

Roger Fry's Formalism

MICHAEL FRIED

THE TANNER LECTURES ON HUMAN VALUES

Delivered at

University of Michigan
November 2 and 3, 2001

MICHAEL FRIED is J. R. Herbert Boone Professor of Humanities and director of the Humanities Center at the Johns Hopkins University. He was educated at Princeton University, awarded a Rhodes Scholarship to Merton College, Oxford, and received a Ph.D. from Harvard University. He has been a visiting professor at many institutions, including Northwestern University, the University of Zurich, *Ecole Normale Supérieure*, Dartmouth, Harvard, and Cornell. He is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He is the author of two volumes of poetry, *Powers* (1973) and *To the Center of the Earth* (1994), and numerous scholarly works, including *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (1980), which was awarded the Louis Gottschalk Prize of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies; *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration: On Thomas Eakins and Stephen Crane* (1987), awarded the 1990 Charles C. Eldredge Prize by the National Museum of American Art; *Manet's Modernism: or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s* (1996), awarded the *Prix Littéraire Etats-Unis/France* 2000; and *Menzel's Realism: Art and Embodiment in Nineteenth-Century Berlin* (2002).

I want to begin my consideration of Roger Fry's art criticism by looking again at a familiar crux—his 1901 article on Giotto, or rather that article together with the notorious footnote he later attached to it when the article was reprinted in *Vision and Design* (1920).¹ Throughout his article Fry stresses Giotto's tradition-inaugurating mastery of an essentially dramatic mode of pictorial representation. For example, referring to the mosaic of the *Navicella* designed by Giotto for St. Peter's in Rome (ca. 1300; fig. 1), a work that is less than a shadow of its original self, Fry writes: "We can, however, still recognize the astonishing dramatic force of the conception and the unique power which Giotto possessed of giving a vivid presentation of a particular event, accompanied by the most circumstantial details, and at the same time suggesting to the imagination a symbolical interpretation of universal and abstract significance" (V, p. 130). (The symbolical interpretation Fry has in mind concerns the three-part contrast among the drifting ship and its distraught crew, the despairing Peter, "who has here the character of an emissary and intermediary, and the impassive and unapproachable figure of Christ himself" [ibid.].) The best-preserved portions of Giotto's achievement, of course, are the frescoes in the Arena Chapel in Padua, nearly every one of which, Fry asserts, "is an entirely original discovery of new possibilities in the relation of forms to one another" (V, p. 136) and at the same time is a masterpiece of dramatic narration.

Among the particular subjects Fry comments on are the *Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalen*, to which he will return in a late essay, and the Joachim and Anna cycle, culminating in the scene of Joachim's meeting with Anna (the future mother of Mary) at the Golden Gate (ca. 1305; fig. 2), in which, we are told, "Giotto has touched a chord of feeling at least as profound as can be reached by the most consummate master of the art of words" (V, p. 138). Fry then writes:

It is true that in speaking of these one is led inevitably to talk of elements in the work which modern criticism is apt to regard as

¹ Roger Fry, "Giotto," in *Vision and Design* (orig. 1920; Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1961), pp. 109–45; the footnote appears on p. 109. Subsequent page references to articles in *Vision and Design* appear in parentheses in the body of the text, with the designation V.



Fig. 1. Giotto, *Navicella*, ca 1300. St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican State. Credit: Alinari/Art Resource, N.Y.

lying outside the domain of pictorial art. It is customary to dismiss all that concerns the dramatic presentation of the subject as literature or illustration, which is to be sharply distinguished from the qualities of design. But can this clear distinction be drawn in fact? The imaginings of a playwright, a dramatic poet, and a dramatic painter have much in common, but they are never at any point identical. Let us suppose a story to be treated by all three: to each, as he dwells on the legend, the imagination will present a succession of images, but those images, even at their first formation, will be quite different in each case, they will be conditioned and coloured by the art which the creator practises, by his past observation of nature with a view to presentment in that particular art. The painter, like Giotto, therefore, actually imagines in terms of figures capable of pictorial presentment, he does not merely translate a poetically dramatic vision into pictorial terms. And to be able to do this implies a constant observation of natural forms with a bias towards the discovery of pictorial beauty. To be able, then, to conceive just the appropriate pose of a hand to express the right idea of character and emotion in a picture, is surely as much a matter of a painter's vision as to appreciate the relative "values" of a tree and cloud so as to convey the mood proper to a particular landscape. (V, pp. 138–39)

(Earlier in the article Fry remarked that "it is impossible to find in [Giotto's] work a case where the gestures of the hands are not explicit indications of a particular emotion" [V, p. 125].)



Fig. 2. Giotto, *Meeting of Joachim and Anna at the Gates of Jerusalem*, ca. 1305. Arena Chapel, Padua. Credit: Alinari/Art Resource, N.Y.

I take his reference to modern criticism to indicate two writers above all: the French painter and critic-theorist Maurice Denis, whose 1907 article on Cézanne Fry was later to translate and whose landmark essay “Définition du néo-traditionnisme,” in which a rigorously formalist pictorial esthetics was first explicitly stated, appeared in 1890; and Bernard Berenson, who in *The Florentine Painters of the Renaissance* of 1896 cautioned against “the error of judging a picture by its dramatic presentation of a situation.”² In any case, there is an obvious tension between the passage I have just cited and the footnote Fry added at the beginning of the “Giotto” article almost twenty years later. Fry writes:

² See Maurice Denis, “Cézanne” and “Définition du néo-traditionnisme,” in *Du Symbolisme au Classicisme: Théories*, ed. Olivier Revault d’Allonnes (Paris, 1964), pp. 155–72 and 33–46, respectively. The implied reference to Berenson is noted by Caroline Elam, “Roger Fry and Early Italian Painting,” in *Art Made Modern: Roger Fry’s Vision of Art*, ed. Christopher Green, exhib. cat. (London: Courtauld Gallery, October 15, 1999–January 23, 2000), p. 106, n. 96. Berenson says this apropos of Giotto.

The following, from the *Monthly Review*, 1901, is, perhaps more than any other article here reprinted, at variance with the more recent expressions of my aesthetic ideas. It will be seen that great emphasis is laid on Giotto's expression of the dramatic idea in his pictures. I still think this is perfectly true so far as it goes, nor do I doubt that an artist like Giotto did envisage such an expression. I should be inclined to disagree wherever in this article there appears the assumption not only that the dramatic idea may have inspired the artist to the creation of his form, but that the value of the form for us is bound up with recognition of the dramatic idea. It now seems to me possible by a more searching analysis of our experience in front of a work of art to disentangle our reaction to pure form from our reaction to its implied associated ideas. (V, p. 109)

I think it is fair to say that Fry held this position, more or less, for the remainder of his life, though he never quite stopped wondering whether there might not be rare instances in which dramatic expression and the expression of properly "esthetic" emotion through relations of pure form actually fused and became one (along with Giotto, it was mainly Rembrandt who kept that possibility alive for him). For the most part, however, Fry maintained that the two kinds of expression are essentially distinct, a view he continually put to the test of introspective analyses of his actual feelings before particular works.³ This is the core of his so-called formalist esthetics, the conviction that all persons capable of experiencing esthetic emotion in front of paintings (to speak only of the latter) are responding when they do so to relations of pure form—roughly, of ideated volumes in relation both to one another and to the surface and shape of the canvas—rather than to whatever dramatic expressiveness the work in question may be held to possess.

Fry's position on these matters seems dated, to say the least: it would surely be impossible to find anyone today who shares his belief that the task of an artist is essentially to communicate esthetic emotion, or that

³ Fry reflects further on these issues in "Some Questions in Esthetics," the first essay in *Transformations* (orig. 1932; Garden City, N.Y., 1956), pp. 1–57, where he essentially arrives at the same conclusion (see my discussion of his analysis in that essay of Rembrandt's *A Schoolboy at His Desk* below). Subsequent references to *Transformations* appear in parentheses in the body of the text, with the designation *T*. An important late text, "The Double Nature of Painting" (1933), acknowledges the existence of certain rare "composite" works "in which the literary element and the plastic element enter into a very intimate combination, so to speak, a sort of chemical combination" (he also speaks of them as "fusing") (in *A Roger Fry Reader*, ed. Christopher Reed [Chicago and London, 1996], pp. 387–88), though at the end of the essay it turns out that only two great masters, Giorgione and Rembrandt, come to mind in that connection (pp. 391–92). Subsequent references to items in *A Roger Fry Reader* appear in parentheses in the text, with the designation *R*.

what he means by pure form or relations of pure form actually exist. Let me quickly say that I have no wish to challenge this negative consensus, though perhaps I ought to add that despite the *prima facie* unpersuasiveness of Fry's esthetic theories I consider him a writer on art of immense subtlety and interest (I assume that this too is a widely shared opinion). Instead I propose to take the discussion of his thought in a new direction by underscoring the fact that, in his writings from the Giotto article on, the counter to form, form's "other," is not primarily subject matter, content, illustration, literariness, or representation as such—though at times he speaks of all of these in this connection—but *drama*, that is, *dramatic expression*. In the case of Giotto, the problem Fry encountered was the apparently perfect synchrony of form and drama, which led him in 1901 to conflate the two to an extent he wished in 1920 to call into question.

But other artists presented different problems. Take El Greco, whose spectacular canvas *The Agony in the Garden*, now thought to be a studio copy of the original in the Toledo (Ohio) Museum of Art (late sixteenth century; fig. 3), entered the National Gallery in 1919.⁴ In Fry's article on the *Agony* in *Vision and Design* he notes both its "melodramatic apparatus," by which he means the "'horrid' rocks, the veiled moon, the ecstatic gestures," and in general the pushing of expression to its limit, and "the extraordinary emphasis and amplitude of the rhythm, which thus gathers up into a few sweeping diagonals the whole complex of the vision" and thus "affects one like an irresistible melody, and makes that organisation of all the parts into a single whole, which is generally so difficult for the uninitiated, an easy matter for once" (V, p. 166). (Fry was impressed by the public enthusiasm for the *Agony*.) He goes on to observe:

El Greco, indeed, puts the problem of form and content in a curious way. The artist, whose concern is ultimately and, I believe, exclusively with form, will no doubt be so carried away by the intensity and completeness of the design, that *he will never even notice* the melodramatic and sentimental content which shocks or delights the ordinary man. It is none the less an interesting question, though it is rather one of artists' psychology than of aesthetics, to inquire in what way these two things, the melodramatic expression of a high-pitched religiosity and a peculiarly intense feeling for plastic unity

⁴ See Christopher Baker and Tom Henry, *The National Gallery: Complete Illustrated Catalogue* (London, 2001), p. 284.



Fig. 3. Studio of El Greco, *The Agony in the Garden*, late sixteenth century. National Gallery, London. Credit: National Gallery, London.

and rhythmic amplitude, were combined in El Greco's work; even to ask whether there can have been any causal connection between them in the workings of El Greco's spirit. (ibid.; emphasis added)

A page or so later, Fry contrasts El Greco with the leading Baroque sculptor Gianlorenzo Bernini, whose sculptures he finds equally excessive and rhetorical but whom he sees as “express[ing] great inventions in a horribly impure technical language” based on a desire to make the crowd, “including his Popes, gape with astonishment” (V, p. 168). El Greco, however, was out of touch with any public and moreover “was a singularly pure artist, he expressed his idea with perfect sincerity, with complete indifference to what effect the right expression might have on the public” (ibid.). Such courage and purity bring El Greco close, Fry suggests, to the stance of the modern artist, which also accounts for the fact that whereas nearly everyone is revolted by Bernini's sentimental

sugariness, “very few artists of today have ever realized for a moment how unsympathetic to them is the literary content of an El Greco. They simply fail to notice what his pictures are about in the illustrative sense” (V, p. 169).

This seems somewhat unlikely, but what I wish to emphasize is, first, Fry’s claim that in El Greco’s picture dramatic and formal considerations are fundamentally at odds (melodrama being a dramatic notion); and second, the related view that although the *Agony in the Garden* is formally extreme, the impulse behind that extremeness had only to do with the complete realization of an artistic idea and not at all with exerting an effect on an audience (which is why the form cannot be considered melodramatic in turn).⁵ In contrast, Bernini’s sculptures are also formally extreme, but their extremeness is compromised, made artistically null and void, by his desire for public acclaim.

The next stage in Fry’s exploration of these ideas takes place in the essay that brings *Vision and Design* to a close, “Retrospect,” despite its brevity perhaps the most important of his mainly esthetic texts. There Fry briefly discusses his early career as a connoisseur of Italian Renaissance paintings, summarizes his growing interest in modern French paintings that led to the organization of several influential exhibitions at the Grafton Galleries in 1910, 1911, and 1912 (also to his coining the term “Post-Impressionism”), acknowledges the influence on his thinking of Leo Tolstoy’s *What Is Art?* with its insistence that the end of art is not beauty but emotional communication between human beings, and—rejecting Tolstoy’s moralism—proceeds to ask: of what kind of emotions is art the expression? His answer is that, inspired partly by Clive Bell’s *Art* (1914) and by his own further reflection on modern French painting (Paul Cézanne being the central figure), he has come to conclude with Bell that “the artist [is concerned] with the expression of a special and unique kind of emotion, the aesthetic emotion” (V, p. 231); and that this has led to what he describes as “an attempt to isolate the purely aesthetic feeling from the whole complex of feelings which may and generally do accompany the aesthetic feeling when we regard a work of art” (V, p. 232).

Fry turns to a particularly challenging example, Raphael’s *Transfiguration* (1517–20; fig. 4), a work he says “a hundred years ago was perhaps

⁵ Fry’s article concludes: “For never was a work more perfectly transparent to the idea, never was an artist’s intention more deliberately and precisely recorded” (V, p. 171).



Fig. 4. Raphael, *Transfiguration*, 1517–20. Vatican Gallery, Rome. Credit: Scala/Art Resource, N.Y.

the most admired picture in the world, and twenty years ago was one of the most neglected" (*ibid.*). Fry notes that the painting depicts two events in the Gospel story of Christ that occurred simultaneously at different places, Christ's transfiguration and the unsuccessful attempt by his disciples in His absence to heal the lunatic boy. The composition thus falls into two halves, one above the other, which also happen to contrast pictorially with one another in obvious respects. In a characteristic thought-experiment, Fry imagines a Christian spectator wholly familiar with the dramatic story the picture tells, and further imagines that such a spectator is also a student of human nature who will therefore be struck by the incongruity between the usual notion that Christ's disciples were simple peasants and fishermen and the sight of "a number of noble, dignified, and academic gentlemen in improbable garments and purely theatrical poses" (*V*, p. 233).⁶ Fry then posits a different sort of spectator, one highly endowed with a special sensibility to form and either ignorant of or indifferent to the Gospel story. Such a spectator, Fry contends, will at once be struck by "the extraordinary power of coordination of many complex masses in a single inevitable whole, by the delicate equilibrium of many directions of line." That is, the spectator will "at once feel that the apparent division into two parts is only apparent, that they are co-ordinated by a quite peculiar power of grasping the possible correlations," but his emotions will have nothing to do with the factors previously mentioned (the Gospel story), "since in this case we have supposed our spectator to have no clue to them" (*ibid.*).

Fry concedes that a spectator entirely preoccupied with considerations of form is extremely rare and in particular that

owing to our difficulty in recognizing the nature of our own feelings we are liable to have our aesthetic reaction interfered with by our reaction to the dramatic overtones and implications. I have chosen this picture of the Transfiguration precisely because its history is a striking example of this fact. In Goethe's time rhetorical gesture was no bar to the appreciation of aesthetic unity [Fry had earlier quoted Goethe's remarks on the mutually complementary character of the painting's upper and lower halves]. Later on in the nineteenth century, when the study of the Primitives had revealed to us the charm of dramatic sincerity and naturalness, these gesticulating figures

⁶ Fry continues: "Again the representation merely as representation, will set up a number of feelings and perhaps of critical thoughts dependent upon innumerable associated ideas in the spectator's mind" (*V*, p. 233).

appeared so false and unsympathetic that even people of aesthetic sensibility were unable to disregard them, and their dislike of the picture as illustration actually obliterated or prevented the purely aesthetic approval which they would probably otherwise have experienced. It seems to me that this attempt to isolate the elusive element of the pure aesthetic reaction from the compounds in which it occurs has been the most important advance of modern times in practical aesthetic. (V, pp. 234–35)

And two paragraphs later Fry cites his Giotto article of 1901, in which the current of feeling associated with the dramatic idea and that stemming from his experience of pure form ran together in his mind so much that he regarded them as being completely fused. Now, however, he would say that the fusion was only apparent and was due to his imperfect analysis of his mental state (V, p. 235, paraphrased).

Again, my concern is not with Fry's claims about the nature of strictly esthetic experience so much as with his identification of considerations of drama as the antithesis to those of form, glossed as "the spatial relations of plastic volumes" (V, p. 234), and especially with his characterization of Raphael's *Transfiguration* as a work in which the "rhetorical insincerity" (ibid.) of the gestures and expressions of the figures in the lower half of the composition is so egregious as effectively to destroy one's appreciation of the painting unless it is somehow ignored or otherwise put out of mind (think back to Fry's contemporary artist in front of El Greco's *Agony in the Garden* being so caught up in contemplating the form of the work that he "takes no notice" of the melodrama of the *mise-en-scène*).

All this leads me to advance a thesis that will not surprise anyone familiar with my work on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French painting: namely, that Fry was in crucial respects an *antitheatrical* critic, one whose most habitual and determining thoughts and feelings about painting (and art in general) belong to the great tradition of antitheatrical pictorial practice and critical reflection that goes back at least to the middle of the eighteenth century in France and that found its major theoretician and founding art critic at the outset in Denis Diderot, a figure whom Fry, for reasons we shall come to, failed to recognize as a precursor.

In my book *Absorption and Theatricality*, I argue that for Diderot the central task of the painter was somehow to negate or neutralize or other-

wise deny the presence of the beholder before the painting.⁷ A painting, he insisted, had to establish the metaphysical illusion of its unawareness of or indifference to being beheld. It accomplished this effect in two mutually reinforcing ways: by depicting personages who appeared to be wholly absorbed or engrossed in their actions, feelings, and states of mind, and therefore wholly unaware of anything other than the objects of their absorption, and by relating those personages to one another and to all the other elements in the picture in so dramatically perspicuous and persuasive a manner as to give rise in the beholder to the conviction of an immediately graspable unity, the effect of unity implying the perfect closure of the composition within the borders of the painting. (The dramaturgical and theoretical instrument binding both strategies together was the *tableau*.)

The result was a new, all-or-nothing conception of the pictorial enterprise: in Diderot's writings on painting and the stage, two notions, drama and theater, that until that moment had been somewhat interchangeable emerged for the first time as opposites. The first or positive term, drama, signified the entire participation of the personages in the world of the representation; the second or negative term, theater, indicated a more or less open address to an audience as if to solicit its applause. To the extent that a painting succeeded as drama, it was free of even the slightest taint of theatricality; conversely, the least suggestion that the personages in the painting were not wholly absorbed in what they were doing and feeling but on the contrary were aware of being beheld irremediably sapped the composition of dramatic credibility. In the passages from Fry we have just examined, this corresponds to the distinction between the powerfully dramatic art of Giotto and the rhetorical or theatrical treatment of gesture and expression in Raphael's *Transfiguration*. Where Fry differs from Diderot, of course, is in his insistence that the "esthetic" viewer will not be repulsed by Raphael's treatment of gesture and expression, as the previous generation was (and as Diderot had been repulsed by what he saw as the mannered gestures and expressions of the figures in paintings by Antoine Watteau and François Boucher), but on the contrary will find a way to ignore or look past it in order to perceive the deeper formal unity that in his view makes the *Transfiguration* absolutely remarkable.

⁷ See Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (orig. 1980; Chicago and London, 1986).

But this difference in turn is more apparent than real; at any rate, I want to argue that Fry's notion of pictorial unity is itself essentially anti-theatrical, indeed that it ultimately stems from or at least has profound affinities with the theorization of unity in Diderot's art writing, in particular in certain of his *Essais sur la peinture* (1766), a text whose intrinsic brilliance and pertinence to subsequent developments have to this day not been fully recognized.⁸ First, however, I need to say just a bit more about Fry's relation to the antitheatrical tradition in which I have placed him. I have suggested that the tradition began around the middle of the eighteenth century in France, the decisive moment being the transition from Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin (I am thinking of his genre paintings of the 1730s and 1740s) to Jean-Baptiste Greuze, whose *Père de famille* enjoyed popular and critical attention in the Salon of 1755 but whose heyday was the 1760s and 1770s.⁹ On the face of it, Chardin is likely to seem absorptive and Greuze theatrical, in the pejorative sense of the latter term as it has just been defined. My argument in *Absorption and Theatricality*, however, is that the very qualities in Greuze's treatment of action and expression that have understandably drawn the related charges of theatricality and sentimentality are the consequence of the particular steps he took to immerse his personages within the world of the representation and thereby to neutralize or counteract a heightened consciousness of the presence of the beholder before the painting. It is as if starting in the mid-1750s and gaining momentum in the decades that followed what I call the primordial convention that paintings are made to be beheld came to the fore in a way that threatened to drain the representation of persons going about their ordinary business of all persuasive force, and as if in order to screen that primordial convention from view—to minimize its disruptive force—Greuze found himself compelled to heat up the action within the painting, to involve his personages in ever more emotionally tendentious narratives, to devise ever more elaborate scenarios for tying his personages together in a single, striking dramatic composition. In short Greuze, too, was with respect to intention an antitheatrical painter, though within a rel-

⁸ The *Essais* are conveniently available in Denis Diderot, *Oeuvres esthétiques*, ed. Paul Vernière (Paris, 1959), pp. 659–740. See also the discussion of Edmond Duranty's citation of the *Essais* in his *La nouvelle peinture* (1876), in Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism, or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago and London, 1996), pp. 259–60.

⁹ See the comparison between Chardin and Greuze in Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, pp. 44–61.

actively short period the particular means that he mobilized to establish the overriding fiction that his personages were wholly unaware of being beheld came to strike disenchanted viewers as theatrical with a vengeance, whence the charge of sentimentality that, with reason, has been leveled at him to this day.

Without retracing the further evolution of the antitheatrical tradition,¹⁰ I will say that the example of Greuze is representative, by which I mean that the steps that were taken and the strategies that were devised by successive generations of French painters to try to neutralize beholding came sooner or later to fall short of the desired result (I think of this as the implicit motor behind the devising of new antitheatrical strategies), until with the advent of Edouard Manet and his generation and their unexpected and unsettling stress on *facingness* the Diderotian tradition was brought not exactly to an end—absorptive paintings continued to be made and admired, theatricality continued to be an issue for some artists and critics—but rather to a state of open crisis from which it has never fully recovered. By the time Fry arrived on the scene in the first decade of the twentieth century the issue of theatricality was no longer central to advanced painting, but antitheatrical values had been largely assimilated in some of the most interesting recent criticism and theory, and he seems to have accepted them as fundamental—to have made them his own—without ever pausing to inquire as to their exact provenance.¹¹

Among other things, this meant that Fry felt no inhibition in applying antitheatrical criteria not just within the modern French tradition but across the entire expanse of painting, sculpture, and related arts of all ages and cultures: his commentaries in *Vision and Design* on El Greco, Raphael, and Bernini are cases in point, as is, to cite an almost comic instance of his willingness to range far afield, his general reservation, in the article “Some Aspects of Chinese Art” (reprinted in *Transformations*), about the makers of Chinese ritual bronzes of 500 B.C. to the effect that “you can never quite catch the artist unprepared for you, never see him so completely absorbed in his idea that he does not know you are looking

¹⁰ See in this connection Michael Fried, *Courbet's Realism* (Chicago and London, 1990); idem, *Manet's Modernism*; and idem, “Caillebotte's Impressionism,” *Representations* 66 (Spring 1999): 1–51.

¹¹ French antitheatrical critics that Fry might well have read include Jules-Antoine Castagnary, Ernest Chesneau, Edmond Duranty, Félix Fénéon, and Joris-Karl Huysmans. In the British tradition, antitheatrical attitudes are expressed by the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and William Hazlitt.

over his shoulder" (*T*, p. 93). (Fry also was put off by what he earlier characterized as "the assertive and self-conscious calligraphy of the Japanese.")¹² In fact it is possible to understand Fry's insistence on the separateness of dramatic and esthetic considerations as in part a response to the fact that so much of the supposedly great art of the past, in particular the art of the foremost Italian painters of the High Renaissance, when assessed from what may loosely be called a Diderotian point of view, now appeared rhetorical or theatrical, so that if the claim for its greatness were to be renewed and sustained a fresh basis for that claim would have to be found. For Fry, this involved an appeal to qualities of form or design, which being closed in on themselves, in that sense wholly internal to the work in question, rather than addressed to a beholder, provided an antitheatrical "core" that far outweighed in significance all other aspects of the work. (The discrepancy between considerations of dramaturgy on the one hand and of form on the other was perhaps most consistently acute in the case of Nicolas Poussin, whose art fascinated Fry for just that reason.)¹³ By the same token, if all paintings of figures in action were like the Arena Chapel frescoes, in which drama and form appeared perfectly consonant with one another, the idea of a fundamental separation between the two might never have occurred to Fry, or if it did occur to him it would not have had remotely the same force.

In this connection it is worth noting that Fry came to see High Renaissance painting as theatrical in the pejorative sense of the term several years *before* his discovery of the primacy of form, a development the

¹² In "Line as a Means of Expression in Modern Art" (1918), in *A Roger Fry Reader*, p. 337. This is said in connection with Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, most of whose drawings are held to "tend to an exuberant and demonstrative effectiveness which reminds one only too much of the assertive and self-conscious calligraphy of the Japanese." He goes on: "But everything in Brzeska's career shows that he would have rapidly outgrown this as well as all other mannerisms into which he may have temporarily fallen" (*ibid.*).

¹³ See, for example, the discussion of Poussin in *Characteristics of French Art* (New York, 1933), which includes the remark: "But perhaps, in a sense, the very insipidity and artificiality of Poussin's drama leaves us all the freer to concentrate on his formal harmonies" (p. 28). Subsequent references to this book appear in parentheses in the text, with the designation *C*. And see also the brief remarks on Poussin's *Baptism* (no further reference given) in "The Double Nature of Painting": "Well, we do see the figures in his *Baptism* making emphatic gestures; but these gestures are too conventional, too formal to convince us of the reality of such over-theatrical beings. He hardly arouses in us the idea of the inner life of his characters, but on the other hand what deep feeling emanates from the general *ordonnance* of his forms, what equipoise there is between the two sides of his composition, how well all the directions of the limbs balance and echo one another. What unshakable unity results from this diversity! . . . No, Poussin never moves us by his frigid demonstrations of antique virtue, but he is one of the great composers of plastic and spatial harmonies" (in *R*, p. 390).

origins of which are usually associated with his first encounter with two canvases by Cézanne in January 1906.¹⁴ The crucial text is a 1903 review of the English translation of Heinrich Wölfflin's *The Art of the Italian Renaissance*. Of the figures in Andrea del Sarto's sacred conversations Fry remarks:

One feels... that they are arranged entirely with a view to the effect to be produced on the spectator, and that even when they do not turn round and look anxiously at him, they are none the less preoccupied with his presence. And what is true of Del Sarto is true in varying degrees of most of the masters of the grand style. The dramatic ideal of mediaeval art, the presentment of definite personalities acting freely and unconsciously under the impulse of a strong emotional situation, gives place in the art of the High Renaissance to an essentially theatrical idea in which the scenic effect is calculated for the spectator. He no longer, as with Giotto and Masaccio, and with Leonardo, is the unseen spectator of a great and all-absorbing event; his coming is anticipated, and before the curtain rises all the actors have taken their allotted places. Even in Raphael's cartoons something of this will be felt, some sense that the poses are over-explicit, "rhetorical rather than truly dramatic" [no source given]. Michaelangelo, most people will feel, just escapes this, for though his figures sometimes display unnecessary movements in order to accomplish the simplest things, they always have an air of self-absorption in some ends of infinitely greater moment than the situation itself can explain. Certainly they never seem to become conscious of the spectator's presence; they miss being truly dramatic only because the internal drama of their own existence weighs too heavily upon them.¹⁵

¹⁴ See Fry's account of these developments in "Retrospect" as well as the discussion of the evolution of his thought in Christopher Green, "Into the Twentieth Century: Roger Fry's Project Seen from 2000," in *Art Made Modern: Roger Fry's Vision of Art*, ed. Christopher Green (London: The Courtauld Gallery, October 15, 1999–January 23, 2000), pp. 13–30; and Elizabeth Prettejohn, "Out of the Nineteenth Century: Roger Fry's Early Art Criticism, 1900–1906," in *ibid.*, pp. 31–44. See also Jacqueline V. Falkenheim, *Roger Fry and the Beginnings of Formalist Art Criticism* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1980).

¹⁵ Roger Fry, review of Wölfflin's *The Art of the Italian Renaissance* in *Athenaeum* 3974 (December 26, 1903): 863. The phrase in quotation marks—"rhetorical rather than truly dramatic"—may come from Wölfflin, but I haven't been able to find it. (The edition I have used was published in New York and London in 1913.) In any case, Wölfflin in the introduction to his book draws a sharp contrast between the immensely appealing "*naïveté* of vision and emotion" of the Quattrocento (p. 1) and the more stately and considered character of the art of the High Renaissance, which contemporary viewers, in his account, find difficult to accept. The public, he writes, "feels itself on insecure ground, and cannot tell whether it should accept the gestures and ideas of classic art as genuine. It has had to swallow so much false classicism, that it turns with zest to coarser but purer fare. We have lost faith in the grandiose. We have become weak and distrustful, and everywhere we detect theatrical sentiment and empty declamation" (p. 3).

Further on, Fry contrasts Raphael's *Transfiguration* with a painting of the same subject by Giovanni Bellini at Naples, which he prefers. "The miraculous, it is true, is absent [from Bellini's painting]," he writes, "but the superhuman is made startlingly evident by the almost ominous gravity of movement of these three mysterious forms, transfigured, indeed, but by no *coup de théâtre*, whereas Raphael's miraculous performance is just a theatrical presentment."¹⁶ By the time Fry came to write "Retrospect," his view of Raphael's dramaturgy had not changed, but the discovery of Raphael's *Transfiguration's* profound formal unity fundamentally altered his judgment of its artistic merit.

As for Fry's conception of pictorial unity, perhaps the most revealing discussion of the topic occurs in a letter of November 23, 1920, to Marie Mauron, wife of the French writer and esthetician Charles Mauron, in which Fry discusses his own landscape painting in terms of a pursuit of wholeness, "a unity where all the parts [are] bound to each other inevitably." He continues: "One can call such moments inspiration, and the whole thing is to preserve this moment of vision when one is aware of the necessity of everything. As one works one is always being sidetracked by the cold observation of unnecessary facts that bother one and that have nothing to do with the essential unity. Therefore the whole effort should be bent towards this question of unity and necessity. This perception of unity and necessity is very like the perception and comprehension of a natural law when one recognizes that many different phenomena are governed by a single principle."¹⁷ More than a century

Fry's remarks on Michelangelo might be compared with the following by Gustave Moreau (a text Fry could not have known): "Toutes les figures de Michel-Ange semblent être fixées dans un geste de somnambulisme idéal. C'est en effet presque inconscientes du mouvement qu'elles exécutent dans l'ensemble de la composition, qu'on les voit se mouvoir et agir. Trouver l'explication de cette répétition presque générale dans toutes ces figures du caractère du sommeil. Donner les raisons de cette rêverie absorbée au point de les faire paraître toutes endormies ou emportées vers d'autres mondes que celui que nous habitons" (*L'Assembleur de rêves: Ecrits complets de Gustave Moreau* [Frontfroide, 1984], p. 197).

¹⁶ Ibid. Bellini's *Transfiguration* is discussed by Fry in his early book on Bellini.

¹⁷ *Letters of Roger Fry*, ed. Denys Sutton, 2 vols. (London, 1972), 2:497. See also Fry's letter of February 20, 1913, to P. J. Atkins:

The reality of a picture is immensely greater if the spectator is not referred back by illusion to a possible exterior reality (which is stronger and more real), but is held within the reality of the artistic creation by its sheer necessity and intensity of unity. [This notion of the viewer not being referred back to the real world will be important shortly.—M. F.] As to the things that we find don't matter, they are innumerable if you consider our work from the point of view of imitative likeness, but if we succeeded (I don't say we do for a moment) every line, every tone would matter intensely to the particular unity.

and a half earlier, Diderot had called for the elimination of any incident that did not contribute directly and indispensably to the dramatic treatment of the subject, insisted that all the elements in a painting be subordinated to the central compositional idea, and put forward a causal, in that sense machinelike notion of the relations among those elements, all of which were to be understood as combining together in a single powerful effect.¹⁸ Above all a painting had to induce in the viewer a conviction of the absolute necessity of the various relationships it comprises, the experience of that conviction being a subjective criterion of artistic success, as well as implying that the relationships in question are as they are owing to the play of forces internal to the work rather than because of a desire to appeal to the beholder. (Needless to say, the conviction of unity and necessity I have just invoked is itself the product of an attempt to affect the beholder *in a certain way*.)

I don't claim that Fry could only have derived his ideas about unity from Diderot's writings; on the contrary, the issue of pictorial unity had been central first to the Italian and then to the French traditions for centuries, and Diderot's dramatic and causal (dramatic *because* causal) inflection of the issue had been assimilated by subsequent French art critics to an extent that makes any ascription of direct influence beside the point. Moreover, Fry would have disavowed an affinity with Diderot if only because of the prominence of dramatic concerns in the latter's writings on painting. From Fry's perspective, this gave Diderot's criticism a literary cast that he deplored. "Diderot's celebrated critiques of the Salons of his day are almost entirely devoted to the psychological aspects of illustration," Fry writes in "Some Questions in Esthetics." "No wonder that for him Greuze was the greatest of painters" (*T*, p. 55). For Diderot, too, chiaroscuro, contrast of light and dark, was a major resource of painting (and vehicle of pictorial unity) mainly because it lent itself to the production of dramatic effects. Not surprisingly, Fry distrusted chiaroscuro, which he saw both as serving melodramatic ends and as tending to obscure contours and hence relations of forms while dissolving the picture surface in an illusion of indeterminate depth (but there was

Indeed it is essential to us that we should never put in anything which does not matter, anything which does not count in the whole. Because anything that is not functional is actually destroying the rest. You see the whole focus of effort and attention changes fundamentally when once you give up the idea of imitative likeness and aim at the creation of absolutely *necessitated* form. (*Letters*, 1:364; emphasis in original)

¹⁸ See Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, pp. 82–92.

always Rembrandt to give him pause).¹⁹ Finally, Diderot stressed the instantaneousness with which the effect of unity was to be achieved, an emphasis often lacking in Fry, who mostly admired artists who “[allow] the motif to unfold itself gradually to the apprehension” (*R*, p. 348).²⁰ (The idea of instantaneousness returns in force in the criticism of Clement Greenberg.)²¹ So there are differences of inflection between Diderot’s and Fry’s ideas about pictorial unity. Nevertheless, I want to suggest that Fry’s conception of painting, including its emphasis on unity, belongs in its essence to the intellectual tradition keyed to considerations of drama and antitheatricity set going textually by Diderot in the 1750s and 1760s. Again, Fry would have dismissed such a suggestion, not only for the reasons I have summarized but also because, in his view, “it is only by representation of persons or events that any dramatic element can enter into a picture,”²² an assumption that effectively excludes the possibility of dramatic relations among forms. But this forecloses the issue much too abruptly, and in the remainder of this essay I shall seek to bring out even more than has already been done the Diderotian tenor of Fry’s thought.

Take, to begin with, one of Fry’s most characteristic and recurrent phrases—“almost unconscious” (and its variants). Again an again Fry says of some admired feature of a work of art under discussion that it

¹⁹ For Fry on chiaroscuro see, for example, his remarks on Caravaggio in “The Seicento,” where he notes “the relation between certain violent and unusual effects of light and the expression of what we may call melodramatic emotion” (*T*, p. 141), and on Leonardo in “The Art of Florence” (*V*, p. 150).

²⁰ This is said apropos of the art of Vanessa Bell in “Independent Gallery: Vanessa Bell and Othon Friesz.” Cf. Fry on Cézanne: “His work has the baffling mysterious quality of the greatest originators in art. It has that supreme spontaneity as though he had almost made himself the passive, half-conscious instrument of some directing power. So little seems implied at first sight in his apparently accidental collocation of form and color, so much reveals itself gradually to the fascinated gaze” (“The Post Impressionists—II,” in *R*, p. 90). See, however, Fry on Giotto in 1901: “Almost every composition [in the Arena chapel] gives one the shock of a discovery at once simple, inevitable, and instantly apprehended, and yet utterly unforeseeable” (*V*, p. 115). And indeed on Matisse in 1935: “In spite of [the violence of his paradoxes, the brevity of his allusions, the incessant equivoque], in spite of this, Matisse is nearly always legible at a glance. No one is in doubt as to what anything is or exactly where it is in the picture space even though the design is built on the strangest, most unfamiliar appositions, the oddest turns of nature’s kaleidoscope” (from *Henri-Matisse*, in *R*, p. 409).

²¹ See, for example, his discussion of “at-onceness” in “The Case for Abstract Art” (1960), in Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 4 vols., *Vol. 4: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*, ed. John O’Brian (Chicago and London, 1993), pp. 80–81.

²² “Some Questions in Esthetics,” p. 14.

came about as the result of an unconscious or (more frequently) almost unconscious choice or decision on the part of the artist. This is a major feature of Fry's discussions of Cézanne.²³ To cite just one characteristic statement: "[Cézanne's work] has that supreme spontaneity as though he had almost made himself the passive, half-conscious instrument of some directing power."²⁴ My point is that unconsciousness lines up with antitheatricity, not having a design on an audience; more precisely, under the Diderotian paradigm unconsciousness in the mode of *oubli de soi*, self-forgetting, is the infallible sign of a personage's complete absorption. Fry's harping on the *artist's* unconsciousness (or half-unconsciousness or almost-unconsciousness) thus amounts to both a displacement and a radicalization of Diderot: to the extent that an artist is imagined as unaware of doing a particular thing, it cannot be claimed that he or she did it in order to make a particular impression on the viewer.

Moreover, the issue of unconsciousness in Fry goes far beyond Cézanne. So, for example (and there are many examples), Fry in "On Some Modern Drawings" insists on a particular psychological fact: "namely, that perfect rhythmic continuity and coherence is only attainable by human beings when their activity is at least partially unconscious. To fix the attention on any gesture is to deprive it fatally of that specific quality of rhythmic unity" (*T*, pp. 266–67). (Henri Matisse was for Fry *the* exemplar of rhythmic unity understood in those terms, though in 1918 he was delighted to find certain younger British artists conceiving of a drawing "as the almost unconscious overflow of a vivid aesthetic experience rather than as a performance before an imagined public.")²⁵ Walter Sickert, an artist (and writer on art) about whom Fry's feelings were often ambivalent, is praised for "the exquisite choice, none the less perfect that it seems to be half-unconscious, of the few tones of violet-grey, dull maroon, orange, and green, out of which he builds his

²³ As Richard Shiff remarks in the chapter on Fry in *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism: A Study of the Theory, Technique, and Critical Evaluation of Modern Art* (Chicago and London, 1984), pp. 143–52.

²⁴ "The Post-Impressionists—II," in *R*, p. 90. It's perhaps worth noting in this connection that Fry begins his Giotto essay of 1901 with a discussion of St. Francis and his teaching, which includes the observation that Francis "was actually a poet before his conversion, and his whole life had the pervading unity and rhythm of a perfect work of art" (p. 111). Fry continues: "Not that he was a conscious artist. The whole keynote of the Franciscan teaching was its spontaneity, but his feelings for moral and aesthetic beauty were intimately united" (*ibid.*).

²⁵ "Line as a Means of Expression," in *R*, p. 337.

color schemes.”²⁶ Similarly, Vanessa Bell is praised for recognizing that “‘handling’ and quality of paint are only really beautiful when they come unconsciously in the process of trying to express an idea.”²⁷ And in a late essay Fry speculates that Rembrandt “attained to design by an indirect method. It was, one guesses, an almost unconscious habit rather than a deliberate and conscious aim.”²⁸ All these are instances of a larger principle. “It is one of the curiosities of the psychology of the artist,” we read in “The Jacquemart-André Collection” (1914), “that he is generally trying very hard to do something which has nothing to do with what he actually accomplishes; that the fundamental quality of his work seems to come out unconsciously as a by-product of his conscious activity” (V, p. 153). This is said as a preamble to a discussion of Paolo Uccello, in whose art the conscious pursuit of elaborate perspectival constructions turned out to facilitate an unconscious mastery of form, but Fry stands behind it in all its generality.²⁹

Or consider the following excerpts from Fry’s analysis in “Some Questions in Esthetics” of Rembrandt’s *A Schoolboy at His Desk* (1655; fig. 5). The topic Fry is pursuing is the nature of realism, which on the face of it would seem to present difficulties for his argument by virtue of its apparent concern with the depiction of reality at the expense of considerations of form. But Fry finds precisely in Rembrandt’s entire engrossment in the scene before him the psychological or spiritual precondition for his creating harmonious plastic unities out of the data of experience. “The boy was at his lessons,” Fry writes of the imagined original scene. “Puzzled and bored by them, he looked up from his task; his thoughts wandered, and he sat there day-dreaming, with his cheek propped on his thumb.” Then: “Rembrandt painted this scene with complete realism, without a thought of anything but the vision before

²⁶ “Mr. Walter Sickert’s Pictures” (1911), in *R*, p. 142. The article ends: “Something of an attitude to life, a very unconscious and little defined one it is true, comes through the impassive mask of Mr. Sickert’s imperturbable manner; an odd refusal to have any dealings with the material of romance, a persistent devotion to the banal and trivial situations of ordinary life, at times even an attraction for what is squalid. All this seems to belong to his supreme and splendid indifference to anything that does not concern the artistic vision in its most limited sense. One might, perhaps, build a philosophy even out of Mr. Sickert’s negations, but I would prefer to leave that task to some German Kunsthistoriker of a remote future” (pp. 142–43).

²⁷ “Independent Gallery: Vanessa Bell and Othon Friesz” (1922), in *R*, p. 348.

²⁸ “Rembrandt: An Interpretation,” in *R*, p. 377.

²⁹ In Uccello’s art “the simplifications and abstractions imposed upon his observation of nature by the [conscious] desire to construct his whole scene perspectively, really set free in him his [unconscious] power of creating a purely aesthetic organisation of form” (V, p. 154).



Fig. 5. Rembrandt van Rijn, *A School Boy at His Desk* (*Portrait of Titus*), 1655. Museum Boymans van Beuningen, Rotterdam. Credit: Kavalier/Art Resource, N.Y.

him.... If one looks carefully in the original at the passage where the thumb indents the cheek one can see why such works occur at very rare intervals. If for a moment Rembrandt had thought about his picture he was undone; nothing but complete absorption in his vision could sustain the unconscious certainty and freedom of the gesture. Each touch, then, had to be an inspiration or the rhythm would have broken down" (*T*, pp. 53–54). Fry goes on to discuss the painting of the desk, in itself "a plain flat board of wood, but one that has been scratched, battered and rubbed by schoolboys' rough usage." He continues:

Realism, in a sense, could go no further than this, but it is handled with such a vivid sense of its density and resistance, it is situated so absolutely in the picture space and plays so emphatically its part in the whole plastic scheme, it reveals so intimately the mysterious play of light upon matter that it becomes the vehicle of a strangely exalted spiritual state, the medium through which we

share Rembrandt's deep contemplative mood. It is miraculous that matter can take so exactly the impress of spirit as this pigment does. And that being so, the fact that it is extraordinarily like a schoolboy's desk falls into utter significance beside what it is in and for itself. (*T*, p. 54)³⁰

In the same spirit Fry observed a few pages earlier of Gustave Courbet's *Blonde endormie*: "However 'realistic' this is we are not tempted ever to refer to what lies outside the picture. This plastic unity holds us entirely within its own limits because at every point it gives us an exhilarated and surprised satisfaction. Everything here is so transmuted into plastic terms and finds therein so clear a justification that we are not impelled to go beyond them or to fill them out, as it were, by thinking of the model who posed more than half a century ago to M. Courbet in Paris, or of any other woman whatever" (*T*, p. 49).³¹

It's worth pausing a moment to gloss these remarks.

1. Fry writes on the assumption that Rembrandt's painting depicts an original scene—an actual schoolboy sitting at a desk and lost in a daydream. But is that likely, given the apparent obliviousness of the boy in the painting to the immediate presence of the painter? My claim, however, is not simply that Fry's mininarrative of the picture's genesis is unpersuasive. It's rather that that mininarrative allows Fry to specify Rembrandt's state of mind and that this is important because he believes, following Tolstoy (also Maurice Denis), that a work of art is essentially an act of communication of emotion (or a mental state) from the artist to the viewer, from which it follows that by specifying the mode of the artist's activity the critic is able to determine the expressive content of the picture. In this instance the artist's state of mind is under-

³⁰ Fry immediately goes on to compare Rembrandt's wood with Alma Tadema's marble: "The whole point of Alma Tadema's celebrated performances lay in his having given one a rather weak illusion of marble itself. To say 'How like marble!' was precisely all that could be said. It had no other purpose, no further meaning than that, being, in fact, totally inexpressive of anything else. Whereas nothing appears more impertinent before this Rembrandt than to call attention to this likeness, exact though it may be" (*T*, p. 55).

³¹ A page before this Fry transcribes notes he had made on another Courbet, a *Baigneuse endormie* he had recently seen at the French Gallery. The notes read: "How nearly Courbet comes to the total transmutation of the theme into plastic values, and by what a curious misunderstanding of the problem he misses complete purity! Here he touches the imagination almost in exact proportion to his absorption in the thing seen. He painted his 'Baigneuse' with a passionate intensity of feeling which carries one entirely away from the actual world, but when he sought to adventitious aid of a poetical *mise-en-scène* and borrowed from literature and the theatre the stereotypes of rocks and overhanging foliage and water, he went near to destroying all sense of illusion. The want of plastic consistency here refers us back, for all their poetical intention, to the actual world" (*T*, pp. 48–49).

stood as wholly absorbed in what Fry calls his “vision,” hence as oblivious to everything else including, Fry imagines, the canvas on which he is working.

2. The subject of Rembrandt's picture is manifestly absorptive, in a vein that will later be mined by Chardin and indeed by Greuze.³² In subsequent essays Fry singles out Rembrandt's *David Harping before Saul* (no longer attributed to the master), in which Fry especially admires “the astonishing invention of [Saul's] *unconscious* seizing the curtain to wipe his tears [emphasis added]”;³³ and *Bathsheba*, two equally absorptive canvases. And Courbet's *Blonde endormie* is asleep, sleep being an absorptive motif, as I first argued in *Absorption and Theatricality*. Fry's strong preference for paintings with absorptive themes and motifs is evident throughout his career, though naturally he is repulsed by works that use an ostensibly absorptive framework for what seem to him artistically illicit purposes (Luke Fildes's *The Doctor* in the Tate, to be glanced at toward the end of this essay, is an egregious instance of this). But Fry had no idea that his admiration for paintings of absorptive subjects could be understood in those terms; like every other critic in the Diderotian tradition, except in a sense Diderot himself, he found himself moved and impressed by such paintings without ever recognizing that it was the treatment of absorption that largely determined his response. And had it been explained to him that this was so he would have resisted the explanation because from where he stood what I have been calling absorption merely concerned considerations of drama or illustration and not at all those of form.

3. Fry imagines the finished painting to be wholly autonomous with respect to the real world to the extent of not even suggesting comparison with it, despite being a *ne plus ultra* of realism—or rather, this is what being a *ne plus ultra* of realism turns out to mean. So, for example, the fact that the desk in Rembrandt's canvas bears an extraordinary resemblance to the original desk becomes utterly insignificant in the light of the spiritual intensity of the depiction (reflecting the intensity of Rembrandt's purely contemplative mood); similarly, the viewer of Courbet's canvas is said to be so deeply satisfied by the plastic unity of the whole that it never occurs to him or her to “go beyond” that unity by

³² See Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, for a brief discussion of Greuze's *Un Ecolier qui étudie sa leçon* (pp. 16–17).

³³ “Rembrandt: An Interpretation” (1927), in *R*, p. 373; throughout that essay Fry stresses Rembrandt's mastery of drama.

thinking of the woman whom Fry assumes modeled for Courbet when he made his painting. Again, Fry's claims are improbably extreme, but what should be underscored are the rhetorical lengths to which he is prepared to go to secure the fiction of the painting's hermetic closure vis-à-vis the outside world. I think of this as a radicalization of Diderot's conception of the autonomous, hence antitheatrical *tableau* (it never occurred to Diderot to deny comparison with external reality; on the contrary in his remarks on Chardin he explicitly courted it),³⁴ as if for Fry mere reference to reality—to a “beyond” or “outside”—undermined a painting's unity and hence disqualified it artistically.³⁵

Fry's preference for Georges Seurat over Vincent Van Gogh is explained on these grounds: although the impassioned Van Gogh was a master of design and color, his “whole nature impelled him to regard even the most indifferent object, a pair of boots or a chair, as charged with dramatic significance,”³⁶ a stance toward the world that inevitably limited his achievement (after recovering from the first shock of encountering his work “we look in vain for further revelations”).³⁷ Seurat, in contrast, in a painting like the *Young Woman Powdering Her Face* (1888–89; fig. 6), took off from “the gimcrack finery of the period,” but “for all [the painting's] reality nothing of the original theme, of the

³⁴ See the discussion of Diderot on Chardin's still-lives in *Absorption and Theatricality* (p. 82), where I quote Diderot as writing in his *Salon of 1765*: “Choisissez son site; disposez sur ce site les objets comme je vais vous les indiquer, et soyez sûr que vous aurez vu ses tableaux.”

³⁵ As Fry writes in “Expression and Representation in the Graphic Arts” (1908): “[A]ny presentment in which unity was obviously lacking would prevent that sense of finality, that self-contained repose which [is] necessary...to pleasurable contemplation. Any apparent lack of unity will at once stir the mind to an undesirable activity, the activity of seeking in the world outside the work of art for the missing and complementary elements” (R, p. 69). And in “Some Questions in Esthetics”: “It will be noticed that the full value of the representational element almost always depends on a reference to something outside the actual work of art, to what is brought in by the title and such knowledge as the title implies to the spectator, whereas plastic values inhere in the work itself” (T, p. 31). And: “We can say, supposing the picture to envisage plastic expression, that the moment anything in it ceases to serve towards the edification of the whole plastic volume, the moment it depends on reference to something outside the picture, it becomes descriptive of some other reality, and becomes part of an actual, and not a spiritual, reality” (T, p. 56). Significantly, Cézanne himself is characterized by Fry as essentially self-contained: in Ambroise Vollard's account of the painter “every word and every gesture...sticks out with the rugged relief of a character in which everything is due to the compulsion of inner forces, in which nothing has been planed down or smoothed away by external pressure—not that external pressure was absent but that the inner compulsion—the inevitable bent of Cézanne's temperament, was irresistible” (“Paul Cézanne” [1917], in V, p. 203).

³⁶ “Vincent Van Gogh,” in T, p. 245.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 248.



Fig. 6. Georges Seurat, *Young Woman Powdering Her Face*, 1888–89. Courtauld Institute of Art, London. Credit: Witt Library, Courtauld Institute of Art, London.

thing seen, remains untransformed, all has been assimilated and remade by the idea. And perhaps this complete transmutation of the theme by the idea is the test of great art. It means that in proportion as a picture attains to this independent reality and inherent significance the element of illustration drops out and becomes irrelevant.”³⁸ Not surprisingly, although Fry devotes a longish paragraph to a discussion of the function of Seurat’s painted frames (*T*, p. 259), the general topic of framing, with its implicit problematization of the distinction so important to Fry between what lies within and outside a painting, goes unexamined in his texts.³⁹

³⁸ “Seurat,” in *T*, pp. 257–58.

³⁹ The by now classic reference here is to Jacques Derrida on framing in “Parergon” in *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago and London, 1987), esp. pp. 37–82. See also the superb remarks on frames by Gertrude Stein in “Pictures,” in *Lectures in America* (Boston, 1935), pp. 85–87. For example: “And then there is

4. As we have seen, Fry praises Rembrandt for being so absorbed in his vision of the schoolboy at his desk that he never thought about his picture but instead handed over its making to his unconscious. Similarly, Camille Corot's *Seated Woman with Bare Breasts* is said in "Some Questions in Esthetics" to evince "an almost reckless indifference to all else but the artist's fascinated response" (in *T*, p. 52),⁴⁰ while in *Characteristics of French Art* Fry remarks apropos of the same picture that "Corot was not thinking at all about making a work of art, it was not even a proper 'académie' or nude study, he was much too moved by his thrilled contemplation of the actual appearance to care whether the result was a work of art or not."⁴¹ In the same spirit he remarks of Vanessa Bell: "One feels before her works that every touch is the outcome of her complete absorption in her general theme. So complete is this devotion to the idea that she seems to forget her canvas and her *métier*. In fact, she is a very pure artist, uncontaminated with the pride of the craftsman. How much harm, by the by, the honest craftsman has done to art since William Morris invented the fiction of his supposed humility!"⁴² (A related topic concerns Fry's ambivalent regard for Sickert and his students.)⁴³ More broadly, Fry in "On Some Modern Drawings" argues that there are two ways by which to arrive at rhythmic drawing: the first calligraphic, calling for the artist to suspend his attention to the gestures he is making, the second when the artist "becomes so concentrated upon the interpretation of a contour as to be unconscious of what goes on between his hand and the paper. The ideal of such a situation is that he should actually never look at the paper" (*T*, p. 268).

another trouble. A painting is painted as a painting, as an oil painting existing as an oil painting, it may be in or it may be out of its frame, but an oil painting and that is a real bother always will have a tendency to go back to its frame, even if it has never been out of it. That is one of the things that an oil painting any oil painting has a very great tendency to do. And this is a bother sometimes to the painter and sometimes to any one looking at an oil painting" (p. 85).

⁴⁰ Fry cites it under the title *Chez le docteur*.

⁴¹ Roger Fry, *Characteristics of French Art* (New York, 1933), p. 96. He immediately adds: "A kind of desultory alertness and distraction seems indeed to be the condition for making such rare and enchanting discoveries as Chardin and Corot did" (pp. 96–97). Further references to this book appear in parentheses in the text, with the designation *C*.

⁴² "Independent Gallery: Vanessa Bell and Othon Friesz," in *R*, p. 348.

⁴³ Thus in "The Allied Artists" (1913) Fry criticizes two of Sickert's pupils, Mr. Gore and Miss Sands, for "seem[ing] too much preoccupied with *métier* of painting to become definite creators" (in *R*, p. 152). See also Anna Gruetzner Robins, "Fathers and Sons: Walter Sickert and Roger Fry," in *Art Made Modern*, pp. 45–56.

A different sort of statement bearing on this topic is found in the late text "Henri-Matisse" (1935). "The artist himself has a double nature and a double allegiance," Fry writes. "He longs on the one hand to realize his vision, on the other to be a maker; he longs to tell of his experience and also to create an object, an idol, a precious thing. And almost always the vision and the precious thing,—the *objet d'art*,—are at variance. His vision and his craft pull different ways and his orbit is determined by their relative powers and proximities" (*R*, p. 401). The struggle to reconcile the two longings is a basic theme of Fry's summary account of the history of European painting. As Fry tells it, the struggle largely takes the form of a tension between representation on the one hand and design on the other; Matisse's distinction, in Fry's view, is that "in the entire history of European art no one has ever played so many delightful, unexpected, exhilarating variations upon the theme of the dual nature of painting as he has" (*R*, p. 406). But there is also in Fry's characterization of the contrary longings, especially when read in the light of the other remarks just cited, the suggestion of a hierarchy according to which realizing one's vision far outweighs considerations of craft, the making of a "precious thing, the *objet d'art*," though naturally both elements must be present if the result of the artist's labors is to be a painting. It is almost as though Fry invites us to imagine that an artist might somehow realize (and communicate) his or her absorbed vision *and yet not produce an object, an artifact, for others to see and admire*; if that were possible, and of course it is not, it would place the viewer in the same position as that of "pure" artists like Rembrandt, Corot, and Bell for whom the work in progress, in Fry's hyperbolic account of their states of mind as they painted, virtually did not exist. I think of this as perhaps the most extreme expression of Fry's lifelong antitheatricalism: to produce an actual work, an *objet d'art*, is to make something that inescapably is there to be beheld; whereas to share certain artists' absorbed visions is to enter into communion with states of mind that not only care not at all for potential viewers but have lost sight of the work of art itself. (The title *Vision and Design* takes on a new inflection in this light.)

One book of Fry's in particular makes fascinating reading within the framework of this essay—*Characteristics of French Art* (1933). Fry begins by noting that the French possess "a peculiar alertness of observation and nimbleness of mind," along with an interest "in life as it is and in people as they happen to be" (*C*, p. 6). This seems unexceptional, but

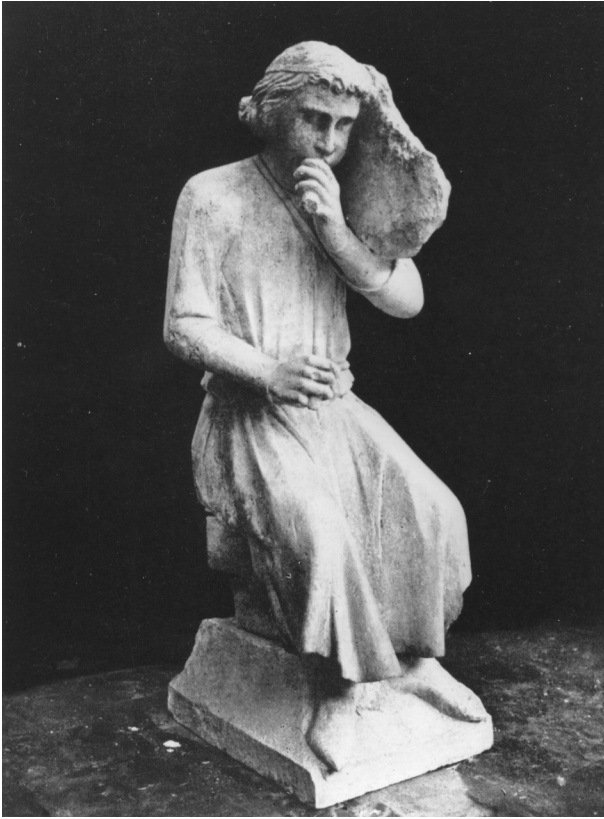


Fig. 7. *Boy Musician*, Rheims, thirteenth century. From Roger Fry, *Characteristics of French Art*.

when Fry turns to specific examples of French art a page or so later his thought acquires an edge. The first work he discusses is a thirteenth-century sculpture of a boy musician from the façade of a house at Rheims (fig. 7). “[W]hat is striking here is the certainty with which the artist has grasped the central character of the figure,” Fry writes. “In the movement of the head and the expression of the face he has made us vividly aware not only of the character of the boy but of his state of mind. In his intently on the music which he is playing he is scarcely aware of the outer world—his face has that vague unseeing regard which comes from a withdrawal from the outside, from concentration on what is passing within the mind” (C, p. 8). A few pages later Fry describes another representative sculpture, a Burgundian *Madonna and Child* of the fifteenth century (fig. 8):



Fig. 8. *Madonna and Child*, Burgundy, fifteenth century.
From Roger Fry, *Characteristics of French Art*.

[T]his is essentially a snapshot, the artist must have seen this very thing happen, must have been so struck by its odd, unexpected significance and by the opportunity it gave for an entirely new and beautiful plastic harmony that he was able to carry it through without losing anything of its momentary quality and its intimate intensity of expression. He has watched some young mother—one fancies her sitting, as they so often do, in the street, just outside her door. Something attracts her attention, and she looks round one way while the child struggles away from her in the opposite direction. She holds him firmly but so easily that she seems scarcely conscious of what he is doing as she becomes absorbed in a tender, slightly melancholy reverie. (C, p. 10)

Fry then contrasts the Burgundian sculpture with an Italian version of the theme by Jacopo della Quercia, in which he finds no hint of a

momentary actual event (early fifteenth century; fig. 9). Not that della Quercia would have neglected to study nature deeply; but his primary concern, Fry suggests, was to achieve “a simple and grand rhythmic motive” while at the same time expressing the tenderness and grace appropriate to the subject. The result is “an intenser plastic unity” than the Burgundian sculpture possesses; more broadly, “the Italian imagination worked at a higher emotional pitch [and] with a greater momentum towards a preconceived end” (C, p. 11). But if the comparison with della Quercia gives the honors of form to the Italians, the victory is less significant than it seems for the simple reason that by the seventeenth century the transcendent achievements of the Italian Renaissance in the realm of design were a thing of the past. The problem, in part, was consciousness itself. “In the full Renaissance,” Fry wrote twenty years earlier (referring, I think, to what we would call the High Renaissance), “this idea of design became the object of conscious and deliberate study, and the decadence of Italian art came about, not through indifference to the claims of artistic expression, but through a too purely intellectual and conscious study of them.”⁴⁴ In practice that meant that the value of unity was carried down to the present by painting in France. And what from my point of view is almost startling (and yet, at this stage in our argument, not altogether surprising) about the two French sculptures Fry begins his book by discussing is that both emerge in his account as quintessentially absorptive, in two by now familiar complementary modes: the first in and through intensity of effort, the second in and through a kind of distraction, which leaves the gesture of restraining the child to operate unconsciously, automatistically (the pair corresponds approximately to the two modes of losing sight of the page in “On Some Modern Drawings”).

Put more strongly, the entire book is written under the twin signs of absorption and antitheatricality, but without the writer being aware that this is so, and *a fortiori* without his recognizing that both absorption and antitheatricality became pressing issues for painting in France starting in the middle of the eighteenth century and continuing at least until the advent of Manet and his generation (in fact they continued to play a role beyond Manet, but in significantly modified terms).⁴⁵ This is

⁴⁴ “Dürer and Company” (1913), in V, p. 161.

⁴⁵ See Fried, “Caillebotte’s Impressionism.”



Fig. 9. Jacopo della Quercia, *Madonna and Child*, early fifteenth century. From Roger Fry, *Characteristics of French Art*.

not said in derogation of Fry: the very force and coherence as well as the continual productiveness of the French antitheatrical tradition seem largely to have depended on its invisibility as such to the artists and critics who took part in it. But Fry does offer the exemplary spectacle of a major critical intelligence who spent almost his entire viewing and writing life in the grip of certain fundamental assumptions and attitudes that continually inform his judgments and determine his preferences but that he was never able to acknowledge in their own right. And because he could not do this, he remained in the dark about their historicity (his negative attitude toward Diderot, the ultimate source of his

most deeply held values, is only the most striking instance of that obliviousness),⁴⁶ which is also to say that he never suspected that there might be a problem in applying those assumptions and attitudes as universal criteria to all the art that came his way.

This last is a large topic, but a portion of its complexities may be glimpsed when it is recalled that I have already suggested that Greuze's intentions were dramatic, not theatrical, and that what has been seen as the blatant theatricality of his art stems directly from that fact. It follows that, with respect to works belonging to the French antitheatrical tradition, Fry treats as an absolute quality (theatricality, antitheatricality) inhering permanently and unchangingly in a given picture what historically speaking is best thought of as a structure of intention on the part of the artist, one that will be perceived differently by different cohorts of spectators with the passage of time.⁴⁷ As for works by artists before or simply outside that tradition (e.g., Andrea del Sarto, Raphael, El Greco, Bernini, Poussin, Caravaggio, and J. M. W. Turner, not to mention makers of Chinese ritual bronzes and Japanese calligraphers), it seems altogether unlikely that the concept of theatricality in the pejorative sense of the term can be made to apply to them in any consistent or illuminating way.

It would be instructive to examine a series of passages in *Characteristics of French Art*, each dealing with a different painter from the perspective of an unexamined antitheatricalism, but by this stage in my argument that's probably not necessary.⁴⁸ Instead I want to bring this lecture to a close by focusing in turn on three rather disparate items.

⁴⁶ Thus he writes in "Some Questions in Esthetics": "This habit of putting psychological above spatial values in graphic art comes, of course, only too naturally to men of letters who occupy themselves with plastic art. Diderot's celebrated critiques of the Salons of his day are almost entirely devoted to the psychological aspects of illustration. No wonder that for him Greuze was the greatest of painters" (*T*, p. 55). See also his remarks about Diderot in "The Double Nature of Painting," in *R*, pp. 383–84, 386–88. Perhaps the most embarrassing statement in all of Fry, given his unacknowledged dependence on Diderot's thought, is "it is hard to reason worse than Diderot when he sets about it" (p. 387).

⁴⁷ Or even by the artist himself. See my discussion of Jacques-Louis David's shifting view of the *Oath of the Horatii* with respect to the issue of theatricality in "David et l'antithéâtralité," in *David contre David* (Actes du colloque organisé au musée du Louvre du 6 au 10 décembre 1989), ed. Régis Michel, 2 vols. (Paris, 1993), I:214–15.

⁴⁸ Among the artists Fry's discussion of whom touches on issues of theatricality are the brothers Le Nain, Poussin, Eugène Delacroix, Corot, and Edgar Degas. Incidentally, Fry's acuteness as an art critic is for me epitomized by his estimation of Théodore Géricault, whom he believes "was almost the most gifted artist of the nineteenth century, at least as regards what one may call his physiological equipment" (*C*, p. 87).

The first is a passage in Fry's *Cézanne: A Study of His Development*. The topic is still-life, and Fry has just remarked on Francisco Goya's ability to give "even to the still-life, a kind of dramatic significance."⁴⁹ Then:

Cézanne at one time might well have had similar aims [Fry earlier stressed the young Cézanne's taste for pictorial melodrama], but by the period which we are considering he had definitely abandoned them. He eagerly accepts the most ordinary situations, the arrangements of objects which result from everyday life. But though he had no dramatic purpose, though it would be absurd to speak of the drama of his fruit dishes, his baskets of vegetables, his apples spilt upon the kitchen table, none the less these scenes in his hands leave upon us the impression of grave events. If the words tragic, menacing, noble or lyrical seem out of place before Cézanne's still-lives, one feels none the less that the emotions they arouse are curiously analogous to these states of mind. It is not from lack of emotion that these pictures are not dramatic, lyric, etc., but rather by reason of a process of elimination and concentration. They are, so to speak, dramas deprived of all dramatic incident. One may wonder whether painting has ever aroused graver, more powerful, more massive emotions than those to which we are compelled by some of Cézanne's masterpieces in this genre.⁵⁰

I find this extraordinary. Throughout his career as a critic (after the Giotto essay, I mean), Fry has been insisting that drama has nothing whatever to do with form. Cézanne was for Fry the supreme modern master of form, and yet it suddenly turns out that his finest paintings, the still-lives, are—not dramatic exactly, in a tangled sentence Fry seems explicitly to state that they are not—but "dramas deprived of all dramatic incident." This would seem to identify form at its most purged and concentrated with drama, period. Diderot would agree.

The second item is the first of six radio broadcasts of 1929, "The Meaning of Pictures; I—Telling a Story," which turns on a highly charged comparison between two sharply different works: Luke Fildes's *The Doctor* (1891; fig. 10) in the Tate, which depicts a doctor caring for a sick child as dawn breaks following an all-night vigil, and Giotto's *Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalen* in the Arena Chapel (ca. 1305; fig. 11). Naturally, Fry abhors Fildes's canvas. After praising its ingenuity, he

⁴⁹ *Cézanne: A Study of His Development* (New York, 1927), p. 41.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42.



Fig. 10. Luke Fildes, *The Doctor*, 1891. Tate Gallery, London. Credit: Tate Gallery, London/Art Resource, N.Y.

writes: “[A]ll the same there is something profoundly wrong. For all the mass of details which are correctly described for us there is something false about the whole thing: the dice are loaded: these people are too noble, they would not be like that unless we were looking on”—an anti-theatrical complaint if there ever was one. And another point: “We feel here,” Fry says, “an invitation to identify oneself with the doctor; we feel that we, too, are capable of this devotion, and we get a certain moral satisfaction which we have done nothing to earn. I suspect that a great deal of the attraction of sentimental art and sentimental stories comes from an indulgence in this fictitious sense of one’s moral worth” (*R*, p. 398).

In contrast, the Giotto makes no such factitious appeal to our emotions. On the contrary, we feel that the sleeping soldiers “are shut out completely from the dramatic situation.” As for the angels, we are struck by “the awful indifference and serenity with which they watch the scene.” Near the right-hand edge of the scene Mary Magdalen reaches out her arms to embrace Christ, who, however, “slides away from her touch.” The entire design produces an effect “of loneliness, isolation and mystery” that accords well with the hour of dawn when it is supposed to have taken place. Plus the Giotto is devoid of the accessory details that clutter *The Doctor*. “We are dealing,” Fry writes, “only with

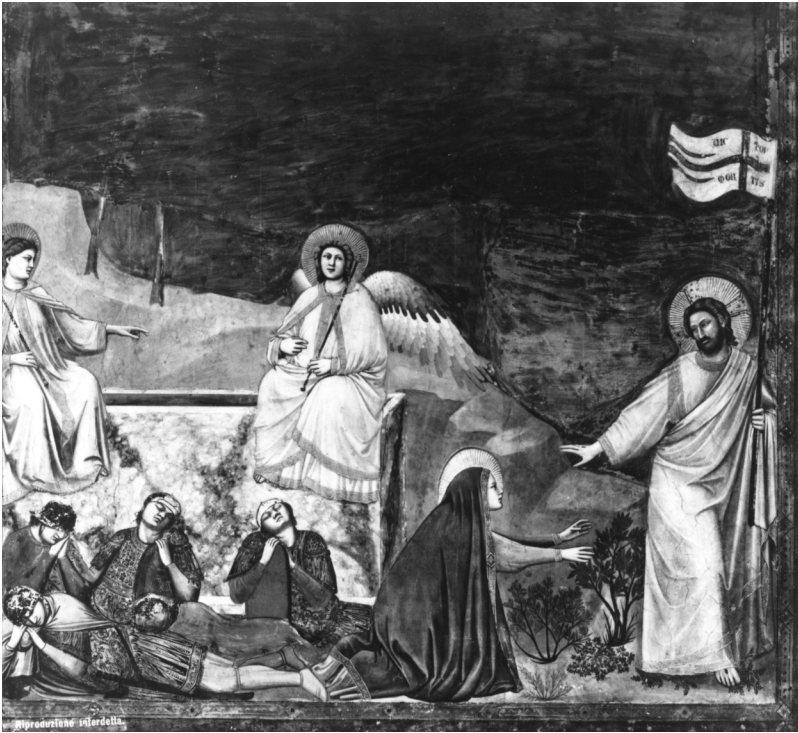


Fig. 11. Giotto, *Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalen*, ca. 1305. Arena Chapel, Padua. Credit: Alinari/Art Resource, N.Y.

the fundamental psychological facts of the story, the great oppositions and contrasts of the situation, and we see that such a bleak, abstract treatment, shows us the fundamental drama with incredible force" (*R*, p. 399). And something more: "For all its dramatic intensity we are not asked to come so close to the action as we are by Luke Fildes. We watch it taking place in a world which is somewhat removed from the actual world, a world which we cannot enter into—wherein we shall never be actors. We cannot identify ourselves with these people; the scene remains there for our contemplation rather than for any immediate personal contact" (*R*, pp. 399–400). Once again Fry does not consider the possibility that the very features of the scene he singles out for praise all but allegorize the distance and detachment he seeks: the sleeping soldiers, oblivious to the dramatic situation; the angels, surrogate beholders, whose awful indifference and serenity the actual beholder can only aspire to match; the loneliness and isolation of the overall mood; and especially the central event, the risen Christ evading Mary Magdalen's

touch as he exits the picture, his gesture of denial insisting on separation, distance, an uncrossable gulf between worlds.⁵¹ Moreover, throughout the discussion of *Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalen* there is not a single mention of form or design (granted, these are not his topic), only evocations of the dramatic force and concentration of Giotto's stupendous invention.⁵² As in the passage from *Cézanne*, all this suggests an unexpected closeness to Diderot, an ascetic and disidentificatory analogue to his conception of the *tableau*, which itself may be characterized precisely in terms of separation, distance, a gulf between worlds.⁵³

The last item I want to consider is a letter Fry wrote to the woman he lived with, Helen Anrep, several months before he died. The letter was written in Paris in March 1934 (Fry would die in September), and it mainly concerns a day he had spent in Milan looking at paintings in the

⁵¹ Something similar occurs in Fry's admiring comments on Giorgione's *The Three Philosophers* in Vienna: "First of all we are struck with the amplitude of these forms, by the disposition of these figures both so unexpected and so inevitable in so strange a space. This very disposition induces in us a heightened frame of mind, a state in which we expect some mysterious revelation. This effect, produced by the disposition of forms, prepares us to meet beings far removed from our everyday life, to hope for something unknown and fateful, and Giorgione does not disappoint us. He has created people that appear to come from far away, from out of another world..." ("The Double Nature of Painting," pp. 391–92).

⁵² Fry does provide a formal analysis of the *Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalen* in the last of the broadcasts, "The Meaning of Pictures—Truth and Nature in Art," *Listener*, November 6, 1929: 617. Not surprisingly, he stresses what he sees as Giotto's perfect meshing of design and drama: "We take in the whole scene at once because of its closely knit unity, because of the subordination of every part to the whole. We notice first the surprising invention of the great sloping contour of the rocky background which carries everything in its sweep from left to right, bringing everything, as it were, to a focus at the point of greatest dramatic significance, the gesture of Christ's right hand as He repels the Magdalen's touch" (ibid.). And so on, including the following: "You will notice that no movements in the general design bring the sleeping soldiers into question. Giotto expressly subordinates them because of their being so entirely cut off from the drama" (ibid.). Later in the same article he compares Raphael's *Galatea* fresco in the Farnesina, which he admires, with Adolphe-William Bouguereau's *Birth of Venus*, which he does not. Specifically, he finds in "poses like that of Galatea...the expression of fullness of life, and of unconscious unpremeditated grace," whereas Bouguereau's figures seem to him to be "posing in a *tableau vivant*, and posing affectedly and badly. No one would take these poses, except to be seen doing so" (p. 618).

⁵³ Thinking about Fry's hostility to identification with figures in a painting has made me realize the importance of the fact that Diderot's esthetics of the *tableau* was, to say the least, open to effects of identification. It is as if what I have called Fry's radicalization of the concept of the *tableau* meant that the figures in a painting had not only to appear unaware of being beheld but also to be psychologically or say spiritually remote from any imaginable viewer. The combination of a structural unawareness of being beheld with a positive invitation to identification characterizes the movies, a medium one would expect Fry not to value highly. (Having said this, it must be acknowledged that for Fry Rembrandt's genius was in part an identificatory one. At any rate, he writes in *Characteristics of French Art*: "When Poussin painted his picture of *The Israelites Gathering Manna*, he did not, as Rembrandt would have done, project himself by an effort of sympathetic imagination into the bodies of men and women dying of hunger..." [pp. 27–28].)



Fig. 12. Correggio, *Adoration of the Magi*, 1516–17. Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. Credit: Alinari/Art Resource, N.Y.

Brera and other museums. He mentions portraits by Antonello da Messina and Tintoretto in the Castello Sforzesco and then begins a new paragraph as follows:

And Correggio. There's something we've both missed in his psychology, I because I've looked too purely at form, you because you're put off by his form, but there's an *Adoration of the Magi* [1516–17; fig. 12], a rather nasty picture in some ways but with such a rare piece of imagination in the Virgin, who's almost hiding from all these grandees behind a pillar and entirely absorbed in her baby and so incredibly tenderly human. I see I'm in danger of getting shockingly "literary" under your influence. But I see that the pictures that "count" most *generally* have some quite new and personal conception of the situation.⁵⁴

Is this not revealing?—Fry the inveterate museum-goer, once again being moved by an absorptive motif (the Virgin hiding from visitors, absorbed in her baby), and once again unable to think of it other than as a "literary" device, yet struggling, not solely to please his correspondent,

⁵⁴ Fry, *Letters*, 2:688.

to find a way to take it seriously—and not quite succeeding. The quotation marks around “count” and the italicization of “generally” bespeak the failure of his effort, the unclarity of the thought they strain too hard to qualify. It’s fitting, therefore, that the letter ends in a bilingual flourish that shows how little Fry’s basic values evolved in the course of his long critical career. The last sentence reads: “I send you a few cards—the innocent crank Scaletti [not of interest to us] and the terribly ‘averti’ Dosso who’s much too conscious and anxious to *épater*.”⁵⁵

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 689.