§ 2 The Museum, Art, and Time

There are times when one regrets that Malraux's books on *La Psychologie de l'art* did not receive more rigorous planning: one finds them obscure not in their language, which is clear—and a little more than clear, brilliant—but in their development. Malraux himself, at the end of his essays, seems to wish that their composition were stronger. Perhaps Malraux is right, but his readers are surely wrong. It is true that the ideas he develops have their quirks; they are quick, sudden, and then they remain without end; they disappear and return; because they often assert themselves in formulas that are pleasing to them, they believe themselves thereby defined, and this accomplishment suffices for them. But the movement that abandons them calls them back; the joy, the glory of a new formula draws them out of themselves.[1]

This movement—this apparent disorder—is definitely one of the appealing sides of these books. The ideas do not lose their coherence in this movement; it is, rather, their contradictions that they escape, although these contradictions continue to animate them and keep them alive. One must add: it is not ideas, exactly, that would be out of place here. Someone—perhaps Valéry—has written: "One must always apologize for discussing painting." Yes, an apology is in order, and he who discusses a book that discusses painting is no doubt in need of a double apology. Malraux's apology is not in the passion he devotes to the art he discusses, nor even

in the extraordinary admiration that he bestows upon it (for perhaps art does not always wish to be admired; admiration also displeases art), but in this exceptional merit: that the thoughts, although they tend toward an important and general view of art according to their own exigencies, succeed, in their risky dialogue with works of art, with the images these works accompany, in illuminating themselves, without losing their explanatory value, with a light that is not purely intellectual; in sliding toward something that is more open than their meaning; in carrying out, for themselves—and for us who are destined to understand them—an experience that imitates the experience of art more than it explains it. Thus the ideas become themes, motifs; and their somewhat incoherent development, about which some complain, expresses, on the contrary, their truest order, which is to constitute themselves, to test themselves through their contact with history by way of a movement whose vivacity and apparent wandering make perceptible to us the historical succession of works of art and their simultaneous presence in the Museum where culture today assembles them.

Malraux no doubt does not think he has made a discovery when he shows that, thanks to the progress of our knowledge and also as a result of our means of reproduction—but also for reasons more profound—artists, every artist, has universal art at his disposal for the first time. Many critics before him have reflected on this "conquest of ubiquity," including, to mention him again, Valéry, who speaks of a very near future rather than the present when he writes: "Works of art will acquire a kind of ubiquity. Their immediate presence or their restoration of any period will obey our call. They will no longer be only in themselves but they will all be wherever someone is." And from this he concluded: "One must expect that such great novelties will transform the whole technique of art, will thus affect invention itself, will perhaps go so far as to modify, marvelously, the very notion of art." Marvelously, but Valéry resisted this marvel, which, moreover, he did not want to perceive except in the light consciousness of a half-dream. No more than he readily accepted history did Valéry like the museums that

Malraux called high places but in which Valéry saw only polished solitudes having in them, so he said, something of the temple and the salon, the school and the cemetery: in these houses of incoherence, he seemed only to perceive the unhappy invention of a somewhat barbaric, unreasonable civilization, although even his disavowal was light, was not insistent.

Not only is Malraux insistent, but with persuasive force he makes of the Museum a new category, a kind of power that, in the era at which we have arrived, is at the same time the purpose of history—as it is expressed and completed by art—its principal conquest, its manifestation, and still more: the very consciousness of art, the truth of artistic creation, the ideal point at which this truth, at the same time that it realizes itself in a work, cites, summons, and transforms all other works by putting them in relation to the most recent work that does not always challenge them but always illuminates them in a different way and prompts them to a new metamorphosis that it does not itself escape. To recall it more quickly, *Le Musée imaginaire* points first to this fact: that we are familiar with all of the arts of all civilizations that devoted themselves to art. That we are familiar with them practically and comfortably, not with an ideal knowledge that would belong only to few, but in a way that is real, living, and universal (reproductions). That, finally, this knowledge has its own singular characteristics: it is historical, it is the knowledge of a history, of a set of histories that we accept and receive without subjecting them to any value other than their own past. But at the same time this knowledge is not historical; it is not concerned with the objective truth of this history, its truth at the moment of its occurrence; on the contrary, we accept and prefer it as fiction. We know that all ancient art was other than it seems to us to be. The white statues deceive us, but if we restore their colored coating to them, it is then that they appear false to us (and they are false, because this restoration disregards the power, the truth of time, which has erased the colors). A painting ages; one ages badly, the other becomes a masterpiece through the duration that decomposes its tones, and we are familiar with the fortuitousness of mutilations: this Victory

to which only the flight of time could give wings, the heads from Bardo, of mediocre craftsmanship, that the sea has resculpted, has made fascinating. Moreover, the very means of our knowledge transform almost at will that which they help us to know: through reproduction, art objects lose their scale; the miniature becomes a painting, the painting separated from itself, fragmented, becomes another painting. Fictive arts? But art, it would seem, is this fiction.

Other, more important results occur: one must further add that these results are not simply still and inanimate effects but the very truth of the Museum, the active meaning that permitted it to develop, while at the same time art became more consciously connected to itself, to the freedom of its own discovery. The Museum assists in the contestation that animates all culture. This is not immediately clear so long as the Museum, incomplete, glorifies a single art, sees in it not one art but perfection and certainty. Thus Greek art and the art of the Renaissance are evidence that the artist can emulate, but even if he equals them, he does not bring them closer to his time; he makes himself lasting, he takes his place outside of time by their side. This is why the only Museum is a universal one. Then the "all has been said," "all is visible" signifies that the admirable is everywhere, is precisely this "all" that triumphs only when the incontestable has disappeared and the eternal has come to an end. On the other hand, as soon as the Museum begins to play a role, it is because art has agreed to become a museum art: a great innovation, and for many the sign of great impoverishment. Is art poor because it is simply itself? This is open to discussion, but the evolution is obvious. Plastic art is first in the service of religious sentiments or invisible realities around which the community perpetuates itself; art is religion, says Hegel. At this stage one finds it in churches, in tombs, under the earth, or in the sky, but inaccessible, invisible in a way: who looks at Gothic statues? We do; the others invoked them. The consequence of the disappearance of prayer was to make monuments and works of art appear, to make painting an art within reach of our eyes. The Renaissance begins this evolution. But the visible that it discovers absorbs it. Certainly it is not content with reproducing appear-

ances, or even with transforming them according to a harmonious understanding that it calls the beautiful. The whole Renaissance did not take place in Bologna, for who, more than the Florentines, disregarded charm, the pleasure of mere detail, and even the delight of color so as better to grasp the meaning of forms—a prejudice they do not owe to antiquity but one that is in them like the passion for a secret? It remains that the Renaissance, if it makes art real, present, seems, through its success and the ambiguous nature of its success, to link this presence to the ability to represent. Whence the misunderstandings, which have still not come to an end—but in the final analysis excellent misunderstandings, given that so many great works arise from them. These great works continued to belong to churches, however; they were at home in palaces, where they sometimes played a political role; they had powerful ties to life, which sought to make use of them. A portrait in the home of the one it figures remains a family painting. But when all of these works really or ideally enter the Museum, it is precisely life that they renounce, it is from life that they agree to be separated. Artificial places, one says of museums, from which nature is banished, the world constrained, solitary, dead: it is true, death is there; at least life is no longer there, neither the spectacle of life nor the sentiments and manners of being through which we live. And what else takes place? What was a god in a temple becomes a statue; what was a portrait becomes a painting; and even dreams, that absence in which the world and the images of the world were transfigured, are dissipated in this new brightness that is the broad daylight of painting.

In this way the transformation, the contestation that is specific to art is momentarily at an end. Modern art, in the Museum, would become conscious of its truth—which is to be neither in the service of a church, nor of a history or specific event, nor of a figure—its truth, which is to remain ignorant of immediate life, the furnishings of appearances, and perhaps all of life in order to recognize itself only in the "life" of art. The painter serves painting, and apparently painting serves no purpose. The strange thing is that from the day he makes this discovery, the artist's interest in his art,

far from diminishing, becomes an absolute passion, and the works that signify nothing seem to incarnate and reflect this passion. Why? One may well ask oneself this.

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Malraux himself asks the question and supplies various answers. But first, one must see more precisely what this evolution expresses, this revelation caused by history, which affirms itself in these two forms: the imaginary Museum and modern art. It will not escape one that in many respects Malraux's views apply to the plastic arts, inspired as he is by the discoveries of our time, the movements of a thought whose principles reside with Hegel. There are certainly many differences, but the analogies are interesting. When one indicates that today, for the first time, art has doubly unveiled itself, the words "for the first time" have an obvious authority: they indicate that a conclusion has been reached, and this conclusion, if it does not bring time to a close, nonetheless permits the observer who speaks in the name of this first time to speak of time as of a closed truth. It is clear that for Malraux, and no doubt for each of us, our era is not—at least for what concerns the plastic arts—an era like any other: it is the radiating world of the "first time." For the first time, art has unveiled itself in its essence and in its totality: movements that are intimately connected. Art abandons everything it was not and extends itself to everything it has been; it reduces itself to itself, it is deprived of the world, the gods, and perhaps dreams, but this poverty leads it to acquire the wealth of its truth and subsequently the wealth of a whole array of works it was prevented from reaching, and was brought to underestimate, to disregard, or to despise because art was not yet conscious of itself. The imaginary Museum is thus not only the contemporary of modern art and the means of its discovery; it is also the work of this art—one might say its masterwork, were it not also necessary to say, to an extent that is half secret, its compensation. That art should be nothing but its passionate contestation, the absolute brilliance of the single moment when art, denying all the rest, is affirmed marvelously in itself—this might not be tolerable were it not

everything, were it not that art slid through the time and civilizations of the world like purity at daybreak, and made suddenly visible, with all of its works, this marvelous event of our art being universal, which means that all works of all times are also our work, the work of our art, which, for the first time, reveals them to themselves, unveils them as they are.

Perhaps we are going a little further than Malraux's formulas would permit. But if today, for the first time, art has arrived at a consciousness of itself (a consciousness that is above all negative: painting no longer imitates, no longer imagines, no longer transfigures, no longer serves values that are foreign to it, is no longer anything—and here is the positive side—but painting, its own value, which, it is true, is not yet easy to grasp)—if, in addition, this consciousness, far from placing art in a timeless place, is linked to duration, is the meaning of this duration, which at a certain moment takes form and makes itself absolutely manifest—then it is true that this moment is indeed privileged, that it has the power to turn back on all the other moments, and because it is absolute transparency for itself, it is also the transparency of all the others, the light in which these moments show themselves in their purity and their truth. No doubt things are not so simple. Art is perhaps not a comet whose brilliant point or shimmering head—modern art—would lead and illuminate the more muted and more obscure beauty of its immense orbit. And what is more, if the works of today help us to become the "heirs of the entire world"—and we must add, more than heirs, the creators and conquerors of all possible works—they themselves depend in turn on this conquest, this creation. This dependence is not one of dry causality but a dialectic to which Malraux gives the name—perhaps insufficiently rigorous or too evocative—metamorphosis. Art—and by this should be understood the entirety of works and that which makes each one a work of art—is in essence anxiety and movement. The Museum is in no way made up of immutable afterlives and the eternal dead. Statues move; we know this, just as Baudelaire was frightened to see unreal images subject to a surprising development. With each decisive work of art, all the others shudder and some succumb, a

death that is the resurrection of tomorrow; and this movement is in appearance infinite, for if, as Schiller said, "what lives immortally in song must die in life," what this immortality maintains, conveys, and sustains is this death itself become work and negative creation. At the end of his three volumes, Malraux writes, "The first universal artistic culture will no doubt transform modern art, by which it has been oriented up to this point." Modern art is thus destined, promised, or condemned to the power of metamorphosis from which it springs, but more than this: of which it seems to be the purest form, the expression of an instant reduced to this expression alone. The unknown is its future. But in the meantime, and because there is no one moment that is like any other, but only this privileged moment that at once revealed and multiplied the power of metamorphosis, it seems possible to search, through modern art, for the meaning of the question to which all the arts are the answer and for the reason why this answer is equally valid and decisive. This is the problem of artistic creation to which Malraux has devoted the second of his books, the book some may prefer, in which civilizations become works of art, in which works of art are composed and accomplished according to the secret of their own completion, which they make perceptible to us as if by transparency and as if this transparency were precisely their secret. This impression, it is true, is but the joy of an instant, and what we will have to say about it is rather the unhappiness that follows, the obscurity that closes in on this fleeting day, for art, having become a problem, is also an infinite torment.

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The plastic arts are strangers to nature: we know this, but Malraux shows it with an energy and perseverance that are sometimes surprising, as if this truth continued to be threatened. It is because he wants to show a little more. When he writes, "Any art that claims to represent implies a system of reduction. The painter reduces all form to the two dimensions of his canvas, the sculptor all virtual or represented movement to immobility," the reduction he is speaking of still seems to refer the artist back to nature. Would

the painting of a landscape be a landscape reduced, transformed by the recourse to technique, thus turned over to the disinterestedness of art? Not at all, for the purpose of painting would then be the search to reduce this reduction, since, as is obvious, many schools have attempted it, not to their credit. In reality, if "art begins with reduction," this means that the work of art is never constituted except on the basis of itself, on the inside of the artistic universe in perpetual becoming—history made art—which the imaginary Museum symbolizes for us, but which, however limited and poor, has always been presupposed by an artist's eye. Art does not begin with nature, were it even to deny it. The origin of a painting is not always another painting, or statue, but all of art, as it is present in works admired and intuited in works scorned; and the artist is always the son of other works, the works of others that he passionately imitates until the moment when he rejects them passionately. Why is Malraux so unyielding in his affirmations, affirmations that force him, for example, to hold in low regard the drawings of children, for the child, if he draws a dog, perhaps does not draw the dog that he sees, but neither does he draw a dog of Tintoretto (and perhaps one should say so much the better)? It seems he needs to put the artist in a place apart, sheltered from the world and beyond the world, just as the Museum is a universe that leads nowhere, a solitary duration, the only free duration, the only one that is a true history, equal to the freedom and mastery of man. The imaginary Museum, plus the new artist who shuts himself away in it to be free—such is art; in it are found gathered all of the givens of artistic creation. How did Giotto discover his vocation? By looking at Cimabue's paintings and not the sheep whose shepherd he is. How does any vocation develop? By way of imitation, copy, until the moment when, through the passionate imitation of masterly forms, the nascent artist becomes the master of the plastic secret of works and little by little, sometimes very late, sometimes without ever achieving it except in the margins, experiences, creates, distinguishes his own plastic secret, what Malraux calls the "initial schemes" of his art. These "schemes" are first powers of rupture, intentions in which is expressed—not abstractly or aesthetically but

plastically—a will to surpass, to transform the art and the style through which the young creator found himself one day introduced into the Museum, and thus made free, although a prisoner, still, of his masters. To rediscover, to describe these schemes is to rediscover the progression, the discoveries, the metamorphoses: in a word, the specific experience that has meaning only in the works and that one betrays the least—but one still betrays it—when one describes it in its most concrete and technical aspect. The most persuasive pages that Malraux has written show, in terms that are extremely evocative and nonetheless precise, what the itinerary of El Greco might have been starting out from Venice, or that of Tintoretto also starting out from Venice, or that of La Tour starting out from Caravaggio, or that of Goya starting out from himself, from that other artist who until the age of forty was called Goya unbeknownst to him. And to return to El Greco, it is not the moving pages on Toledo, the solitude, the somber twilight with which the artist surrounds his own vision, that would bring us closer to this mastery, but everything that makes the central point of his discovery perceptible to us, which can be expressed thus: to maintain the baroque drawing of movement—the turbulence of all lines—while eliminating that from which it arose: the quest for depth (the distant).

Malraux seems irritated when he hears mention of an artist's "vision." This antipathy to vocabulary is remarkable. Just as he energetically excludes from art the idea of representation, so does he seem to exclude from artistic genesis the notion of image. This is logical up to a certain point (one might say that painting is a struggle to escape vision); it is in any case the consequence of formulas that he willingly repeats: "Plastic art is never born from a way of seeing the world but of making it." And this banishment of vision holds for imaginary vision as well, for interior fiction, for everything that might reduce painting to the passive, subjective expression of a resemblance, be it one of an invisible form. In his three books, Malraux grants only one line to surrealism, and this is to brush it aside. This distrust, which is strong but instinctive—it is obvious that Malraux uses terms according to his own pleasure,

which is authoritarian, and it would be a malicious game to take him at his word—this distrust of the word *vision* and of the imaginary tends above all to separate everything from plastic art that might make its function, its creative activity, less obvious. The painter is a creator of forms and not a visionary who would passionately copy down his dreams, and the conception is nothing outside of the painting in which it does not suffice to say that it expresses itself, for before the painting there is nothing but an intention that is already pictorial, given that it is in its contact with other paintings that it took shape, trying itself through imitation. Painting is an experience in which a specific power affirms or seeks itself, which is valid only for that art and makes sense only in relation to it, a power that must nonetheless be defined, or at least named, and that Malraux calls style. What is art? "That by which forms become style." But what is style? The answer can be found, and from a certain perspective—it should be said—is surprising: "All style is the giving of form to the elements of the world that help orient the world toward one of its essential parts."

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There would be reason enough to imagine that *La Psychologie de l'art* is uniquely concerned with restoring to art the experience that belongs to it, the world that belongs to it, this Universe of the Museum (monad without windows), which the artist creates and elicits into the infinite of time, perfectly self-sufficient, self-ordered, oriented toward itself alone, animated by the duration of its metamorphoses, a solitude worthy of all passions and all sacrifices, in which the one who enters knows that he goes before the greatest danger, because what he seeks is the extreme. Yes, one can imagine that Malraux's investigations might have taken such a turn, and one can tell oneself that such a turn might not disagree with "one of [his] essential parts," that part which bound him to painting and to the plastic arts with true passion. But for this, Malraux would perhaps have had to be a painter himself, would perhaps have had to be interested in painting in order to continue it and not to justify it, in order to make it and not to see it. Still, the

more one advances in the investigation of a problem, the more difficult it becomes not to express it from the point of view of all the questions to which one is vitally bound. Malraux is interested in painting, but, as we know, he is also interested in man: to save one through the other, he was not able to resist this great temptation. A temptation all the more imperious in that the problem itself leads us to it, for one must indeed reflect on this strange Museum in which we dwell and on this even stranger history into which it introduces us. What do we see in it? What we prefer—and what we prefer are those works, which, like our own, are ignorant of appearance, do not submit to it, create a world that is other and whose power and victorious strangeness fascinate us. But these works (those, for example, of Byzantine style, to take the best-known works) and this refusal of appearance, this rupture they express—we are forced to recognize that it is not the search for form, it is not at all the search for a style that has produced them: it is, rather, those values alien to the world, those to which we owe all of our gods, those from above and those from below. Striking observations, but not unexpected. If art is defined and constituted by its distance in relation to the world, by the *absence* of world, it is natural that everything that puts the world into question, what one calls, in a word—a word whose usage has become so unrigorous—transcendence; everything that surpasses, denies, destroys, threatens the body of relations that are stable, comfortable, reasonably established, and anxious to remain; all of these powers, be they pure or impure, proposed for the "salvation" of man or his destruction, insofar as they shatter the validity of the common world, work for art, open the way for it, call it forth. Gods thus become, in the greater part of the Museum, the surprising illusion that has permitted the artist, in consecrating himself to their cult, to consecrate art. Art is at this moment religion, that is to say, a stranger to itself, but this strangeness, being what tears it away from profane values, is also what brings it closest to its own truth without its knowledge, although this truth is not manifest. In this sense, one could say that gods were only the temporary substitutes, the sublime masks—but without beauty—of artistic power for as long as this power, through

the dialectic of history and of metamorphoses, could not achieve, in the artist finally reduced to himself, the consciousness of its autonomy and solitude. The Pantocrator waiting for Picasso.

And now? Now art is perhaps called Picasso, but it seems that it is Picasso's duty to continue the Pantocrator, not only because the demiurgic task of being a creator of forms and a creator of everything that is the life of the Museum falls to him alone, but also in bringing painting into harmony with this "essential part," this superior aim, the level of the eternal, which was represented for men of the first centuries by the golden image of the absolute. For modern art and for Malraux's aesthetics this is a turning point, a difficult moment. It is true the complicitous gods have disappeared; they have reentered the profound absence, this realm above or below the world; it seems that it was formerly their task to make this absence appear or, more precisely, to offer it to art as the bold place—the void—in which art could become master of itself without, however, knowing itself. Absence, depth, destined to divert the gazes of the "real," to challenge appearances, to substitute the conquering power of a style for representation. But from the moment that art gained consciousness of its truth, that it revealed itself as the refusal of the world and the affirmation of the solitude of the Museum, this absence, this depth, reconquered by painting, in which the gods lived in order to accustom the artist to managing without life—must it not in turn disappear in the painting, be painting—and nothing more; be the fact that painting has *worth* as painting—and nothing else? Yes, it seems it must, and yet if one returns to Malraux, this absence does not permit itself to be thus mastered by art and it still claims under more or less glorious names—the human quality, the ideal image of man, the honor of being human, in a word, "the essential part of the world"—to be the exemplary power, the divinity that art cannot leave unexpressed without losing itself. The arts of the past certainly had a relationship with the gods. The arts intended, by expressing the gods, to make present that which is not seen, does not express itself, does not make itself present; and through this superb pretension, art found itself not led astray toward the invisible or the formless but, rather, on the path of pure visible presence and form as it alone affirmed itself purely. Impressive results. However, the invisible remained. It was not really mediatized. More must be said, because for Malraux painting is not "image," is not the pictorial conquest of this *absence,* which, before any technical reduction, brings that which is seen back to the stupor of a "this is not," "this cannot be seen," because, in addition, he does not want to reintroduce the invisible as fiction (although he makes a place for "poetry" in his third book), the invisible, which is not pictorialized, can but wander dangerously around the painting under the name of the ideal and the values of culture.

This reorientation does not occur in a deliberate way; it is a stirring debate that Malraux seems to pursue with the different parts of himself. To what end do the evolution of time and the metamorphoses of the Museum lead? To a painter who would be only a painter: to Cézanne, who, compared with Goya, is painting liberated from metaphysical passion, from the dream and the sacred, who is painting that has become a passion for itself and creation of itself alone. Malraux confirms this to us: modern art imposes the autonomy of painting, autonomy with regard to all tradition and even culture. Painting that has become culture is a stage, a moment: a bad moment, and this moment corresponded to the intervention of intellectuals who could see in the plastic arts only what was most visible in the arts: a harmonious fiction, the transfiguration of things, the expression of values, the representation of a human and civilized world. But can painting, when its representative function has disappeared, when it is only bound to the pursuit of its own values, still serve as the guarantor of a culture? "An art of great Navigators," yes, says Malraux. "But is a culture of great Navigators conceivable?" Elsewhere doubt becomes the answer: "Picasso succeeds Cézanne, the anguished questioning supplants annexation and conquest. But a culture of questioning alone cannot exist."

This is probably true. But should one not conclude that art, the impassioned questioning, has nothing to bring to this stationary ideal, this body of recognized values, public truths, and established

institutions that one calls civilization, just as it has nothing to receive from it? The painter, the artist, as we are made to see him, is certainly a being who may be called divine, and we are not surprised by this, since he has taken the place of the gods; but more than this: he is the truth of which the divinity was only the mask, its necessary caricature. "The gestures with which we handle the paintings we admire . . . are those of veneration. The Museum, which was a collection, becomes a kind of temple. Of course, a still life by Braque is not a sacred object. And although it is not a Byzantine miniature, it belongs, as does the latter, to another world and is part of an obscure god that one wants to call painting and that is called art." Malraux adds, expressing a repugnance that we share with him: "Religious vocabulary is irritating here, but there is no other. This art is not a god; it is an absolute." An absolute, but one whose truth it is to be closed in on itself, whose truth it is to have its excellence and its signification in itself—and what is outside of itself one can only call insignificant. This, at least, is what Malraux's views on modern painting seemed to invite us to think. The god is called painting, and painting, in the past, so as to escape the temptations of aesthetic realism, was in need of a metaphysical or religious realism, which is why it liked the gods. But today, when the gods have become paintings, when it is a matter of the "creation of a painting that wants to be only painting," metaphysics must also disappear in the painting and must be nothing more than *this* painting, for fear of transforming it into metaphysics—of restoring, consequently, another form of realism or, worse yet, of appearing above the painting as the duty, the purely moral obligation to save civilization and protect man.

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However, this obligation becomes more and more urgent in the course of the third book, and it seems that art also assumes this obligation more and more willingly: what one could call its idealizing function, its ability to "sustain, enrich, or transform, without weakening, the ideal image of himself that man has inherited." An aim that is perhaps urgent, perhaps inevitable, but the result is that

the whole perspective in which the Museum, the world, and the artists appeared to us, changes. The Museum seemed to be the artist's own universe, not the history of art but art as the freedom of history, the expression of a specific duration (which we would still have to question), the manifestation of a time sui generis that the idea of metamorphosis shed light on. All works of art were present in the Museum, and because modern art expresses, without mediation or travesty, the truth (the language that needed all of these works in order to be heard), one could say that in effect these works formed a totality and consequently that they were, from a certain point of view, one and the same work whose true meaning—whose pure plastic merits—could be perceived and admired in the past only through a pretense of anecdote, fiction, and sacred values, but whose clear and manifest truth we are able to see today with a gaze that is finally competent. Of course, we know that Byzantine art was not an art for itself and that it wanted to make things attain a sacred universe, but our role is to replace what Byzantine art was to itself with what Byzantine art is to art, that is to say, first a system of forms (as Malraux writes in *Le Musée imaginaire*: "But for us Byzantine art is first a system of forms; any art that is reborn undergoes metamorphosis, changes signification; it is reborn without God"). In the same way, if so many disparate works today are a part of what we prefer, if we are able to enjoy both Negro art and Poussin, it is, it seems, because we are able to discover the elements common to art in works without community, it is because painting must appear to us as a specific language, a language that is present in a manner that is more or less expressive and more or less manifest, whatever the representation, suggestion, and historical travesty to which this language is linked.

But in reality this is not the case, and we were deceiving ourselves about the Museum. "This place that gives one the highest idea of man" cannot be only the Temple of images; it is the Temple of civilizations, religions, historical splendors. And the Museum we should enjoy is not such as it is revealed to us by Cézanne—a museum of art that wishes to be only painting, negation and authentic refusal of all content, of any part of the world—but, if it

may be said, the museum of contents, the museum of histories and times. "Our time," says Malraux, "seemed at first to want to found the unity of the arts it recognized on the kinship of forms alone. But a great artist who knew, besides contemporary works, only the specifically plastic qualities of past works, would be a superior type of modern barbarian, one whose barbarity was defined by the refusal of any human quality. Our culture, were it limited to the extremely acute culture of our sensibility to colors and forms, and to what expresses this in the modern arts, would not even be imaginable. But our culture is far from being limited in this way, for a culture without precedent is being established." And this artistic culture, as Malraux has just warned us, cannot be, must not be, *purely* artistic; moreover, as soon as art becomes culture, is the means, the instrument of a culture, it can no longer belong to itself; it falls prey to travesties and servitudes: the wheel of values and knowledge.

However, Malraux does not intend to put into question so easily that which appeared to him to be the meaning of modern art. The affirmation of painting as negation of the world and all values (other than itself) does not even appear to him to be incompatible with the service imposed on it, which is to save the quality of man and his values. This is one of the thorny points of *La Psychologie de l'art.* To understand it, one must try to understand the situation of the Museum better in relation to history and the situation of art opposite time. When we are in a museum—but perhaps, then, we are there as "spectators" and no longer as "artists"—it is indeed true that our admiration and our interest are also for the past that these works represent to us, for the past not as it may have been but as it is present and as it shines forth ideally in these works. Is it Greece that is there, is it Sumer, Byzantium? No, not at all. Our historical vision is an illusion; it is a myth, but this myth has an extreme "spiritual wealth." This illusion represents what is eternally true, that part of truth which there is in an afterlife that stays present to us, remains accessible to us, moves us, fascinates us, belongs to us, as if this afterlife found life in us, and we, survival through it. "The dialogue that links our culture to the ephemeral absolutes transmitted to it by resuscitated arts, reestablishes, with the past it shapes, the link between Greek gods and the cosmos, between Christ and the meaning of the world and the numberless souls of the living and the dead. Every Sumerian work of art suggests the kingdom of Sumer, in part ungraspable, in part possessed. The great museums satisfy in us an exoticism of history, *give* us a vast domain of human powers. But the long trace left by the sensibility of the earth in these museums is not the trace of history. It is not dead societies that art resuscitates: it is often the ideal or compensatory image that these societies had of themselves." One can therefore say of art that it perpetuates the spirit, that it plays, in relation to history, the role that, for Hegel, history plays in relation to nature: it gives it a meaning, it assures, beyond the perishable and across the death of duration, life and the eternity of meaning. Art is no longer the anxiety of time, the destructive power of pure change; it is bound to the eternal; it is the eternal present, which, through vicissitudes and by means of metamorphoses, maintains or ceaselessly re-creates the form in which "the quality of the world through a man" was one day expressed. A power that Malraux never tires of celebrating in striking terms: "In whatever way an art represents men, it expresses a civilization as this civilization conceives of itself: it grounds the civilization in meaning, and it is this meaning that is stronger than the diversity of life." "On Judgment Day, let the gods raise up the army of statues in face of the forms that were living! It is not the world that they created, the world of men, that will testify to their presence: it is the world of artists. . . . All art is a lesson for its gods." And this revealing line: "The obscure relentlessness of men to re-create the world is not in vain, because nothing becomes *presence* again beyond death, with the exception of re-created forms."

But where does this privilege, if it is one, come from? For it could be that it is also a curse and the darkest failure of art, of which art is perhaps only today becoming conscious. Where does this exceptional power come from that seems to make the artist the sole torchbearer, the sole master of the eternal? Malraux notes it more than he proves it. But one can nonetheless perceive the reasons that

underlie his thinking. The main reason is that the artist is par excellence a "creator." He is one because he is never subject to nature, neither when he seems to imitate it nor when he impugns it in order to submit himself to the gods. With regard to the gods themselves, he is free; he is perhaps ignorant of this freedom, but his work affirms and exercises it. It sometimes happens, even today, that he allies himself with the nocturnal powers and, like Goya, with monsters, with horror, with the night; or, like those "primitives" that haunt us, with the fascination for the formless and for chaos: a disturbing dependency that seems to signify a possession more than a mastery. But herein lies the wonder: through the work of art, possession becomes the power to possess; servitude wakes up emancipated. "Although the expression of archaic sentiments, even when it is indirect, gives the masterpiece a particular resonance, the recourse to darkness remains in the service of a royal accent: no monster in art is an end in itself. Always mingled in our admiration are the feelings about the deliverance of man and the mastery of the work." Goya's solitude is great, but it is not without limits, for he is a painter, and if "the painting is for him a means of reaching the mystery . . . the mystery is also a means of reaching painting" and thus of coming to light, of becoming the freedom and the brightness of the day. Van Gogh is mad; his paintings are a superior lucidity and consciousness. The artist is never dependent on his time, or on his personal history, no more than his paintings depend on the common vision. We now understand why, from his birth to his death, he has been represented to us within the sole existence of the Museum: this is because he is free only in the Museum, because his freedom is to belong to art that belongs only to itself, although art is always, when it is creative, that which transmutes existence into power, subordination into sovereignty, and death itself into a power of life.

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It seems that for Malraux, it is the artist alone who saves us from absurdity and contingency, he alone who transforms what would otherwise be only the formless ruins of a duration without memory, the disgusting rot of the cadaver of time, into a radiant, intelligible, and salutary present. When in the passage we have cited he writes, "nothing becomes *presence* again after death, with the exception of re-created forms," he indeed invests art with this exorbitant privilege, seemingly without asking himself whether all vestige of human labor has not the same power of becoming historical and, through history, of taking on and keeping meaning, of constantly being enriched by a meaning that is always new. And yet this is the question one would be tempted to ask oneself: if so many remote works attract and fascinate us as if they were highly aesthetic, it is because remoteness can substitute itself for art; it is because the retreat, the movement of history—on the condition that they escape all proximity with our world—have in themselves a value of creation that can be compared with that of the artist. But perhaps this remark helps us to recognize where Malraux's assurance comes from. It is very likely that he is aware that fragments of polished stone are just as moving and carry just as much human meaning as does Praxiteles' smiling *Hermes*. If, however, he puts art beyond comparison, it is because his discovery of the Museum and his feeling of wonder before works of art have made him sensitive to the paradox in which time causes any work of art to slip. It is true that there is something strange in the manner by which duration opens into this figure of Praxiteles, for example. This has often been commented upon: I can approach the canvas or the marble, but not the "images" in which the artistic intention is incarnated, and no more than their nearness puts them within my reach, does the passing time move them from themselves or seem to have any hold on them. Why? Could one say that this presence is an emancipation of duration, a marvelous equivalent of the eternal? Classical aesthetics believed this, and perhaps a part of Malraux himself remains classical. The idealization of figures, the search for perfection and beauty, are supposed to maintain this endless presence, to liberate absolutely the unique moment that the statue symbolizes and affirms from time. The ideal of the beautiful is but the theoretical elaboration of this exceptional situation. Subsequently it was thought that a figure would last eternally if it was

beautiful; but this was because it was first felt that, beautiful or not, it did not pass away, or else that it had always already passed away. Of course, the value attributed to this eternal present of the figure (artistic immortality) itself depends on the times and on histories. Even today, one seems to forget that the survival of images has often been valued very little or cursed outright, and one forgets, furthermore, that it is the survival that is condemned and not the image. Civilizations of the eternal are perhaps the only civilizations, but man is also aware that if eternity shelters him from what makes him dangerous and what exposes him to danger, then eternity is the illusion that takes from him his one chance at truth.

Art, it is evident, plays a role in the faith in this illusion. In humanistic civilizations, it is immediate life, ephemeral time that it is called on to transmute, to eternalize by placing it under the seal of a resemblance. Resemblance is not a means of imitating life but of making it inaccessible, of establishing it in a double that is permanent and escapes from life. Living figures, men, are without resemblance. One must wait for the cadaverous appearance, the idealization by death and the eternalization of the end for a being to take on the great beauty that is its own resemblance, the truth of itself in a reflection. A portrait—one came to perceive this little by little—does not resemble because it makes itself similar to a face; rather, the resemblance only begins and only exists with the portrait and in it alone; resemblance is the work of the portrait, its glory or its disgrace; resemblance is tied to the condition of a work, expressing the fact that the face is not there, that it is absent, that it appears only from the absence that is precisely the resemblance, and this absence is also the form that time seizes upon when the world moves away and when there remains of it only this gap and this distance.

What does one call this time? Perhaps it does not matter. To call it *eternity* is consoling but misleading. To call it *present* is no more exact, for we know only one present, the present that fulfills and realizes itself in the active life of the world and that the future ceaselessly raises to itself. It is just as tempting to see in it a pure and simple absence of time. The critics tell us this: Praxiteles' *Hermes*

smiles from the depths of its mystery, and this smile expresses its indifference to time, the mystery of its freedom in relation to time; this is why all of these smiles of art that touch us as if they were the human secret par excellence, the smile of Rheims, the smile of Saint Anne, affirm the defiance with which the expression of the ephemeral—grace and freedom of an instant—challenges duration by enclosing itself within the unreal.

But the absence of time here signifies only the absence of the world in which we act and work (that of the possible, which constantly denies being in order to transform it, through work, into livable reality). The absence of time that art would designate alludes only to the power that we have of putting an end to the world, of standing before or after the world—that space of practical life but also of truth as it is expressed, of culture and significations—a power that is perhaps a sovereignty but that also asserts itself in all situations in which man gives up mastering himself and accepts that he will not recover himself. This is why art is tied to all that puts man in danger, to everything that puts him violently outside the world, outside the security and intelligence of the world to which only the future belongs. Thus in Goya blood, anguish, death are the work of art. Thus also the child who is almost completely ignorant of the world and the madman for whom the world has almost been lost are "naturally" artists. All of them, through anguish, heedlessness, already belong to this absence—which could be called nothingness, but a nothingness that is still being, being about which one cannot grasp anything or do anything, where nothing ever begins and nothing ever ends, where everything is repeated ad infinitum because nothing has ever truly taken place. The eternal, perhaps, but if so, the eternal recurrence.

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Just as the world of art is tied to absence, so the time of art is related to eternal repetition. However, it would be difficult not to see it: this absence to which art tries to be equal and in view of which, but also by means of which, it tears all things from the measure and truth of the world; art must *realize* it, and this reality

can lead to the rehabilitation of the "world." This is unfortunate, because it involves playing with misunderstandings; it also paradoxically gives art the duty to perform, through its submission—the submission to appearance—its task, which is to achieve absence; not simply the absence of the world, but absence as world. In any case, under whatever form it may be and according to whichever means, absence tends in turn to become world, reality—but, as modern art teaches us, a reality all the more "authentic," all the more worthy of absence the more it fulfills itself according to the exigencies of this art, in terms that give this art a full existence and give full existence to it alone. One might ask oneself whether formalism does not threaten an art that is so close to itself. The threat is certain; any art is always threatened by what appeases it. But this would be, however, to forget that art is perpetually unequal to what it seeks; that it constantly betrays what it seeks, the closer success brings art to it; and that this dissatisfaction, this infinite contestation—unable to be expressed except through the experience of plastic art—can only render vain all attempts to give it theoretical limits (for example, by reducing it to a purely formal question).

Yet more needs to be said: the canvas or statue perhaps aspires to solitude, not in order to become the sole masterpiece capable of erasing all others but in order to remove itself from the society of masterpieces and thus to maintain a *remoteness from everything* that it must make manifest. This aspiration to remain alone is the hopeless truth of all works said to be authentic, but in general this desire is in vain. And this means not only that the painting must enter into the world as a pleasant spectacle and a commercial value, but also that it must take its place *outside* the world, in the imaginary space, in the life freed from life to which Malraux has called our attention under the name of Museum. The Museum is not a myth, but this necessity: that the condition of being outside the world, which the work of art seeks to maintain, nonetheless puts it in relation to a group, ends up constituting a whole, and gives rise to a history. The Museum, as Malraux has taught us, moreover, is not a place but a history. This history is certainly not a

celestial history, without relation to the history of the "world"; however, one cannot deny that a specific form of duration and a particular dialectic are realized in it. The term *metamorphosis* has made us sensitive to this dialectic. Any great artist takes form in the Museum, by submitting to it, and then by submitting to its mastery. Any great work of art transforms all others. And there is a labor specific to duration that disturbs the canvases and awakens or puts to sleep the statues. Torsos are complete because time has broken their heads. The crushed face of Saint Elizabeth of Bamberg gives her a nocturnal likeness that she was obviously expecting. Colors decompose, and this dissolution is the reward of art, thus reconciled with absence. What does all of this signify? First, that it is not true that Praxiteles' adolescent smiles in an eternal present. This smile took form in the unreal, but the unreal is also a form of time, a time that is the work of forms and the destiny of images. Even if the marble has preserved this smile, the figures who do not smile—the *Daughter of Euthydikos*, the *Head of an Ephebe*, with which time, our time, puts this smile in relation—have changed it, have disdainfully erased it, by making it too visible, too "worldly." It would not be enough to say that we see the smile differently; the smile is truly other. It is no longer the smile of absence, it is the presence of a smile, an interesting witness but one that interests culture and that the artist barely notices anymore.

Classical aesthetics did not seek to idealize forms or to make them pure so much as it tried to idealize the moment, to make it an absolutely pure present, capable of being repeated without growing faint. Out of the obscure malediction of eternal recurrence—this time-space that takes hold of us when the world moves away—this aesthetics made the glory and joy of a repetition that nothing seems able to prevent from always being new. Remarkable goals. And sometimes it achieves them by means of a stylization that keeps life at a distance without compromising it, while at other times it achieves them through a desire to fuse with the living moment, to grasp it and make it ungraspable. But classical aesthetics cannot, be that as it may, do without the representation of appearance. Why? For many reasons (the most obvious is that it aspires to the world:

art, insofar as it is closely bound up with nothingness and absence, is a curse that must be overcome by great humanist activity) and for the following reason, which is no less pressing: namely, that the image, when it becomes *representative*, gives the most vivid idea of a *presence* that seems able to repeat itself, removed from the pain of becoming. This repetition is affirmed in the doubling of resemblance; the similar, which is then in the safekeeping of the painting, refers eternally to the similar. Praxiteles' adolescent will eternally resemble itself in its smile, because this resemblance, detached once and for all from the life from which it is presumed to have been borrowed, is protected, by the force of the sculpture, from the marble—in some sense behind the marble, which is solid but not eternal—as it is also protected from the sculpture. When appearance disappears or moves away from works of art, this demonstration of a present that is always capable of repeating itself—an unreal Mona Lisa always ready to smile behind unreal colors and lines—singularly loses some of its obviousness. When a work decides to identify itself with its canvas, its spots, and its material ingredients, without dissimulating anything or promising anything behind itself, then the pure present collapses, the ideal instant has perished, the power of beginning again that the work brings closer to us is also brought closer to it and assures the work neither a true present nor a certain future, dooming it to the fascination of evanescence and to the call of metamorphoses.

The classical ideal strives to shelter the image and the moment that carries it forth from perishable things, canvas and stone—those things that, however, allow us to grasp them: canvas deteriorates and marble cracks, but the image is incorruptible and the moment repeats itself without completion (consequently, without exhausting itself). The Museum teaches us that such is not the case. It is perhaps disturbing for us to recognize that the truth of a painting is not at a distance from the painting but is inseparable from the painting's material reality, from its "means"; that its glory resides in this presence of pure matter arranged in such a way as to capture absence; and that it is tied to the fate of this matter. One could not say, however, that the painting is entirely in what *is there*—the

canvas, the spots, the shuddering become thickness—for the painting is entirely in the assurance that it is not there and that what is there is *nothing*; assurance that it communicates to us in greatest intimacy, in the *fascination*, that gaze that would like to make itself nothingness, which is contact and no longer vision, the shattering possession by something that has slid outside of all meaning and all truth.

The duality of the painting thus persists in modern art, with the difference that its essence can no longer be divided: it is always essentially pure matter, pure material presence, and pure absence, passion and desire for this absence, which is also the absence of itself; it is essentially that which contradicts itself and that which posits itself at the same time in this contradiction that it nonetheless cannot accommodate and that it does not want to appease. But the result is also that time works according to this duality. Sometimes wearing away the stone, decomposing its tones, a wearing away that most often has an aesthetic value, just as what is very ancient has an aesthetic value, in the gap that is thus revealed to us. And this work is not an accident; what is altered is also not the inessential outside of the work of art, as the classical age had hoped, but its intimacy, its truth, which has it that the statue is only stone and Leonardo's fresco is doomed to erasure, an erasure that he had, in some ways, premeditated. At other times—and this is what is most important—time turns this absence, which is also the essence of the work, into a principle of change, the anxiety of metamorphoses, a powerful and powerless dialectic. The work is tied to this absence, and this absence tears it from itself, makes it slip outside of itself. For the classical age, the work eternally repeated itself (that is, did not repeat itself or did not reproduce itself in the always first identity of its essence), because it was connected to the unreality of the moment whose notion of the similar, of the inexhaustible reflection, provided, as it were, an obvious translation. Thus the work did not fear anything from others, nor from itself. It was not protected from time; it was the protection of time, and in it lay the absolute fixity of a present preserved, which we believed we were admiring and wanted to admire. But the work is

its own absence: because of this it is in perpetual becoming, never complete, always done and undone. If, through an image, one were to make perceptible to oneself the dimension that the work acquires in its relation to absence, one can consider the Museum to be, in its imaginary totality, this absence realized, a realization that supposes a certain completion, that completion precisely which modern art would give it. At the heart of this absence, works of art are in perpetual dissolution and in perpetual motion, each one being but a marker of time, a moment of the whole, a moment that would like desperately to be this whole, in which absence alone rests without rest. And because this wish is impossible, the work itself, as it becomes more and more conscious of this impossibility, always reaches further to assert itself as a pathetic sign, a fascinating arrow, pointed in the direction of the impossible.

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From Malraux's remarks on metamorphosis, one of the possible conclusions that he might have reached is the idea that the masterpiece is no longer very meaningful, is always more threatened. He alludes to it quickly when he questions himself regarding an "absolutely free art." "A symptomatic element, which no painting had ever known before, begins to develop in our art. Let us call it, for lack of another word, a spot. A spot that is not connected to the structure of the canvas nor to its composition in the traditional sense; which is not, furthermore, an accent in its construction, nor as in Japan an accent of its representation.* On the contrary, the spot seems to be the canvas's reason for being, as if it only existed through the spot. . . . In Miró, as formerly in Kandinsky, sometimes in Klee, all subordination has disappeared; one is tempted to speak of an art of one dimension. But this spot seems to push the painter to destroy the painting in the same way as the writing of certain Picassos [does]. . . . We touch the provisionally extreme point of our painting." This extreme point (if, as Malraux says, "every major discovery is projected onto all of the past") thus warns us that since there is the Museum, there can no longer be true works, real repose (nor perhaps any Museum), and that all masterpieces tend to be but brilliant traces of an anonymous and impersonal passage, which would be that of art as a whole, orienting and dispersing itself toward the spot. There can be no doubt that works of art attract us less in themselves than as the dazzling marks that make the passionate development of an artist visible to us, the movement expressing his specific contestation and, through it, the contestation of art having become stability and repose—and every artist appears to us in turn as the trace, not destined to endure but perhaps to be erased, a trace that art has left in search of its extreme point. This is why it is difficult to make out the difference that Malraux, who is concerned with culture, energetically maintains between savage or crude art and the art of masterpieces. For him, the drawings of children or "madmen" do not belong to art, because they manifest a possession and not a mastery. "The child is artistic but is not an artist in that he is possessed by his painting, in that the artist finds support in a work—be it his own—which he seeks to surpass, something the child never does. Furthermore art is not dreams, but the possession of dreams." Which also brings him to write the following: "We would not, without remorse, dare to describe as a masterpiece anything but those works that make us believe, as secretly as it may be, in the mastery of man." This may be, but then one must give up the Museum, the perspective without perspective of the Museum, which is itself, alone, the sole true artist, which is just as capable of making one perceive the essence of artistic creation in the drawing sketched by the chance of a hand—in the fortuitously happy mark of an artist who had not intended it—as a great creator is capable, as Kandinsky said, of transforming into painted work the residues that the disorder of tubes has marvelously thrown upon his palette.

Art is no longer to be found in the "perfection" of *a* work; it is *nowhere*, and if the Museum has meaning, it is because it seems to be this "nowhere," the anxiety and the powerful negation of which it conveys. Certainly we want to admire masterpieces; we even become attached to each one of them through a fascination that willingly excludes all others. And it is also true that the work of art, before it destroys or proudly offers itself to the erasure of meta-

morphosis, would like to eternalize itself for a moment and, for a moment, become equal to all of art. But to become equal to art is already to return to absence, and absence alone is "eternity." The image, we feel, is joy, for it is a limit beside the indefinite, the possibility of suspension at the heart of a shifting movement: through it, we believe ourselves to be the masters of an absence become form, and the dense night itself seems to open itself to the resplendence of an absolute clarity. Yes, the image is joy—but close to it lies nothingness; nothingness appears at the limit of this image, and all the power of the image, drawn from the abyss in which it is founded, cannot be expressed except by calling to nothingness. Citing a famous line from his last novel, Malraux turns it into the song of glory of artistic creation: "The greatest mystery is not that we were thrown by chance between the profusion of matter and the profusions of the stars; rather, it is that in this prison we drew from ourselves images so powerful as to negate our nothingness." But perhaps one must add that the image, capable of negating nothingness, is also the gaze of nothingness upon us. It is light, and it is immensely heavy. It shines, and it is the diffuse thickness in which nothing reveals itself. It is the interstice, the spot of this black sun, a laceration that gives us, under the appearance of a dazzling brilliance, the negative in the inexhaustible negative depths. This is why the image seems so profound and so empty, so threatening and so attractive, always richer in meanings than those with which we provide it, and also poor, null, and silent, for in it this dark powerlessness, deprived of a master, advances; it is the powerlessness of death as a beginning-again.

§ 3 Museum Sickness

I draw the following remark from one of Curtius's essays: "The possibility of always having Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare, Goethe completely at our disposal shows that literature has a different manner of being than art." A striking remark, at first almost obvious. However, we quickly realize that this is falsely obvious. Curtius seems to be writing at a time in which there are no long-playing records, no audiovisual means of communication, no museums, and certainly not the "imaginary Museum," which the improvement in the technology of reproduction continues to enrich with prodigious generosity. That art and all of art can be brought to each person, at any moment, is the considerable event that Malraux has made perceptible to us and from which he drew a new outlook and seemingly a new exigency for artistic creation. We cannot forget this. But we are aware that this change could not have occurred by accident. Technical advances give us art, just as they give us the earth; they give us possession of everything and access to everything through a power of domination that scares some and drives others but can be stopped by no one. Let us not linger on this fact, which is of the first order, and let us take another look at Curtius.

He would perhaps say to us (if he could still speak to us), I doubt that a work of art is reproducible, when, in fact, it is the characteristic of great literary works to be transmitted without loss of sub-

Words from one shore to the other shore, speech responding to someone who speaks from the other shore and where, even in our life, the measurelessness of the movement of dying would like to complete itself. And yet when the event itself comes, it brings this change: not the deepening of the separation but its erasure; not the widening of the caesura but its leveling out and the dissipation of the void between us where formerly there developed the frankness of a relation without history. In such a way that at present, what was close to us not only has ceased to approach but has lost even the truth of extreme distance. Thus death has the false virtue of appearing to return to intimacy those who have been divided by grave disagreements. This is because with death all that separates, disappears. What separates: what puts authentically in relation, the very abyss of relations in which lies, with simplicity, the agreement of friendly affirmation that is always maintained.

We should not, by means of artifice, pretend to carry on a dialogue. What has turned away from us also turns us away from that part which was our presence, and we must learn that when speech subsides, a speech that for years gave itself to an "exigency without regard," it is not only this exigent speech that has ceased, it is the silence that it made possible and from which it returned along an insensible slope toward the anxiety of time. Undoubtedly we will still be able to follow the same paths, we can let images come, we can appeal to an absence that we will imagine, by deceptive consolation, to be our own. We can, in a word, remember. But thought knows that one does not remember: without memory, without thought, it already struggles in the invisible where everything sinks back to indifference. This is thought's profound grief. It must accompany friendship into oblivion.

Notes

Chapter 1

1. Georges Bataille, *La Peinture préhistorique: Lascaux ou la naissance de l'art* (Skira).

2. The word *transgression* certainly does not have the same meaning in each of these two moments. It would require lengthy elaborations to try and justify the use of this word in the first case. It seems, however, that later, when man in progress comes to surround himself with certain prohibitions, it is because of the fortuitous "transgression" of the gaps through which nature has, as it were, exceeded and transgressed itself as far back as the distant *Dryopithecus*. As strange as this may appear, the subsequent possibility of prohibition perhaps always arises from, and forms itself upon, an initial transgression. First we "transgress," and then we become conscious of the way thus opened by establishing bounds, defenses, which often limit us at other points altogether: the law, always breached because it is unbreachable.

Chapter 2

1. This text was written in 1950, when the last of the three volumes of *La Psychologie de l'art* appeared. All three volumes were published by Albert Skira, beginning in 1947, in an edition that Malraux has since substantially revised (*Les Voix du silence*, Gallimard).

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