

***Van Gogh, the Man
Suicided by Society (1947)***

XXXIII

Introduction

One can speak of the good mental health of van Gogh who, in his whole life, cooked only one of his hands and did nothing else except once to cut off his left ear,

in a world in which every day one eats vagina cooked in green sauce or penis of newborn child whipped and beaten to a pulp, just as it is when plucked from the sex of its mother.

And this is not an image, but a fact abundantly and daily repeated and cultivated throughout the world.

And this, however delirious this statement may seem, is how modern life maintains its old atmosphere of debauchery, anarchy, disorder, delirium, derangement, chronic insanity, bourgeois inertia, psychic anomaly (for it is not man but the world which has become abnormal), deliberate dishonesty and notorious hypocrisy, stingy contempt for everything that shows breeding,

insistence on an entire order based on the fulfillment of a primitive injustice,

in short, of organized crime.

Things are going badly because sick consciousness has a vested interest right now in not recovering from its sickness.

This is why a tainted society has invented psychiatry to defend itself against the investigations of certain superior intellects whose faculties of divination would be troublesome.

Gérard de Nerval was not mad, but society accused him of being mad in order to discredit certain very important revelations that he was about to make,

and besides being accused, he was also struck on the head, physically struck on the head on a certain night so that he would lose memory of the monstrous facts which he was about to reveal and which, as a result of this blow, were pushed back within him onto a supranatural level, because all society, secretly in league against his consciousness, was at that moment powerful enough to make him forget their reality.

No, van Gogh was not mad, but his paintings were bursts of Greek fire, atomic bombs, whose angle of vision, unlike all other paintings popular at the time, would have been capable of seri-

ously upsetting the spectral conformity of the Second Empire bourgeoisie and of the myrmidons of Thiers, Gambetta, and Félix Faure, as well as those of Napoleon III.

For it is not a certain conformity of manners that the painting of van Gogh attacks, but rather the conformity of institutions themselves. And even external nature, with her climates, her tides, and her equinoctial storms, cannot, after van Gogh's stay upon earth, maintain the same gravitation.

All the more reason why on the social level institutions are falling apart and medicine resembles a stale and useless corpse which declares van Gogh insane.

In comparison with the lucidity of van Gogh, which is a dynamic force, psychiatry is no better than a den of apes who are themselves obsessed and persecuted and who possess nothing to mitigate the most appalling states of anguish and human suffocation but a ridiculous terminology,

worthy product of their damaged brains.

Indeed, the psychiatrist does not exist who is not a well-known erotomaniac.

And I do not believe that the rule of the confirmed erotomania of psychiatrists admits of a single exception.

I know one who objected, a few years ago, to the idea of my accusing as a group this way the whole gang of respected scoundrels and patented quacks to which he belonged.

I, Mr. Artaud, am not an erotomaniac, he told me, and I defy you to show me a single piece of evidence on which you can base your accusation.

As evidence, Dr. L., I need only show you yourself,
you bear the stigma on your mug,
you rotten bastard.

You have the puss of someone who inserts his sexual prey under his tongue and then turns it over like an almond as a way of showing contempt for it.

This is called feathering one's nest or having one's way.

If in coitus you have not succeeded in chuckling from the glottis in a certain way that you know, and in rumbling at the same time through the pharynx, the esophagus, the ureter, and the anus,

you cannot say that you are satisfied.

And through your internal organic thrills you have fallen into a rut which is the incarnate evidence of a foul lust,
and which you have been cultivating year after year, more and more, because socially speaking it does not come under the jurisdiction of the law,

but it comes under the jurisdiction of another law whereby it is the whole damaged consciousness that suffers, because by behaving in this way you prevent it from breathing.

You dismiss as delirious a consciousness that is active even as you strangle it with your vile sexuality.

And this was precisely the level on which poor van Gogh was chaste,

chaste as a seraph or a maiden cannot be, because it was in fact they

who fomented

and nourished in the beginning the vast machinery of sin.

And perhaps, Dr. L., you belong to the race of iniquitous seraphim, but for pity's sake, leave men alone,

the body of van Gogh, untouched by any sin, was also untouched by madness which, indeed, sin alone can bring.

And I do not believe in Catholic sin,

but I do believe in erotic crime which in fact all the geniuses of the earth,

the authentic madmen of the asylums, have guarded themselves against,

or if not, it was because they were not (authentically) mad.

And what is an authentic madman?

It is a man who preferred to become mad, in the socially accepted sense of the word, rather than forfeit a certain superior idea of human honor.

So society has strangled in its asylums all those it wanted to get rid of or protect itself from, because they refused to become its accomplices in certain great nastinesses.

For a madman is also a man whom society did not want to hear and whom it wanted to prevent from uttering certain intolerable truths.

But, in this case, confinement is not its only weapon, and the concerted gathering of men has other means of overcoming the wills it wants to break.

Besides the minor spells of country sorcerers, there are the great sessions of world-wide spell-casting in which all alerted consciousness participates periodically.

Thus on the occasion of a war, a revolution, or a social upheaval still in the bud, the collective consciousness is questioned and questions itself, and makes its judgment.

This consciousness may also be aroused and called forth spontaneously in connection with certain particularly striking individual cases.

Thus there were collective magic spells in connection with Baudelaire, Poe, Gérard de Nerval, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Hölderlin, Coleridge,

and also in connection with van Gogh.

This may take place in the daytime, but generally, it is more likely to take place at night.

Thus strange forces are aroused and brought up into the astral vault, into that kind of dark dome which constitutes, over all human respiration, the venomous hostility of the evil spirit of the majority of people.

It is thus that the few rare lucid well-disposed people who have had to struggle on the earth find themselves at certain hours of the day or night in the depth of certain authentic and waking nightmare states, surrounded by the formidable suction, the formidable tentacular oppression of a kind of civic magic which will soon be seen appearing openly in social behavior.

In the face of this concerted nastiness, which has as its basis or fulcrum on the one hand sexuality and on the other hand the mass, or other psychic rites, it is not delirium to walk around at night in a hat with twelve candles on it to paint a landscape from nature;

for how else could poor van Gogh have managed to have light, as our friend the actor Roger Blin pointed out so justly the other day?

As for the cooked hand, that is heroism pure and simple;

as for the severed ear, that is straightforward logic,

and I repeat,

a world which, day and night, and more and more, eats the uneatable,

in order to carry out its evil designs,
has nothing to do on this point
but to shut up about it.

Post-Scriptum

Van Gogh did not die of a state of delirium properly speaking,

but of having been bodily the battlefield of a problem around which the evil spirit of humanity has been struggling from the beginning.

The problem of the predominance of flesh over spirit, or of body over flesh, or of spirit over both.

And where in this delirium is the place of the human self?

Van Gogh searched for his throughout his life, with a strange energy and determination,

and he did not commit suicide in a fit of madness, in dread of not succeeding,

on the contrary, he had just succeeded, and discovered what he was and who he was, when the collective consciousness of society, to punish him for escaping from its clutches, suicided him.

And this happened to van Gogh the way this always generally happens, during an orgy, a mass, an absolution, or some other rite of consecration, possession, succubation or incubation.

Thus it wormed its way into his body,

this society

absolved,

consecrated,

sanctified

and possessed,

erased in him the supernatural consciousness he had just achieved, and, like an inundation of black crows in the fibers of his internal tree,

overwhelmed him with one final surge,

and, taking his place,

killed him.

For it is the anatomical logic of modern man that he has never been able to live, has never thought of living, except as one possessed.

The Man Suicided by Society

Pure linear painting had been driving me mad for a long time when I encountered van Gogh, who painted neither lines nor forms but things of inert nature as if in the throes of convulsions. And inert.

As if under the terrible staggering blow of that force of inertia which the whole world talks about cryptically and which has never been so obscure as it is now that the whole earth and all of life have combined to elucidate it.

Now, it is with a bludgeon stroke, truly with a bludgeon stroke, that van Gogh never ceases striking all forms of nature and all objects.

Carded by van Gogh's nail,
the landscapes show their hostile flesh,
the anvil of their eviscerated folds,
which one knows not what strange force is in the process of transforming.

An exhibit of the paintings of van Gogh is always a date in history,
not in the history of painted things, but in history pure and simple.

For there is nothing, no famine, no epidemic, no volcanic eruption, no earthquake, no war which grates on the monads of the air, which wrings the neck of the menacing figure of *fama fatum*, the neurotic destiny of things,

like a painting by van Gogh—brought out into the light of day,

restored directly to sight,
hearing, touch,
smell,
on the walls of an exhibit—
in short, launched afresh into current reality, reintroduced into circulation.

The latest van Gogh exhibit at the Orangerie does not have all the very great paintings of the unfortunate painter. But among those that are there, there are enough rotating processions studded with clumps of carmine plants, enough sunken roads with

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overhanging yews, enough violet suns whirling over haystacks of pure gold, enough *Père Tranquille* and enough self-portraits, to remind us what a sordid simplicity of objects, people, materials, elements,

van Gogh drew on for these kinds of organ peals, these fireworks, these atmospheric epiphanies, in short, this "Great Life-work" of an incessant and untimely transmutation.

These crows painted two days before his death did not, any more than his other paintings, open the door for him to a certain posthumous glory, but they do open to painterly painting, or rather to unpainted nature, the secret door to a possible beyond, to a possible permanent reality, through the door opened by van Gogh to an enigmatic and sinister beyond.

It is not usual to see a man, with the shot that killed him already in his belly, crowding black crows onto a canvas, and under them a kind of meadow—perhaps livid, at any rate empty—in which the wine color of the earth is juxtaposed wildly with the dirty yellow of the wheat.

But no other painter besides van Gogh would have known how to find, as he did, in order to paint his crows, that truffle black, that "rich banquet" black which is at the same time, as it were, excremental, of the wings of the crows surprised in the fading gleam of evening.

And what does the earth complain of down there under the wings of those *auspicious* crows, auspicious, no doubt, for van Gogh alone, and on the other hand, sumptuous augury of an evil which can no longer touch him?

For no one until then had turned the earth into that dirty linen twisted with wine and wet blood.

The sky in the painting is very low, bruised,
violet, like the lower edges of lightning.
The strange shadowy fringe of the void rising after the flash.
Van Gogh loosed his crows like the black microbes of his suicide's spleen a few centimeters from the top *and as if from the bottom of the canvas*,

following the black slash of that line where the beating of

their rich plumage adds to the swirling of the terrestrial storm the heavy menace of a suffocation from above.

And yet the whole painting is rich.

Rich, sumptuous, and calm.

Worthy accompaniment to the death of the man who during his life set so many drunken suns whirling over so many unruly haystacks and who, desperate, with a bullet in his belly, had no choice but to flood a landscape with blood and wine, to drench the earth with a final emulsion, both dark and joyous, with a taste of bitter wine and spoiled vinegar.

And so the tone of the last canvas painted by van Gogh—he who, elsewhere, never went beyond painting—evokes the abrupt and barbarous tonal quality of the most moving, passionate, and impassioned Elizabethan drama.

This is what strikes me most of all in van Gogh, the most painterly of all painters, and who, without going any further than what is called and is painting, without going beyond the tube, the brush, the framing of the *subject* and of the canvas to resort to anecdote, narrative, drama, picturesque action, or to the intrinsic beauty of subject or object, was able to imbue nature and objects with so much passion that not one of the fabulous tales of Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Gérard de Nerval, Achim von Arnim, or Hoffmann says more on a psychological and dramatic level than his unpretentious canvases,

his canvases which are almost all, in fact, and as if deliberately, of modest dimensions.

A candlestick on a chair, an armchair of braided green straw, a book on the armchair, and there the drama is revealed.

Who is about to enter?

Will it be Gauguin or some other ghost?

The lit candle on the straw-bottomed chair seems to indicate the line of luminous demarcation that divides the two antagonistic individualities of van Gogh and Gauguin.

The aesthetic object of their disagreement would not, perhaps, be of great interest in itself, but it would necessarily indicate a

profound human division between the two natures of van Gogh and Gauguin.

I believe that Gauguin thought that the artist must look for symbol, for myth, must enlarge the things of life to the magnitude of myth,

whereas van Gogh thought that one must know how to deduce myth from the most ordinary things of life.

In which I think he was bloody well right.

For reality is frighteningly superior to all fiction, all fable, all divinity, all surreality.

All you need is the genius to know how to interpret it.

Which no painter before poor van Gogh had done,

which no painter will ever do again,

for I believe that this time,

today, in fact,

right now,

in this month of February 1947,

reality itself,

the myth of reality itself, mythic reality itself, is in the process of becoming flesh.

Thus, no one since van Gogh has *known* how to move the great cymbal, the superhuman, the *perpetually* superhuman tone, according to the repressed order with which the objects of real life ring,

when one has known how to open one's ear enough to understand the rise of their tidal wave.

It is thus that the light of the candle rings, that the light of the lit candle on the green straw-bottomed chair rings like the breathing of a loving body in the presence of the body of a sleeping invalid.

It rings like a strange criticism, a profound and surprising judgment whose sentence van Gogh may well allow us later to assume, much later, on that day when the violet light of the straw-bottomed chair will have finished submerging the whole painting.

And one cannot help noticing that fraction of lavender light that consumes the crossbars of the large ominous chair, the old splay-legged chair of green straw, although one cannot notice it at once.

For the focus of this light is as if placed elsewhere and its source is strangely obscure, like a secret whose key only van Gogh would have kept on his own person.

If van Gogh had not died at thirty-seven? I do not call in the Great Mourner to tell me with what supreme masterpieces painting would have been enriched,

for after *The Crows*, I cannot persuade myself that van Gogh would ever have painted again.

I think that he died at thirty-seven because he had, alas, reached the end of his dismal and revolting story of a man strangled by an evil spirit.

For it was not because of himself, because of the disease of his own madness, that van Gogh abandoned life.

It was under the pressure of the evil influence, two days before his death, of Dr. Gachet, a so-called psychiatrist, which was the direct, effective, and sufficient cause of his death.

When I read van Gogh's letters to his brother, I was left with the firm and sincere conviction that Dr. Gachet, "psychiatrist," actually detested van Gogh, painter, and that he detested him as a painter, but above all as a genius.

It is almost impossible to be a doctor and an honest man, but it is obscenely impossible to be a psychiatrist without at the same time bearing the stamp of the most incontestable madness: that of being unable to resist that old atavistic reflex of the mass of humanity, which makes any man of science who is absorbed by this mass a kind of natural and inborn enemy of all genius.

Medicine was born of evil, if it was not born of illness, and if it has, on the contrary, provoked and created illness out of nothing to justify its own existence; but psychiatry was born of the vulgar mob of creatures who wanted to preserve the evil at the source of illness and who have thus pulled out of their own inner nothingness a kind of Swiss guard to cut off at its root that impulse of rebellious vindication which is at the origin of genius.

There is in every lunatic a misunderstood genius whose idea, shining in his head, frightened people, and for whom delirium was

the only solution to the strangulation that life had prepared for him.

Dr. Gachet did not tell van Gogh that he was there to straighten out his painting (as Dr. Gaston Ferdière, head physician of the asylum of Rodez, told me he was there to straighten out my poetry), but he sent him to paint from nature, to bury himself in a landscape to escape the pain of thinking.

Except that, as soon as van Gogh had turned his back, Dr. Gachet turned off the switch to his mind.

As if, without intending any harm but with one of those seemingly innocent disparaging wrinklins of the nose where the whole bourgeois unconscious of the earth has inscribed the old magic force of a thought one hundred times repressed.

In so doing, it was not only the evil of the problem which Dr. Gachet forbade him,

but the sulphurous insemination,

the horror of the nail turning in the gullet of the only passage, with which van Gogh,

tetanized,

van Gogh, suspended over the chasm of breath, painted.

For van Gogh was a terrible sensibility.

To be convinced of this, one need only look at his face, the always panting and also in certain respects spellbinding face of a butcher.

Like the face of an old-time butcher, become wise and now retired from business, this badly lighted face pursues me.

Van Gogh has represented himself in a very large number of canvases and, no matter how well lighted they were, I have always had that painful impression that the lighting had been faked, that van Gogh had been deprived of a light indispensable for carving out and tracing his path within himself.

And of course it was not Dr. Gachet who was able to point out this path to him.

But, as I have said, there is in every living psychiatrist a repulsive and sordid atavism that makes him see in every artist, every genius he comes across, an enemy.

And I know that Dr. Gachet left the impression on history, with regard to van Gogh, whom he was treating and who ultimately committed suicide while at his house, that he was his last friend on earth, a kind of providential consoler.

And yet I am more convinced than ever that it was to Dr. Gachet of Auvers-sur-Oise that van Gogh was indebted on that day, the day he committed suicide at Auvers-sur-Oise, was indebted, I say, for abandoning life—

for van Gogh was one of those natures whose superior lucidity enables them in all circumstances to see farther, infinitely and dangerously farther, than the immediate and apparent reality of facts.

I mean that he saw farther in his consciousness than consciousness usually contains.

In the depths of those almost lashless butcher's eyes, van Gogh devoted himself relentlessly to one of those operations of somber alchemy which took nature as their object and the human body as their vessel or crucible.

And I know that Dr. Gachet always found that this tired him.

Which was not in him the result of a simple medical concern, but the admission of a jealousy as conscious as it was unacknowledged.

The truth is that van Gogh had arrived at the stage of illumination where the mind in disorder falls back before the invading discharges of matter

and which to think is no longer to use oneself up,
and is no longer,

and where there is nothing left to do but *gather the body together*, I mean

PILE UP BODIES.

It is no longer the world of the astral, it is the world of direct creation which is thus recovered beyond consciousness and the brain.

And I have never seen a body without a brain that may have been tired by inert supports.

Supports of the inert—these bridges, these sunflowers, these yews, these olive harvests, these haymakings. They no longer move.

They are frozen.

But who would have been able to dream them more solid beneath the carver's blow to the quick which has unsealed their impenetrable trembling.

No, Dr. Gachet, a support has never tired anyone. These are forces of a madman which lie in repose without causing movement.

I, too, am like poor van Gogh, I no longer think, but I direct, every day at closer hand, formidable internal ebullitions, and I would like to see any medical science whatsoever come and reproach me for tiring myself.

History tells us that someone owed van Gogh a certain sum of money: van Gogh had already been fretting about it for several days.

It is a tendency of lofty natures, always one notch above reality, to explain everything in terms of bad conscience, to believe that nothing is ever due to chance and that everything bad that happens is the result of an ill will that is conscious, intelligent, and concerted.

Which psychiatrists never believe.

Which geniuses always believe.

When I am sick, it is because I am under a spell, and I cannot believe I am sick if I do not also believe that someone has an interest in robbing me of my health and is profiting by my health.

Van Gogh also believed that he was under a spell, and he said so.

And as for myself, I believe pertinently that he was, and some day I shall tell where and how.

And Dr. Gachet was that grotesque Cerberus, that sanious and purulent Cerberus, in sky-blue jacket and gleaming linen, placed before poor van Gogh to rob him of all his sound ideas. For if this way of seeing which is sound were to become universal, society

could no longer exist, but I know which heroes of the earth would find their freedom there.

Van Gogh was unable to shake off in time this type of vampirism of a family selfishly concerned that the genius of van Gogh the painter stick to painting, without at the same time demanding the revolution indispensable to the bodily and physical blossoming of his visionary personality.

And there took place between Dr. Gachet and Theo, van Gogh's brother, how many of those stinking confabulations that families have with the head physicians of insane asylums regarding the *patient* they have brought them.

"Keep an eye on him, make sure he forgets all those ideas. You understand, the doctor said so, you must forget all those ideas: they're hurting you, if you keep on thinking about them you'll stay shut up for the rest of your life."

"But no, van Gogh, come to your senses, look, it's chance, and then it never does any good to want to look into the secrets of Providence this way. I know Mr. So-and-so, he's a very fine man, it's your persecution complex that makes you believe again that he is thus secretly performing magic."

"He promised you he would pay you this sum, and he'll pay it. You can't go on this way, insisting on attributing this delay to ill will."

These are examples of those smooth conversations of good-natured psychiatrists which seem harmless enough, but which leave on the heart the trail of a little black tongue as it were, the harmless little black tongue of a poisonous salamander.

And sometimes it takes no more than this to drive a genius to suicide.

There are days when the heart feels the deadlock so terribly that it takes it like a blow on the head with a piece of bamboo, this idea that it will not be able to go on any longer.

For it was, in fact, after a conversation with Dr. Gachet that van Gogh, as if nothing were the matter, went back to his room and killed himself.

I myself spent nine years in an insane asylum and I never had the obsession of suicide, but I know that each conversation with a psychiatrist, every morning at the time of his visit, made me want

to hang myself, realizing that I would not be able to cut his throat.

And Theo may have been very good to his brother financially, but this did not prevent his believing him to be a raving, hallucinated visionary, and from doing everything he could, instead of following him in his delirium,

to calm him down.

If he died of regret, afterward, what does it matter?

What van Gogh cared about most in the world was his idea of a painter, his terrible, fanatical, apocalyptic idea of a visionary.

That the world should be organized under the command of its own womb, should resume its compressed, anti-psychoic rhythm of a secret festival in the public square and, in front of the whole world, should be returned to the extreme heat of the crucible.

This means that the apocalypse, a consummated apocalypse, is brooding right now in the paintings of old martyred van Gogh, and that the world needs him in order to lash out with head and feet.

No one has ever written, painted, sculpted, modeled, built, or invented except literally to get out of hell.

And I prefer, to get out of hell, the landscapes of this quiet convulsory to the teeming compositions of Brueghel the Elder or Hieronymus Bosch, who are, in comparison with him, only artists, whereas van Gogh is only a poor dunce determined not to deceive himself.

But how is one to make a scientist understand that there is something unalterably deranged about differential calculus, quantum theory, or the obscene and so inanely liturgical ordeals of the precession of the equinoxes—by means of that shrimp-pink quilt which van Gogh puffs up so gently at a chosen spot on his bed, by means of the minor insurrection—Veronese green, liquid blue—of that boat in front of which an Auvers-sur-Oise washer-woman rises from her work, also by means of that sun screwed in behind the gray angle of the village steeple, pointed, over there, behind; in the foreground, that enormous mass of earth which, like a musical introduction, seeks to form itself into a frozen wave.

o vio profe,
o vio proto
o vio loto
o théthé

What is the use of describing a painting by van Gogh! No description attempted by anyone else could be worth the simple alignment of natural objects and hues to which van Gogh gives himself,

as great a writer as he was painter, and which gives, in relation to the work described, the impression of the most astounding authenticity.

What is drawing? How does one do it? It is the act of working one's way through an invisible wall of iron which seems to lie between what one feels and what one can do. How is one to get through this wall, for it does no good to use force? In my opinion, one must undermine the wall and file one's way through, slowly and with patience.

September 8, 1888

In my painting The Night Café, I have tried to express that the café is a place where one can ruin oneself, go mad, commit crimes. I have tried by contrasting pale pink with blood red and maroon, by contrasting soft Louis XV and Veronese greens with yellow greens and hard pure greens, all this in an atmosphere of an infernal furnace, of pale sulphur, to express as it were the evil power of a dive.

And yet in the guise of Japanese gaiety and the good fellowship of Tartarin . . .

July 23, 1890

Perhaps you will see this sketch of the garden of Daubigny—it is one of my most studied paintings—I am enclosing with it a sketch of old stubble and the sketches for two twelve-inch canvases representing vast stretches of wheat after a rain.

Daubigny's garden, foreground of green and pink grass. To the left a green and lavender bush and the stump of a plant with

whitish foliage. In the middle a bed of roses, to the right a wattle, a wall, and above the wall a hazel tree with violet leaves. Then a hedge of lilacs, a row of rounded yellow linden trees, the house itself in the background, pink, with a roof of bluish tile. A bench and three chairs, a dark figure with a yellow hat, and in the foreground a black cat. Pale green sky.

How easy it seems to write like this.

Well, try it then, and tell me whether, not being the creator of a van Gogh canvas, you could describe it as simply, succinctly, objectively, permanently, validly, solidly, opaquely, massively, authentically, and miraculously as in this little letter of his.

(For the distinguishing criterion is not a question of amplitude or crampedness but one of sheer personal strength.)

So I shall not describe a painting of van Gogh after van Gogh, but I shall say that van Gogh is a painter because he recollected nature, because he reperspired it and made it sweat, because he squeezed onto his canvases in clusters, in monumental sheaves of color, the grinding of elements that occurs once in a hundred years, the awful elementary pressure of apostrophes, scratches, commas, and dashes which, after him, one can no longer believe that natural appearances are not made of.

And what an onslaught of repressed jostlings, ocular collisions taken from life, blinkings taken from nature, have the luminous currents of the forces which work on reality had to reverse before being finally driven together and, as it were, hoisted onto the canvas, and accepted?

There are no ghosts in the paintings of van Gogh, no visions, no hallucinations.

This is the torrid truth of the sun at two o'clock in the afternoon.

A slow generative nightmare gradually becoming clear.

Without nightmare and without result.

But the suffering of the prenatal is there.

It is the wet gleam of a meadow, of the stalk of a slip of wheat which is there to be extradited.

And for which nature will one day answer.
As society will also for his untimely death.

A field of wheat bowing under the wind, and above, the wings of a single bird like a suspended comma: what painter, who would not be strictly a painter, would, like van Gogh, have had the boldness to attack a subject of such disarming simplicity?

No, there are no ghosts in van Gogh's paintings, no drama, no subject, and I would even say no object, for what is the motif?

If not something like the iron shadow of the motet of an ancient indescribable music, the leitmotiv of a theme that has despaired of its own subject.

It is nature, naked and pure, seen as she reveals herself when one knows how to approach her closely enough.

Witness this landscape of molten gold, of bronze fired in ancient Egypt, in which an enormous sun leans on roofs so tottering with light that they are as if in a state of decomposition.

And I know of no other painting—apocalyptic, hieroglyphic, phantasmal, or pathetic—which gives me this sensation of occult strangeness, of a cadaver of useless hermeticism, head opened, which would give up its secret on the executioner's block.

When I say this I am not thinking of *Père Tranquille*, or of that funambulatory autumn lane down which there walks, last, a bent old man with an umbrella hanging from his sleeve like a ragpicker's hook.

I am thinking again of those crows with their wings the black of polished truffles.

I am thinking again of his wheatfield: ear of wheat upon ear of wheat, and all is said,

with, in the foreground, a few little poppy blossoms cautiously scattered, tartly and nervously applied, and thinly sown, knowingly and furiously punctuated and shredded.

Only life knows how to offer such epidermic denudations which speak under an unbuttoned shirt, and one does not know why the glance is drawn to the left rather than to the right, toward that little mound of wavy flesh.

But it is thus and it is a fact.

But it is thus and this is made fact.

Occult, too, his bedroom, so charmingly rural, and sown as it were with an odor that should be bottled of that wheat that one sees trembling in the fields in the distance, behind the window that would hide it.

Rural, too, the color of the old quilt, the red of mussels, sea urchins, shrimps, mullet, the red of scorched pimento.

And it was certainly van Gogh's fault if the color of the quilt on his bed was in reality so effective, and I doubt whether any weaver could have transplanted its indescribable stamp the way van Gogh was able to transfer from the back of his mind onto his canvas the red of that indescribable glaze.

And I do not know how many criminal priests, dreaming in the head of their so-called Holy Ghost, of the ocher gold, the infinite blue of a stained-glass window dedicated to their strumpet "Mary," have known how to isolate in the air, to draw from the cunning niches of the air those homey colors which are an event in themselves, in which every stroke of van Gogh's brush on the canvas is worse than an event.

One time this takes the form of a tidy room but with an aura of balm or aroma which no Benedictine will ever find to perfect his salutary liqueurs.

Another time it takes the form of a simple haystack crushed by an enormous sun.

This room brought to mind the Great Work with its white wall the color of clear pearls on which a rough bath towel hangs like an old peasant charm, unapproachable and comforting.

There are certain light chalk whites which are worse than ancient tortures, and nowhere does the old operative scruple of poor great van Gogh appear as clearly as in this canvas.

For all this is truly van Gogh, the single-minded concern for the stroke silently and movingly applied. The plebeian color of things, but so right, so lovingly right that no precious stones could attain its rarity.

For van Gogh will prove to have been the most genuine painter of all painters, the only one who did not try to go beyond

painting as the strict means of his work and the strict framework of his means.

And at the same time the only one, absolutely the only one, who absolutely transcended painting, the inert act of representing nature, in order to make a whirling force, an element torn right out of the heart, gush forth in this exclusive representation of nature.

Under the guise of representation he welded an air and enclosed within it a nerve, things which do not exist in nature, which are of a nature and an air more real than the air and nerve of real nature.

I see, as I write these lines, the blood-red face of the painter coming toward me, in a wall of eviscerated sunflowers, in a formidable conflagration of cinders of opaque hyacinth and of fields of lapis lazuli.

All this amid a seemingly meteoric bombardment of atoms which would appear a particle at a time, proof that van Gogh conceived his canvases like a painter, of course, and only like a painter, but one who would be for *that very reason* a formidable musician.

Organist of a suspended tempest which laughs in limpid nature, this nature which is pacified between two storms but which, like van Gogh himself, shows that it is ready to move on.

After seeing this, one can turn one's back on any painted canvas, it has nothing more to tell us. The stormy light of van Gogh's painting begins its somber recitations the very moment one has ceased looking at it.

Only a painter, van Gogh, and nothing more, no philosophy, no mysticism, no ritual, no psychurgy or liturgy, no history, no literature or poetry, these sunflowers of bronzed gold are painted; they are painted as sunflowers and nothing more, but in order to understand a

sunflower in nature, one must now go back to van Gogh, just as in order to understand a storm in nature,
a stormy sky,
a field in nature,
it is henceforth impossible not to go back to van Gogh.

It was stormy like this in Egypt or on the plains of Semitic Judaea,
perhaps it was dark like this in Chaldaea, in Mongolia, or in the mountains of Tibet, which as far as I know have not moved.

And yet when I look at this field of wheat or stones, white as a buried bone yard on which weighs this old violet sky, I can no longer believe in the mountains of Tibet.

Painter, nothing but a painter, van Gogh adopted the techniques of pure painting and never went beyond them.

I mean that in order to paint he never went beyond the means that painting offered him.

A stormy sky,
a chalk-white field,
canvases, brushes, his red hair, tubes, his yellow hand, his easel,

but all the lamas of Tibet gathered together can shake out of their skirts the apocalypse they will have prepared,

van Gogh will have given us a whiff of its nitrogen peroxide in advance, in a painting which contains just enough of the sinister to force us to reorient ourselves.

One day for no reason he decided not to go beyond the subject, but after one has seen van Gogh, one can no longer believe that there is anything more impossible than to go beyond the subject.

The simple subject of a lighted candle on a straw-bottomed chair with a violet frame says more in the hands of van Gogh than all the Greek tragedies, or the plays of Cyril Tourneur, Webster, or Ford, which until now, moreover, have never been performed.

It is literally true that I saw the face of van Gogh, red with blood in the explosion of his landscapes, coming toward me,

kohan
taver
tensur
purtan

in a conflagration,
in a bombardment,
in an explosion,
avengers of that millstone which poor van Gogh the mad wore
around his neck all his life.

The millstone of painting without knowing why or for what.

For it is not for this world,
it is never for this earth that we have always worked,
struggled,
troated of horror, of hunger, of poverty, of hatred, of scandal,
and of disgust,
that we were all poisoned,
although by these things we may have all been bewitched,
and that we have finally committed suicide,
for are we not all, like poor van Gogh himself, suicided by
society!

Van Gogh renounced storytelling in his painting, but the
amazing thing is that this painter who is only a painter,
and who is more of a painter than other painters, since he is
the one for whom the material, painting itself, is of primary
importance,
with the color caught just as it is when squeezed out of the
tube,
with the impress of the separate hairs of the brush in the
paint,
with the touch of the paint itself, as if distinct in its own
sunlight,
with the *i*, the comma, the tip of the point of the brush itself
twisted right into the paint, applied roughly, and splashing in
sparks which the painter smooths and reworks all over the canvas,
the amazing thing is that this painter who is nothing but a

painter is also, of all painters born, the one most likely to make us
forget that we are in the presence of painting,

painting intended to represent the subject he has selected,
and who presents to us in front of the fixed canvas the enigma
pure, the pure enigma of the tortured flower, of the countryside
slashed, plowed, and harried on all sides by his intoxicated brush.

His landscapes are old sins which have not yet recovered their
primitive apocalypses, but which will not fail to recover them.

Why do the paintings of van Gogh give me this impression of
being seen as if from the other side of the grave, from a world in
which his suns, in the end, will have been all that turned and
shone with joy?

For is it not the entire history of what was once called the soul
that lives and dies in his convulsionary landscapes and in his
flowers?

The soul which gave its ear to the body, and van Gogh gave
the ear back to his very soul's soul,
giving it to a woman to flesh out the grisly illusion.

One day the soul did not exist,
neither did the mind,
as for consciousness, no one had ever thought of it,
but where, for that matter, was thought, in a world made up
solely of warring elements no sooner destroyed than recomposed,
for thought is a luxury of peacetime.

And what is, better than the incredible van Gogh, the painter
who understood the phenomenal nature of the problem, in whom
every real landscape is as if latent in the crucible where it is going
to be reborn?

Thus, the old van Gogh was that king against whom, while he
slept, was invented the curious sin called Turkish culture,

example, vessel, motive, of the sin of humanity, which has
never been able to do anything except eat raw artist to stuff its
respectability.

By which it has served only to consecrate ritually its
cowardice!

For humanity does not want to go to the trouble of living, of
entering into that natural friction of the forces that make up

reality, in order to extract from them a body that no storm will ever be able to pierce.

It has always preferred to settle simply for existence.

As for life, it is in the genius of the artist that humanity is in the habit of seeking it.

Now van Gogh, who cooked one of his hands, was never afraid of the struggle to live, that is, to separate the fact of living from the idea of existing.

and everything can certainly exist without taking the trouble to be,

and everything can be without taking, like van Gogh the madman, the trouble to radiate and to glow red.

This is what society stole from him in order to complete the Turkish culture, that surface honesty whose source and support is crime.

And so it was that van Gogh died a suicide, because the consciousness of society as a whole could no longer endure him.

For although there may have been neither mind, nor soul, nor consciousness, nor thought,

there was fulminate,
mature volcano,
medium's stone,
patience,
inflamed ganglion,
cooked tumor,
and the skin of a flayed man.

And king van Gogh drowsed, incubating the next warning signaling the insurrection of his health.

Why?

Because good health is a plethora of deep-seated evils, of a formidable ardor for living corroded by a hundred wounds, which must nevertheless be brought to life,

which must be led to perpetuate themselves.

Anyone who does not smell cooked bomb and compressed vertigo is not worthy of being alive.

This is the solace which poor van Gogh in a burst of flame made it his duty to reveal.

But the evil which was watching injured him.

The Turk, beneath his honest face, crept delicately to van Gogh to pluck the praline from him,

to break off the (natural) praline that was forming.

And van Gogh lost a thousand summers there.

He died of this at thirty-seven,

before living,

for every imitator lived before him on strengths that he had assembled.

And this is what must now be given back, to enable van Gogh to rise from the dead.

In comparison with a humanity of cowardly imitators and cowering dogs, the painting of van Gogh will prove to have been the painting of a time when there was no soul, no mind, no consciousness, no thought, nothing but the first rudiments by turns enchained and unchained.

Landscapes undergoing strong convulsions, of frenzied traumatism, as of a body that fever torments to restore it to perfect health.

The body under the skin is an overheated factory,

and, outside,

the patient glistens,

he shines,

from all his pores,

burst open.

Like a landscape

by van Gogh

at noon.

Only perpetual war explains a peace which is only a passing phase,

just as milk that is ready to be poured explains the pan in which it was boiling.

Beware of the beautiful landscapes of van Gogh, tempestuous and peaceful,

convulsed and pacified.

This is health between two bouts of brain fever which will pass.

This is fever between two bouts of an insurrection of good health.

One day the painting of van Gogh, armed both with fever and with health,

will return to scatter the dust of an imprisoned world which his heart could no longer endure.

Post-Scriptum

I am returning to the painting of the crows.

Who has already seen, as in this painting, the earth become equivalent to the sea?

Van Gogh is of all painters the one who strips us most profoundly, right down to the woof, but he does so as one would cleanse oneself of an obsession.

The obsession of causing objects to be other than they are, of daring to risk the sin of *the other*, for the earth cannot be the color of a liquid sea, and yet it is as a liquid sea that van Gogh flings his earth as if with a hoe.

And he has infused his painting with the color of the dregs of wine, and it is the earth which smells of wine, which even splashes amid the waves of wheat, which rears a dark cockscomb against those low clouds that are gathering in the sky on all sides.

But, as I have already said, the funereal aspect of all this is the luxuriousness with which the crows are treated.

This color of musk, of rich nard, of truffles from some magnificent dinner.

In the violet billows of the sky, two or three old men's faces of vapor chance an apocalyptic grimace, but van Gogh's crows are there urging them to greater decency, I mean to less spirituality,

and what did van Gogh himself mean by this painting with its brooding sky, painted almost at the precise moment that he rid himself of existence, for this painting has a strange, almost stately color of birth, marriage, departure,

I hear the wings of the crows striking cymbal blows loudly over an earth whose torrent it seems that van Gogh can no longer contain.

Then death.

The olive trees of Saint-Rémy.

The solar cypress.

The bedroom.

The olive harvest.

Les Aliscamps.

The café at Arles.

The bridge where one feels like dipping one's finger in the water, in a gesture of violent regression to a state of infancy forced on one by the astounding hand grip of van Gogh.

The water is blue,
not the blue of water,
but the blue of liquid paint.

The suicided madman passed this way and he gave the water of painting back to nature,
but who will give it back to him?

A madman, van Gogh?

Let someone who once knew how to look at a human face look at van Gogh's self-portrait, I am thinking of the one in a soft hat.

Painted by van Gogh the extra-lucid, this redheaded butcher's face which inspects and spies on us, which also scrutinizes us with a glowering eye.

I know of no psychiatrist who could scrutinize a man's face with such overwhelming force or so dissect its inviolable psychology as at a carving board.

The eye of van Gogh is that of a great genius, but in the way I see him dissecting me from the depths of the canvas from which he has arisen, it is no longer the genius of a painter that I feel at this moment living in him, but the genius of a certain philosopher whom I have never encountered in life.

No, Socrates did not have this eye, the unhappy Nietzsche may have been the only man before him to have had this look that undresses the soul, that releases the body from the soul, that lays bare the body of man, beyond the subterfuges of the mind.

The look of van Gogh is suspended, screwed in, it is glazed behind his unusual eyelids, his thin smooth eyebrows.

It is a look that penetrates immediately, it transfixes, in this face which is rough-hewn like a piece of squared-off timber.

But van Gogh has caught the moment when the pupil is about to pour itself out in the void,

when this look, fired at us like the bomb of a meteor, takes on the expressionless color of the void and of the inertia that fills it.

Better than any psychiatrist in the world, this was how the great van Gogh located his illness.

I penetrate, I persist, I inspect, I seize, I force open, my dead life conceals nothing, and nothingness moreover has never hurt anyone, what forces me to return within is this desolating absence which passes and submerges me at times, but I understand it clearly, very clearly, I even understand what nothingness is, and I can say what is in it.

And van Gogh was right, one can live for the infinite, can be satisfied only with the infinite, there is enough of the infinite on the earth and in the spheres to satiate a thousand great geniuses, and if van Gogh was unable to fill to overflowing his desire to irradiate his whole life with it, it is because society forbade it to him.

Flatly and consciously forbidden.

One day the executioners came for van Gogh, just as they came for Gérard de Nerval, Baudelaire, Poe, and Lautréamont.

Those who one day said to him:

That's enough now, van Gogh, to the grave, we've had enough of your genius; as for the infinite, the infinite is for us.

For it was not because he sought the infinite that van Gogh died,

that he found himself forced to suffocate from poverty and asphyxiation,

it was because he found himself denied the infinite by all that rabble which, even in his lifetime, thought to withhold the infinite from him;

and van Gogh could have found enough of the infinite to last his whole life if the brutish consciousness of the masses had not

wanted to appropriate it to nourish their own orgies, which have never had anything to do with painting or poetry.

Besides, one does not commit suicide by oneself.

No one has ever been born by oneself.

No one dies by oneself either.

But, in the case of suicide, there must be an army of evil beings to cause the body to make the gesture against nature, that of taking its own life.

And I believe that there is always someone else at the moment of extreme death to strip us of our own life.

So it was that van Gogh doomed himself, because he was through with life and because, as we gather from his letters to his brother, with the birth of his brother's son,

he felt he was one mouth too many to feed.

But above all, van Gogh wanted at last to rejoin that infinite for which, he says, one embarks as on a train for a star,

and one embarks on the day when one has decided to have done with life.

Now, in the death of van Gogh, the way it happened, I do not believe that this is what happened.

Van Gogh was dispatched from the world first by his brother, when he announced the birth of his nephew, next by Dr. Gachet, when, instead of recommending rest and solitude, he sent him to paint from nature on a day when he knew quite well that van Gogh would have done better to go to bed.

For one does not oppose so directly a lucidity and a sensibility of the stamp of the martyred van Gogh's.

There are consciousnesses which, on certain days, would kill themselves over a simple contradiction, and to do this it is not necessary to be a madman, a registered and classified madman; on the contrary, it is enough to be in good health and to have reason on one's side.

I, in a similar situation, shall no longer tolerate someone telling me, as has so often happened, "Mr. Artaud, you're raving," without committing a crime.

And this is what they told van Gogh.

And this is what gave the final twist to the knot of blood in his throat that strangled him.

Post-Scriptum

Regarding van Gogh, magic, and spells: Are all those people who have been filing past the exhibit of his works at the Orangerie for the last two months sure they remember everything they did and everything that happened to them on every evening of the months of February, March, April, and May 1946? And was there not a certain evening when the atmosphere of the air and the streets became as if liquid, gelatinous, unstable, and when the light of the stars and of the celestial vault disappeared?

And van Gogh, who painted the café at Arles, was not there. But I was in Rodez, that is, still on the earth, whereas all the inhabitants of Paris must for one night have felt very close to leaving it.

And was it not true that they had all participated in concert in certain generalized filthinesses during which the consciousness of Parisians left its normal level for an hour or two and passed onto another level to one of those massive unfurlings of hate that I have been many times something more than a witness to during my nine years of confinement? Now the hate has been forgotten, like the nocturnal expurgations that followed it, and the same persons, who so repeatedly laid bare their base swinish souls for all to see, now file by van Gogh, whom during his lifetime they or their fathers and mothers so effectively strangled.

But did there not fall, on one of the evenings I speak of, on the boulevard de la Madeleine, at the corner of the rue des Mathurins, an enormous white rock that might have come from a recent volcanic eruption of the volcano Popocatepetl?