



GILLES DELEUZE

Painting and the Question of Concepts

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I

Forgive my hesitations in advance. So, last time, we started this kind of... I don't know what, about painting and I tried to grasp something that... Because this strikes me. Again, what I say has no value, it goes without saying, no universal value. Every time I would like – it's up to you to see if another painter of whom I haven't thought, if something is suitable or not – anyway, what struck me in a certain number of painters, was the presence on the canvas of a true catastrophe.

And my question was, actually, what is this rapport, not between painting and catastrophe, but this deeper rapport between a catastrophe and the act of painting? As if the painter had to pass through this catastrophe. Henceforth I tried, and this is all we did last time, I tried to see if there was something we could call, I don't know, by a very vague word, a first, not absolute first, but for us, a first concept properly of painting. A kind of pictorial concept.

And with the help of texts written by painters, we created a kind of concept, a first concept of catastrophe germ, or chaos germ, as if the painting contained this catastrophe germ from which something would emerge. And, in a certain number of painters, this catastrophe germ is visible. So, that obviously poses a problem. In the work of those where it is not visible, can we say that it is still there, but virtual or invisible? These are things I dare not even address, we must be more solid to even ask this question, without it being completely verbal or completely literary; but anyway, in certain painters it [catastrophe germ] is obvious. And certain painters tell us about this catastrophe through which they pass, again, not personally, although it can have many personal consequences on their own equilibrium; but it's not about saying that they pass through it personally because this is very secondary; what passes through it is the painting, it's their painting. And perhaps the most striking text was by Paul Klee, when he talks about these two moments: the gray point as chaos and this gray point that leaps over itself in order to unfold as a germ of space, it leaps over itself and I was trying at least to understand or to interpret it as if there were two grays, these two states of gray, the gray black-white leaps over itself, becomes the gray green-red, that is to say the matrix of color.

Fine, is then this chaos germ that through which the painting must pass in order to... what? For the light to be born, or – and here we see all kinds of possible answers – for the color to be born.

Hence, the admirable title of Turner's stacks: "Birth of color," "beginning of color," and this theme that traverses all the painters, that finally the painting, the painter puts himself in



the situation of a creation of the world or a beginning of the world. What would this mean if not precisely that he passes through this chaos catastrophe, he introduces it on the canvas so that something might emerge from it, which is what? Which is obviously no longer the world of objects. It can no longer be under any circumstances the world of objects, but the world of light-color. Now, you understand that – I was insisting on this – there is no general formula of the chaos catastrophe, the chaos germ or the catastrophe germ. It's obvious that Van Gogh's chaos germ is completely different – and I'm giving examples from close time frames – from Cézanne's chaos germ. In addition, it is also completely different from Gauguin's chaos germ, all of this is... all the more so from Klee's chaos germ. So, there are chaos germs that are very, very singularized, on which will already play what we'll call the style of the painter; and what will emerge from them will also be very different.

The painters of light, I think that – although the painters of light can be great colorists – I think that the painters of light who attain color through light, and the painters of color who attain [inaudible comments] the painters of light, who attain color through light, and the painters of color, the colorists who attain light through color, well, you see, there are absolutely different techniques, it goes without saying.

So, when I talk about a chaos germ, I don't mean at all something undifferentiated, on the contrary, it is rather signed, there is already there the signature of the painter. And so, last time I was just saying chaos germ; it so happens that a contemporary painter has a word that intrigues me and is of great use to me, so I repeat, it's Bacon, when he calls this chaos germ a diagram. He says: "yes, in a painting, there is a diagram" and it was the quote that I had read to you, even in a portrait [...] and what is a diagram? He tells us "the diagram," and I think we need to pay attention to the word he uses. A diagram is a possibility of fact, and so what interested me – it almost gives me the idea, finally, of what we're doing here, talking about painting – was a logic of painting, which doesn't mean at all reducing painting to logic, but considering that there is a logic specific to painting. Well, this word, "diagram," would serve me all the more that it is frequently and currently used, as I was telling you, by certain British and American logicians; the theories of the diagram are everywhere, and what I would like to do, among other things, in order to reach more logical or philosophical considerations, would be to try to see if painting can provide us with the elements, some elements in any case, for a theory of the diagram. But anyway, you see, for the time being, because this diagram or this chaos germ, I tried to situate it in the time of the act of painting, and I say, yes, very simply, could we not say this, even if we are to correct it later.

Well, it's like the second moment in the three moments of the act of painting. It's in that sense that I was saying, you know, in a painting, there is always an implicit synthesis of time. And what are these three moments? Well, I was saying that the painting is in immediate communication with a before-painting moment (*un avant peindre*). The painting cannot be thought prior to a before-painting (*un avant peindre*), that is to say, the painting fundamentally has a pre-pictorial dimension. And I invoke for myself this long text by Cézanne, where he talks about everything that happens before he starts painting. It's precisely this pre-pictorial dimension that already belongs to the painting. Now, it's based on this pre-pictorial dimension that the diagram positions itself as a second time, hence this question: "What is it [the diagram] going to do with respect to the second time?" "What is it going to do, sorry, with respect to the first time?"

If there is definitely visible or non-visible in the painting, a belonging and a pre-pictorial dimension, we don't know yet in what consists this dimension. All I can say is that the necessity or the chaos-germ, that is to say the diagram will find its necessity in a certain function that it performs in relation to this first pre-pictorial dimension. What is it [the diagram] going to do?



It is going to act, literally, as a kind of zone of interference, of cleaning, in order to allow what? To allow, undoubtedly, the advent of painting. We're going to have to clean up, to scramble.

Fine, let's suppose that for the third time to come out... So, you see, I have my kind of temporal dimension of the act of painting, the pre-pictorial dimension, the diagram that is going to act we don't know yet how on this dimension, in such a way that might emerge from the diagram what? Let's go back to Bacon's words. The diagram is not yet the pictorial fact. Oh, so there would be a pictorial fact? Perhaps there is a pictorial fact.

Why is it that when critics speak about painting, there is always a word that everybody, many people use, the theme of presence. Presence, presence, it is the simplest word to describe the effect of painting on us, and you notice that I'm not making any distinction for the time being, there is no reason for it, whether it is a Mondrian square or a figure of very classical painting, there is no need for it, there is a kind of presence. Presence, what does it mean when critics use this word? It is used to tell us – and obviously what we know well thanks to them, thanks to ourselves, uh – it's not representation. Presence is... what is it? We don't know very well; we know above all that it is different from representation. The painter has brought forth a presence, namely a portraitist, well, he doesn't represent the king, he doesn't represent the queen, he doesn't represent the little princess, he brings forth a presence. Okay, then it's a convenient word. It's another way of saying that there is a pictorial fact. Where does the pictorial fact come from? Well, after all, all the vocabularies suit us, so my three moments: the pre-pictorial moment, which, in a way, I insist again, belongs to the painting; then the diagram; then the pictorial fact that emerges from the diagram.

Ok, we take this as a point, again it's a hypothesis because it'll have to be revised, all that. Let's speak Latin because it is... I'm thinking of a text by Kant, in a completely different field, where he uses a Latin terminology distinguishing...; it's good actually, it is a beautiful page where he distinguishes the datum and the factum, that is to say, in French it's less pretty, the given and the fact. And he says: "you know the fact is something completely different from the given." Well, I'd say that my first time, the pre-pictorial dimension, is the world of the givens. What is given? So, my question becomes more specific, it will help us: what is given on the canvas before the painting begins?

Fine, I emphasize this because there is a kind of platitude, quite recent, which is a catastrophe, it seems to me, it is a catastrophe because it's such a distortion of the real problem, either to write or to paint... that makes everything childish. And I think it's a theme that, generally those who support it claim to be influenced by Blanchot – but it's simply an erroneous interpretation of Blanchot who never said anything stupid – whereas the theme they draw from him is incredibly stupid.

This theme, which is ruinous in literature, is the theme of the writer in front of a blank page. It's silly, but ridiculously silly, and henceforth the problem of writing is: "my God, how I am going to fill this blank page?"

So, there are people who write books about this, about the vertigo of the blank page. You understand, we don't really see why someone would want to fill a blank page, there is nothing missing from a blank page, I mean, I see very few themes as stupid as this one, which is entirely clichéd. The anxiety of the blank page, you can even add a bit of psychoanalysis to this, the blank page... And sometimes people write novels of up to eighty pages, a hundred and twenty, a hundred and forty pages about this relation of the writer with the blank page.

I'm saying that it is of an unfathomable stupidity, because if someone sits in front of a blank page, he is not going to fill it, it's forced; moreover, this is accompanied by such a conception of writing and so stupid that, you understand, it's just the opposite. When you have something to write, or when you estimate, I'm not saying at all... I'm not making a distinction between true and fake writers, it's more general... if you have something to write



you mustn't think that you are... it's the third, it's the one looking over your shoulder who says: "oh, he hasn't written anything yet..." "Okay, I haven't written anything yet."

But what is the difference between... my poor head, my excited brain and the page? None, in my opinion, none. Namely, there are already many things, there are far too many things on the page, there is no blank page. There is a blank page objectively, that is to say a false objectivity for the third party who is watching, but when it comes to your own page, it is cluttered, it is completely cluttered, and that's exactly what writing means. That the page is so cluttered that there is no room to add anything at all.

So much so that writing will fundamentally be "erasing," it will fundamentally be "deleting." What is on the page before I start writing? I would say there is the infinite world, forgive me, the infinite world of stupidity. There is this infinite world... or rather, how is writing a test? It's just that you don't write like this, with nothing in your head, you have many things in your head. But in the head, in a way, everything is on the same plane, namely what is good about an idea and what is easy and clichéd. It's on the same plane, it's only when you act through the activity of writing that this bizarre selection where you become "act" happens, I'd say the same thing for speaking. When you have something in your head, before speaking, but there are plenty of things, yet everything is on the same plane... no, in a way not everything is on the same plane, but it's useless editing in your head, there is the test of acting it out either by talking or by writing, which is a fantastic elimination, a fantastic purging.

So, your page is full, full of what? I would say of ready-made ideas and you would have a difficult time finding them original. Ready-made ideas, that doesn't necessarily mean ideas that others also have, you may very well have your own ready-made ideas, entirely your own, although they are ready-made. They are ready-made ideas. Facile, facile, the type of ideas you have when you are eighteen years old [...] and of which you are ashamed when you wake up. No, [it's] too facile all that, not serious. You understand, the world of ideas, once again, has never been justiciable of the true and the false. It is justiciable of much finer categories. The important, the essential and the inessential, the remarkable and the ordinary, etc. As long as it is in your head, well, you can take very ordinary things for remarkable things. But it's not innocent, this kind of confusion, when you take something ordinary for something remarkable, it affects the content of the idea. Not just formal stuff, so that's why you always have books about which you say – I don't know if you've had this experience – but anyway, no, this is not ok, it's childish. And we would have a difficult time saying in what respect this is false. No, it's not false, it's nothing – while the guy seems to find his ideas great, there is something in you – and there are no grounds for discussion.

That is why discussions are always shit, you know. This is not the place for a discussion at all. I cannot tell someone why their idea isn't splendid, eh, it's impossible to say. Fine, that's simply what we have in our head, the world of ready-made ideas, either collective ideas, or even personal ideas. A personal idea is not a good idea because it's personal... There are some ready-made ideas that are, however, just mine, that are facile; I can, at a pinch, say them in conversation, but if I test them in writing, I say to myself but what on earth is this? What am I saying, is it worth writing this down? Well, if we ask ourselves that a lot, I'm not saying that we succeed, we are wrong like everyone else but we are mistaken less often, we must have urgent questions [inaudible comment].

I turn to painting, that's what interests me: it's also idiotic to think that the canvas is a blank surface, no more than paper. A canvas is not a blank surface, I think painters know that well. Before they start, the canvas is already full, it is filled with what, before they start? Again, it's for the eye of the guy who walks around and sees – so he sees a painter, he looks and then says: "you haven't done much there, huh, there's nothing." As for the painter, if he has trouble getting started, it's precisely because his canvas is full. Full of what? Full of the worst. And you



understand this, otherwise painting wouldn't be a job... the canvas is full of the worst, the problem will be to remove, to really remove these things, these invisible things that have already overtaken the canvas, which is to say evil is already there. What is evil? What are the ready-made ideas about painting? Painters have always used a word to designate, well not always, but there is a word that's become common currency to designate what fills the canvas before the painter begins, it's cliché, one cliché, several clichés. The canvas is already filled with clichés.

So much so that in the act of painting there will be, as in the act of writing, that which has to be presented, although it is quite insufficient, a series of subtractions, of deletions. The necessity to clean the canvas. So, would that be the role, at least a role, the negative role of the diagram? The necessity to clean the canvas to prevent the clichés from taking. What's so terrible about clichés? Well, we can say, and indeed, people say that after all currently, painters, it's rather worse than before, if we had to say something, it's true in a way. I don't want to repeat those analyses on the existence of a world of simulacra, authors like Klossowski, for instance, have done them too well; although Klossowski understands simulacrum in a very erudite way, it also includes this aspect, the cliché, the ready-made. We live, we are often told, we live in a world of simulacra, we live in a world of clichés. No doubt, it is necessary to question progress, certain technical developments, in the field of images, the photo-image, the cinema-image, the television-image, etc. Oh well, this whole world of images, but this doesn't exist only on screens, it exists in our heads, it exists in rooms, it exists in a room, it's truly Lucretian, you know when Lucretius talks about simulacra that go around the world, that cross spaces in order to come from some place to hit our heads, to hit our brains, all that.

We live in a world of clichés, there are posters, there is all that, fine. All that, at the extreme, is on the canvas before the painter begins. And what is catastrophic is that as soon as a painter has found something, it becomes a cliché, and very fast today there is a production, infinite reproduction of the cliché, which makes the consumption extremely quick. Well, war against the cliché, that is the painter's battle cry, I think. Now, the painter knows that there are personal clichés as well as collective clichés, that the painter can have his little cerebral idea, his little idea of something new. But every cerebral idea in painting is a cliché. Even if that's his own personal cliché, it's still a cliché. I don't very much like the phrase by Oscar Wilde that's always quoted, namely, "it is nature that starts to resemble such painter." It's not the painter who copies nature, it's nature that once the painter exists, then indeed, for instance, we start to say of a landscape, oh look, this is a Renoir. To me, this doesn't seem so much a compliment for the painter, it only really shows the speed with which an act of painting becomes a cliché. I start saying in front of a woman: "ah, a real Van Dongen," in front of a landscape: "oh, this is a Renoir," cliché, cliché, cliché. Perhaps the painter who struggled – eventually, his clichés, you'll tell me, don't have any objective existence on the canvas. Okay, I'm saying that they have a virtual existence, a force, a weight. How will the painter avoid the clichés, both the clichés that come from outside and that already force themselves on the canvas, and the clichés that come from him?

It will be a struggle with the shadow, because his clichés don't exist objectively, eh, once again we believe in the white surface, and yet, they [the clichés] are there. In any case, for the painter, they are there. The one who pushed, to my knowledge, I don't know, all of them had this drama, how to escape the clichés, even a cliché that would be entirely theirs, it's a frightening struggle.

Regarding the rapports between painting and photography about which I'd like to speak later, but now, I would still launch a theme, because I find it relevant at this point. Regarding the rapports between painting and photography and what painters may have learned from photography, or the relevance of photography in relation to painting, two things seem to me



very, very questionable. Um, you understand, you have to distinguish, you have to distinguish, because even the painters who use photos, what is this about? What is this about, the painters who use photos, who use photos today? I'm thinking of a painter, I don't know what you think of him, if um, maybe, he only suffers from an excess of talent. There is something, um, it's Fromanger. In one of his periods, Fromanger used photos in a way that seems very, very interesting to me. This was his method. We'll see if we won't find again our diagram story. What was he doing? In a period, during a time, it was the time when he used photos the most, he would go walking in the street, well, it was his way of looking for the motif, he would stroll in the street, with a photographer, a press photographer, a newspaper photographer. And he would photograph street scenes, especially shops, several shots, and that's what he was doing, and I'm asking you to see where the act of painting starts in this process. He wasn't the one taking the photos, he makes that very clear, and it's obvious that when we see a photo, um, esthetically worthless, [there is] no esthetic claim. Does the photo have the right to make aesthetic claims? It's a very interesting problem, I think, quite interesting. But that wasn't even in question, since the photos were purposely instant press photos; he would take twelve, twelve of the same scene or of the same shop. Fromanger would select from the twelve photos, he would select, he would select.

That's where the act of painting was already starting, yet he had painted nothing. There was already an act there, he chose a photo, based on what? He had an idea in his head, what was his idea? There is clearly an intention, what was the intention to paint, and to paint what in Fromanger's case, from the point of view of that technique? Well, what was his idea, his little idea? He would choose a photo from twelve or ten, depending on a color, which had to be, which had to become the dominant color of the painting to be made. Yes, they were black and white photos, oh yes, I forgot to specify that they were black and white photos. Fine, he would select a photo, like this, so he had twelve photos, he would look at the technical quality of the photo, but if needed he would pick a photo of a lower technical quality because it seemed more compatible with, the scene vaguely brought to his mind a color. Let's imagine a scene that would evoke for him a violet, a very specific violet, he would say: "oh, well yes, that scene, I see it in violet." Then, he would choose the photo that seemed to him the most compatible with – it was already a painter's choice – this violet he had in his head, that the scene had vaguely evoked for him. What was he doing with it? And I can already say: the act of painting began at the level of this first choice. He would project the photo on the canvas. Fine, he would project the photo on the canvas. I like this technique a lot because, I'm not saying that it is a technique that's very, um... Besides, it must be abandoned, one can make a series, a painter can make a series like that, and if he stops there, it obviously becomes a "cliché" in turn. He had had an idea, indeed, pop art had sometimes had similar techniques, but that specific technique, no, it was a little variation, it was a Fromanger variation.

Okay so what did he do from that point on? You see, he wasn't painting at all on a blank canvas, even apparently. There was a kind of truth of painting, which was already emerging, there was the projection of the photo on his canvas. Photo of no aesthetic value, and deliberately worthless. If there had been a photo with even the slightest artistic claim, he wouldn't have been able to work, I think. So, his canvas had to be filled with the image of the image, with the projection of the photo. I think that finally...

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... his idea of a dominant color, well, his violet for instance, and he would make a first scale. He was a painter, that's what being a painter meant. He would make a first scale. Scale



that I'm going to call, you'll see why, "scale of light." He would make his scale of light. You see to what extent we are already, it's getting very close, indeed, you will have to ask me the question I won't answer:

"And he would replace the initial cliché with a new cliché." Obviously, that's why... he couldn't carry on with this technique for a long time. Fine, he would make his scale of light, and what does that mean? He would have the photo projected and he would paint everything in violet, the chosen violet, but going from light zones to dark zones.

What did that mean in terms of painting? It means that for the light zones, he mixed his violet with white (this is an act of painting), and for the dark zones there was less and less white and in the end no white at all, it was the pure violet that gushed straight out of the tube. Let's see. He would make a scale of light, of luminosity, obtained through the variable mixture of white and this violet. Fine. Then, what was he doing? That was for the background. Or, for example, for the shop. But the photographer had shot a street scene, I made it clear, that is to say people passing in front of the shop or people coming out of the shop, all that... The violet he had chosen was, technically, for those who know this color, a Bayeux violet, namely, a violet that we call "warm."

Later, when we'll talk about color more specifically, but most of you already know this, the contrast of colors from the point of view of tonality, the fundamental opposition is between warm and cool colors. Warm generally speaking... all of this is quite insufficient because I'm not yet talking about color, warm being a sort of... defining a color with a vector of "expansion," of movement of expansion; cool with a movement of "contraction." Among the elementary colors, yellow is called "warm," blue is called "cool." Fine.

So, his Bayeux violet was a warm violet. He had thus established his scale of light, and he was moving to a scale of colors. He would make an ascendant scale of light, towards the pure Bayeux violet. He would then make a scale of colors. Namely, the dominant "violet" being warm, he was going to paint a man in green, for example, a cool green, since there are cool greens, warm and cool being relative and dependent on hues. He would create a cool green.

So, from a color standpoint, there was this opposition between the cool green, the man in cool green and the dominant "violet." What was its purpose? The juxtaposition of the "cool green" zone in relation to violet was intended, as painters say, to warm the violet even more. Fine, let's admit that. We'll look at all this from the point of view of a very simple conception of colors. You see, when you are, for instance, in front of an impressionist painting, you always have these things, these themes: the complementary relations, the relations between warm and cool colors, how a cool color warms up more, warms up even more a warm color, etc.

Fine, so the cool green warmed the violet even more. Fine. But in relation to the cool green as a new element, what was he going to do? At that moment a whole circuit of colors appears. He was going to paint another man in yellow, in warm yellow. This time, the warm yellow, you see, wasn't in direct relation with the violet, but it was in relation with the violet via the cool green, etc., etc. He was going to do his scale of colors until the entire painting was filled.

What had he done? To come back to our theme. How is there a kind of diagram? Where was the diagram located? From the very beginning it was about one thing, it's a bad case, precisely a bad example and we'll have to ask ourselves if that's not always the case with the painters who have had a relationship with photographs. Far from using the photo as if it were an element of art, he completely neutralized the photo and the cliché. He neutralized the cliché in such a way, he projected it on his canvas (but it was entirely a way of conjuring the cliché, much more than using it) because the act of painting only started from the moment the photo was going to be cancelled in favor of a first scale of light, of an ascendant scale of light and a scale of colors. Fine.



So, there, we find my three times: the pre-pictorial moment, cliché, cliché, nothing but clichés. The necessity of a diagram that will blur, that will clean the cliché so that something might emerge: the diagram being only a possibility of fact, the cliché is the given, that which is given, given in the mind, in the street, in the perception, given, given everywhere. Fine. You see then, the diagram acts as that which will blur the cliché so that the painting might emerge. Fine. I find my three times there.

But I'm saying that perhaps nobody has waged the "fight against the cliché" as passionately, as – I would say, even if I had to justify this word later – as hysterically as Cézanne. It seems to me that there is an extraordinary conscience in Cézanne: "my canvas is full of clichés even before I start painting" and the kind of exigency that's never satisfied in Cézanne is: "how to get rid of all these clichés that are already occupying the canvas?" It's a struggle with the shadow, only, my question – and we'll see what that can mean – I feel that the true struggles are always struggles with the shadow. There are no other struggles but the struggle with the shadow. The clichés are already there, they are in my head, they are in me, they don't need... and when Fromanger brings them out, to put them on his canvas in order to destroy them and to bring out a pictorial fact, it's already a way of conjuring them. They are already there, and they are already there to such a great extent that I resume the list of dangers.

If you don't pass through the chaos catastrophe, you will remain a prisoner of the clichés and people could say: "oh yes, he has a nice brushstroke." It will be worthless, and the painter himself will undoubtedly know that it is worth nothing. Thus, not passing through the chaos catastrophe, that is to say not having a diagram, is very, very unfortunate, it means not having anything to say, not having anything to paint. There are many painters who paint and who have nothing to paint. Fine. But there is another thing: mishandling the cliché. Mishandling the cliché, fiddling with the cliché. It seems very close to the diagram, to the chaos catastrophe and yet you must feel that it is... I'm trying to... it's like a premonition of all the dangers, all the practical dangers. It's far too deliberate, "mishandling the cliché." Photographers keep doing it, mishandling the cliché. That's not how they become painters. Fine, you can always mishandle the cliché, fiddle with it. It's not... that's not okay either.

On the other hand, I was saying, the danger that Klee pointed out, if the cliché, if the diagram, if the catastrophe, if chaos overtakes everything, it's not good either. In other words, we are constantly surrounded by dangers, very, very formidable dangers. So, I'm thinking of a text, I'm not going to read it because I have trouble reading, I'm saying that I would have liked to read it to you, it's a text by Lawrence, which I think I talked to you about, you'll read it yourselves, it's in the collection of articles that appeared in French under the title "Eros et les chiens" where there is a splendid text on Cézanne. Splendid. I find the theme of the text so beautiful... Lawrence, you know, was painting watercolors, especially towards the end of his life, they are not very good, but he knew it, he knew it, he needed them. Miller also did watercolors, Churchill too but they are even worse. [Laughter]

[Inaudible comment from someone next to Deleuze] Barthes too?

Barthes was doing watercolors? Well, maybe they were good. Fine. Lawrence said: "well, there you go, you understand, this is what Cézanne is all about." And that's why I'd like you to read this text that says: "never has a painter gone so far in the preliminary fight against the cliché." Before painting. And he says, and that's where Lawrence's text interests me a lot: "but you know, Cézanne had his own clichés." And indeed, he could do... The painter who submits to his own clichés, what is it? It's when the true painter is missing; as if we were saying: "Oh, this, of course, is a Cézanne, but it's very close to a fake Cézanne." You have the feeling that he wasn't himself. For those who saw it, I was not long ago at the Modigliani exhibition, and curiously, there are Modiglianis, you almost feel... they are admirable, prodigious, but it's a painter, I don't know, there was something, forgive me, I feel a little embarrassed, as if he had



been too gifted, as if there were Modiglianis that were at the extreme, at the extreme, an excess of gift or an excess of ease. Fortunately, Cézanne had no gift. No gift at all.

So then, his fight against the cliché led him to what? To what did it lead him, this fight against the cliché? Lawrence's passages are very beautiful. At the end, he says: "well, yes... What did Cézanne achieve?" And Lawrence's very beautiful phrase, he says, "well yes, finally, he understood the fact pictorially"; what is Cézanne's fact? What he captured, what he did, what led him to painting is "the fact of the apple." The apple, he understood the apple very, very well, nobody has ever understood an apple like that. What does it mean: "understand as a painter?" Understanding an apple, that is going to be our problem, but that means making it happen as "fact," what Lawrence calls "the appleyness of the apple" (*le caractère pommesque de la pomme*). That's what Cézanne was able to paint, "the appleyness of the apple."

Fine. At the end of what, what fight against the cliché, what search where Cézanne was never satisfied? On the other hand, he says: "oh well, things are going less well with landscapes, no matter how beautiful they are." He says the problem with Cézanne was that if he understood so well the appleyness of the apple, he hadn't really understood, for instance, the feminineness (*le caractère fémininesque*) of women. And no, that... His women... And in this wonderful passage Lawrence says: "Oh well, these women, he paints them like apples and that's how he manages." [Laughter] Mrs. Cézanne is a kind of apple, but they are still brilliant paintings, it's not about... but... and Lawrence says: "it's excessive, eh, if at the end of his life, a painter will say, like Cézanne: "I understood the apple and one or two pots," it's already tremendous.

What did Michelangelo understand? We can transpose, look for... namely, what "fact" they brought? I'd say, well, Michelangelo, among others, didn't understand much, eh, you know, it's like everything, a writer doesn't understand much, a philosopher doesn't understand much, we mustn't exaggerate... they are not people who understand like that... a painter doesn't just paint anything. Fine, what did Michelangelo understand? He understood, for instance, and it's quite an accomplishment, he understood "a large male back." Not a woman's. A large back of a woman or a small back of a woman would be a completely different thing, that would be other painters. A large back of a man. An entire life for "a large back of a man," okay, a lifetime for "a large back of a man." Well, that's worth Cézanne's apple. As Lawrence says, these are not Platonic ideas.

Fine, Michelangelo also understood other things, but still, it's always rather limited, what a painter can understand, namely the pictorial facts that he brings to light. Well, then, what are these, since I'm talking about the facts. I cannot say everything I say... it seems to me that it's sometimes connected to such and such a painter but there are also things that are valid for painting or that are not valid for painting in general.

I mean, it's always been like this, the painter's task, to bring forth the pictorial fact, to fight against the givens, yes, I resume my three times, which are a bit academic but let's hope we'll get something out of it: the fight against the ghost or against the givens, the establishment of the diagram or of the chaos catastrophe and, what comes out of it, namely: the pictorial fact.

So, I would almost say, it's not contradictory, it's always existed in painting but I'm saying to myself, well, it has always existed but in a more or less latent way. I was talking about Michelangelo earlier. I would almost say that his importance in painting for me is that he is, maybe, maybe, eh, I should nuance all this, one must always nuance a lot, he is the first painter who brought to light in its most raw form what a pictorial fact was. I think that if we had to date this notion, it would date back to Michelangelo.

So, if we try a little, now, I take a completely different painter with respect to the periods and the style of those I had considered last time, I say: "the pictorial fact" is born in its reality,



that is, it establishes itself on the canvas with Michelangelo. That would be the contribution, Michelangelo's unfathomable contribution.

So, if my impression is true, I'm thinking now is the time to try to specify what it is that we could call the pictorial fact as opposed to the pre-pictorial givens. Again, the pre-pictorial givens are the world of clichés, in the broadest sense of the word, namely, that against which or the world of ghosts, that against which or the world of fantasy or the imaginary world, anything you want, all that, I'm including it... that is the world of the givens, it's with all of this that the painter has to break. If he stays there, he's lost. If he stays there, he'll be a pretty little painter and that's all. But then, the pictorial fact why... it seems to me that it's Michelangelo who, in a way, invents the pictorial fact, which doesn't contradict the idea that I also have that... it's always existed but it is he who brings it to light, who makes us see it. I'm sticking to anecdotes because it'll help us make headway.

It's first with Michelangelo that the status of the painter really changes. I mean, the painter, he clearly had to have his whole personality, he also had to have his epoch, the era is good for that, but the painter stops being a guy who executes orders. I mean, the others, it didn't stop them from being great and from doing whatever they wanted but they weren't arguing, eh, if a Pope... was placing an order, they weren't arguing. What's new with Michelangelo, which is very important in terms of pure anecdote?

The first anecdote I remember about Michelangelo is that Julius II told him to do this. And Julius II has very specific ideas about what he wants and nothing else. Nothing else. Michelangelo does something completely different. In addition, he talks with the Pope, he convinces the Pope, and finally the Pope is fed up and he gives him, as they say, *carte blanche*. Well, that's something new. Okay, you'll tell me, what does this mean pictorially, this anecdote that would otherwise be of little interest?

Well, what does that mean? I'll tell you a second anecdote. Michelangelo is one of those who exhibit – maybe this existed before, maybe it was less visible – exhibit a splendid indifference to the subject. So obviously all the painters, we'll see that, is it true? but maybe the subject is part of the cliché. The subject or the object represented may have always been, for all the painters, the equivalent of the cliché and it's certainly that which always had to be blurred for the pictorial fact to emerge. In other words, the cliché has always been the object. Fine. So, the cliché was blurred, the object was blurred, in order to bring out what? Well, the answer is simple: the pictorial fact that was already light and color. Fine.

But it turns out that with Michelangelo this indifference to the object or the subject takes on a kind of insolence such as – knowing which Biblical scene Michelangelo represents, knowing what the characters in the background are doing – and we are almost ashamed to ask these questions. The fact that we're ashamed to ask these questions is that especially with Michelangelo, we are ashamed to ask these questions – we feel really stupid when we say: “but what are these four men in the background?” For instance, four men in the background of the Holy Family, all naked, with an attitude that... from the point of view of figuration we can only call a pronounced homosexual attitude. What are these four men doing? We feel embarrassed to ask a question like that because it is so stupid. Fine. It's... Fine. In the scene, they are doing nothing. What is this scene? It's called the Holy Family. Okay. Fine. Splendid indifference to the subject in there.

That's where I want to go anecdotally. He is commissioned to paint a battle, a famous battle. Very well. He says: “okay.” And what does he do? He won't do the painting, he won't be able to do it. He does a preparatory drawing (*carton*). What does the preparatory drawing represent? A group of naked young people. In the water, coming out of the water, and in the background, soldiers. People say: “Phew, there are soldiers, that's already something, huh.” [Laughter]. And a group... what is it doing there? It's a masterpiece by Michelangelo; these



young people naked in the water, splendid, splendid, the soldiers on the horizon. Scholars are looking for answers. Nevertheless, people are wondering why he calls it “The Battle of Cascina.” Scholars are searching. And there is a commentator at the time who says that in this battle, a small group of Florentine soldiers took a bath... and that their commander reminded them of decency – they weren’t surprised at all. Not at all. Fine. Michelangelo is not really interested in the subject. Regarding the battle, he says: “okay, I’m going to paint naked young people in the water.” He says: “they want a battle, I can’t care less...” so he invents, these naked young people who would have been surprised by the enemy bathing in the water is a purely invented episode, that’s a bit like a battle. [Laughter]

What does this mean? How is this more than just an anecdote? I’m coming back – I seem to be jumping but I’m not. All of this remains quite identical – I come back to this contemporary painter I was talking about: Bacon. In his interviews Bacon keeps saying: “there are only two dangers in painting” – and that’s not an original idea because it seems to me that it’s always been the idea of all painters – “there are only two dangers in painting, illustration, and even worse, narration.” A great art critic, Baudelaire, was already talking about these dangers: illustration and narration. And what we generally call figuration is the common concept that groups these two things: illustration and narration. So, what happens in front of certain paintings? And yes, what is he doing? Oh yes, someone cuts off someone else’s head, etc. It’s a battle, fine. There is a whole figurative aspect, a whole narrative aspect.

Fine, then you understand, by dint of making circles and always coming back to my starting point, I’d say that the fight against the cliché is the fight against any narrative and figurative reference. A painting has nothing to show and nothing to tell. That is the basis. If you want to tell something, you have to choose other disciplines, you have to choose narrative disciplines. A painting has nothing to do with a story, it’s not a story. That’s good, but at the same time, you understand, narrations and figurations do exist; they are the givens even before the painter starts to paint, they are the givens. And they are there on the canvas, the figurations and the narrations.

There are a certain number of paintings that could be very beautiful and that we already know are not great paintings, precisely because you can’t help saying: “what happened?” Not only: “what does this represent,” that would be... but: “what happened?” For instance, Greuze, is a narrative painting in what sense? It’s that you feel the need to... There is a very beautiful painting by a Dutch painter whose name I can’t recall, which shows a father scolding his daughter. And the daughter is seen from behind, an arching back. We can’t see this painting without saying: “but what is the daughter’s expression?” That’s not good, that’s not good. I mean, it can be very pretty, it can be amazing, it’s not great painting, it’s really a painting that’s inseparable from a narrative, right? You understand, it’s not okay. What bothers me ... I’m saying this... but you... it’s not at all... what bothers me terribly in a contemporary painter who is actually very good, like Balthus, is that... we constantly have the feeling that the image is taken from something that is happening. There is a story in there. I understand that those who like Balthus may find revolting what I’m saying, so I eliminate, I cross out this unfortunate example.

Fine, well, removing the narration and illustration, that would be the role of the diagram and of the chaos catastrophe. So, getting rid of all the figurative givens because figurations and narrations are given. They are given. So, making the figurative and narrative givens pass through the chaos catastrophe, through the catastrophe germ, so that something completely different emerges, namely, the fact.

The fact is what? Bacon defines it quite well and it really applies to all painting. The pictorial fact is when you have several – we see it better when there are several – when you have several Figures in the painting, without telling a story. And Bacon gives an example that



could touch us: Cézanne's "The Bathers" (*Les Baigneuses*). He says: "it's amazing, he managed to put twelve or fourteen figures," take all the versions of The Bathers, and he managed to put several figures, to make them coexist on the canvas – it is implied, otherwise it made no sense, "necessarily," "necessarily." Fine. I add "necessarily," making coexist several figures, without telling any story. If this coexistence is necessary, you then sense what the pictorial fact is. This necessity specific to painting.

I'll give a particularly famous example. A well-known 19th-century painting shows a female nude in a wood. A naked woman and clothed men. A painting that stirred up a scandal, from a figurative point of view, indeed, this naked woman and these dressed men. You grasp it pictorially when you eliminate every story. If there was a story, this story could only be disgusting. What's going on with this naked woman sitting in the grass with these dressed men? It would be a story of little perverts, right? How to remove all narrative givens, all figurative givens in order to bring out the pictorial fact of this naked body in relation to the dressed bodies, the scale of colors or the scale of light, etc.?

So, I come back to Michelangelo, to this famous painting by Michelangelo, The Holy Family. It seems that there, he is more scrupulous, he represents indeed the Holy Family and at the same time, the indifference to the subject bursts forth. You understand, it is only from the indifference to the subject that the "pictorial fact" can emerge, namely the painting generates its own "fact." And what is the "fact?" It's that there are three bodies. Baby Jesus is on the shoulders of Virgin Mary. The three figures are caught up – there, it's very well... you'll see, you have it in mind, you see immediately – in a kind of serpentine movement. This treatment of the figures came from Da Vinci, but Michelangelo carried it to a point... A serpentine movement as if the three figures were literally cast in a continuous flow. [It is] not surprising, after all, that it was a sculptor who brought to light what was to be the sculptural and pictorial fact; perhaps it was easier for sculpture to bring forth a sculptural fact. But as a painter-sculptor, Michelangelo imposes the necessary fact. He imposes the "fact" "necessarily" pictorial. This serpentine movement will, indeed, be prodigious because it gives the infant Jesus an absolutely dominating position which will then completely determine the expression of the figure. The figure of the infant Jesus has this expression figuratively only by virtue of its position in the serpentine. And the three bodies are thus cast in one and the same figure; the same figure for three bodies, that's it, there is no story. No story, no narration and the figuration itself collapses. At that moment the serpentine will distribute a whole scale of colors. The serpentine plays exactly the role of the diagram. Which breaks with the figurative and narrative givens to bring out the "pictorial fact."

The "pictorial fact" is three bodies in one figure.

Fine, "three bodies in one figure," okay, okay. The "necessity" – I can't tell you, I can't find my words, there is no problem – it's not about saying it, it's about doing it. There is a "pictorial necessity" of the same figure for three bodies, not a "figurative necessity," not a "narrative necessity," a "pictorial necessity," namely, that can only come from light and color. So, I would say that painters are fierce atheists. And at the same time, they are atheists who truly haunt, or at least, the painters of... who haunt Christianity. The manner in which they tear Christianity away from all figuration and narration so as to bring out a "pictorial fact." That's what we will have learned from this theme, why Christianity seems to them so... or why they experience it as eminently favoring the emergence of the pictorial fact. This goes back a longtime, really, to Byzantium. With Byzantium, it's already in its pure state – when I said that Michelangelo is the birth of the pictorial fact, it was idiotic, at the risk of correcting myself. Mosaic painting in Byzantium is fundamentally this foundation of the pictorial fact. Fine.

It was mostly in mosaic; as for oil painting, I think that maybe, after all, we have to wait. What was the name of the movement that coincides with Michelangelo and to which



Michelangelo actually belonged? So, I'm going to say something about this point because it interests me a lot. There is a term for it. The movement to which Michelangelo belongs, as founder, as co-founder at least, and which will last long after his death, is called Mannerism. Why was it called Mannerism? It's because the bodies have very contorted attitudes. At the extreme, they are very artificial. For instance, in the Holy Family, the four characters in the background. [They are] Very artificial, very... with sometimes homosexual stances, sometimes contorted stances. Mannerism is very interesting as... In a painter like Bacon, if you see paintings by Bacon, you singularly find – I find Michelangelo's influence on Bacon obvious. If you want to see what it is like to discover a large back of a man... he obviously had to make a triptych, he needed three. There is a triptych by Bacon that represents seen from behind, a man, a figure that is shaving. I'm showing it to you, you won't see anything, but it's just so you have an idea. I'm turning it slowly – and I'm ashamed to show you images, this really should be a course without images – did you see it? [Laughter]

Fine, you see the three male backs. It's interesting because there is a scale... the color of the reproduction is awful, I think, because it's a difficult color. Actually it's... there is a dominant ochre-red, a dominant blue on the central panel and to the right, the co-existence of blue and red. What I'm interested in is...

Let's consider a problem, because we'll have to come back to it. The question of painting, in accordance with what we have just said but which you already knew, is not to paint visible things, it's obviously to paint invisible things. Now, the painter only reproduces the visible precisely to capture the invisible. What does it mean to paint a large male back? What is it? Well, it's not painting a back, it's painting forces that are exerted on a back or forces that a back exerts. It's painting forces, not painting forms.

The act of painting, the "pictorial fact," is when the form is related to a force. Yet, the forces are not visible. To paint forces is, indeed, the "fact."

Everyone knows what Klee says about painting: "it's not about rendering the visible, it's about making visible," implying, making visible the invisible. To make visible something invisible. Fine, showing the visible is figuration. That would be the "pictorial given," which needs to be destroyed. It is destroyed by catastrophe. What is the catastrophe? We can therefore make a little progress, the catastrophe is the place of forces. Obviously, it's not just any force. "The catastrophe is the place of forces."

The "pictorial fact" is the "distorted" form. What is a "distorted form?" Distortion is a Cézannesque concept. It's not a matter of transforming, painters don't transform, they deform. Deformation as a pictorial concept is not just the deformation of the form, it's the form as a force is exerted upon it. The force has no form. It is therefore the deformation of the form that must make visible the force, which doesn't have a form. Which must make visible the force. If there is no force in a painting, there is no painting. I'm saying this because we often confuse it with another problem, which is more visible but much less important. We confuse this with a completely different problem, which is that of the decomposition and recomposition of an effect. Let's take for example, "Renaissance painting: decomposition-recomposition of depth." After some centuries, "Impressionism: decomposition-recomposition of color." Take next, "Cubism or in another way, Futurism: decomposition-recomposition of movement."

Fine. This is very interesting, but it only concerns the effects. That's not the act of painting, not at all. It's not decomposing, recomposing an effect. What is it then? I say it is to capture a force. And I think that's what Klee means when he says that it's not about rendering the visible but rendering visible.

So, the form will have to be sufficiently deformed for a force to be captured. It's not a story, it's not a figuration, it's not a narrative. And the role of the diagram will be to establish



a place of forces such that the form will come out of it as a “pictorial fact,” namely, as a deformed form, in relation to a force; it is therefore the deformation of the pictorial form that makes the non-visible force visible.

I’ll give a very simple example because there too, Bacon has strangely succeeded, it’s one of his domains, still in the series of questions for each painter. What did he understand pictorially? What did Bacon understand pictorially? Well, again, no painter understands much, eh. [It’s] Too tiring to understand something. It is not incorrect to say that Cézanne had it “for life with his apples.” Fine, Bacon understood, indeed, “a large back of a man,” in a frame, in a triptych. But it’s not inaccurate to say that this may not be the best Bacon because Michelangelo had understood the same thing in the same way.

But a large male back, that means including the relationship with forces. What kinds of forces? All sorts of forces. In Michelangelo’s case, and this would respond to these very variations of stylistic devices, sometimes it’s internal forces.

III

[Translation forthcoming]