *Revue Indépendante* (September 1890): 392-402; reprinted in Susan Alyson Stein, ed., *Van Gogh: A Retrospective* (New York: H. L. Levin, 1986), 258-60.

I have hardly catalogued all the ways in which van Gogh's creative behavior is consistent with Galenson's definition of the practices of conceptual artists. But I would like to conclude by returning to the reception of van Gogh's life and art, and how we might begin, therefore, to reframe our understanding of some of its basic features.

From some of his earliest work to his post-Parisian maturity, van Gogh carried in his mind basic conceptions of what he wanted to paint. Technique, for him, was generally an issue of finding the best (and, after Paris, most modern) method to explicate these ideas. He could find commonalities between neoimpressionism and Japanese woodblock prints because he was not concerned merely with their physical attributes, but rather understood the underlying conceptual logic that produced these works. Style, as a means of expression, meant much less to him than it would for an experimental artist like Cézanne.

Conversely, much of van Gogh's stylistic contributions to modern art can be summarized by a few characteristics that could be easily taken up by other artists. For example, Émile Bernard made a lithograph copy of one of the Vincent's self-portraits for the cover of the journal in which he printed his posthumous essay on the artist.^[*21] Bernard captured the intensity of the artist's gaze — which of course points to the emotional intensity of the man — but also captured the simplicity of van Gogh's overall color scheme in its the basic contrast of two colors. Bernard even indicates something of Vincent's graphic-based painting style, using line in the manner of Vincent's application of varied lengths of drawn out paint to suggest emotional turbulence even as it structures and enlivens the pictorial surface. I'm not suggesting that Bernard's reproduction played any important role in the diffusion of Vincent's ideas. Unlike the impact on Soviet artists made by a George Grosz photomontage reproduced on the cover of *MA*, it was not sufficient for paintings to be reproduced either through graphic translations or black and white photography to communicate their more specific qualities. Painting as a medium usually requires that it be seen first-hand in order to be fully understood. However, many of the things Vincent's work (and biography) represented were already in wide circulation among European artists long before these same artists might have been aware of van Gogh's specific contributions to the development of these practices — such as the liberation of color from naturalistic depiction and its use as an independent expressive device.

21 ——— É. Bernard, cover for *L'Homme d'Aujourd'hui*, vol. 8, no. 390 (July 1891).

The second, direct, stage of van Gogh's influence occurred only when his work entered international distribution, or perhaps not even until his letters began to be published. At this point, the nature of the artist's legacy was fundamentally altered. Now the aesthetic practices became irrevocably tied to the artist's biography. Van Gogh, whether he intended to or not, directly contributed to this aspect of his reception. The very fact that his painting was so ideational meant that it was dependent on outside sources in order to acquire anything like the significance the artist attempted to embody in the work. Since van Gogh wrote no manifestos, and since the early critics who wrote about his work hardly knew him, but knew rather his reputation, his correspondence became the inevitable repository of his artistic intentions, and thus integrally bound up with them. Perhaps his most ambitious paintings, those that he described as *tableaux* rather than *études*, such as the *Night Café*, are capable of communicating their meanings with greater degrees of independence. But for the artist's work in general, the letters were required, as it were, to travel with the paintings in order for them to have the resonance they eventually achieved. It was in the letters that van Gogh laid out his artistic principles (which transcend simply stylistic concerns, but have much instead to do with art as a religious calling, requiring sacrifice and suffering), so that individual paintings became specific illustrations of these principles and not independent entities.

I have found it odd, therefore, that van Gogh scholars have paid so little attention to the selection of the artist's letters published in German translation in 1905.^[*22] The volume included widely representative examples from the artist's correspondence with his brother as well as translations of most of Vincent's letters to Bernard. It was this volume that Rilke read; it was certainly this volume that the artists of the Brücke, and who knows how many other painters of the European avant-gardes after 1905, read. We know the volume sold very well, reaching tens of thousands of copies long before Johanna van Gogh brought out the complete edition of the artist's correspondence with his brother in 1914. These letters, and not Bernard or Aurier or any other French critic, taught Central European artists how to look at, how to use, van Gogh's legacy.

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22 ——— V. van Gogh, *Briefe* (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1905).