It is necessary to point out once more that archetypes are not determined as regards their content, but only as regards their form and then only to a very limited degree. A primordial image is determined as to its content only when it has become conscious and is therefore filled out with the material of conscious experience. Its form, however, as I have explained elsewhere, might perhaps be compared to the axial system of a crystal, which, as it were, preforms the crystalline structure in the mother liquid, although it has no material existence of its own. This first appears according to the specific way in which the ions and molecules aggregate. The archetype in itself is empty and purely formal, nothing but \textit{facultas praeformandi}, a possibility of representation which is given \textit{a priori}. The representations themselves are not inherited, only the forms, and in that respect they correspond in every way to the instincts, which are also determined in form only. The existence of the instincts can no more be proved than the existence of the archetypes, so long as they do not manifest themselves concretely. With regard to the definiteness of the form, our comparison with the crystal is illuminating inasmuch as the axial system determines only the stereometric structure but not the concrete form of the individual crystal. This may be either large or small, and it may vary endlessly by reason of the different size of its planes or by the growing together of two crystals. The only thing that remains constant is the axial system, or rather, the invariable geometric proportions underlying it. The same is true of the archetype. In principle, it can be named and has an invariable nucleus of meaning – but always only in principle, never as regards its concrete manifestation.

7 Alfred H. Barr Jr (1902–1981) from \textit{Cubism and Abstract Art}

The author was the first Director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Barr's innovations in many ways set the terms in which modern art has continued to be viewed, both as regards the physical display of works of art and the scholarly apparatus – notably the exhibition catalogue – which surrounds them. To accompany the exhibition 'Cubism and Abstract Art' of 1936 Barr produced for the catalogue a complex diagram to illustrate the dominance of two trends in modern art: one 'fantastic' in purport and largely curvilinear or biomorphic in execution; the other rationalist and principally rectilinear. Though Barr's perspective was thus fundamentally formalist, he was not altogether heedless of social and political circumstances. For Barr, abstract and near-abstract avant-garde art expressed a freedom denied to art, and \textit{a fortiori} to society, by regimes which enforced particular artistic forms (regimes which he had experienced at first hand on visits to Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany). Originally published by the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1936. The present extracts are taken from pp. 11, 13, 19.

The early twentieth century

Sometimes in the history of art it is possible to describe a period or a generation of artists as having been obsessed by a particular problem. The artists of the early fifteenth century for instance were moved by a passion for imitating nature. In the North the Flemings mastered appearances by the meticulous observation of external detail. In Italy the Florentines employed a profounder science to discover the laws of perspective, of foreshortening, anatomy, movement and relief.
In the early twentieth century the dominant interest was almost exactly opposite. The pictorial conquest of the external visual world had been completed and refined many times and in different ways during the previous half millennium. The more adventurous and original artists had grown bored with painting facts. By a common and powerful impulse they were driven to abandon the imitation of natural appearance.

‘Abstract’

‘Abstract’ is the term most frequently used to describe the more extreme effects of this impulse away from ‘nature.’ It is customary to apologize for the word ‘abstract,’ but words to describe art movements or works of art are often inexact: we no longer apologize for applying the ethnological word ‘Gothic’ to French thirteenth-century art and the Portuguese word for an irregular pearl, ‘Baroque,’ to European art of the seventeenth century. Substitutes for ‘abstract’ such as ‘non-objective’ and ‘non-figurative’ have been advocated as superior. But the image of a square is as much an ‘object’ or a ‘figure’ as the image of a face or a landscape; in fact ‘figure’ is the very prefix used by geometers in naming A or B the abstractions with which they deal.

This is not to deny that the adjective ‘abstract’ is confusing and even paradoxical. For an ‘abstract’ painting is really a most positively concrete painting since it confines the attention to its immediate, sensuous, physical surface far more than does the canvas of a sunset or a portrait. The adjective is confusing, too, because it has the implications of both a verb and a noun. The verb to abstract means to draw out of or away from. But the noun abstraction is something already drawn out of or away from—so much so that like a geometrical figure or an amorphous silhouette it may have no apparent relation to reality. ‘Abstract’ is therefore an adjective which may be applied to works of art with a certain latitude. […] The ambiguity of the word abstract as applied to works of art is really useful for it reveals the ambiguity and confusion which is inseparable from the subject. […]

Dialectic of abstract art

Abstract art today needs no defense. It has become one of the many ways to paint or carve or model. But it is not yet a kind of art which people like without some study and some sacrifice of prejudice. Prejudice can sometimes be met with argument, and for this purpose the dialectic of abstract painting and sculpture is superficially simple enough. It is based upon the assumption that a work of art, a painting for example, is worth looking at primarily because it presents a composition or organization of color, line, light and shade. Resemblance to natural objects, while it does not necessarily destroy these esthetic values, may easily adulterate their purity. Therefore, since resemblance to nature is at best superfluous and at worst distracting, it might as well be eliminated. […]

Such an attitude of course involves a great impoverishment of painting, an elimination of a wide range of values, such as the connotations of subject matter, sentimental, documentary, political, sexual, religious; the pleasures of easy recognition; and th
enjoyment of technical dexterity in the imitation of material forms and surfaces. But in
his art the abstract artist prefers impoverishment to adulteration. […]

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Two main traditions of Abstract Art
At the risk of grave oversimplification the impulse towards abstract art during the past
fifty years may be divided historically into two main currents, both of which emerged
from Impressionism. The first and more important current finds its sources in the art
and theories of Cézanne and Seurat, passes through the widening stream of Cubism
and finds its delta in the various geometrical and Constructivist movements which
developed in Russia and Holland during the War and have since spread throughout the
World. This current may be described as intellectual, structural, architectonic, geo-
metrical, rectilinear and classical in its austerity and dependence upon logic and
calculation. The second — and, until recently, secondary — current has its principal
source in the art and theories of Gauguin and his circle, flows through the Fauvisme of
Matisse to the Abstract Expressionism of the pre-War paintings of Kandinsky. After
running under ground for a few years it reappears vigorously among the masters of
abstract art associated with Surrealism. This tradition, by contrast with the first, is
intuitional and emotional rather than intellectual; organic or biomorphic rather than
geometrical in its forms; curvilinear rather than rectilinear, decorative rather than
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spontaneous and the irrational. Apollo, Pythagoras and Descartes watch over the
Cézanne-Cubist-geometrical tradition; Dionysus (an Asiatic god), Plotinus and Rous-
seau over the Gauguin-Expressionist-non-geometrical line.

Often, of course, these two currents intermingle and they may both appear in one
man. At their purest the two tendencies may be illustrated by paintings of twenty years
ago: a Suprematist composition by Malevich and an Improvisation by Kandinsky. The
geometrical strain is represented today by the painter Mondrian and the Constructiv-
ists Pevsner and Gabo; the non-geometrical by the painter Miro and the sculptor Arp.
The shape of the square confronts the silhouette of the amoeba.

Henri Matisse (1869–1954) Statements to Tériade
For most of the 1920s and 1930s Matisse had worked in the south of France. His works of
this period have a relationship to hedonism and luxury which has often provoked concern
even among supporters such as Clement Greenberg; though it should be said that these
doubts have tended to be resolved in Matisse's favour. In the mid-1930s Matisse seems to
have experienced similar doubts and to have conceived the need to return to the basic
principles of his art, to reinforce his 'purity of means'. E. Tériade was a critic and friend who
had published previous statements by Matisse in 1929–30 and 1933. Entitled 'Constance
de Fauvisme', the present statements were published, somewhat paradoxically, in the
Surrealist journal Minotaure, II, no. 9, 15 October 1936, p. 3, under Tériade's editorship.
The parenthetical passages are from an alternative version of the statements published by
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