



---

## On the Origin of the Word 'Expressionism'

Author(s): Donald E. Gordon

Source: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 29 (1966), pp. 368-385

Published by: The Warburg Institute

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/750724>

Accessed: 13-04-2020 17:03 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

*The Warburg Institute* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*

# ON THE ORIGIN OF THE WORD 'EXPRESSIONISM'

By Donald E. Gordon

Although today the German 'Brücke' is acclaimed as the pioneer group in the German expressionist movement, it is surprising to learn that neither the group nor any of the individual Brücke artists were ever specifically called 'expressionist' during the 1905–13 period of the Brücke's existence. Even up to that moment in 1917 when Ernst Ludwig Kirchner<sup>1</sup> (the former group's leader) permanently left Germany to reside in Switzerland, he had only once been called an expressionist in his native land. These facts raise several questions: Who were the expressionist artists before World War I, if not Kirchner and the Brücke? And what did the word 'expressionism' mean before, and after, its retroactive application to the Dresden pioneers of modern art?

## I

Even though there remain a number of still unanswered questions, this much now seems certain: the first usages of the word 'expressionism', as well as the first artists to be called expressionist are to be found not at all in Germany, but in France.

The story apparently begins in Gustave Moreau's studio at the Ecole des Beaux Arts between 1891 and 1898. Moreau reportedly emphasized the personal, the individual, and the spontaneous aspects of 'self-expression'. The year after Moreau's death, for example, Flat wrote in 1899:<sup>2</sup>

. . . by his example and his convincing words [Moreau taught his students that] the high mission of art, the true function of the artist was, in his words: *to express yourself*.

A few years later, a detailed critique of Moreau's art by Goffroy states:<sup>3</sup>

. . . the essential, if the highest, goal of art is expression.

And later in the decade, Henri Matisse reflected the teachings of Moreau (with whom he had studied, 1892–97) in such passages as the following from the famous 'Notes d'un peintre' of 1908:<sup>4</sup>

What I am after, above all, is expression . . . The simplest means are those which enable an artist to express himself best . . . [The artist's] expression must derive inevitably from his temperament.

<sup>1</sup> In slightly altered form this study formed part of the author's doctoral dissertation on E. L. Kirchner, accepted by Harvard University in 1959. Unless otherwise noted, translations from German sources are by the writer. For another view of the word expressionism, see: Fritz Schmalenbach, 'Das Wort "Expressionismus"', *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, Zürich 1961 (11 March). Assistance in manuscript preparation was provided by a Dickinson College faculty research grant, for

which I am grateful.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Flat, *Le musée Gustave Moreau: l'artiste—son oeuvre—son influence*, Paris 1899, p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> Gustav Geffroy, *L'oeuvre de Gustave Moreau*, Paris, 1903?, p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> Henri Matisse, 'Notes d'un peintre', *La Grande Revue* 52 (24), 25 December 1908, pp. 731–45, as quoted in: Alfred H. Barr, Jr., *Matisse: His Art and His Public*, New York 1951, pp. 119–23.

In Moreau's studio, according to Barr,<sup>5</sup> the early expression of personal attitudes was fostered, while rapidity and economy of execution were sought by work 'in the streets' as well as in museums. Spontaneity went hand-in-hand with personal expression, in Moreau's view: it was apparently he who taught his students Delacroix' dictum:<sup>6</sup>

You should be able to draw a man falling from a fifth floor window and finish it before he hits the ground.

It is uncertain whether Moreau actually used the word, expressionism, in the nineteenth century;<sup>7</sup> if he did, the word may well have signified some type of dissent from impressionism.

On the other hand, the term expressionism was used publicly in the year 1901, by a little-known artist named Julien-August Hervé,<sup>8</sup> under circumstances suggesting a pointed rebuttal to Neo-Impressionist aesthetics.<sup>9</sup> Also in 1901, a young artist named Derain wrote his friend Vlaminck a letter in which the following sentence appears:<sup>10</sup>

The telegraph wires must be made enormous, so much goes on along them.

Kahnweiler later cites this passage as 'a typical example of the psychological process which leads to . . . expressionist distortion, a violation of form in favor of expressiveness.' We shall document below the occasion when both Derain and Vlaminck were exhibited as expressionists.

Matisse, meanwhile, maintained his acquaintance with Manguin and Marquet, who had also studied under Moreau. After the master's death, Matisse went briefly to the studio of Carrière, and later shared a work-studio, with several young artists during the 1900-1 period; among the latter were Puy and Derain himself. The next few years in Matisse's development are of

<sup>5</sup> Barr, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16, 33-34, 37-38.

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 38, esp. n. 2. Barr states that Matisse 'intoned' the Delacroix maxim around 1900, 'after Moreau's death'. But in view of the facts that Barr considers Moreau 'true to the tradition of Delacroix' in the matter of colour (p. 15), and that Moreau had told his students to 'go down into the streets' (p. 38), it is quite likely that Matisse and Marquet gained their respect for Delacroix' advice from Moreau himself. It is relevant to note, with Barr (p. 40), that as late as 1900 'Matisse's position . . . in the Paris art world and indeed in his own eyes was still that of a student.'

<sup>7</sup> This writer is indebted to Professor Meyer Schapiro, Columbia University, who first suggested in 1957 that the origins of the word 'expressionism' were to be sought in the life and teachings of Moreau. All sources written immediately after Moreau's death agree that he continually emphasized 'expression' and 'self-expression' but it is unlikely that, if he had used the word 'expressionism', writers like Geffroy or Flat would have

attached significance to it; neither Moreau nor his more conservative pupils possessed that peculiarly self-conscious sense of the 'modern' which emerged in French art the decade after Moreau's death. On the other hand, should future research uncover a link between Moreau and Hervé (see below), then Hervé's usage to indicate a dissent from Neo-Impressionist theory or practice makes a prior usage by Moreau seem quite plausible.

<sup>8</sup> Theodor Däubler, *Das Kunstblatt*, 1918, p. 327, as quoted in: Jakob Rosenberg, 'German Expressionist Printmakers', *Magazine of Art* 38 (8), December 1945, p. 300.

<sup>9</sup> Hervé reportedly exhibited eight paintings, titled 'expressionismes', at the 1901 Salon des Independents, the Salon founded by the Neo-Impressionist artists Seurat, Signac and Cross in 1884. In such a forum, where Signac in 1901 was the acknowledged leader, Hervé's action seems to signify a dissent from Neo-Impressionist doctrine.

<sup>10</sup> D. Henry Kahnweiler, *Juan Gris, His Life and Work*, New York 1947, p. 96.

course well known, culminating in the major 'Fauve' exhibitions of 1905, 1906 and 1907 in Paris; Matisse's circle now expanded to include Braque, Friesz, Van Dongen and Vlaminck—Fauves at this time, one and all.<sup>11</sup>

There can now be little doubt that most of the exhibitors at these Fauve exhibitions came to consider themselves as expressionists in ensuing years;<sup>12</sup> certainly both Matisse and the influential critic de Vauxcelles used the term, expressionism, around 1908.<sup>13</sup>

By 1908, in fact, Matisse had developed several new ideas about 'expression' which went considerably beyond the statement inspired by Moreau and cited above. As if in answer to Moreau's imaginative, often imaginary, subject matter, Matisse insisted that 'expression' was linked closely to nature: for the expression-seeking artist, *the creative process becomes the intermediary between nature and the picture*.<sup>14</sup>

[the artist] must sincerely believe that he has painted only what he has seen . . . an artist must recognize that when he paints, he must feel that he is copying nature—and even when he consciously departs from nature, he must do it with the conviction that it is only the better to interpret her.

In his teaching, Matisse tried to clarify this idea by advising the student to 'represent' nature, rather than to 'copy'.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, according to Matisse, 'expression' is *thoroughly conditioned by decorative considerations*. After stating that both colour and composition should 'serve' expression, he continues:<sup>16</sup>

My choice of colors is based on observation, on feeling, on the very nature of each experience . . . [I] merely try to find a color that will fit my sensation. There is an impelling proportion of tones that can induce me to change the shape of a figure or to transform my composition. Until I achieve this proportion in all the parts of the composition I strive towards it and keep on working. Then a moment comes when . . . it would be impossible for me to add a stroke to my picture without having to paint it all over again.

It is of interest that the creative 'sensation' for Matisse is thus based not alone on 'feeling', but also on 'observation' and indeed on the momentary—almost impressionist—aspect of 'each experience'.

Matisse's views thus provide a necessary counterbalance to such statements as Derain's, quoted earlier, in which distortion for the sake of expressive

<sup>11</sup> For Matisse's connexion with Manguin and Marquet, see: Barr, *op. cit.*, pp. 16, 38—similarly (p. 38) the period of study with Carrière, and the work-studio with Derain and Puy are mentioned. Barr also documents Friesz' and Vlaminck's exhibition at the 1905 Salon d'Automne (p. 55); Van Dongen's first exhibition at the 1906 Salon d'Automne; and Braque's exhibition at the Salon des Independents of 1907 (p. 83).

<sup>12</sup> See n. 21.

<sup>13</sup> Däubler, *loc. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> Matisse, *loc. cit.*

<sup>15</sup> Barr, *op. cit.*, p. 552. (Matisse Speaks to his Students, 1908: Notes by Sarah Stein): 'You are representing the model, or any other subject, not copying it; and there can be no color relations between it and your picture; it is the relation between the colors in your picture which are the equivalent of the relation between the colors in your model that must be considered.'

<sup>16</sup> Matisse, *loc. cit.*

content alone is stressed; now distortion must also be governed by tonal relationships and compositional necessity. In its most developed form with Matisse, in sum, expressionism is meant to reflect the new French avant-garde's insistence on the primacy of the *personal creative process* over both natural subject and pictorial result. This meaning is still conservative, to the extent that both nature and decorative principle remain as means towards the goal of expression. Yet this thing called expression is just as clearly recognized as *self-expression*, allowing the artist consciously to depart from nature when following the dictates of temperament and interpretive conviction. In France, then, the noun 'expression' was clearly distinguished from 'impression'; an expressionist was one who 'sought expression' or who 'sought to express himself'.

## II

The first group exhibition of 'expressionist' artists to take place anywhere in the world opened in April, 1911, as part of the XXII Berliner Sezession. In a separate gallery, clearly labelled *Expressionisten*, was shown the recent work of eleven French artists, as identified in contemporary reviews.<sup>17</sup> Of the eleven mentioned, eight have already been cited above as members of Matisse's Paris circle—former students of Moreau or Carrière, and exhibitors at one or more of the Fauve shows. These eight were: Manguin, Marquet, Derain, Puy, Braque, Friesz, van Dongen and Vlaminck. Of two others, Doucet and Herbin, little is known. The eleventh artist, Picasso (whose reputation as an independent innovator was already known in Germany), was represented by works which were not obviously Cubist in style.<sup>18</sup>

The first expressionist exhibition was an important event for several reasons. From the viewpoint of historical perspective, the show represents a cross-section of French artistic innovations centred around the 1907–9 years—essentially post-Fauve but yet pre-Cubist. If one were to postulate a communality of aims and attitudes for these artists, it would rest on a pictorial concern more for Cézanne than for any other artist,<sup>19</sup> and on a concrete embodiment of Matisse's 1908 ideas on expression. This show's very existence marks the announcement of a French expressionist school—a school totally ignored ever since by critics who have chosen to stress the slightly earlier, short-lived phenomenon of Fauvism.

From the contemporary German viewpoint, the show's inclusion of Picasso and exclusion of Matisse were not remarked upon by critics. It is to be supposed that the Sezession officials were given credit for intentionally excluding from this show the most 'revolutionary' styles of Fauvism (since 1909, associated in Berlin with the name of Matisse)<sup>20</sup> and of Cubism (not yet

<sup>17</sup> Max Osborn, 'Berliner Sezession 1911', *Kunstchronik*, xxii (25), 5 May 1911, cols. 385–390; J. Sievers, 'Die XXII. Ausstellung der Berliner Sezession', *Der Cicerone*, iii (10), May 1911, pp. 383–4; Karl Scheffler, 'Berliner Sezession: die zweiundzwanzigste Ausstellung', *Kunst und Künstler*, ix (ix), June 1911, p. 486; Walter Heymann, 'Berliner Sezession, 1911', *Der Sturm*, ii, 15 July 1911,

p. 543.

<sup>18</sup> Sievers, *loc. cit.*: 'Pablo Picasso, in letzter Zeit viel genannt, bringt keine Proben seiner merkwürdigen Auffassung. . . .'

<sup>19</sup> Barr, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>20</sup> Matisse's first comprehensive exhibition in Germany, mainly comprising Fauve works, was held in Cassirer's Gallery, Berlin, in January 1909: Barr, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

widely known in early 1911, even in Paris). Just who was responsible for the show's organization, composition and title, must remain uncertain.<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, there is no uncertainty concerning the critics' voluminous and negative reaction to the exhibition and its title of 'Expressionisten'. One critic thought the word 'frightfully stupid' and commented, with what proves to have been astounding accuracy, that 'This name will now immediately be parroted by all the "faithful" . . .'<sup>22</sup> Another dismissed the title as merely a 'disavowal of the older Impressionism.'<sup>23</sup> A third, named J. Sievers, maintained that the artists 'consider Impressionism conquered or, more likely, worth conquering', and continued:<sup>24</sup>

. . . they no longer want to portray the impression which they receive from nature . . . but the *imprint* which the viewed object leaves in their artistic imagination.

A fourth (publishing last, in July 1911) suggested that 'native talents'—such as those of Pechstein and Melzer, leaders of the Neue Sezession—should have been included in the gallery of French 'Expressionisten'.<sup>25</sup> But this first tentative, and very possibly ironic,<sup>26</sup> attempt to broaden the application of the term was opposed in some detail by Paul Ferdinand Schmidt. He maintained that there was little relationship between such artists as Pechstein, Puy, Vlaminck, Herbin and Nolde, and concluded:<sup>27</sup>

the common name is the product of a dilemma—it signifies little.

<sup>21</sup> Däubler's statement that Matisse and de Vauxcelles used the word 'expressionism' around 1908 makes it likely that the word was current among other French artists of the pre-Cubist avant-garde—especially since the term 'Fauve' (which we associate today with these artists) was thought to have 'disappeared' by 1915: D. H. Kahnweiler, *The Rise of Cubism*, New York 1949, p. 5. It is, conversely, impossible to assume that the Sezession officials *invented* the application to French artists in 1911—not only because German critics assumed the application to be current in France at the time, but because the word *was* French. The Berliner Sezession had been the stronghold of Impressionism in Germany since the early 1890s and was led by the painter Max Liebermann and the dealer Paul Cassirer. But it is more likely that one of the German members of Matisse's Paris circle was responsible for the 'Expressionisten' title. Hans Purrmann, Rudolph Levy, and Oskar and Greta Moll, for example, were students in Matisse's art class beginning in early 1908 (Barr, *op. cit.*, pp. 59, 116). Several of these had direct connexions with the Berlin art world: Greta Moll translated Matisse's 'Notes d'un peintre' for the Berlin art magazine *Kunst und Künstler* (May 1909,

pp. 335-47); and Purrmann was himself 'an associate of the Berliner Sezession' who had been negotiating the Berlin exhibition of contemporary French art since 1908 (Barr, *op. cit.*, p. 108). Unfortunately, in correspondence with the author during the autumn of 1964, Professor Purrmann was unable to shed any light on this matter which occurred, of course, more than half a century earlier.

<sup>22</sup> Scheffler, *loc. cit.*

<sup>23</sup> Osborn, *loc. cit.*

<sup>24</sup> Sievers, *loc. cit.*

<sup>25</sup> Heymann, *loc. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> The Neue Sezession under the leadership of Nolde and Pechstein had in 1910 seceded from the Berliner Sezession, led by such German impressionists as Max Liebermann. Since Heymann was a conservative critic quite favourable to Liebermann (Peter Selz, *German Expressionist Painting*, Berkeley 1957, p. 256), his suggestion is actually a tongue-in-cheek reproof to the officials of the older Sezession for opening their doors to those no longer satisfied with impressionism.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Ferdinand Schmidt, 'Die Expressionisten', *Der Sturm*, ii, January 1912, pp. 734-5.

In his view that there was no 'expressionist school' in France at that time, much less in Germany, Schmidt thus made one of the first critical attempts to deny expressionism to France and, simultaneously, one of the last to deny it to Germany. This occurred in January 1912.

### III

If the original expressionists in Germany in 1911 were French, when did the word lose its specific application to French artists? In spite of contrary indications by recent American writers (to be discussed below), the answer is: not before 1914.

In June 1911, a hostile reviewer applied the title, expressionists, to a group of French artists represented in a Düsseldorf exhibition.<sup>28</sup> His application (and his scorn) were no doubt prompted by the contemporary reviews of the French section of the XXII Berliner Sezession. Of the seven<sup>29</sup> French artists indicated, six had been included in the original Berlin show; Guérin, the seventh, was a former student of Moreau considered, in France, as one of the younger 'conservatives'.<sup>30</sup>

In Berlin's *Sturm* magazine in August 1911, W. Worringer referred with full approval to the contemporary French 'synthetists and expressionists', though mentioning none by name.<sup>31</sup>

In March 1912, Herwarth Walden brought together works by many of the French artists represented in the XXII Berliner Sezession the previous spring, labelling them once again as 'expressionists'. This was the opening *Sturm* Gallery exhibition and the expressionists were 'young French painters'.<sup>32</sup> As Selz points out,<sup>33</sup> works by other European artists including Kandinsky and Marc did happen to be exhibited in adjacent rooms—but there was no use of the French title for these other painters. Myers<sup>34</sup> is mistaken in his belief that 'the expressionist idea was crystallized as such' in this exhibition, merely because Blaue Reiter artists were shown under the same roof as the French expressionists. From this viewpoint of 'expressionist by association', the XXII Berliner Sezession would have to be the first crystallization—with Max Liebermann, Fritz von Uhde and other German impressionist painters being the unlikely German counterparts!

As a matter of fact, it is perfectly clear that both Franz Marc and Wassily Kandinsky in 1912 disclaimed any title of expressionist either for themselves or for other German artists. Marc referred to younger Dresden, Berlin and

<sup>28</sup> G. Howe, 'Ausstellung des Düsseldorfer Sonderbundes', *Die Kunst für Alle*, xxvi (June 1911), p. 475.

<sup>29</sup> Braque, Derain, Van Dongen, Friesz, Guérin, Picasso, and Vlaminck.

<sup>30</sup> Barr, *op. cit.*, pp. 16, 63.

<sup>31</sup> Wilhelm Worringer, 'Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte . . .', *Der Sturm*, ii, August 1911, pp. 597–8.

<sup>32</sup> Of the five weekly editions of the *Sturm* magazine during the month of March 1912, the first (p. 801) announces the opening of

the exhibition of works by 'Hodler, Kokoschka, Munch, jungfranzösischen Malern, Kokoschka Zeichnungen, Skulpturen Franz Flaum'; the second (p. 808) announces 'Der Blaue Reiter, Franz Flaum, Oskar Kokoschka, Expressionisten.' By the last edition (p. 829) the announcement is abbreviated simply: 'Der Blaue Reiter / Flaum / Kokoschka / Expressionisten.'

<sup>33</sup> Selz, *op. cit.*, pp. 257–8, 261.

<sup>34</sup> Bernard S. Myers, *The German Expressionists*, New York 1957, p. 35.

Munich artists as 'Die "Wilden" Deutschlands'<sup>35</sup>—Wilde, or Fauve, being quite appropriate as a designation for the styles of both the Brücke and the Neue Künstler Vereinigung groups in the preceding years 1908–11. And Kandinsky, also in 1912, referred with some sarcasm to Picasso's alleged 'need for self-expression'—with the inference that he, Kandinsky, did not share this need.<sup>36</sup>

The fifth Sturm Gallery exhibition in August 1912, was but a variant of the first, in March. Walden once again showed works by French artists, this time under the title of 'French expressionists';<sup>37</sup> now six artists were represented, of whom only one (Marie Laurencin)<sup>38</sup> had not already been included in the original XXII Berliner Sezession show of expressionists the previous year.

Walden's connexion with 'expressionists' was thus limited to the showing of French avant-garde artists. Yet Selz has stated (without any documentation) that Walden also applied the word to German and Belgian painters in 1912. Selz describes the fourth and sixth Sturm Gallery exhibitions (June–July and September 1912, respectively) as:<sup>39</sup>

4. German Expressionists: Marc, Kandinsky, Bloch, Jawlensky, Münter, Werefkina.

This is the first usage of the term 'German Expressionists,' then applied by Walden exclusively to the Blaue Reiter group . . .

6. Belgian Expressionists: James Ensor and Ryk Wouters . . .

There is no support, to our knowledge, for these statements. Walden advertised the earlier show, in four successive announcements in *Sturm* magazine, as 'Pictures refused by the Sonderbund, Cologne . . .'<sup>40</sup> The later show is announced merely as 'Belgian artists Ryk Wouters, James Ensor'; or, a few weeks later, as 'Young Belgian artists'.<sup>41</sup>

In the absence of documentation by the author, one further alleged application of the word at this time may be questioned: Selz' suggestion that an exhibition in Bonn in late 1912 was entitled 'Rhenish Expressionists'.<sup>42</sup>

#### IV

Only when one realizes that the 'expressionists' in Germany had heretofore been French artists, can one place in proper perspective the next event in our chronicle: the most important exhibition of the entire period in Germany, and

<sup>35</sup> Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, *Der Blaue Reiter*, 1st ed., Munich 1912, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Wassily Kandinsky, *Ueber das Geistige in der Kunst*, 1st ed., Munich 1912, p. 31: 'Immer durch Selbstäusserungszwang geführt, oft stürmisch hingerissen, wirft sich Picasso von einem äusseren Mittel zum anderen.' Here Kandinsky reveals his understanding that 'expressionist' connotes 'self-expression'—though he does not consider himself so motivated.

<sup>37</sup> *Der Sturm*, iii, August 1912, p. 122 and (repeated in the next edition two weeks later) p. 130: 'Französische Expressionisten Braque/

Derain / Friesz / Herbin / Marie Laurencin / Vlaminck.'

<sup>38</sup> Laurencin's work was at this time being introduced to Germany in the Cologne Sonderbund Internationale: Selz, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

<sup>39</sup> Selz, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

<sup>40</sup> *Der Sturm*, iii, June 1912, pp. 66, 86; July 1912, pp. 98, 110.

<sup>41</sup> *Der Sturm*, iii, September 1912, pp. 142, 156; Ensor was then fifty-two years of age, hardly 'young'.

<sup>42</sup> Selz, *op. cit.*, p. 249.



the first to broaden the word 'expressionism' from its specifically French application to a wider European connotation.

On 25 May 1912, in the city of Cologne, a new 'movement' was officially announced by Richard Reiche, Director of the Sonderbund Internationale, in the catalogue introduction to that exhibition:<sup>43</sup>

This year's fourth exhibition of the Sonderbund wishes to give a survey of the present state of the most recent movement in painting, which has come to the fore after the naturalism of atmosphere and the impressionism of movement. This movement strives for a simplification and enhancement of forms of expression, a new rhythm and color, and aims at decorative or monumental formulation. The exhibition attempts to survey this movement, which has been called expressionism.

Since this is the only mention of the word expressionism in connexion with the Sonderbund Internationale, Reiche's usage was extremely vague. Because the Cologne exhibition gave the place of honour to 125 works by Van Gogh, and included many works by Signac, Cross, Munch, Cézanne and Gauguin, the word could apply quite literally to all art which came *after* 'naturalism' and impressionism in various European countries. On the other hand, the public could (and most likely did) assume that it was the 'new painting' in Germany, France, Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, Holland and Norway which represented the movement.<sup>44</sup> In either case, 'expressionism' was here used for the first time as a synonym for what then was 'modern' in European art—as a popularizing 'catch phrase' by which an unsophisticated public might readily distinguish the new from the old. Since Reiche's usage embraced *all* post-impressionist artists, the application of the term to any individual painter was, at least for the time being, superfluous.

The Cologne Sonderbund exhibition of 1912 performed a remarkable function in awakening the German public to modern art. But its only effects, as far as documentable usages of the word 'expressionism' are concerned, were extremely minor. First, Walden added the qualifying adjective 'French' to the announcement of his August 1912 expressionist exhibition (see above). And in the same month, Paul Klee associated the word with the art of his Swiss friends in the *Moderne Bund* to indicate:<sup>45</sup>

a form of artistic expression in which a long period can elapse between the moment of perception and the actual painting, in which several impressions can be combined or rejected in the final composition, and in which the constructive element of art is heightened and emphasized.

This definition is as remarkable for its emphasis upon Cézannesque and Nabi principles as for its apparent denial of spontaneity to the expressionist artistic process.

After the closing of the Sonderbund show in the fall of 1912 (judging by all available documentary sources) the supposedly broad, international 'movement' of expressionism was not seriously discussed, or remembered, by that

<sup>43</sup> Lothar-Günther Buchheim, *Die Künstlergemeinschaft Brücke*, Feldafing 1956, p. 12.

<sup>44</sup> Ludwig Coellen, *Die neue Malerei*, Munich 1912.

<sup>45</sup> Paul Klee, 'Die Ausstellung des Modernen Bundes im Kunsthaus Zürich', *Die Alpen*, vi (August 1912), pp. 696ff., as paraphrased in: Selz, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

title in Germany. In fact at Walden's 'First German Fall Salon' (a survey of contemporary art in nine countries, held in Berlin in late 1913), the words expressionism and expressionist were most conspicuous by their absence.

## V

Only in 1914 was the word expressionism first directly applied to the Brücke and Blaue Reiter artists. The honour belongs to Paul Fechter, a Dresden newspaper feuilletonist and later biographer of Max Pechstein, whose book *Der Expressionismus* was published by Piper in Munich in that fateful year. Although Fechter described the Brücke and Blaue Reiter as representative of two German expressionist 'currents' and named twentieth-century Dresden as 'the home-town of expressionism' (p. 28), he was less successful in defining the word expressionism itself.

First, according to Fechter, expressionism is the *antithesis to impressionism*. But by impressionism the German author signifies not merely the 'intrinsic impressionist movement . . . of the last third of the nineteenth century' (p. 6) but also 'the dominion of naturalism—the word understood in its most comprehensive sense' (p. 4). The impressionist dominion is thus made to include the 'old-masterly naturalism . . . of Manet, Courbet and Liebl' (p. 6), the 'scientific systematization . . . of Seurat and Signac' (p. 7), and by implication all art, from the Renaissance on, which accepted 'the natural environment as the only real reality' (p. 4). From this thesis it follows that:

Expressionism puts the accent essentially upon the experience of feeling and on its formulation in the most intensely concentrated manner possible. The perfunctory satisfaction in making the picture conform to 'reality' is eliminated. Appearance is subordinated to the wish for expression . . . Nature relinquishes her previous sovereignty once more to the artist, to the human soul. (p. 22.)

And expressionism is found in the work of all post-impressionist artists, including both Van Gogh and Cézanne (p. 8) and, from the vantage-point of the year 1914, 'all modern currents' (p. 24).

The second dimension of Fechter's definition states expressionism's *antithesis to intellect and to craftsmanship*. Expressionism is seen in opposition to: 'mere talent' (p. 21); 'scientifically refined theories'; the observer's 'physiological' participation (p. 23); that part of the mind which is concerned with 'representational intellect and the ability to project cause and effect relationships' (p. 25); conceptual or visual accuracy (p. 27); the 'superstitious belief in scientific method'; and, because they allegedly depend upon the intellect, 'literary and academic art' (p. 28). In this anti-intellectual sense the expressionist picture is conceived as

the concentrated, integrated expression of a feeling. Decorative considerations must become secondary; heightened human and spiritual considerations must become the essential purpose which everything else is to serve. . . . The artist's task . . . is the development of his image of things, feasible only in some kind of intuitive release. (p. 22).

The observer of an expressionist picture must recreate for himself 'that emotion from which the work grew inside the artist' (p. 23), and must be 'vivified himself in an analogous manner' (p. 24). Unfortunately, it is a necessary consequence of Fechter's anti-intellectual view of expressionist art that both craftsmanship and artistic quality be sacrificed. Composition from mere 'decorative considerations' is a sin (p. 24); 'the creative process' is more essential than the finished painting (p. 28); and 'the artistic merit' of expressionist works is far from absolute (p. 29).

An equally important dimension of the German author's approach is his insistence that expressionism *metaphysically embodies the Gothic spirit*. Fechter first indicates (p. 4) his indebtedness to Wilhelm Worringer's book published in 1910, *Die Formprobleme der Gotik*, and then defines the Gothic spirit as the 'metaphysical necessity of the German people' (p. 29). Since 'that metaphysical requirement' is also equated with the 'instinct for expression' (p. 3), it follows that expressionism is, in principle, a Germanic, Aryan or 'Northern' (p. 4) phenomenon, with only momentary and indirect influence upon the art of other countries. No matter whether either the Gothic or the expressionist art-forms had their origins outside Germany;

the tempo of the process was accelerated, the French lead was offset and, as things stand today, the leadership has shifted more and more to the German side again. (p. 13)

Not particularly chauvinistic in arrogating to German expressionism a Gothic spirit, Fechter also attributes to 'a new Gothic' the Cubist (viz. proto-Cubist) 'predilection for Negro sculpture and Polynesian art' (pp. 39-40); even Italian Futurist art is said to possess 'late Gothic effects' (p. 46), though these are 'without deeper significance'.

In addition, Fechter sees the expressionist creative impulse as *responsive to the Zeitgeist, rather than to the individual artist*. Since expressionist creation results from 'an obligation and a necessity' (p. 21), the individual artist deserves neither responsibility nor credit for his acts. Expressionism is a 'longing of the times' (p. 39), a 'striving of the times', and an 'inclination of the times' (p. 49), far beyond the ability of the individual artist to invent or contravert. In fact:

The individual perceives that he is more or less a link in the chain of communality. He discovers that he is somehow the medium for the expression of the world's soul, that there is a 'something', a universality, carrying him to creation. He realizes that it is not his own small volition, bounded by individuality. (pp. 49-50)

In the context of the other dimensions of his definition, Fechter thus proposes no less than a third major cycle of recent western art history. After the earlier occurrences of the Renaissance and the Baroque, and of Neo-Classicism and Romanticism, the 'modern' equivalents are seen as Impressionism and Expressionism. The author makes quite clear that his is an original interpretation of the word, expressionism:

Actually, it is apparently new that we appropriate expressionism to serve

as an antithesis to impressionism. It is a designation as good and as bad as the latter and is not a reflection on the old meaning. . . . (p. 22)

The reader is not informed here, or in any subsequent German source, as to the old meaning of the word.

The word expressionism in sum experienced a profound metamorphosis through Fechter's 1914 book. Without issue as a title for a group of French artists in and before 1911, without wide effect as the designation for all European post-impressionist art in 1912, expressionism at last became successful in finding retroactive application to modern German art.

## VI

How did it happen? How could a French word, applied to French artists, be transformed into a label for a German 'movement'—all within the few short years from the XXII Berliner Sezession in 1911 to the formulation of Fechter's definition in 1914?

The semantic confusion would seem to have two causes. First, expressionism *as a word* was foreign to Germany; like the term impressionism (which in Germany had long borne overtones of naturalism, as Max Liebermann's art attests), expressionism had no etymological links to any previously existent German word. But second and more important, an explanation for the transformation is readily found in a most unfortunate, but perfectly accidental, 'short-circuit' between unrelated ideas connoted by the German word 'Ausdruck' at this time.

In crossing the Rhine early in 1911, first of all, the French word 'expressionist' lost two of its most important connotations. According to Sievers' 1911 description quoted earlier, an expressionist was thought to be one who '[portrays] the *imprint* which the viewed object leaves in [his] artistic imagination'; an expressionist thus *portrayed imprints, or expressions, of something else* (here, 'the viewed object'). 'Imprints' and 'expressions' may be equated because Sievers (and others)<sup>46</sup> used the word 'Eindruck', where later writers would use 'Ausdruck', to indicate that which the expressionist artist portrays. Also (and this proved crucial) the two nouns are almost indistinguishable in German meaning: 'Eindruck' signifies 'impression, stamp, imprint, mark'; 'Ausdruck' translates as 'expression, phrase, term, appearance'. Unlike the French, the Germans could not seek the difference between impression and expression, between impressionist and expressionist, in any obvious semantic distinction—'impression, mark' (Eindruck) was simply too close to 'expression, appearance' (Ausdruck). Thus the idea of 'expression' was divorced from its French verbal origins and transferred to a German noun of considerable ambiguity: right here, the German critics lost the two French ideas of *process* and *direction of process* implicit in the Moreau-Matisse usages. The expressionist artist no longer expressed; he recapitulated or rendered. The expressionist no longer expressed himself; he rendered images with which external nature had already stimulated the internal self.

<sup>46</sup> Schmidt, for example, asked in relation to the expressionists: 'Of what use are [compositional studies or cartoons] to the modern artist, who wishes to render his impressions (Eindrücke)?' For source, see n. 27.

Had Sievers or his contemporaries wished to translate 'expressionist' literally and still retain the French meaning, some such verbal noun as 'Ausdrücker' or 'Äusserer' would have had to have been invented; the idea of actively 'externalizing' one's personality or temperament would have required 'Selbstäußerung'—as only Kandinsky perceived at this time.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps now we can understand why Schmidt called the word 'Expressionisten', of little significance early in 1912: the German substantive had no real meaning.

By the time that Reiche and the Sonderbund organization decided to label all modern art 'expressionism', the term had lost all emphasis on an active, creative process and connoted instead the fixed result of a process otherwise ill-defined. Expressionism, yes. Expression of what? Reiche did not supply the answer, contenting himself with the statement that the exponents of expressionism sought the 'simplification and enhancement of forms of expression (Ausdrucksformen)'. But Reiche's statement does provide the first clue to the ultimate denouement: his was the very first approach to connect the German noun 'Ausdruck' with the foreign term, expressionism. Although others during that summer of 1912 used 'Eindruck' and 'Ausdruck' together in seeking the meaning of the foreign word,<sup>48</sup> there was still no progress until, at last, Fechter in 1914 found the 'meaning' of expressionism in the fact that<sup>49</sup>

. . . the essence of art is always to give concentrated, inconceivably direct expression (Ausdruck) . . . to some feeling induced by human existence in the world.

With this statement, the semantic 'short-circuit' within the German word 'Ausdruck' was complete. An expressionist no longer expressed himself (Matisse, 1908); he no longer rendered images stimulated by nature on self (Sievers, 1911); he no longer merely used enhanced forms of expression (Reiche, 1912); now the expressionist gave expression to emotions, feelings, the spiritual and psychological strivings of his times (Fechter, 1914). Moreover, the creative process was neither personal nor limited by nature and decorative principle, as with Matisse; the creative process, universal and absolute, was itself the purpose and goal of art. Expression of what? Where Matisse had answered, self!—Fechter answers, emotion! And in this manner the French word expressionism became synonymous with the cardinal German aesthetic concept, *Ausdruckskunst*.

'Ausdruckskunst' combines the idea of expression with the connotation of feeling or emotion. Grohmann notes that in early twentieth-century France, 'there was no "Ausdruckskunst" in our sense of the word';<sup>50</sup> he also writes that:<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> See n. 36.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Fuchs, 'Der Ursprung der Künste', *Der Sturm*, iii, July 1912, p. 106: 'Impressionisten und Expressionisten können in den bildenden Künsten in dieser Reihenfolge mit wachsender Kraft einander ablösen. . . . Erst im Kampf mit der Wirklichkeit findet der Geist seine Einfachheit. Der Eindruck und die Bedeutung des Ausdrucks fallen zeitlich in vielen Fällen auseinander.'

See also Klee's statement of August 1912, in which both 'expression' and 'impressions' are used.

<sup>49</sup> Fechter, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>50</sup> Will Grohmann, as quoted in: Buchheim, *op. cit.*, p. 12; original source not indicated.

<sup>51</sup> Will Grohmann, *Bildende Kunst und Architektur zwischen den beiden Kriegen*, iii, Berlin 1953, p. 45.

The German 'Ausdrucks-kunst' is . . . dependent on universal and philosophical hypotheses; it is not merely the concern of the pictorial artist, but equally as much of the musician and writer.

An American author, H. Dickinson, describes German art as 'an art of expression' in these words:<sup>52</sup>

For the key-note of the Germanic character is emotion and the ideal of German art is, not beauty, but expression . . . its most significant manifestation is the inner perception, the insight which differentiates between the real and the apparent—between the essence and the phenomenon. . . . What the German apprehends as real is the inner *nature*—character and emotion—and this he expresses in art to the disregard of beauty of *external* form and feature. . . . 'Gefühl ist alles,' said Goethe, giving us in these few words the key to German character [and] German art. . . .

German art . . . is essentially a great emotional art. [One of] its characteristics, therefore, [is] insight—deep penetration into the inner life or significance of the subject, with resultant vivid characterization, but with relatively scant regard to external beauty. . . .

Dickinson's words characterizing all Germanic art of the past as 'Ausdrucks-kunst' are essentially identical to Fechter's arguments for twentieth-century expressionism. But the former does *not* derive from the latter: Dickinson's book was published in New York in 1914, the same year as Fechter's in Munich. On different continents then, both Dickinson and Fechter were utilizing the Ausdrucks-kunst aesthetic first postulated by such writers as Alois Riegl, Theodor Lipps and Wilhelm Worringer between 1893 and 1910.<sup>53</sup> Fechter merely applied to a new body of art the critical approach developed by leading German aestheticians to explain their own artistic heritage; no longer interpreting past art history, however, he was attributing artistic purposes and motives to contemporary artists very much in mid-career. What the English-speaking peoples might call 'the art of expression' was thus transformed into a critical hybrid—mating the French word, expressionism, with the meanings of the German concept, Ausdrucks-kunst.

## VII

Before offering certain conclusions to this study, it is well to outline briefly the contradictory approaches to the word expressionism current in art

<sup>52</sup> H. Dickinson, *German Masters of Art*, New York 1914, esp. ch. i, 'German Art as an Expression of German National Character', pp. 4-5, 8.

<sup>53</sup> Alois Riegl, *Stilfragen*, 1893; Riegl, *Spätromische Kunstindustrie*, Vienna 1901; Theodor Lipps, *Asthetik, Psychologie des Schönen in der Kunst*, Hamburg 1903; Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*, 1908; and Worringer, *Formprobleme der Gotik*, 1910. Selz, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9, 12-13, surveys the

critical approaches of these books; but it should be noted that the original editions of these books could have had no mention of the word 'expressionism'. Selz's statement (p. 13) that 'Worringer finally linked expressionism with the German Gothic tradition' might be based on his reading of the 1918 edition of *Formprobleme*: if so, this would have to be a revision of the 1910 text. Actually, as we have seen, it was Fechter who first linked expressionism with 'the Gothic spirit' in 1914.

criticism in the half century since Fechter's usage. The very juxtaposition of these approaches is often amusing—or would be if it did not point out so glaringly a major area of weakness in modern criticism.

Originating in Fechter's anti-impressionist dialectic, one approach equates expressionism with the *art of the early twentieth century as a whole*, finding cultural roots or parallels in the other arts and sciences of our time. Thus Herwarth Walden first asserted in 1919:<sup>54</sup>

We call the art of this century expressionist in order to distinguish it from what is not art. We are thoroughly familiar with the fact that artists of previous centuries also sought expression. Only they did not know how to formulate it.

In 1934 Seldon Cheney developed this argument to its most extreme and applied the term, expressionist, to the work of all modern artists from Cézanne and Rousseau to Picasso, Dali, and the social realist M. Siporin.<sup>55</sup> And in 1957 Peter Selz saw expressionism<sup>56</sup>

in part as a reaction against the prevailing values of the deceptively stable society in which the artists grew up. In their reactions against materialism and rationalism they were attempting to affirm the values of the spiritual. . . . Expressionism can be more fully understood if it is seen in relation to the relativistic and subjective trends in modern psychology, the sciences, and philosophy. . . .

In view of the inclusiveness of this description, it is not surprising that Selz is able to discuss no less than seventy German artists as expressionists where Fechter originally had mentioned but seven.<sup>57</sup>

The late Wilhelm R. Valentiner was to our knowledge the first to evaluate expressionism not as the whole, but as *one of the two most important parts, of modern art*. In 1941 he wrote:<sup>58</sup>

. . . from the point of view of historical significance and artistic quality, there can be little doubt that the two movements, expressionism and abstract art (the latter including cubism in its early phase), are of the greatest importance within the post-impressionist development.

The problem with this approach to the word is the difficulty in defining the

<sup>54</sup> Herwarth Walden, 'Kunst und Leben', *Der Sturm*, x, 1919, p. 2, as quoted in: Selz, *op. cit.*, p. 256. The quotation summarizes Walden's approach to the word as put forward in: H. Walden, *Expressionismus—die Kunstwende*, Berlin 1919. Later Walden followed contemporary opinion in restricting the word to German art; for this approach see: H. Walden, *Einblick in die Kunst—Expressionismus, Futurismus, Kubismus*, Berlin 1924.

<sup>55</sup> Seldon Cheney, *Expressionism in Art*, New York 1934; rev. ed., 1948, *passim*. Hans

Hoffman is Cheney's source for the word, expressionism.

<sup>56</sup> Selz, *op. cit.*, p. viii.

<sup>57</sup> The seven were: Kandinsky, Pechstein, Heckel, Kirchner, Schmidt-Rottluff, Marc and Kokoschka.

<sup>58</sup> W. R. Valentiner, 'Expressionism and Abstract Painting', *Art Quarterly*, iv (3), summer 1941, pp. 210–39, as quoted in: Jakob Rosenberg, 'German Expressionist Printmakers', *Magazine of Art*, xxxviii (8), December 1945, p. 300.

difference between an 'expressionist' and an 'abstract' artist.<sup>59</sup> As just one example, Lyonel Feininger is an artist who chose to call himself an expressionist,<sup>60</sup> yet his style derives directly from that very Cubist school which Valentiner and most recent writers consider to be abstract.

Fechter's anti-intellectual dialectic is the original source for the use of expressionism as a synonym for *emotionalism*. The dictionary distinction between the two words is quite clear:<sup>61</sup>

*expressionism*, . . . The theory or practice of freely expressing one's inner, or subjective, emotions and sensations.

*emotionalism*, . . . The habit of appealing to the emotions rather than to the conscience or judgment.

Emotion is involved in both definitions. But with the one, we are concerned with the feelings of the artist *during the creative process*; with the other, we are concerned with the feelings of the observer judging the *completed picture's effect*. As soon as expressionism is defined 'to indicate all art which depends on free and obvious distortions of natural forms to convey emotional feeling',<sup>62</sup> the emphasis is placed on the conveying of emotion to the observer—rather than on a definition in which distortions emphasize 'the personal emotional feelings of the artist toward his subject'.<sup>63</sup> Unfortunately, the confusion between process and effect is common in English-speaking countries today. When an American picture magazine first popularized 'Expressionism' in 1958 it did so by illustrating the most extreme examples of German emotionalist art over such captions as:<sup>64</sup>

*Violent Images of Emotion* . . . Horror and anxiety . . . Terror of burning city . . . Power of love . . . City's loneliness . . . Ghoulish satire . . .

The editorial assumption that emotional excess is the norm of expressionist art, indefensible on historical grounds,<sup>65</sup> reduces the anti-intellectual approach to this art to the level of the absurd.

The most far-ranging approach to the word, expressionism, equates it neither with emotionalism nor with modern art and culture in general, but with *Germanic art and culture in general*. Starting with Fechter's metaphysical link between expressionism and the 'Gothic spirit', this viewpoint proved

<sup>59</sup> For discussions of just this difficulty, see: D. Henry Kahnweiler, *Juan Gris, His Life and Work*, New York 1947, pp. 96–97; and Robert M. Coates, 'Four Expressionists', *The New Yorker*, 24 January 1959, p. 79.

<sup>60</sup> Lyonel Feininger, letter, 1917, as paraphrased in: Selz, *op. cit.*, p. 278.

<sup>61</sup> *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, Springfield 1949, p. 292; and *Funk & Wagnalls New Standard Dictionary*, New York 1937, p. 813.

<sup>62</sup> John I. H. Baur, *Revolution and Tradition in Modern American Art*, Cambridge, Mass., 1951, p. 34.

<sup>63</sup> Charles L. Kuhn, *German Expressionism and Abstract Art*, Cambridge 1957, p. 5.

<sup>64</sup> 'Expressionism', *Life*, 12 May 1958, pp. 82ff.

<sup>65</sup> Although the article states that the 'short-lived' expressionist epoch occurred in the 'decade in Germany before World War I', the desire to depict emotionalist paintings has led the editors to reproduce in colour more paintings created *after* the outbreak of that war than before; of the nine paintings so illustrated, five are datable between 1915 and 1947.



particularly popular among slightly later German critics who devoted numerous articles and at least ten books to the subject of expressionism in the years between 1919 and 1922 alone.<sup>66</sup> As early as 1919 the authority of Goethe was invoked in this cause:<sup>67</sup>

'Painting,' says Goethe, 'predicates what man wants to see, and what man ought to see, not what he ordinarily sees.' If one really needs a programme of expressionism, this is it.

Given the semantic confusion between expressionism and *Ausdruckskunst*, it was inevitable that expressionism was soon extended into the past to apply (in 1922) to the work of Matthais Grünewald,<sup>68</sup> and forward in time to apply (in 1923) to the art of the most important German painter to emerge after World War I, Max Beckmann.<sup>69</sup> By 1936 a general 'Introduction to German Painting' could exempt all Germanic art from the demands of 'beauty of form' by claiming that<sup>70</sup>

. . . German paintings, since they are so personal, emotional, and expressionistic in manner, do not primarily afford aesthetic pleasure; they demand thoughtful inspection.

None of these aspects of 'expressionism as Germanic art' can go unchallenged. Though Grünewald was first discovered during the period in question, his alleged influence on Kokoschka and other pre-war expressionists is of course a literary invention.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, although Beckmann was influenced by Brücke art, he personally 'never wished to be classified with the

<sup>66</sup> Among the first editions during these years are, according to Selz, *op. cit.*: Hermann Bahr, *Expressionismus*, 1919; Gustav Hartlaub, *Kunst und Religion*, 1919; Wilhelm Hausenstein, *Ueber Expressionismus in der Malerei*, 1919; Joachim Kirchner, *Die Voraussetzungen des Expressionismus*, 1919. See also the Walden sources cited in n. 54 above. Also: Theodor Däubler, *Im Kampf um die moderne Kunst*, 1920; Eckart von Sydow, *Die deutsche expressionistische Kultur und Malerei*, 1920; Fritz Landsberger, *Impressionismus und Expressionismus*, 1920; Georg Marzysky, *Die Methode des Expressionismus*, 1921; and Max Deri, *Naturalismus, Idealismus, Expressionismus*, 1922. Selz (p. 9, n. 41) also mentions Fechter, *op. cit.*, but in the second edition of 1920, not the first edition of 1914. For other bibliographic entries see, esp.: Lothar-Günther Buchheim, *Die Künstlergemeinschaft Brücke*, Feldafing 1956; and Bernard S. Myers, *The German Expressionists*, New York 1957. First edition dates provided in these sources, however, vary from those given by Selz—generally on the early side. Myers, for example, is certainly in error in dating Max Picard's *Expressionistische Bauernmalerei* in 1912, since the word had only French or

contemporary connotations in that year. Buchheim's dating of this book in 1915, and of Bahr's book in 1916, may be explained by the war-caused delay in printing and may represent the years in which publication contracts were signed with the writers; but if so, later dates (corresponding to the actual times of publication) would be the definitive ones for normal bibliographical purposes.

<sup>67</sup> Bahr, *op. cit.*, p. 115, as quoted in: Selz, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>68</sup> Deri, *op. cit.*, p. 73, as quoted in: Selz, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>69</sup> Paul Westheim, 'Beckmann: Der Wahre Expressionismus', [1923], as included in: St. Louis Museum catalog, *Max Beckmann*, 1948, pp. 104–5, and quoted in: Selz, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

<sup>70</sup> Arthur Burkhard, 'An Introduction to German Painting', as quoted in: Charles L. Kuhn, *A Catalog of German Paintings of the Middle Ages and Renaissance in American Collections*, Cambridge, Mass., 1936, pp. 5–7.

<sup>71</sup> Paul Ferdinand Schmidt ('Die internationale Ausstellung des Sonderbundes in Köln', *Zeitschrift für Bildende Kunst*, N.F. xxiii, 1912, p. 234) first compared the 'wild and fantastic' qualities of Kokoschka's art to those of Grünewald's. Fechter (*op. cit.*, p. 28)

expressionists'.<sup>72</sup> Finally, the argument that German art need not offer aesthetic pleasure (or be subject, in Fechter's words, to 'decorative considerations') can hardly be used as a defence against Latin critical standards. The argument becomes, rather than a defence, an indictment—as written by the late Bernard Berenson in 1954:<sup>73</sup>

'Expressionism,' . . . I venture to assert, has been the characteristic of Nordic . . . [art] from the Ottonian period to our own day, except for the feeble classicizing efforts of the hundred years ending with Marées and Hildebrandt. . . . Over-expression comes about either through more violent action of the body than the subject requires, or by means of features saying more than is called for. Over-expression, 'expressionism,' may be designated as inflational, as over-loud, as over-emphatic. The appeal is to the insensitive. . . .

## VIII

It has become common to speak of a German expressionist 'movement', allegedly centred in the pre-World War I period and comprising (at least in nucleus) the years 1905–13. Aside from the applicability of the expressionist label, to be discussed below, there is a further question as to whether the 'movement' itself can be considered as historical fact. An art movement has been defined as a sharing of creative vision, as 'the result of common interests, aims, attitudes and methods'.<sup>74</sup> But what did the pre-war German generation actually share? Did the artists of the Brücke and Blaue Reiter groups, and such individuals as Modersohn-Becker and Kokoschka, all possess the same creative vision? Are the attitudes and methods of, say, Kirchner and Kandinsky that much more similar than those of Matisse and Picasso—so that the grouping of the first pair is defensible where, for the latter two, it is not? No, it remains to be proven whether a communality of interests and aims existed among all German artists before 1914; all we have succeeded in suggesting here is that this communality existed among German critics and writers, primarily in the years 1914–23—and that the thing shared was an ambiguous term, expressionism, not any single artistic attitude by that name.

goes further and alleges a 'connection' between Kokoschka and 'painters of the past whom the modern generation sees as the true forefathers of German art . . . above all, Grünewald'. While claiming that 'the Gothic and Grünewald had been [a very real utopian ideal] for the expressionist generation', Selz (*op. cit.*, pp. 18–19) can only find one 1913 painting by Heinrich Nauen, based on the Isenheim altar, in direct support of his view. In general, it appears that with the exception of Nauen's work (isolated from, and formally without influence upon, contemporary art in Berlin and Munich) admiration for Grünewald was expressed by

postwar critics in their writings, not by pre-war painters in their art.

<sup>72</sup> Selz, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

<sup>73</sup> Bernard Berenson, *Piero della Francesca, or The Ineloquent in Art*, New York 1954, pp. 8, 13, 18. Contrast Berenson's definition of 'expressionism' with Matisse's approach to the word 'expression': 'Expression to my way of thinking does not consist of the passion mirrored upon a human face or betrayed by a violent gesture.' For the Matisse source, see n. 4 above.

<sup>74</sup> John I. H. Baur, *Revolution and Tradition in Modern American Art*, Cambridge, Mass., 1951, pp. vii–viii.

Under the circumstances it might be wise to consider redefining 'expressionism', rigorously, in terms of its original French meanings—and to assign with equal rigour all later meanings to the word 'Ausdruckskunst' or (as an appropriate English-language analogue) 'emotionalism', in the sense of 'art of emotional expression'. Resting on the basic distinction between Moreau's 'express yourself' and Goethe's 'Gefühl ist alles', the early French usages are quite specific and internally consistent. They describe a creative process (succinctly characterized by Matisse in his 'Notes d'un peintre' of 1908) whereby representation is both conditioned by pictorial logic and determined by subjective perception. No longer possessing a metaphysically Germanic meaning, expressionism becomes all the more appropriate for the art of Kirchner, the Brücke, and some other pioneers of 'art as self-expression' in early twentieth-century Germany.

If expressionism were redefined in this manner, it might then prove provocative (following the precedent of the Cologne Sonderbund International exhibition in 1912) to ask whether most avant-garde European art of the 1885–1914 period was not indeed 'expressionist'. The Cologne usage at least suggests the possibility of similarities in creative process between post-impressionist artists (now often arbitrarily isolated in critical scholarship) and their immediate successors: between Cézanne and Matisse, for example, or between Gauguin and Kandinsky. On the other hand it is perfectly possible to restrict the application to art of the 1900–14 period in France and Germany. Such a usage is in keeping with the original French connotations of 'expression' and could stimulate new inquiries into unexplored relationships between such near-contemporary schools as, for example, the Fauve and the Cubist. That such Cubists-to-be as Braque and Picasso were among the very first artists ever to be exhibited as 'expressionists' indicates a closer relationship between all the major schools of the period—Fauve, Brücke, Cubist, and Blaue Reiter—than has heretofore generally been recognized.