Georges Rouault's Modernism and the Question of Materiality

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Volume I: Text

Short Abstract

'Georges Rouault's Modernism and the Question of Materiality'

The central concern of my thesis is to bring into focus the problematic relation between Georges Rouault's (1871-1958) pictorial vocabulary and his subject matter: on the one hand, abstract mark-making and on the other, a refusal to cede to abstraction or formalism through an insistence that these marks remain yoked to representation. The result is an examination a way of painting that embraces its state of uncertainty, which interrogates its own construction, and strains against the very materiality it simultaneously celebrates. Chapter one traces the critical reaction to Rouault's painting in the early years of the twentieth century, which was at best mystification, and at worst, disgust. This chapter also analyses the thick painterly terms of these paintings and their resistance to conventional meaning, arguing that there are parallels between Rouault's project and contemporary experimental forms of art and literature within modernism. Chapter two continues this exploration, attending to the various relationships between surface and depth that are interrogated by Rouault's canvases. These relationships reveal the deep philosophical and theological questions at stake Rouault's painting. Chapter three explores a theological reading of Rouault's work beginning with the aesthetics of his associate, the French Catholic philosopher, Jacques Maritain – a reading that shows how painting can be true to its material conditions and strain towards a higher, albeit obscure, form of knowledge. Against this, the last chapter argues that the paintings also support the possibility of a bleaker world-view, aligned with Dostoyevsky's kenotic theology, in which matter potentially overwhelms the possibility of transcendental meaning. In conclusion, I argue that Rouault's painting interrogates the vocabulary of modernism and presents the 'fallen' or 'wounded' state of a painting that acknowledges its material conditions.

Long Abstract

'Georges Rouault's Modernism and the Question of Materiality'

When Georges Rouault's (1871-1958) paintings were exhibited in the early years of the twentieth century, the critical reaction was at best mystification, and at worst, disgust. They were described as 'coal-daubed nightmares', as 'dark mistakes', as a 'babbling collection of horrors', and as 'dug-up corpses'. Sympathetic critics of Rouault have turned to a narrative of pity and transcendence in the face of these works, but arguably what the original critics reacted to was the *lack* of transcendence: the pure, vulgar physicality of the works. Rouault therefore has a difficult relationship to narratives of modernism. On the one hand, he seems to fit – he trained in Gustave Moreau's studio alongside Matisse, and is often associated with Fauvism. On the other hand, he doesn't fit at all, becoming most well-known as a religious painter due to subject matter that from the start was seen as distancing his work from mainstream modernism.

The central concern of my thesis is to bring into focus the problematic relation between Rouault's pictorial vocabulary and his subject matter: on the one hand, abstract mark-making and on the other, a refusal to cede to abstraction or formalism through an insistence that these marks remain yoked to representation.

Beginning with the works themselves, I embed Rouault's work – including its theological significance, which is too often overlooked in histories of modernism – in the wider contemporary modernist picture, showing that on the one hand he *is* embedded in the multifaceted texture of French modernism circa 1900, and on the other, that his sometimes difficult relationship to existing narratives of modernism provokes an important critique of modernist painting. In examining the question of the materiality of Rouault's painting, the aim is not to seize upon a single 'truth' or meaning, but to explore the ways in which meaning is constructed in modernist painting – and equally, to attend to the ways in which Rouault's surfaces resist, curtail, and deconstruct those processes of meaning.

Following a short introductory chapter, the subsequent four chapters are arranged thematically and are concerned with Rouault's paintings and writings between 1890 and 1925. Chapter One opens with an analysis of the criticism of Rouault's work in the first decade of the twentieth century. Taking the terms of the critics 'difficulty' in understanding Rouault's painting seriously, I examine *Tête de clown tragique* at the level of the 'mark', daub, line, or patch: each of which overtly declares itself *as* a mark, daub, line or patch before, or alongside, making any other claim. Attending to the oscillation between paint-matter and signification in this work, I suggest that the surface resists or blocks interpretative attempts, while simultaneously motivating dislocated remnants or indications of former representational strategies. In the second part of the chapter, I examine these fragments of signification, comparing their mobilization in Rouault's work to the narrative strategy of Virginia Woolf's short story, *The Mark on the Wall*. I then turn to two moments in Rouault's writing: the first, his break with Symbolism after the death of Moreau, and the second, his

recurring reconstruction of the circumstances of his birth in a cellar in Belleville in 1871. Approaching these narratives as constructed literary pieces, I reconsider the influence of Moreau's Symbolism upon Rouault, and argue that, epistemologically, Rouault's unstable painterly 'mark' has much in common with the Mallarméan symbol. I then examine the historical and political resonances mobilised by the overt materiality of Rouault's painterly marks, resonances bound up with a history within modernism connected to depiction of the 'low' and to a narrative of the 'lowering' of the art of painting. In the final section of this first chapter, I argue, through an analysis of *Jeu de massacre*, that while these historically specific fragments of representation appear to invite a representational or figurative reading, these readings are effectively short-circuited by the materiality of the surface, which draw attention to questions of meaning on a less-specific and theoretically deeper and darker level.

Chapter Two asks whether the material insistence of Rouault's surfaces can, or should, be understood as a protrusion of depth, an imposition of surface, or as an annihilation of the relation of surface to depth. This is examined in three ways, and begins to indicate how Rouault's work moves towards metaphysical questions of meaning and material. The first part of the chapter is concerned with the motif of the mask or costume in Rouault's work, introducing Nietzsche as an interlocutor. The second part turns to an article written by Rouault on Rodin in 1910, which examines the relation of surface and depth, and proposes a model that establishes the materiality of the work of art as the limiting factor but which is animated by the (ultimately futile) attempt to move beyond those constraints. In the third part of the chapter, I consider the materiality of the body – specifically the mutilated, fragmented 'modernist' body associated with the First World War. I examine examples of this fractured and dismembered body, arguing that this offers a new 'language that is taken up in Rouault's surfaces and in his increasingly puppet-like figures. However, I then suggest that this materiality in Rouault's work in fact speaks to the prosaic materiality described in de Man's 'discovery' of a materialism at the heart of the Kantian sublime, and can be used to question the assumptions of 'transcendence' made about Rouault's work.

Chapter Three takes up the analogy between the body and the work of art, and introduces the aesthetics of the philosopher Jacques Maritain, a close friend of Rouault. The first part of the chapter asks what it means to understand the work of art, as Maritain does, as a *concrete incarnation* of ideas or vision analogous to the 'bound' condition of the body. Through a comparison of Heidegger and Maritain, I argue that their model of obscurity is a useful one for understanding the epistemology of Rouault's painting and the notion of 'fallenness' as a way of accepting the duality of the work of art as both a material object and something that can 'mean more than it is'. The second part examines '"Noli me tangere": (Cézanne)', a second article published by Rouault in 1910, in which, playing upon the title of the biblical scene in which Mary Magdalene encounters Christ on Easter Sunday, Rouault weaves together questions about the 'presence' of painting, the bodily encounter with art – through 'touch' especially – and the possibility or impossibility of truly 'knowing' or understanding art. Finally, the chapter concludes with an analysis of the significance of the 'Holy Face' in Rouault's oeuvre, probing the notion of mystery, of the collision of the

material and immaterial in painting, and extending the discussion of presence and absence through Jean-Luc Marion's understanding of the 'impoverishment' of the image.

Beginning with *Filles (ou deux nus)* (1905) and *Filles (ou deux prostituées)* (1906), as exemplary of this aspect of Rouault's painting, Chapter Four argues that the critics were right to recognise a vulgar physicality, an emphasis upon flesh and paint that might indeed be described – at least initially – as a flabby resignation to matter. Once again, however, this emphasis upon paint-as-matter or matter-as-flesh does not offer the concrete surety of Courbet's materialism. Instead, what Rouault's painting posits here is the potential emptiness of materialism: what if, he asks, this is it? At its darkest, its most 'bodily', most literally 'fleshly' and most unsettling, what Rouault's work proposes between 1902 and 1920 is an aesthetic based upon *doubt*. This is the kind of doubt, the 'what if' of Easter Saturday – what if this, the body, is it? – that permeates the work of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, which Rouault deeply admired. I suggest that the emphatic physicality and materiality of Rouault's paintings of bodies can be compared to Dostoyevsky's kenotic theology and to the notion of blasphemous or profane terms as a radical form of acknowledgement of the holy. The questions of recognition and of *iurodstov* (holy foolishness) are then extended to Rouault's paintings of criminals in court; beginning with several images from 1907 entitled *Le Condamné*, and turning to two of Rouault's later works entitled *Homo homini lupus*. Drawing upon the resonances of this latter title and Derrida's *The Beast and the Sovereign*, this section investigates animality in Rouault's painting, and the implications for the ethics of his project. It also considers an aspect of Rouault's paintings as yet unmentioned in any of the literature – that the imagery central to works such as the two *Homo homini lupus* paintings and *Petite Magicienne* (1949) is drawn from that of the tarot. In returning to 'game-playing' these later paintings re-stage earlier questions associated with artifice and knowing or not-knowing. Finally, the chapter returns to the notion of 'not-knowing' through the themes of vision and blindness in Rouault's work, arguing that these complicate questions of truth and falsity in ways that bring doubt and scepticism to bear upon his project. The central argument here is not that Rouault's paintings are nihilistic, but that the ever-present possibilities of emptiness or of a nihilistic darkness are necessary to the uncertainties and tensions that keep meaning in play in Rouault's emphatically painterly project.

In the conclusion to the thesis, I examine *Le clown blessé* and propose that Rouault's work represents 'woundedness'; a vein in the epistemological and aesthetic history of modernist painting that offers both a critique of painting and modernity and a celebration of the qualities of painterliness. It is in the refusal to settle that Rouault's surfaces are so disturbing, and in retrieving this 'disturbance', refusing to reconcile the problems raised by the surface, I hope to have unsettled assumptions enough to restore the significance of Rouault's surfaces to debates about meaning in modernist painting.

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For my parents, Penny and Ian, with love and gratitude,
and for H.C. Lee (1912-1989), who would have read it.

Note on translations:
Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by the author.

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Volume I

Introduction

On 4 November 1905, the French illustrated paper, *L'Illustration*, published a double page spread of reproductions of images from that year's Salon d'Automne [fig.1].[1] The paintings reproduced on the left hand page included *Les Baigneurs* by Paul Cézanne as well as works by Edouard Vuillard, Henri Rousseau, Pierre Guérin, and Le Beau (works that by 1905 were reasonably familiar to Parisian salon visitors); and on the facing page, their 'successors' – the recently identified collective that had acquired the descriptive title of 'Fauvism' from a review by Louis Vauxcelles. These included works by Henri Manguin, Henri Matisse, André Derain, Jean Puy, Louis Valtat, and Georges Rouault. The feature in *L'Illustration* was intended to ridicule: hence the inclusion of Matisse's *Femme au chapeau*, which had been singled out as one of that year's most abhorrent and 'deranged' entries,[2] and the selection of accompanying texts – taken from reviews by Vauxcelles and Gustave Geffroy – whose 'serious' consideration of these works was deemed to be equally unpalatable and laughable. Describing this page over a month later in *La Grande Revue*, the critic Camille Mauclair wrote that: 'One of our illustrated contemporaries has had the amusing idea of reproducing twenty or so of the most ridiculous of these works, captioned with the flattering notices written about them by so-called "leading critics". The contrast is enough to make one die laughing.'[3]

Even within this curious collection, the painting by Rouault is incongruous. Its presence on this page misled the original readers and half a century of writing on Rouault to believe that Rouault's work was exhibited in the same room (Salle VII, the so-called *cage aux fauves*) as Matisse, Derain, and the others. In fact, Rouault's paintings were hung in Salle

[1] 'Le Salon d'Automne', *L'Illustration*, 3271 (4 Nov. 1905), p.295.
[2] See Alastair Wright, *Matisse and the Subject of Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp.67 and 239 n. 36.
[3] J.E. Muller, *Fauvism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1967), p.15.

XVI, a significant distance away. [4] Rouault's inclusion in this group has two probable origins: firstly, he trained alongside Matisse, and other Fauves such as Marquet (with whom he also shared a studio in 1903), Camoin and Manguin under Gustave Moreau at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts; and secondly, the inclusion of a painter already considered to be notoriously dark and difficult contributes to the representation of the unacceptable, the deviant or even the monstrous on this page of reproduction. But 'notoriously dark' is one reason why Rouault's work does not fit amongst the bright colours of the Fauvist palette, even if this distinction was somewhat lost in the black and white reproductions of *L'Illustration*. The positioning of the image of Rouault's work on the right hand page replicates the placing of Cezanne's on the left, the effect of which is to pose the pastoral idyll of Cézanne's semi-naked bathers in the landscape against the scrawled, semi-caricatured, dressed-up urban figures of Rouault's canvas.[5] Where Cézanne's painting has space, and a sense of order derived from the solid forms of the composition and the treatment of the whole surface in thick painterly marks, Rouault's work is almost overrun by his mark-making in a composition that spills out of its frame and in which the 'foreground' figure (there is no sense of depth) is difficult to distinguish from the mass of figures around her (again, unaided by the reproduction). The works around Rouault's, such as Matisse's *Femme au chapeau*, also differ from Cézanne at the level of the brush mark, and this spread might be said to roughly represent a narrative in which the materiality of painting becomes increasingly explicit.

Rouault, however, also stands apart from this narrative. His marks, lines, and patches of paint are more dynamic, more chaotic even, than the surfaces of the other works. His is also the only painting not to be given its title. Instead it is reproduced above the words 'Forains, Cabotins, Pitres' (Fairgrounds, stage-scenes, clowns), which operate as a stand-in

[4] See Soo Yun Kang, *Rouault in Perspective: Contextual and Theoretical Study of his Art* (Maryland and Oxford: International Scholars Publication, 2000), p.40 n.6; Gaston Diehl, *The Fauves* (New York: Abrams, 1967), p.25.
[5] See Margaret Werth, *The Joy of Life: The Idyllic in French Art Circa 1900* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2002).

title. This concocted title suggests an attempt to bring Rouault's work into line with the Fauves, whose titles tended to state the subject matter in literal terms. It is accurate in that it sums up Rouault's entire catalogue of entries to the 1905 Salon d'Automne, but it utterly fails to describe this particular painting. Perhaps the editor was hedging his bets with regard to Rouault's subject matter, which is certainly not immediately clear. In fact, *Jeu de massacre (La Noce à Nini Patte en l'air)* [fig.2] depicts a cashier in front of a line of figures,[6] at first glance seemingly a line up of Rouault's low-life Parisian figures, but actually an entertainment stall filled with puppets (sometimes known as 'Aunt Sallys') and used as a version of skittles. In stark contrast to the other works, Rouault's treads a strange line between a socially-engaged realism and a dark, theatrical unreality.

It is, as the following chapters will argue, this unsettling combination of insistent painterly facture and an equally insistent subject matter that meant that where the critics were determined to laugh at Fauvism, to find it chaotic or mad (although this laughter also masked sincere concern), the criticism pertaining to Rouault was much darker and disgusted rather than amused. Art historians have long been aware of his difference from his colleagues. Although the incongruity of Rouault's painting on this famous page is rarely mentioned, but his status as a Fauve, or an associate of the Fauves, has long been questioned.[7] At times, Rouault's attention to surface facture appears to have much in common with Fauvist mark-making, but he combines this apparently highly-modernist, new pictorial vocabulary with a subject matter seemingly dredged up, or lingering on, from the previous century. From the early 1900s, his subject matter included prostitutes, clowns, and circus scenes, as well as an increasing number of explicitly religious themes such as the head of Christ. Although vastly different from the established religious modernism of a painter such as Maurice Denis,

[6] Identifiable in part due to her likeness to figures in *Caissières de cirque forain III* (1904).
[7] See Kang, *Rouault in Perspective*.

Rouault was, of course, by no means the only avant-garde painter at this time to draw upon such subjects. In many ways, his clowns – and his association of himself with the outcast clown – have much in common with Pablo Picasso's saltimbanques. Both painters drew upon the creator-clown-Christ paradigm, which Naomi Ritter argues was inherited from Honoré Daumier.[8] However, Rouault's treatment of this subject matter is different. It is darker, and paradoxically, his use of these familiar motifs in conjunction with a thick painterly facture is at once contemptuous of traditional painting (arguably Fauve-like) and wholly invested in the history of artistic practice.

It is Rouault's singularity that makes his work worth examining. His particular twinning of an emphatic materiality with residual elements of mimesis and hints of metaphysical and other idealist meanings complicates standard accounts of the development and significance of modernist painting. The central argument of the thesis is that his paintings can best be read as philosophical statements upon the condition of painting itself. This has not yet been recognized in the literature on the artist; nor has the import of this kind of question been fully worked out for modernism more generally. It is this that makes an account of his painting, and the light it sheds on the recent preoccupations with questions of materiality within the history of art, long overdue. Furthermore, I would argue that such an inquiry is particularly timely. The questions raised by Rouault's work resonate with recent work in the fields of philosophy and art history on questions of materiality and meaning by, for example, T.J. Clark, Jane Bennett, and Jean-Luc Nancy: I will say more about this below. Rouault's is thus a voice that should now be added to the revision of the landscape of

[8] See Naomi Ritter, *Art as Spectacle: Images of the Entertainer since Romanticism* (Missouri, 1989). Rouault's work was exhibited with Picasso's in 1964 at the Musée de Gemmail in Tours, France. The exhibition was called 'Braque-Picasso-Rouault et Matres contemporains du Musée de Tours'.

painterly modernism in the early twentieth century as a useful, and complicated, counterpoint to existing narratives.

The darkness and disgust of the early critical accounts of Rouault's work are at the heart of this project; not, to be clear, because I am suggesting that the first reactions were necessarily more truthful or insightful than the later criticism, but because they restore the problematic relationship of Rouault's canvases to the moment in early-twentieth century modernism when questions of meaning in painting – pictorial, ideological, and reactionary – were at stake. Rouault's work has remained troubling, particularly to subsequent narratives of modernism that celebrate its tendency towards formalism and abstraction. In 1945, Clement Greenberg dismissed Rouault as a 'rather limited' painter, 'who masks a conventional sensibility behind modernist effects'. Turning to Rouault's interest in surface facture, he continued:

> Interpenetrating layers of viscous paint begin to emphasize the surface in a declamatory way. Rouault seemed to be settling the conflict between pattern and illusion in favour of the immediate, sensuous effect of the former – but it was only seeming. The unifying conception of the picture remains oriented toward a standard illusion in depth, and the result, for all its ornamental accents, remains essentially conventional in the in-and-out movement of its lights and darks, and in the obviousness with which the subject is illustrated.[9]

Greenberg dismisses Rouault's 'modernism' as fake, as an applied style that attempts to 'hide' conventional, representational art. To Greenberg, Rouault's subject matter and paint matter remain utterly disconnected – 'we come away remembering *paint*', he adds, 'but this does not make it any less a fact that paint is the weakest side of Rouault's art'. Arguably, what Greenberg cannot countenance here, and what J.M. Bernstein suggests is also evident in Greenberg's criticism of Chaïm Soutine, is the bringing together of a modernism in which

[9] Clement Greenberg 'Georges Rouault', *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*, pp. 84-86.

'increasingly, the matter of painting is what happens on the surface of the canvas' with 'the representational ambitions and concerns of pre-impressionist art.'[10] Rouault's works (like Soutine's) disrupt Greenberg's later account of the purity of painterliness, by retaining a 'literariness' which, according to Greenberg, had no place in modernist painting.[11]

There are two further points to be derived from Greenberg's essay. The first of these is the question of violence. Greenberg closes by describing Rouault as a pornographic, sadomasochistic embarrassment to modern art. The 'embarrassment' is easily dealt with (if not in the way Greenberg meant it), since Rouault's conjunction of significant paint matter and subject matter potentially threatens Greenberg's schema, and from inside the very kind of pictorial language that Greenberg endorsed. Pornography and sadomasochism, however, are vitriolic terms which are matched only by some of the original outcry at Rouault's work in 1904 and 1905. These accusations of violence – which I take to be based in observations of the handling of paint – suggest that there is a kind of sacrilege in the combination of thick materiality with subject matter such as the bodies of women or of Christ. This reaction is in opposition to an assumption often made about Rouault's paintings: that the religiosity of the artist protects or redeems the works from the baseness of their initial appearance.

This brings us to the second point, which relates to the question of Rouault's biography. In the opening to his essay, Greenberg writes that he has 'a real distaste for the artistic personality I discern in his pictures', and confesses further that he tends to suspect 'the unconscious motives of those who praise him.' In this recognition of 'artistic personality' Greenberg appears to align Rouault not with abstraction but with the freeing-up of the brush-mark for self-expression (even if he dislikes the 'self' he finds expressed), a narrative often

[10] J.M. Bernstein, p.63.

[11] Although Greenberg is now rarely accepted uncritically by modernist scholars, his narrative remains a truism of much of the literature, and as such he remains representative of what might loosely be called a prevailing 'normative' modernist position – from which, of course, under scrutiny almost every painter deviates.

associated with Fauvism. This draws upon the kind of sentiment expressed, for example, by van Gogh when he wrote in a letter to his brother, Theo, that 'I use colour in a completely arbitrary way in order to express myself powerfully'.[12] One way in which sympathetic critics of Rouault seek to recuperate the difficulty (and violence) of his work is to ascribe his painterly terms to his personal hatred of the injustices of society – a narrative which, as I will argue, fails to account for either the paint handling or the subject matter, and certainly not for their combination. Greenberg's suspicion of Rouault's advocates, and of the labelling of Rouault's work as 'profound' (a term, Greenberg says, that gets associated with religiosity and acts as a kind of guarantee: 'Religion may not put one "in the truth", but it is the surest way of attaining depth'[13]), speaks to this characteristic problem (a problem this thesis is concerned to avoid) of the Rouault literature: the common recourse from paintings to the painter, and especially to the painter's Catholicism (particularly by scholars of theological Modernism) for explanation, or as a reason for incomprehension, in the face of the paintings.

As early as 1904 Vauxcelles' was guilty of this, ending his review of Rouault's entries to the Salon d'Automne with the following caveat: 'Were I not so convinced of the integrity and noble character of M. Rouault... I would certainly not stand up to defend him against the sneering mob that cluster before his "black canvases".'[14] It is this kind of caveat or premise that has, over the last century, created amongst Rouault's supporters a narrative of genius, of a solitary and unique painter whose unusual and exemplary character is the (legitimate) cause of what continue to be perceived, if unacknowledged, as baffling effects. This narrative has also isolated Rouault from wider modernist contexts, and has instated a redemptive story that foregrounds the 'pity' of the painter.[15] Where biographical details are

[12] Vincent Van Gogh, letter to Theo, see Muller, *Fauvism*, p.19.
[13] Greenberg, *Art and Culture*, p.85.
[14] Louis Vauxcelles, *Gil Blas*, 14 Oct. 1904, n.p.
[15] The biographies that continue to dominate studies of Rouault are by Pierre Courthion (*Georges Rouault*, Paris: Flammarion, 1962), Bernard Dorival (*Rouault*, Paris: Flammarion, 1982), and Lionel Venturi (*Rouault*, Geneva: Skira,

included in my analyses, they arise because of their role in Rouault's construction of his painterly modernism: Rouault read widely, and was deeply invested in his artistic heritage as a modernist painter. I do not assume that these details and writings explain Rouault's work: instead, where I draw upon his writings, it is because they either operate as reconstructions of the events of Rouault's life as part of his own attempt to come to terms with the influences at work in his painting, or as efforts on his part to form a coherent narrative for his painting and his relationship to modernism. Approaching these critically enables an analysis of the points of convergence or rupture between Rouault's oeuvre and the wider modernist project. At times, the structures of these writings also provide some useful parallels to the structures of his paintings.

Rouault has become most well-known as a religious painter due to subject matter that from the start was seen as distancing his work from mainstream modernism, but this distance is neither useful nor necessarily particularly attentive either to Rouault's work or to 'mainstream' narratives of modernism. However, Rouault's work remains generally more familiar to scholars concerned with theological modernism than to art historians. Most recently this is due to the work of Stephen Schloesser, including *Jazz Age Catholicism* and *Mystic Masque*, which have helped to revive an interest in this strand of modernist studies and in Rouault.[16] Eric Tonning has also developed the theme of theological modernism and the connection between the arts but, as with Schloesser's work, his approach tends to concentrate upon the conservative, even anti-modernist, threads of this debate and to focus upon notably religious artists and writers in a way that continues to isolate them from the

1972). These biographies are detailed accounts of Rouault's life and work, but they are not critical examinations, and although his work is presented as unique and deeply spiritual, they do not necessarily do the paintings justice by taking such an a priori admiring stance. Rouault's own writings – especially those collected in *Sur l'art et sur l'art vie: le metier de peinture* – are also taken as 'truths' about the painter. This work is not translated, and in translating and using it, I adopt a critical approach treating it as a self-consciously constructed work.

[16] Stephen Schloesser, Jazz Age Catholicism: Mystic Modernism in Postwar Paris, 1919-1933 (Toronto, 2005) and Stephen Schloesser (ed.), *Mystic Masque: Semblance and Reality in Georges Rouault 1871-1958* (Chicago, 2008).

main debate.[17] Neither Schloesser nor Tonning pay close attention to the terms of Rouault's *painting,* preferring to deal with him as part of an intellectual landscape. Sarah Whitfield, Fabrice Hergott, and Pierre Courthion[18] have attended more closely than most to the paintings themselves, the former treating him as a modernist but without pursing the implications of this modernism in conjunction with his Catholicism, while the latter turn towards readings based upon Rouault's biography or religion without integrating the actual terms of his painting into these wider conceptions of his oeuvre. This split reflects general state of the literature, which tends either to dwell upon Rouault's stylistic innovation without engaging with the difficult conjunction of paint matter and subject matter, or turns away from the paint matter in order to write a social or iconographical history of his subjects.[19] The latter category includes the otherwise excellent study of Rouault's iconography by Soo Yun Kang, *Rouault in Perspective: Contextual and Theoretical Study of his Art.* Even Rouault's most sympathetic critic, Jacques Maritain, seemed to find it easier to write separate narratives for these aspects of his friend's work. I will deal with the various arguments put forth by these writers at appropriate moments in the following chapters.

In general, this thesis stands against the majority of this literature. What follows is neither intended as an apologetic for Rouault, nor for twentieth-century Catholicism. It rather offers a re-evaluation of Rouault's work, beginning with the works and engaging with their inconsistencies, ambiguities, and difficulties.

Rouault's Catholicism, and the Catholicism of some of his original critics and friends, most notably Jacques Maritain, is of course relevant – and at moments, fundamental – in that, for Rouault, the invocation of an 'other' or 'more' in painting is understood as a Divine

[17] Erik Tonning, *Modernism and Christianity* (London, 2014).
[18] Pierre Courthion, *Rouault* (Paris: Flammarion, 1962: New York: Abrams, 1977).
[19] See Soo Yun Kang, *Rouault in Perspective: Contextual and Theoretical Study of his Art* (Oxford and Maryland, 2000).

presence, or the possibility of such a presence. It thus seems important, at a moment in art historical practice where secularity and materialism have been more widely considered than historical theological contexts, to acknowledge this interest within the avant-garde. But I would also argue that the models arising from Rouault's theological work and the theologically-oriented critics can be understood more broadly. For example, in Chapters three and four the language of 'fallenness' is picked up from Rouault and Maritain, but this essentially Biblical language is understood in more broadly philosophical terms – specifically as part of a wider move against the discourse of 'transparency' which can be understood to be rooted in the denial of the embodied human condition. This will be my general approach: not to take the theological language as true reflections of the divine (as Rouault perhaps and Maritain certainly did), and absolutely not to condone the reactionary and at times deeply repugnant cultural politics with which such theological reflections occasionally became entangled in the France of the interwar years (more on this below), but rather to argue that Rouault's work and the explanations that surrounded it were historically-specific articulations of broader non-theological questions concerning, for example, the relationship between ideas and the possibility of their being embodied in matter.

My central claim is that examining the writings of Maritain and others and investigating what was or is disgusting and dark about Rouault's work offers a fresh account of modernist painting as simultaneously wrapped up in the volatile relationship between the modern art's new awareness of its own conditions and questions of signification. Rouault's painting was a complicated investigation, even contemplation, of the possibilities of meaningful artistic practice. Despite the apparent 'lowering' of the terms of his practice (which will be discussed in Chapter One), Rouault in no way reduced his own creative intervention, which remained paramount. In part, it is his insistence upon practice that forces

a series of questions about painting upon the viewer through the difficult encounter with the surface.

These surfaces, thickened, chaotically inscribed, and dark, take to task both the teleological assumptions about the 'emptying' of meaning in formalist accounts of modernism, and the opposite assumptions about the ability of painting to carry meaning. In allowing the tensions and inconsistencies of Rouault's surfaces to stand, this study hopes to offer new ways of thinking about the complex relations between the foregrounded paint-matter of modernist painting and meaning.

Methodologies

This project operates on three levels, the first of which is the re-evaluation of Rouault's painting and, through the lens of Rouault's modernism, of the question of 'materiality'. According to the anthropologist Daniel Miller, there has been a 'material turn'[20] in the humanities over the last decade, and, roughly speaking, this has taken two directions. Firstly, disciplines such as art history and literature have emphasized the object in a manner that draws upon anthropological methods (such as Tim Ingolds' 'Materials Against Materiality' (2007)) and object theories such as Thing Theory and most recently the New Materialisms. While these are useful to the study of painting, drawing attention to the material qualities of painting which are a dominating issue in modernist painting, this thesis is more concerned with the second direction, which is a more abstract notion of materiality. Exemplary of this vein is work by Judith Butler, W.J.T. Mitchell, Peter de Bolla, and Tom

[20] Daniel Miller, 'Materiality: An Introduction', *Materiality*, ed. D.Miller (North Carolina, 2005).

Toremans;[21] equally important to my project will be the analysis of the 'materiality of the letter' central to Post-Structuralism.[22] These directions ask questions such about the inherence of meaning in matter, about the capacity of physical presence to elicit an embodied response, and at their most abstract, about how the material or physical might manifest or visualize the invisible. Michael Ann Holly offers a working definition of materiality as 'the meeting of matter and imagination,'[23] a working definition I concur with up to the point that she suggests it is a place 'where opposites take refuge from their perpetual strife'. Key to my argument is that the materiality of Rouault's paintings *preserves* strife. However, Holly also offers a diagram [fig.3] which presents the philosophical and theoretical strands involved in existing discussions of materiality, a nexus that underlies my own exploratory approach.

The choice of scholars and philosophers brought to bear on this project is informed, to some extent, by these existing discourses on materiality. It is an aim of the project to work through multiple approaches in seeking to understand and illuminate what is at work in Rouault's painting, and the ways in which these approaches are informed, complicated, or nullified by application to his modernism. In particular, Rouault's 'materiality', as evidenced by his painting and writing, resonates with the three interrelated uses of the term 'materiality' in de Man's late work: the 'materiality of the letter', the materiality involved in a certain way of seeing (specified by de Man, following Kant as 'seeing as the poets do it' (see Chapter Two)) and the materiality of 'actual history'. In Rouault's work I understand these to correlate to: the prosaic materiality of paint-as-matter, the material basis of sensory perception, and materiality as the condition under which meaning appears (or, the threads of

[21] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* and 'How can I deny that these hands and this body are mine'; W.J.T. Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Peter de Bolla, 'Toward the Materiality of Aesthetic Experience' (2002); Tom Toremans, 'Surfacing Materiality: Wordsworth, Kant and de Man's Epistemological Critique of Reading' (2011). See also recent work by Jacques Rancière, Jane Bennett, James Elkins, Alex Potts, Véronique Fóti, Johanna Drucker and Marjorie Levinson.
[22] Particularly Paul de Man's discussion of this in *Aesthetic Ideology* (Minnesota, 1996).
[23] Michael Ann Holly, 'Notes from the field: Materiality', *Art Bulletin*, Vol. XCV, No.1 (March, 2013), pp.15-17.

meaning embedded in matter historically). At various points in the thesis I evoke these notions of materiality, and draw heavily upon this strand of de Man's work and upon subsequent studies of his notion(s) of materiality and materialism. This includes work by Jonathan Loesberg, Anne Fernihough, Tom Cohen, and T.J. Clark.[24] Beginning with the simple equation of materiality with thick paint, my work builds upon the work of these scholars, to explore questions about medium and matter, with a view to understanding what seems to be a changing relationship between matter and meaning in Rouault. I also consider recent writing on matter and material by the New Materialists and that of the Hungarian critic, Leo Popper, a contemporary of Rouault and associate of Georg Lukács, to challenge a widely held assumption that modernist painting is ultimately materialist.[25]

This involves an extended close reading of several works. Rouault's work, I suggest, presents a subtle and nuanced resistance to modernism's celebration of the surface, or rather, an insistence that meaning resides therein, twinned with a simultaneous questioning of whether paint – paint understood as *matter* – *can* contain meaning in this way. In developing a theory of a 'grasping' epistemology embedded in Rouault's mark-making, I argue that Rouault's materiality refuses to give up on the sense of an 'other' or a metaphysic. The presence of this in a painter closely associated with Matisse and Fauvism, and deeply influenced by painters such as Cézanne and Courbet, is part of the 'complication' that this project aims to contribute to revisionist histories of modernist painting.

These qualities are most apparent in Rouault's paintings, and it is therefore to these that I will primarily be attending. As was the case with many modernist painters in the first

[24] See: Jonathan Loesberg, 'Materialism and Aesthetics: Paul de Man's *Aesthetic Ideology*', *Diacritics*, Vol. 27, No. 4, (1997); Anne Fernihough, *DH Lawrence: Aesthetics and Ideology*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) and T.J. Clark, 'Phenomenality and Materiality in Cézanne' in *Material Events: Paul de Man and the Afterlife of Theory*, eds. Tom Cohen, Barbara Cohen, J. Hillis Miller, Andrezj Warminski (Minneapolis & London, 2001), pp.93-113.
[25] See especially T.J. Clark's *Farewell to an Idea* (Yale, 1999), 'Madame Matisse's Hat', *London Review of Books*, vo1.30, no.16 (14 August 2008), pp.29-32, and *Picasso and Truth* (Princeton, 2013).

decade of the twentieth century, including Matisse and Picasso, Rouault experimented briefly with ceramics, but in ways that are less relevant to the objectives of this thesis. While his ceramics support his interest in medium and matter – something also demonstrated by his wide range of mixed-media paintings – they do not raise questions of the relationship between materiality and meaning in anything like the nuanced way that many of his paintings do. This is largely because they comprise of a few nudes, and replications of his Cezanne-like bather paintings upon bowls or vases, whereas the paintings grapple with subjects intimately tied to questions either of transcendence and metaphysics or of surfaces and masks. Rouault's prints, on the other hand, do touch upon issues relevant to our inquiry. In so far as they repeat an interest within painterly modernism in the 'lower' or more popular forms of artistic practice, they speak to a process of lowering in Rouault's work, which is discussed in Chapter One. They also engage with subject-matter that echoes that of some of his paintings. I will therefore bring various motifs from his most well-known print series *Miserere*, for example, to bear upon my discussion in the final chapter. Nevertheless, the paintings pose the question of materiality in a more pressing manner than the prints ever do, and for this reason I will concentrate primarily on Rouault's painting in all its myriad forms – watercolours, works in oil, pastel, chalk, ink, charcoal, tempera, gouache, and the endless combinations of these media – and on the place of these works in the history of modernist painting.

The second level at which the thesis operates, is the comparison of meaning-making in Rouault's project to literature. In articulating the indeterminacy that I argue to be central to Rouault's materiality and in unpacking the nuances of Rouault's modernism, I make use of a number of literary models or comparisons. These are drawn from two different approaches. Some are canonical and deemed to be broadly applicable, such as the comparison to Shakespeare's *King Lear* in an analysis of blindness and knowledge. Others are derived from

Rouault's contemporaries, such as André Gide, or from modernism more widely, such as Virginia Woolf's experiments with narrative. The reason for this is that the kind of interrogation of meaning that is shown to be at work in Rouault's painting, and which is tied to both the materiality of the signifier and the subject matter, is often more akin to experiments with meaning in literary modernism than many of the models usually discussed in relation to painting. Since I will argue that Rouault's painting demonstrates an interest in 'fictions' and multiple meanings, it is both appropriate and useful to draw upon models derived from other works of art. I am also concerned to demonstrate that Rouault's works are embedded, in nuanced and often critical ways, in the multi-faceted texture of French modernism circa 1900. In this intertextual and interdisciplinary approach my methodology is influenced by that of writers on modernism such as Maud Ellmann, Jean-Michel Rabaté, and the recent work of T.J. Clark.[26] In attempting to add Rouault's oeuvre to the current revisions of modernist history, I believe that this approach pays greater attention to the patterns and themes that arise – and are at times unlikely – within the eclectic and disparate-seeming landscape of modernism.

The third level is the context of the philosophical and theological debates around these questions. Again this involves two approaches: on the one hand I consider debates within Rouault's historical moment, particularly those associated with Maritain, but also taking in figures such as Nietzsche, Bergson and Heidegger. Here I will explore how these period writers help us to articulate these questions about matter and meaning, as well as the indeterminacy that the close-readings of Rouault's work will posit as central to his aesthetics. Rouault was widely read, and his writings as well as his paintings indicate his awareness of

[26] See Maud Ellmann, *The Nets of Modernism: Henry James, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Sigmund Freud* (Cambridge, 2010); Hanneke Grootenboer, *The Rhetoric of Perspective: Realism and Illusionism in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Still-Life Painting* (Chicago, 2006); and Clark, *Picasso and Truth*.

these thinkers. Instead of source-searching, however, my intention is to show that Rouault's paintings are philosophical statements in themselves, bound up in a process of questioning.

It is significant that, working within a period of art that has come to be defined by its physical means, and despite his own heavy facture, Rouault has emerged as a religious artist. It is my contention that this in itself indicates that the presence of meaning and the particular kinds of meaning in Rouault's surfaces need further enquiry. In attending to the tensions and inconsistencies of his surfaces I will argue that the emphasis is upon the process of meaning-making, there is no single 'truth' or 'foundational signified' to seize upon, but instead the materiality of the surfaces are an exploration of the ways in which meaning is constructed in modernist painting – and equally, the ways in which Rouault's surfaces resist, curtail, and deconstruct those processes of meaning.

In exploring Rouault's surfaces in this way, I draw upon various texts by thinkers connected to deconstruction, particularly Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida. As a methodology that 'eats its own progeny', which is to say, integrates into that system whatever is produced by or in opposition to that system, deconstruction is an especially apt approach in examining the kind of construction that I am arguing takes place in Rouault's work. Deconstruction attends to the slippages or breakages in systems of meaning, the aporias or moments in which meaning appears to defy convention or coding, and it is this attention that allows for the peculiarities, problems, nuances, and contradictions of Rouault's paintings to 'speak'. It is also the case that many of these thinkers find their own point of origin in questions posed by modernism, and turning their methods and findings to the case of Rouault's painting draws out the complications that such a methodology is able to articulate. The examination of Rouault's work in these terms thus also allows us to rethink certain ideas, such as de Man's 'materiality' or Jean-Luc Nancy's notion of 'presence through absence',

and to find a different purchase in using them to discuss visual art. To apply them to the physical problem of paint forces a reconsideration of these otherwise highly abstract, even immaterial, concepts.

Moreover, in proposing an 'other', or an indeterminate 'more than', or a deeper or higher metaphysical resonance for art *through* highly physical terms, Rouault's painting also anticipates the late twentieth-century theological turn in phenomenology. It is significant to my use of thinkers such as de Man and Derrida that their various critical approaches are sensitive to the theological aspects of Rouault's oeuvre. To put these to one side, would, I think, produce as distorted an analysis of his significance to modernism as would a Catholic apologetic account.

A note is required here on the word 'modernism': attempts to define modernism are inevitably reductive, but it is necessary to establish some parameters to my use of the word. In general, I use it to refer to painting in France from 1850 which sought to distinguish itself in opposition to the state-sponsored work of the Academies and official Salons, and to the parallel movements in literature and philosophy in France and indeed in the arts across Europe. Although it often implies a progressive avant-gardism, the relation to tradition is not so clear cut and I wish the term to remain ambiguous.[27] Hence I will speak of 'Rouault's modernism' as a way of specifying his project and of differing it from more general trends associated with the term.

Structure of the Chapters

In outline, the following chapters begin with a close analysis of Rouault's painting questioning their construction as paintings, their immediate and more opaque indications of

[27] Studies such as Alastair Wright's *Matisse and the Subject of Modernism* have overturned both the narratives of Greenbergian formalism and the 'break from tradition' narratives associated especially with early twentieth century French modernist painting.

signification, and what kind of surface/depth relationship they posit. I then offer two accounts – informed by contemporary theological and philosophical perspectives – for understanding the epistemological and aesthetics tensions and critiques motivated by Rouault's surfaces. For the most part, I focus on Rouault's paintings and writings between 1900 and 1925, since it was during this period that most of his innovative and experimental work was done. Much of his later work can be seen as repetitive, but there are exceptions to this which I consider in chapters three and four.

Chapter One opens with an analysis of the criticism of Rouault's work in the first decade of the twentieth century. Taking the terms of the critics' 'difficulty' in understanding Rouault's painting seriously, I examine *Tête de clown tragique* at the level of the 'mark', daub, line, or patch: each of which overtly declares itself *as* a mark, daub, line or patch before, or alongside, making any other claim. Attending to the oscillation between paint-matter and signification in this work, I suggest that the surface resists or blocks interpretative attempts, while simultaneously motivating dislocated remnants or indications of former representational strategies. What this painting lays hold of, in motivating the notion of the exiled or 'outsider' clown within a dense and complex facture, is the history of the use and transformation of the motif through a paint matter that threatens such transformative processes. Arguably, what Rouault participates in here, by putting pressure upon both established forms of practice and new painterly vocabularies, is what Klans Dirschel has called the 'creative-destructive task of finding meaning'.[28]

In the second part of the chapter, I examine these fragments of signification, comparing their mobilization in Rouault's work to the narrative strategy of Virginia Woolf's

[28] Klaus Dirschel, 'The Materiality of Painting' in *Materialities of Communication*, eds. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht & Karl Ludwig Pfeiffer (Stanford, 1988) pp.187-188.

short story, *The Mark on the Wall*. I then turn to two moments in Rouault's writing: the first, his break with Symbolism after the death of Moreau, and the second, his recurring reconstruction of the circumstances of his birth in a cellar in Belleville in 1871. Hugo von Hofmannstahl's 'Letter to Lord Chandos' offers a way of approaching Rouault's autobiography as a self-conscious construction of the artist. I then reconsider the influence of Moreau's Symbolism upon Rouault, and argue that, epistemologically, Rouault's unstable painterly 'mark' has much in common with the Mallarméan symbol. In this, I draw upon both Derrida's and de Man's analysis of Mallarmé, and especially de Man's comparison with the Baudelairean symbol. I then examine the historical and political resonances mobilised by the overt materiality of Rouault's painterly marks, resonances bound up with a history within modernism connected to depiction of the 'low' and to a narrative of the 'lowering' of the art of painting. Comparisons with Gustave Courbet, Honoré Daumier, and Emile Zola offer weight to the kind of politics Rouault is attempting to lay hold of in his painting. In the final section of this first chapter, I argue, through an analysis of *Jeu de massacre*, that while these historically specific fragments of representation appear to invite a representational or figurative reading, these readings are effectively short-circuited by the materiality of the surface, which draw attention to questions of meaning on a less-specific and theoretically deeper and darker level.

Chapter Two asks whether the material insistence of Rouault's surfaces can, or should, be understood as a protrusion of depth, an imposition of surface, or as an annihilation of the relation of surface to depth. This is examined in three ways, and begins to indicate how Rouault's work moves towards metaphysical questions of meaning and material. The first part of the chapter is concerned with the motif of the mask or costume in Rouault's work, introducing Nietzsche as an interlocutor and the dualism of *The Birth of Tragedy* as a useful

model on the grounds that these ideas had been widely received in France in the early years of the twentieth century. The second part turns to an article written by Rouault on Rodin in 1910, which examines the relation of surface and depth, and proposes a model that establishes the materiality of the work of art as the limiting factor but which is animated by the (ultimately futile) attempt to move beyond those constraints. In the third part of the chapter, I consider the materiality of the body – specifically the mutilated, fragmented 'modernist' body associated with the First World War. I examine examples of this fractured and dismembered body, arguing that this offers a new 'language that is taken up in Rouault's surfaces and in his increasingly puppet-like figures. However, I then suggest that this materiality in Rouault's work in fact speaks to the prosaic materiality described in de Man's 'discovery' of a materialism at the heart of the Kantian sublime, and can be used to question the assumptions of 'transcendence' made about Rouault's work. Running throughout this chapter, and explicitly addressed in this final section, is a critique of the existing Rouault literature and its reliance upon a quasi-theological notion of transcendence as a way of explaining away the difficulties of reading his work.

Chapter Three takes up the analogy between the body and the work of art, and introduces the aesthetics of the philosopher Jacques Maritain, a close friend of Rouault. Maritain is a difficult figure in the history of Catholicism in France, involved briefly with the right-wing Charles Maurras and *Action Française*, engaged in fraught friendships with figures such as Jean Cocteau and André Gide, and later a strong voice against anti-Semitism. Although the political and social context of Maritain's Catholicism is indicated, both in the text and in the footnotes, it is not equated with Rouault's; nor does it have a direct bearing upon the aspect of Maritain's aesthetics I wish to foreground. Rouault was distinctive at this moment in being both left-wing and Catholic, and his Catholicism (indicated by his writings)

is a deeply personal 'version'. In this chapter, I am interested in examining Maritain's oft-neglected aesthetics, as articulated in his 1910 review of Rouault and his book, *Art and Scholasticism*. These were shaped by a sincere interest in avant-garde art, poetry, and music, and demonstrate a wide philosophical and literary framework. That Maritain was deeply influenced by Rouault's work during the writing of these aesthetics suggests that his thinking – especially on the material embodiment of art – is important as a contemporary account. It is here that the language of 'fallenness' is most frequent, but it should be taken as model for physicality that resonates beyond the context of Maritain's Catholicism. By drawing attention to the resonances between theologically-derived concepts and the problems of painting, I ask what these say *about painting*, and particularly, about painting such as Rouault's which was involved in a self-consciously philosophical investigation.

Therefore, the first part of the chapter asks what it means to understand the work of art, as Maritain does, as a *concrete incarnation* of ideas or vision analogous to the 'bound' condition of the body. Through a comparison of Heidegger and Maritain, I argue that their model of obscurity is a useful one for understanding the epistemology of Rouault's painting and the notion of 'fallenness' as a way of accepting the duality of the work of art as both a material object and something that can 'mean more than it is'. The second part examines '"Noli me tangere": (Cezanne)', a second article published by Rouault in 1910, in which, playing upon the title of the biblical scene in which Mary Magdalene encounters Christ on Easter Sunday, Rouault weaves together questions about the 'presence' of painting, the bodily encounter with art – through 'touch' especially – and the possibility or impossibility of truly 'knowing' or understanding art. I compare and contrast Rouault's writing with Nancy's exploration of touch, of the body, and of the question of presence in the 'Noli me tangere' moment. As indicated above, this critical dialogue contributes to the understanding both of

Rouault's painting and of Nancy's idea of presence through absence. Finally, the chapter concludes with an analysis of the significance of the 'Holy Face' in Rouault's oeuvre, probing the notion of mystery, of the collision of the material and immaterial in painting, and extending the discussion of presence and absence through Jean-Luc Marion's understanding of the 'impoverishment' of the image.

Beginning with *Filles (ou deux nus)* (1905) and *Filles (ou deux prostituées)* (1906), as exemplary of this aspect of Rouault's painting, Chapter Four argues that the critics were right to recognise a vulgar physicality, an emphasis upon flesh and paint that might indeed be described – at least initially – as a flabby resignation to matter. Once again, however, this emphasis upon paint-as-matter or matter-as-flesh does not offer the concrete surety of Courbet's materialism. Instead, what Rouault's painting posits here is the potential emptiness of materialism: what if, he asks, this is it? At its darkest, its most 'bodily', most literally 'fleshly' and most unsettling, what Rouault's work proposes between 1902 and 1920 is an aesthetic based upon *doubt*. This is the kind of doubt, the 'what if' of Easter Saturday – what if this, the body, is it? – that permeates the work of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, which Rouault deeply admired. I suggest that the emphatic physicality and materiality of Rouault's paintings of bodies can be compared to Dostoyevsky's kenotic theology and to the notion of blasphemous or profane terms as a radical form of acknowledgement of the holy.[29] The questions of recognition and of *iurodstov* (holy foolishness) are then extended to Rouault's paintings of criminals in court; beginning with several images from 1907 entitled *Le Condamné*, and turning to two of Rouault's later works entitled *Homo homini lupus*. Drawing upon the resonances of this latter title and Derrida's *The Beast and the Sovereign*, this section investigates animality in Rouault's painting, and the implications for the ethics of his project. It also considers an aspect of Rouault's paintings as yet unmentioned in any of the literature –

[29] See Rowan Williams, *Dostoyevsky: Language, Faith, and Fiction* (London, 2008), p.226.

that the imagery central to works such as the two *Homo homini lupus* paintings and *Petite Magicienne* (1949) is drawn from that of the tarot. In returning to 'game-playing' these later paintings re-stage earlier questions associated with artifice and knowing or not-knowing. Finally, the chapter returns to the notion of 'not-knowing' through the themes of vision and blindness in Rouault's work, arguing that these complicate questions of truth and falsity in ways that bring doubt and scepticism to bear upon his project. Once again, the interlocutor is Nietzsche, but a later and more nihilistic Nietzsche. In arguing that Nietzsche can be used to explore Rouault here the aim is foreground the ethics of obscurity and to suggest that once again Rouault's project is a distinctly nineteenth century one. The central argument here is not that Rouault's paintings are nihilistic, but that the ever-present possibilities of emptiness or of a nihilistic darkness are necessary to the uncertainties and tensions that keep meaning in play in Rouault's emphatically painterly project.

In the conclusion to the thesis, I examine *Le clown blessé* and propose that Rouault's work represents 'woundedness'; a vein in the epistemological and aesthetic history of modernist painting that offers both a critique of painting and modernity and a celebration of the qualities of painterliness. It is in the refusal to settle that Rouault's surfaces are so disturbing, and in retrieving this 'disturbance', refusing to reconcile the problems raised by the surface, I hope to have unsettled assumptions enough to restore the significance of Rouault's surfaces to debates about meaning in modernist painting.

Chapter One: Paint-as-Matter

'Oh, you painter of darkness, what a distressing vision!' wrote the critic Louis Vauxcelles (1870-1943) of Georges Rouault's contribution (eight oils and thirty-six watercolours and pastels, including *Tête de clown tragique* [fig.4] and *Caissières de cirque forain III* [fig.5][1]), to the 1904 Salon d'Automne:

> Are those, by any chance, negresses in a tunnel? Or is it perhaps an illustration for the newspaper "The Invisible"? One can distinguish nothing; nothing save a paste made up of caviar, blacking and pitch... What sort of light is there in M. Rouault's studio? What over-smoked glasses conceal nature and life from this misogynous dreamer who plunges into the depths of Erebus?[2]

Vauxcelles' review dramatises – to the point of melodrama – the several kinds of darkness he perceived in Rouault's work: firstly, there is an all pervading literal darkness that seems to occlude vision; there is something there but it is darkness upon or in darkness and cannot be 'seen', a blindness that is also invisibility as it disables vision. Secondly, Vauxcelles' allusion to the modernist interest in so-called 'primitive' cultures ('negresses') contributes a sense of otherness and strangeness to this lack of seeing. This is reinforced by the powerful imagery of the 'unseen' worlds in the final line: the underworld of Erebus and the dream-world darkened further by the addition of 'misogynous', which also adds to the ethical obscurity of 'negresses'. Finally, there is the darkness of the materiality that obscures: nothing can be

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[1] As Rouault only sporadically and intermittently signed and dated his works – often returning to and reworking them as he rarely considered his paintings to be 'finished' – as well as repeating general titles such as 'filles' or 'clown' for dozens of works, it is difficult to exactly date these works, and to match them to the details of the works hung at the Salons d'Automne and Indépendants during 1904-1909. This is exacerbated by Rouault's tendency to change or add to titles retrospectively. (Fondation Georges Rouault) The *Catalogue. du Salon d'Automne de 1904* (15 oct-15 nov) includes listings for '1621: *Clown*, pastel', '1623: *Monsieur Clown'*, and five listings, 1093-1097, as 'Croquis de cirque', which might all refer to *Tête de clown tragique*, as might the listing for work '1490: *Clown'* in the 1906 Salon d'Automne catalogue. (Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Centre de documentation et de recherche du MNAM/Cci, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris : BV AP ROUAULT)

[2] Louis Vauxcelles, *Gil Blas*, 14 Oct. 1904, n.p. repr. & trans in Irina Fortunesca (ed.), *Rouault: Anthology of Texts*, trans. Richard Hilliard (Bucharest & London, 1975), p.12. Translation modified.

distinguished except the paint, which is reduced to 'paste', to 'caviar', and then, lower still, to 'blacking and pitch'. In evoking other materials to describe the paint, the paint matter is denied (and apparently refuses) the status of signifier. It does not seem to carry meaning but to block interpretative efforts – it is physically in the way. The image of the darkened, smoky glass that conceals creates a parody of Leon Battista Alberti's well-known metaphor of the painting as a window to be 'seen through', in which the paint matter becomes transparent and, usually, points to something beyond itself.

It is tempting to read this opaque window as representative of an encounter that discloses the physicality of the painting as a thing – i.e. an encounter in line with formalist claims for modernism's material self-reflexivity. For Vauxcelles, it seems, Rouault's painting does not respond to the usual ways of looking at paintings, which forces the critic to confront the works as material 'things'.[3] And yet if Vauxcelles' expectations about the act of looking at painting are thwarted in his encounter with this obdurate materiality, there are hints that he nevertheless sensed meaningful possibilities in the works – evidenced by the references to 'negresses' and Erebus. Vauxcelles sees 'nothing', but at the same time transforms the dense paint matter into caviar, a thick, heavily textured, and extremely luxurious delicacy, and then into the viscous industrial materials 'blacking and pitch'. That Vauxcelles' account oscillates between 'nothing' and an almost excessive materiality, and that these fragments of signification lead in opposite directions, indicates a fundamental instability in Rouault's work. As a critic, Vauxcelles supported the progressive and individualist in modern art but

[3] In the article that inaugurated 'Thing Theory', published in *Critical Inquiry* in 2001, Bill Brown argues that we only encounter things in their 'thingness' through chance interruptions; moments of contingency that 'disclose a physicality of things'. However, for Thing Theory, this is a moment of relinquishing theory to relish the world at hand which provides a relief based upon an assumption about the stability of material things that is absent from Vauxcelles' account. Bill Brown, 'Thing Theory', *Critical Inquiry*, (2001), pp.1-5.

was wary of wholly or even strongly abstract art, and the oscillation in his account also speaks to his own indecision about the tendencies in Rouault's painting.[4]

In this sense, the over-smoked glass windows of Rouault's studio are akin to the window that appears in James Joyce's short story 'The Sisters' from *The Dubliners*, where the narrator's gaze through a window is obstructed by a 'darkened blind'.[5] This window-turned-surface is at once something to look at and something to read. As a dark square its materiality is attended to, but it is also 'read' by the viewer as a sign of the death of the priest that has occurred inside the house, and symbolizes the blind that has been drawn over the priest's disgrace. As in Vauxcelles' account of Rouault's black canvases, there is 'nothing' to see (echoed by the death inside the house), but at the same time the dark materiality of the window holds the possibility of signification and meaning yet to be divined. In these instances, the opaque window can also be seen as emblematic of the modernist concern with the status of the surface as opposed to the Romantic emphasis upon depth.

Vauxcelles was not the only critic to be troubled, mystified or even horrified, by Rouault's paintings in 1904. Gustave Geffroy (1855-1926), despite his rejection of academic and idealist painting and his formalist tendencies as a critic (evident in his early interest in Cezanne's innovations in painting), also dwelt upon the opaque darkness of Rouault's paintings and regretted that, it seemed to him, Rouault had taken leave of his former talent.[6] The critic in *Le Journal* found the violent blackness of the works 'confounding', describing them as 'dark mistakes', and adding that although the salon catalogue claimed that these

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[4] See Patricia Leighton, *The Liberation of Painting: Modernism and Anarchism in Avant-Guerre Paris* (Chicago, 2013), pp.95 & 105.
[5] James Joyce, *Dubliners* (London, 1914 repr. 2000), p. 9.
[6] Gustave Geffroy, 'Le Salon d'Automne', *L'Humanite*, 14 Nov. 1904 : 'Chez M. Rouault, il y a toujours une obscurité opaque … Je me souviens du talent de M. Rouault, et je regrette son parti pris.' Despite being one of the first critics to engage with Cezanne and his appreciation of later movements, Geffroy claimed bewilderment at Fauvism and Cubism, and it is possible that his criticism of Rouault was wrapped up in this more general opinion. Geffroy was an influence on Vauxcelles, Faure, Andre Salmon and Apollinaire. See Robert Thomas Denommé, *The Naturalism of Gustave Geffroy* (Geneva, 1963).

'impenetrable pastels' were 'circus impressions', he could not make them out.[7] Élie Faure (1873-1937), informed by his developing aesthetics, highly poetic in nature and strongly Lamarckian,[8] seemed to have had less difficulty in reading at least one of Rouault's works (probably *Tête de clown tragique*) as a picture, describing it as a 'head of a clown of such unspeakable anguish' that it must be an hallucination of nightmarish inspiration.[9]

Six months later, Rouault's work drew contrasting reviews from the older, Symbolist critics. On the one hand, at the Salon des Indépendants (where several of Rouault's works were shown, including *Fille* [fig.6], *L'Ivrognesse* [fig.7], and various clowns, amongst them probably *L'Écuyère* [*La clowness*] [fig.8][10] and *Clown au singe* [fig.9]), Charles Morice (1860-1919) wrote – not entirely unkindly – of Rouault's dark manner and opaque matter which, although vibrating in places 'with meaningful accents', 'barely and incompletely reveals the forms of his ambivalent characters'.[11] Morice also noted the melancholic and crepuscular tone of the works. A Catholic and prolific writer on Symbolism, Morice was influenced by the notoriously obscure poetry of Paul Verlaine, which may have led to his more sympathetic attitude towards the 'difficulty' of Rouault's surfaces. Morice had also collaborated (in 1886) on a translation of Dostoyevsky's novella *L'Esprit Souterrain* (*Notes from the Underground*), a writer that I will argue in later chapters is deeply significant for Rouault, and this too may have guided Morice in his approach to Rouault.

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[7] Anon., *Le Journal* (Oct. 1904) cited in Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism*, p.217.
[8] Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829), a French naturalist. Faure's aesthetics were influenced by Lamarck's evolutionary theory which, opposed to Darwinian theory, posited a complex alchemical that drove organisms up a ladder of complexity, combined with an environmental force that shaped their adaption to specific environments through the use and disuse of characteristics. See Richard W. Burkhardt, *The Spirit of System: Lamarck and Evolutionary Biology* (Harvard, 1995).
[9] Élie Faure, *Les Arts de la vie*, (Nov. 1904) in Fabrice Hergott (ed.) *Rouault: Première période 1903-1920* exh. cat. (Paris, 1992), p.188. In *The Spirit of Forms* (New York, 1930), the final volume of his *History of Art*, Faure gave full voice to this poetic aesthetic, pointing, in lyrical style, to the 'uncanny-potency' of the artistic sensibility and seeing artistic form as the manifestation of spirits and forces in nature.
[10] This work is variably dated 1905 or 1906 by the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.
[11] Charles Morice, *Mercure de France* (15 Apr. 1905).

In marked contrast to Morice's relatively sanguine response, at the Salon d'Automne in October 1905 (best known for Vauxcelles' coining of the term *les fauves*), Joséphin Péladan (1858-1918), advocate of spirituality, idealism, and occultism in art, and who had previously exhibited examples of Rouault's work in his Salon de la Rose + Croix,[12] included Rouault in his collective criticism of the so-called Fauvists. Several of these 'Fauves', including Matisse and Rouault, had been pupils of another Symbolist, Gustave Moreau, and Péladan, shocked by the anarchy of the Salon, wrote that it was just as well that Moreau had not lived to see it: 'what would he say, he, the man of myth and dreams... in seeing his aesthetic sons in such an anarchic salon?' Péladan added, 'I do not throw this epithet around lightly, but choose it to emphasize the procedure of these painters.'[13]Although it could be said that this response conforms to Gertrude Stein's prescription that in the face of great works 'for a very long time everybody refuses and then almost without pause almost everybody accepts... [but] when it is still a thing irritating annoying stimulating then all quality of beauty is denied to it',[14] the accusations of confusion, ugliness, and darkness have never really been exorcised from the reception of Rouault's work. They remain *things*, irritating and stimulating.

If anything, the reviews got worse before they got better. In 1910, the year of Rouault's first solo exhibition (held in Paris at the Galérie Druet on the rue Royale from 24 February to 5 March), *Les Nouvelles* described the decade of work represented there as a 'disastrous road' on which most of the pieces were 'only barbarous images without any

[12] Of the six Rose+Croix exhibitions organized by Péladan, starting in 1892, Rouault exhibited in the last one in 1897. He sent 13 works including *The Christ Jesus among the Doctors*. Moreau refused to exhibit in the Salons, considering Péladan to be a sham and a show-off. See Kang, *Rouault in Perspective*, p.30; Robert Pincus-Witten, *Occult Symbolism in France. Josephin Péladan and the Salons de la Rose+Croix* (New York, 1976).
[13] Josephin Péladan, 'Le Salon d'Automne' in *La Revue Hebdomadaire 9* (Oct. 1905), pp.455-73.
[14] Gertrude Stein, 'Composition as Explanation', *Look at Me Now and Here I Am*, ed. Patricia Meyerowitz (Harmondsworth, 1984), p.149.

rapport whatsoever with true art.'[15] *Progrès* described Rouault's 'collection of horrors' as 'babbling'[16] – an indication that neither the subject matter (the 'horrors'), nor the style ('babbling'), and certainly not the integration of the two, were acceptable to the critics. This reviewer went so far as to suggest that if Moreau were to return from the dead he might revoke his decision to make Rouault the curator of the Musée Moreau (Rouault took up this position in 1902 and the museum officially opened in 1903, based in Moreau's house on the Rue de la Rochefoucauld), and even feared that Rouault might, in a 'furious madness' destroy the works of his former master.[17]

Le Feu, for its part, declared itself unable to see what Rouault was trying to achieve, unless it was to 'begin Daumier all over again', and criticised the lack of construction and line.[18] The *Paris-Journal* called it 'chaos', an 'exasperating disequilibrium of both the brain and the eye', merely the death-throes of an outdated Symbolism[19]; and *Excelsior* thought his paintings 'simply incomprehensible', a slapping of paint onto canvas that ended in chaotic forms suggesting 'the mentalité of a Carribbean' instead of 'a Parisian of the Twentieth Century'.[20] Here, as Stephen Schlosser notes, the influence of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's 1910 study of primitivism, *Les fonctions mentales dans les societies inférieures*, can be heard.[21] Even Guillaume Appollinaire (1880-1918) – whose interests in Symbolism (evident in his first collection of poetry, *Alcools* (1913)), the materiality of poetry (*Calligrammes* (1918)), and early notions of surrealism, might have been expected to cultivate sympathy with

[15] Schlosser, *Jazz Age Catholicism*, p.223.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid. p.224.
[21] Ibid.

Rouault's project – wondered, in *L'Intransigeant*, what 'inhuman urge' prompted Rouault to produce such 'sinister canvases'.[22]

In 1910, as in the earlier criticism, similar concerns were picked up by a variety of publications of differing political sympathies, and by reviewers of otherwise distinct critical vantage-points. And although the claims of incomprehension ('babbling', 'chaotic', 'anarchic' and 'incomprehensible') were, to some extent, well-rehearsed reactions to the avant-garde, the response to Rouault is also rather specific. Whilst similar accusations were levelled at Matisse and Fauvism, the vocabulary is revealingly different. For one thing, neither the realism of Daumier nor Symbolism appears as a point of reference in the 1905 Fauvist criticism unless it is to distance the new generation from the influence of older movements. The invocation of these analogies in relation to Rouault is striking, signalling on the one hand lingering meaning ('the death-throes of an outdated Symbolism'); on the other a social conscience ('beginning Daumier again'). However they are to be understood, these critical positions are in clear tension with the emphatic 'thingness' of the opaque paint matter.[23]

Also emerging from the critics' vocabulary, in particular the use of words such as 'inhuman', 'horror', 'barbarous' and 'nightmarish', is the sense that their confusion at the mode of Rouault's painting extended beyond accusations of incompetence or madness towards something darker – something monstrous. The implication that Rouault's might be a 'monstrous mode' is suggestive in itself. Derived from the Old French *mostre* and the Latin

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[22] Guillaume Appollinaire, 'Vernissage d'Automne' in *L'Intransigeant* (Oct.1910), p.1.

[23] That it was the conjunction of Rouault's painterly terms and subject matter that particularly offended the critics is also supported by the reviewer in *Le Journal* who having described Rouault's work as 'dark mistakes' added that the exceptions were a few small landscapes 'in the English style'. 'Englishness' might be a way of further neutralising the subject matter, by distancing it both geographically and artistically, and also of accounting for the dark palette. Importantly, this comment implies that the marriage of Rouault's style with landscape was less offensive than when married to the bodies of prostitutes, religious figures, or circus performers.

mōnstrum and *monēre*, the 'monster' and the 'monstrous' are both a prodigious, marvellous or portentous sight, and a warning. Like the opaque window, monstrosity is something to look at and something to read. The monster is usually understood as an aberration or deformation of the 'norm', and monstrosity can take the form of physical deformity or (after the advent of modern science in the eighteenth century dispelled the fear associated with biological malformation) a moral or behavioural abnormality.[24] In the reaction to Rouault's work, we can sense both: the physical 'deformity' of the surfaces taken to imply some madness or monstrous vision or character at work. Alexa Wright has argued that the 'normal' human body has acted as a model for interpreting the 'natural' or 'correct' structure of the external world, whilst 'the unintelligible body of the monster has historically provided an exposition of moral, social or ontological uncertainty'.[25] Analogously, Rouault's painting can be approached as an exposition of representational uncertainty in the early years of the twentieth century.

Another fundamental meaning of the monster, especially in its early mythological form, is its hybrid character. Monsters, writes Zakiya Hanafi, 'create confusion and horror because they appear to combine animal elements with human ones; they posit a possibility of animal origins, of bestiality, of some kind of "promiscuous" coupling.'[26] This meaning of the monstrous is, I will argue, equally relevant to Rouault. In combining abstract mark-making with an insistence that these marks are yoked to representation, Rouault's painting appeared

[24] See Alexa Wright, *Monstrosity: The Human Monster in Visual Culture* (London and New York, 2013), p. 3; Michel Foucault, *Abnormal*: *Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975*, trans. Graham Burchell (London and New York, 2003); Georges Canguilhem, 'Monstrosity and the Monstrous', *Diogenes*, Vol.40 (1962), pp.37-40.
[25] Wright, *Monstrosity*, p.5.
[26] Zakiya Hanafi, *The Monster in the Machine: Magic, Medicine, and the Marvellous in the Time of the Scientifc Revolution* (North Carolina, 2000), p.2.

to his contemporary critics (as later to Greenberg) as a similarly confusing, even horrifying, hybrid of painterly and representative orders that threatened to give way to chaos.[27]

Sympathetic critics of Rouault have reacted to this monstrosity by turning to a recuperative narrative of pity and transcendence, in which art 'rescues' these themes and the society in which they exist, and where the 'lower' the terms to which the artist descends the 'higher' the message can be deemed to be. But arguably, what the original critics reacted to was the *lack* of transcendence, the pure, vulgar physicality of the works. Accordingly, this chapter is concerned with how this uncertain and monstrous mode operates: in other words, how Rouault's canvases complicate or challenge notions of representation and meaning, and destabilize expectations about what can be 'known' in the face of the painting. The central question is how the emphatic materiality of Rouault's painterly marks resists the 'emptying' of meaning associated with narratives of abstraction and insists that meaning resides therein whilst at the same time calling into doubt whether paint – paint understood as matter – can contain meaning in this way.

Beginning with *Tête de clown tragique* (1904-5), Fauré's head of 'unspeakable anguish', the first part of the chapter will examine Rouault's painting at the level of the 'mark', daub, line, or patch, each of which overtly declares itself *as* a mark, daub, line or patch before, or alongside, making any other claim.[28] I will argue that the materiality of his surfaces breaks down the opposition between matter and signification that has been theorized by Georges Didi-Huberman, amongst others. For Didi-Huberman, the mark or *tache*

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[27] More literally, in 1925 Carl Einstein wrote that Rouault's clowns, 'tragic portraits of ill-treated, wretched ludicrous creatures' seldom rise 'beyond a hybrid caricature'. Carl Einstein, 'Georges Rouault', *Der Querschnitt*, (March, 1925), p.244, repr. in *Georges Rouault* exh. cat. (Berlin, 1988), pp.22, repr. & trans. in *Rouault: Anthology of Texts*, p.16.

[28] In his comparative examination of Manet and Flaubert, Arden Reed posits such marks – *taches* – as the site of their 'modernism', arguing that 'On the mirror called "realism" taches leave an ineffaceable stain that can signify modernism itself.'28 La tache, he writes, may be 'a mark, stain, spot, patch, dot, blob, blot, blotch, splotch, daub, blemish, flaw, bruise, macula, stigma, and so on. Generally speaking, the tache signifies an unstable or irregular mark on some surface; in painterly terms, it is a brush stroke that asserts itself as such, perhaps to the point of losing its descriptive function.' Arden Reed, *Manet, Flaubert, and the Emergence of Modernism: Blurring Genre Boundaries*, (Cambridge, 2003), p.57.

'proposes, against the grain of representational function, a blaze of substance' and 'opposes its material opacity [...] to all *mimesis* thinkable as an "act of the lens".'[29] The opposite of this mark is the 'detail', which Didi-Huberman characterizes as that which can be named, which 'cleansed of all material ...is conducive to discourse: it helps to tell a story, to describe an object.' Rouault's work refuses such distinctions.

The second part of the chapter revolves around two moments in Rouault's life: his birth, in a cellar in war-torn Paris in 1871 and the crisis he experienced following the death of Moreau in 1898. I depart from the usual treatment of these moments by approaching them as highly constructed literary episodes. This part will develop two points in relation to the intelligibility of Rouault's marks. Firstly, the continuity between Moreau's Mallarméan symbolism and Rouault's post-1900 mark-making, which is an argument against the prevailing assumption that his period of crisis after 1898 caused him to break entirely with the influence of Moreau. Secondly, I will argue that the complex entanglements of the visual, the social, and the political in Rouault's literary reconstructions of his own history parallel the rhizomatic structures of meaning mobilised by the materiality of his surfaces.[30] I will pay

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[29] Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images*, trans. John Goodman (Pennsylvania, 2005), p.252.

[30] The 'rhizomatic' structure of thought was proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, 1987), pp.19 & 21. In her examination of the structure of modernist texts in *The Nets of Modernism*, Ellmann explores the cutting of umbilical cord, which inscribes in the navel-scar the contradictory ideas of absence and entanglement. (Ellmann, *Nets*, p.9.) The navel, she argues, implies a network of umbilical connectedness that creates uncontrollable dependencies and interfusions. (*Nets*, p.167) At the same time, the navel scar signifies separation: 'a knot that adds nothing'. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud describes an 'unplumbable' spot in every dream, a spot he designates the dream's 'navel'. (Sigmund Freud, *The Complete works Psychological Works*, Vol. IV, trans. James Strachey (London, 1953-1974), p.111, n.1; and David Sigler, 'The Navel of the Dream: Freud, Derrida and Lacan on the Gap where "Something Happens"', *SubStance*, Vol.39, No.2 (2010), pp.17-38, esp. p.19) For Freud, it is a point of obscurity, which reveals the incompleteness of the information given-up to interpretation. (Freud also withholds information – making him, as 'creator' or writer an untrustworthy intermediary: the ethics of this obscurity will be discussed in chapter 4.) Later, writes Ellmann, Freud redefined the navel as a 'tangle of the dream-thought which cannot be unravelled.' This navel 'opens up the void from which "the dream-thoughts branch out in every direction into the intricate network of our world of thought." It is where this "meshwork is particularly close" that the dream-wish rises "like a mushroom out of its mycelium".' Ellmann goes on to connect this image of the mycelium, a shallow creeping fungus, to the 'rhizomatic' structure of thought proposed by Deleuze and Guattari. In a similar vein, Mieke Bal describes the navel as 'a meaningful pointer that allows plurality and mobility.' (Mieke Bal, *Looking in: The Art of Viewing*, (Oxford, 2013) p.83) In proposing readings 'in the "navel" mode', Bal posits readings of paintings that: 'acknowledge visuality but do not shy away from discursive elements, which recognize where cultural commonplaces are mobilized yet leave room for the marginal "other", which endorse the "density" of visual signs and let that density spill over into literature while not fearing to point out specific, discrete signs in visual works and the loci of density in literature.'(p.8.) The result, she cautions, is no more

particular attention to the historical and political narratives bound up with a history within modernism connected to the depiction of the 'low' and to a narrative of the 'lowering' of the art of painting, which I will show to be embedded in Rouault's project (a project that has its own narrative of a 'fall').

Finally, with these analyses in hand, the last part of the chapter turns to *Jeu de massacre* (1905) and *Parade* (1907) to explore the interpretative indeterminacy of Rouault's paintings. It will continue to take account of the actualities of the surfaces, but also begin to show how aspects of Rouault's painterly experiments accord specifically with particular strands of thinking associated with modern philosophy and with anxieties about the condition of modernity.

Part One: Materiality

Tête de clown tragique, [fig.4] painted circa 1904-1905, is one of the 83 works devoted to circus themes painted by Rouault between 1902 and 1910.[31] Typical of Rouault's experiments with mixed media during this period, it is a combination of watercolour, pastel, and gouache on paper. It is also one of Rouault's literally darkest works: a face, the features roughly demarcated by thick gestural slabs of paint, emerges from a mass of black marks and patches in which the accoutrements of a clown – a hat, circular collar, and over-sized buttons on the chest – are laid out in equally rough patches of blue outlined in black with a flash of

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complete than any other art-historical reading, nor does it form a narrative that reconstructs the 'pre-texts' that give the works meaning. But this mode, beginning at the navel, allows for the stuff that does not fit. Bal adds elsewhere that a defining feature of such "navel" signs is that most commentators notice them, and fight them off.'(p.176) And this can certainly be said of Rouault's work: most critics noticed the obscurity of Rouault's canvases, the darkness and difficulty of interpreting the thick paint, and it is also true that most critics then turn away from these 'dark works', rendering them 'mistakes', or recuperate that malevolent difficulty through an external narrative of pity. Instead, the 'navel mode' proclaims an interaction, not an opposition, between discourse and image. (pp.87 & 68.)

[31] *Georges Rouault: Les Chefs-d'Oeuvre de la Collection Idemitsu*, exh. cat (Paris: Editions Pinacothèque de Paris, 2008), p.104.

white denoting the direction of the pleats of the collar. The patches of colour are applied in a scumbled or scribbled manner, through which the colour and texture of the paper are visible. The thick black lines have a heaviness combined with a gestural dynamism that appear to hew the face out of its ground in a manner that recalls the surface of a block used in wood-cutting, or a crudely executed wood-engraving. Although the face – or, specifically, certain facial features: cheek bones, eye sockets, nose and jaw – emerges from the paper, it never escapes entirely from the work as a whole. At the same time we slowly realise that the bust-length image of the clown fills the entirety of the canvas – exceeds it, even, as the hat and shoulders are cut off by the edges of the paper. It has something of the theatrical portrait to it – up-front, almost confrontational, but at the same time caught up and kept at a distance by the tangled web of painterly marks.

The dark lines operate across the paper giving the surface a sense of unity, and drawing attention to the surface, in a manner that effectively collapses the figure-ground distinction. Demonstrative of this effect is the monkey, which, with prolonged attention and especially if one is familiar with the recurrence of the same loosely-indicated animal across Rouault's circus works, can be divined on the shoulder of the clown, filling the top left of the painting [fig.10]. A jumble of marks, the monkey serves to utterly dissolve any sense of depth between foreground and background by pictorially belonging to the mark-making of the ground, but simultaneously 'belonging' to (sitting on) the subject.

Darkness is the absence of light, and light is conventionally one of the organising principles of painting: Paul de Man writes that 'Light implies space which, in turn, implies the possibility of spatial differentiation, the play of distance and proximity that organizes perception as the foreground-background juxtaposition that links it to the aesthetics of

painting.'[32] If the Impressionist and Neo-Impressionist interest in light was to do with its phenomenal power in revealing the world as it is seen, Rouault's use of black proposes a dark materiality that leaves the visual space of the painting ambivalently dislocated, teetering on the verge of both abstraction and representation. This uncertainty is exacerbated by several other points. Firstly, certain areas of the painting, such as the body of the hat, which come forward most explicitly, are also those that are the least painted. This effect literally turns ground into figure, and upon close examination, turns it back into ground. Secondly, before the monkey is identified, the arrangement of marks in that corner of the work can also appear as another face, looming out beside the head of the clown and undermining confidence in what we are looking at. Finally, the title itself is ambivalent: it is unclear if it is the clown that is tragic or the painting that depicts the head in tragic terms.

If the monkey is a disequilibrious presence, there is what appears to be an answering stabilising or steadying presence in the painting. In the top right-hand corner of the work there is a broad vertical brush mark that denotes a structure – an 'edge' of something – conventionally 'behind' the clown's hat [fig.11]. Whether this 'edge' belongs to a door, a wall, or a poster (several of Rouault's paintings of clowns have the rectangular shapes of advertisements around and behind the figures and here this reading is supported by the suggestion of a figure on the poster) is not important; what is important is that even this is not clear. This is not the specifically located place of Lautrec's circuses and shows; rather it briefly indicates the possibility of a specific space while setting up a deeply ambiguous space in a manner more akin to Seurat's *Parade* (1888) [fig.12]. Françoise Künzi, writing of a similar background found in Rouault's *Lutteur* of 1906 [fig.13], describes such vague

[32] Paul de Man, 'Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric', *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York, 1984), p.258.

divisions evident in the background as 'cloisonnement'.[33] This term for 'partitioning' recalls Edouard Dujardin's description of Post-Impressionism at the 1888 Salon des Indépendants, including works by Paul Gauguin and Émile Bernard, in which bold, flattened forms were separated by dark contours or outlines. Dujardin's and Künzi's use of this word also alludes to the enamelling technique of medieval and Byzantine artists, a reference that emphasizes the material quality of these areas of the canvas, and which is especially relevant to Rouault who frequently sought to align himself with the popular idea of the medieval artisan.[34] But where in Gauguin and Bernard this partitioning offered visual stability, in Rouault it operates very differently. What this particular structuring but unspecific mark in *Tête de clown tragique* puts under strain is the attempt to privilege either form or content. What is nameable and what is unnameable, identifiable and unidentifiable, is ambiguous or deeply uncertain: clown or paint?

What is 'clown' in the work, then, has its own unverifiable status built into it because, although as we have said, the marks hew out the face of a clown, epistemologically they posit little more than this. The mixed media draw attention to the differing textures of the materials of the work, but no direct claim is made upon the 'outside' world by these marks: that is, they contain no instrumental relation to the textures of the clown, to fabric or flesh, as understood in the 'real' world. However, the fact that, apparently paradoxically we can speak of the 'clown' in Rouault's work immediately creates meaning to the marks that exceeds 'mere' or 'pure' paint. This paint-stuff collapses the distinctions that traditionally organise painting, replacing light with matter. Even the 'spaces' are filled out, embodied or animated by their articulation through these thick marks. One way we might make sense of what we see here

[33] Françoise Künzi in *Georges Rouault: Les chefs-d'oeuvre de la collection Idemitsu* exh. cat. (Paris, 2008-2009), p.104.
[34] Rouault once declared: 'I do not belong to this modern life on the streets where we are walking at this moment; my real life is back in the ages of the Cathedrals.' Quoted in Seamus Gaffney, 'Georges Rouault "The Monk of Modern Art"', *The Irish Monthly*, Vol.78, No.926 (Aug. 1950), p.387.

would be to argue that the disparate marks are brought together in a nuanced totality, in ways that confirm the consistency of the picture and its conformity with the world-as-experience. We might think, here, of T.J. Clark's analysis of Picasso's Cubism circa 1910-1911, as 'its all being made of the same experiential stuff',[35] or of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's conception that it is all the 'flesh' of the world: 'things and my body are made of the same stuff', he wrote, 'The eye lives in this texture as a man in his house.'[36]

Such arguments were already in circulation at the time Rouault painted his clown. In 1909, Leó Popper (1886-1911), the little known Hungarian critic, and close friend of György Lukács, related this kind of total materiality, which he saw in Cézanne's painting and that of Pieter Brueghel the Elder to the painters sense of the solidity of both their materials and the substance of the real material world.[37] This 'material sense', according to Popper, 'permeated [Cézanne's] paintings and integrated every element in them including "the air", the space between the objects, so that solidity and plasticity dominate and bind [his] pictures.'[38] To describe this ever-present substantiality and tangibility, and the likeness between the materiality of paint and the materiality of existence, Popper formed the terms *teig* meaning 'dough' and *allteig* meaning 'general dough':[39] thick, dense terms (interestingly containing a certainly malleability) for 'experiential stuff'. What Popper proposed, then, was that the materiality of paint could, in an analogous fashion, lay hold of the materiality of the world.

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[35] T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes in a History of Modernism* (Yale, 1999), p.219.
[36] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind' (1961) in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, trans. and ed. Galen A. Johnson (Illinois, 1993), pp.125 &127.
[37] Leó Popper, 'Peter Brughel l'Ancien', *Pesanteur et abstraction*, trans. (into French) Sibylle Muller (Paris, 2009), pp.57-65. Originally published in German in *Kunst et Künstler*, VIII, 1910, pp.599-606.
[38] Leó Popper, 'Pieter Brueghel der Altere,'' in Ottó Hévizi and Arpád Tímár, eds. *Dialógus a müvészetröl. Popper Leó´ írásai. Popper Leó és Lukács György levelezése* [*Dialogue about art. The writings of Leó Popper. The correspondence of Leó Popper and György Lukács*] (Budapest: MTA Lukács Archívum,T-Twins Kiadó, 1993), p.266. Translated in Eva Forgács, 'The safe haven of a new classicism: the quest for a new aesthetics in Hungary 1904-1912', *Studies in Eastern European Though*, Vol.60 (2008), p.92. Also in Lukács, 'Léo Popper (1886-1911)' in Popper, *Pesanteur et abstraction*, pp.7-8.
[39]See Letter 96 n.14, in *Georg Lukacs: Selected Correspondence 1902-1920*, trans. & ed. Judith Marcus and Zoltán Tar (New York, 1986), p.195. On '*allteig'* see also letters nos. 29, 41, and 49.

The insistence upon tangibility in Popper's account sounds appropriate to Rouault's thick surfaces, especially those literally laden with paint, and Popper's claim that the inherence of meaning in paint-matter is analogous to the inherence of meaning in the physical world resonates well with Rouault's project. However, Rouault's subject matter is more abstract, and at times more symbolically referential, than Cézanne's landscapes and still-life compositions with which Popper is mainly concerned. Rouault's work does not, therefore, make the same claim to 'lay hold' of the *materiality* of the world as Popper suggests is evident in Cézanne's work, but does similarly claim to lay hold (or attempt to lay hold) of meaning within the material world.

One of the criticisms that can be levelled at the recent theoretical work that appears under the umbrella of 'New Materialisms' is that the supposedly new claim that we should abandon the terminology of matter as an inert substance[40] tends to overlook existing accounts of 'matter' (such as Popper's) that already stand in complicated relation to such a notion. This is perhaps particularly the case in terms of paint-matter, which has always had a peculiarly dual status as part-matter part-signifier (or 'actor', in New Materialist terms[41]) in the 'event' that is painting. This is certainly the case for Rouault. Materially, his marks are not 'pure' matter: they are corrupted or muddied by the activity of painting; their application is, at least to some extent, bound up with the appearance of the head of the clown in their midst. At the same time, these marks declare themselves, first and foremost, as material things – they do not, as we have said, give way simply to the representation of the clown's coat or collar but oscillate between inert matter and representation. We can tell what kind of brush was used, and arguably we can divine more about the substance of the paint matter than we do about the

[40] Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, 'Introducing the New Materialisms', *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, eds. Coole and Frost (North Carolina, 2010), p.9.
[41] Ibid.

subject, but, nevertheless, they remain tied up with the subject. The marks 'show their own workings', but this does not allow us to work back through the operation and, as it were, to pull apart the paint and the clown.

In work that precedes and, in relation to these questions of painting, remains more nuanced and conceptually helpful than New Materialism, Judith Butler has pointed out that in both Latin and Greek, 'matter (*materia* and *hyle*) is neither a simple, brute positivity or referent nor a blank surface or slate awaiting an external signification, but is always in some sense temporalized'.[42] This was also the case for Karl Marx (1818-1883) when 'matter' is understood as a principle of transformation, 'presuming and inducing a future'.[43] Matter – and this seems particularly relevant to trying to grasp the role of a paint-matter that declares itself whilst simultaneously going about its conventional work – contains potentiality (its Aristotelian definition). In this sense, Butler writes, 'to know the significance of something is to know how and why it matters, where to matter means at once "to materialize" and "to mean".'[44] Rouault's picture posits both the marks and the clown as the 'something' of which significance can be known, leaving each wrapped up in one another's process of materialization (what Butler calls the 'indissolubility of materiality and signification'[45]), re-orienting the uncertainty between paint and clown towards a question about process – about what it is to make meaning.

The conception of matter as a principle of transformation removes the exteriority that notions of 'pure' or inert matter are supposed to secure.[46] The distinction between Butler's approach to this question and that of the New Materialists is useful here. In Butler's terms we

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[42] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the discursive limits of "sex"* (London, 1993), p.7.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid. p.6.
[46] Ibid. pp.6 & 31.

have to ask whether language, in this case painterly mark-making, can simply refer to materiality, or whether language or painting is also the 'very condition under which materiality may be said to appear?'[47] The implications of Butler's thesis is that matter is not seen as matter except when it is also 'meaning', which throws matter into relief, rendering it noticeable in itself – but through the condition of its interrelationship with meaning. Although a New Materialist such as Jane Bennett also draws upon a history of thought in which materiality is figured 'not as inert or even particularly passively resistant but as active and energetic',[48] she argues that the active principle 'inhabits us and our inventions, [and] also acts as an outside or alien power'.[49] This assumes an a priori meaningfulness to matter, and suggests the possibility of separating a meaningful matter from the processes to which it is subjected or a materiality that is not in fact indissolubly bound up with anything.[50]

This is not the case with painting, even though it is true that the material qualities of media have always had a role in aesthetics. The notion of a 'truth to materials' that arose in the nineteenth century (most notably in the writings of John Ruskin (1819-1900), who made it both an aesthetic and an ethic[51]) drew particular attention to an empathetic relationship between the work of the artist and his or her materials, and as modernist painting increasingly reflected upon its own condition, it often proposed a conversation or mutability between paint-matter and subject that transgresses the conventional object/subject divide. Nevertheless, it is deeply problematic to think of paint-matter as *a priori* invested with significant values and capabilities. If paint-matter is meaningful in and of itself, it is because

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[47] Ibid. p.6.
[48] Jane Bennett, 'A Vitalist Stopover on the way to a New Materialism' in *New Materialisms*, p. 47
[49] Ibid.
[50] See also Diana Coole, 'The inertia of matter and the generativity of flesh' in *New Materialisms*, 92. For example, Coole asks, 'Is it not possible to imagine matter quite differently: as perhaps a lively materiality that is self-transformative and already saturated with the agent capabilities and existential significance that are typically located in a separate, ideal, and subjectivist realm?'
[51] John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (London, 1849).

it has acquired a history of its own use, application, associations, reception, and 'meaningfulness' (this conception of history is addressed fully in the second part of this chapter). The problem that this 'history' challenges is the attribution of these qualities to the matter itself: on the one hand, the qualities of wood are always those of wood, but the ways in which they are brought to bear upon the representational process in a work of art is rarely ever (at this late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century moment) because they are just 'there', speaking for themselves. The associations that paint-matter has acquired have been put there through the activities of centuries of painters. Certainly as regards Rouault's materiality, it is the wielding of paint-matter as a thing of expression that draws our attention to that matter, and by 1904 painting had reached a point where that attention already meant something to painting.

To some extent this resembles the question posed by Marx's dancing table and the commodity fetish[52] – what properties inhere in an object or thing? Deciding what is 'contained' in objects involves deciding where human labour or thought resides. For Marx, qualities perceived to belong to, or to be immanent within an object, are properties of labour or power that, he argued, rightly belong *not* to the object but to the person with whom the labour itself originated. [53] For Butler, the risk of instating an idea of matter as *a priori* or external to discourse, as a means of looking to such matter to ground the discourse, is that we may well discover that matter itself is saturated with discourses.[54] In Butler's terms, the indissolubility of materiality and signification is intended to unsettle, to trigger a loss of epistemological certainty that does not result in the annihilation of either element, but rather may initiate new ways of understanding the mattering of matter. Where painting is

[52] Karl Marx, 'The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof', *Capital*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (London, 1887), chapter 1, section iv, pp.76-81. See also Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx* (London and New York, 2012).
[53] See John Plotz, 'Can the Sofa Speak? A look at Thing Theory', *Criticism*, Vol.47, no.1, (2005), pp. 109-118, esp.114.
[54] Note that this is contentious in her argument for gendered bodies, but posits an important aspect of painting. See Sara Salih, *Judith Butler* (London and New York, 2002), p.143

concerned, then, Butler's deconstructive approach also allows for the possibility that not all materiality is conceptualized materially. What of the 'excess' we have mentioned, the possibility that Rouault's marks tantalizingly pose – that they do, might, or try to, mean more than they physically are? One way of rephrasing the point we have reached with Rouault's marks is to cannibalize Butler's terms, and say that whilst painting is the condition under which materiality may be said to appear, *materiality* is the condition under which painting may be said to *mean*.

This becomes clearer if we turn to further examples. The material opacity of the mark increases in paintings such as *Clown au tambour* (c.1903-1907) [fig.14] and *Polichinelle* (1910) [fig.15]. These weighty, heavily painted surfaces – worked over and over again, sometimes requiring reinforcing if originally painted on paper – would last, and thicken, throughout the rest of Rouault's career. Against the concreteness claimed by the thick paint of Gustave Courbet's materialism, for example, the surety or epistemologically concrete content of Rouault's painting are not positively correlated with the amount of paint applied. Once again, in *Clown au tambour*, the torso of the clown fills the whole (and quite large at 72x57cm) canvas. Painted in oil and watercolour on paper, the composition is dark, dominated by black and a darker blue as in *Tête de clown tragique*, but brutally interrupted by the thick red shape of the clown's arm, hitting a drum, positioned along the diagonal of the canvas and the thick white impasto of the clown's neck and hat. The unyielding thickness of the paint creates shapes instead of traces. The figure does not appear caught in a web of lines and marks, but is bound by the density of the matter out of which disparate parts are sculpted in varying textures and brush marks. These marks are eclectic; daubs and dashes, or slabs of paint applied in a variety of lengths and directions. The top and bottom left-hand corners are completely dark, a void filled by dark matter, as a description of which the viscosity of

Vauxcelles' 'caviar, blacking and pitch' is wholly appropriate. The top right hand corner, in contrast, is a messy area of unrefined non-representative slabs and marks of paint. The bottom right contains the distorted circular shape of the drum, with a thick outline on one side, a scuffed, dry-brush centre and no detail or depth. The clown's face is violently constructed; consisting of a white base on which slashes of red, yellow, green and black, impose the shapes of the face. There is no distinct eye, just a black daub.

Clown au tambour is initially easier to read than *Tête de clown tragique*: the colour picks out and embodies the main figure more clearly. However, it is equally dominated by the material presence of the marks: the arm obviously signals an arm but is simultaneously a flat shape of thick paint and from the waist down the figure of the clown disintegrates utterly into murky, indeterminate marks. As in *Tête de clown tragique* it is possible that another clownish face looms out of the mass of marks in the top right-hand corner. The overall effect is the sheer presence of this painting – to stand in front of it is to be faced by a quite impressive amount of paint, out of which is hewn the peculiar figure of the clown, caught somewhere between a dark expression of a figure in action and an image of dislocated indications of body parts (the arm from a distance is almost autonomous), figures, and action.

The dark palette aside, *Clown au tambour* has certain similarities to Matisse's *The Gypsy* (1906) [fig.16], which has an equally thick and inconsistent facture. The body of *The Gypsy* is also arranged diagonally, although she is more 'contained' by the composition than Rouault's clown whose materiality and proportions exceed the conventional confines of the canvas. Details in Matisse's painting are derived by the viewer from patches, smudges, and colourful smears of paint. The body is basically thick cream impasto but breaks into a whole host of colours that demarcate shapes, relations between bodily features, and which are repeated in the divisions of the background. The direction of the overtly visible brush marks

is sometimes linked to the contours of the body, but in other places is apparently arbitrary and definitely unruly. The subject matter is similarly entangled with the means; entangled as in bound by the matter, and also because, like the clown, the idea of the gypsy has a certain unknowability or strangeness associated with a dislocated wandering life, or in the case of the clown, the masked or made-up visage of an artificial figure created to entertain. In *The Gypsy*, Matisse, like Rouault, was seen to be undoing signification and unleashing a troublesome abstraction,[55] but although the comparison demonstrates the validity of visually associating Rouault, at least to some extent, with Fauvism, it also indicates a key difference. *Clown au tambour* remains deeply uncertain, and this uncertainty is part of what keeps its potential to mean or signify in play whereas, as Alastair Wright argues, the pictorial elements of *The Gypsy* are destabilized to a point of inertia, left on the surface 'as a kind of expressive residue, as a series of fragments in a ruptured signifying chain.'[56]

Polichinelle has the same heavy presence as *Clown au tambour*, but is a more forceful image. It does not disintegrate, even in the darkest corners, as *Clown au tambour* does, and the effect, perhaps surprisingly, is stranger. Where, in *Tête de clown tragique*, the painting is haunted by its subject matter, the face of the clown emerging from the dark marks but trapped within an explicit handling of paint-matter that oscillates between paint and clown, *Polichinelle* is an imposing portrait-like image of Polichinelle (otherwise known as Pulcinella or Punch), a clown from the *Commedia dell'arte* tradition. The thick, slab-like marks of paint construct the equally heavy and static face and torso of Polichinelle. Even the slightly twisted posture of the torso and the clasped hands recalls the attitude of the portrait-sitter, except that again the figure exceeds the perimeters of the canvas. But this apparent coherence, at the level of the subject matter, brings us back to the handling of the paint. In *Polichinelle* the

[55] Alastair Wright, *Matisse and the Subject of Modernism* (Princeton, 2004), p.90.
[56] Wright, *Matisse and the Subject of Modernism*, p.88.

paint-matter does do the old job of describing, but simultaneously, through its own insistent presence, suggests that this is not the main 'truth' of the painting. This renders the surface stranger, more obscure, and more insistent upon its own physical presence, than *Tête de clown tragique* in which the oscillation between paint and subject is 'staged' by marks that hover uncertainly between the two. In this sense, the paint in *Polichinelle* is even more closely wrapped up with representation than in *Tête de clown tragique*: in *Polichinelle* the static surface holds both matter and subject in awkward, disarticulated, coexistence.

The effect is brutish and opaque; epitomized by the thick, white marks that make up the 'moon'. These marks have nothing moon-like about them, and to underline this they are similar to the marks that make up the collar and the patches of forehead and cheek on the face. That they signify a moon is known largely on account of their placing amongst dark blue marks that make up the background and, conventionally, suggest a sky. The marks of the moon draw attention to the *mise en scène* or 'artifice' or 'staging' of the painting and to the double structure of the surface. This double structure effects, on the one hand, what Clark describes as a dialogue with contingency – which is, for him, modernism's base kind of materialism – 'a point-by-point reframing and re-articulation of painting's pursuit of likeness, which reveals this pursuit and its procedures as the unlikely things they always were.'[57] But on the other, the surface of *Polichinelle*, as in *Tête de clown tragique*, denies any such 'revelation' of either pursuit or procedure by refusing to yield to an account of mere, unmotivated, matter, or to untangle paint-matter and subject matter. Posited as equally significant, each is wrapped up with the materialization of the other where, to reiterate, 'to matter means at once "to materialize" and "to mean"'.[58] This is what is most epistemologically challenging about Rouault's work; for what the irreducible materiality of

[57] Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, p.221.
[58] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, p.7.

his marks posits is not the separation between the materiality of the signifier and the signified, which has lent itself to an overly-simplistic invocation of transcendence as the opposite of materialism, but the integration or grounding of signification in the material.

Part Two: Signification

Thus far this chapter has proposed that Rouault's marks neither give way to mimesis nor are reducible to a modernist celebration of 'pure' painterliness or medium specificity. Instead, they oscillate between or contain both these possibilities, taking up the questions of each approach but remaining contradictory and resistant. This brings us to the question of what sort of meaning inheres in the unstable and indissoluble materiality of the surfaces. This part of the chapter will consider whether, circa 1900, the instability of Rouault's mark-making, resulting in paintings that oscillate on 'edges', pushing established modes of meaning and refusing to 'settle', can be extended to the politics of those paintings. Do the paintings also occupy a politics of tension by presenting a nexus of artistic, social and political associations that are equally contradictory and unstable?

These questions can be approached by likening Rouault's irreducible marks to the condensed (and usually literary) modernist 'moment': moments that include Walter Benjamin's 'Denkbild' (Theodor Adorno called these scribbled picture puzzles[59]), Joyce's 'epiphanies' and Virginia Woolf's 'violent moments of being'.[60] These moments are dense, self-consciously literary constructions that foreground their 'wordiness' and expressive limitations in a manner analogous to the ways in which Rouault's marks foreground their

[59] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Benjamin's *One-Way Street*' in *Notes to Literature*, vol. 2, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson (New York, 1992), p.323.
[60] See Gerhard Richter, *Thought-Images: Frankfurt School Writers' Reflections from Damaged Life*, (Stanford, 2007); Carmen Concilio, 'Things that do speak in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September*' in *Moments of Moment: Aspects of the Literary Epiphany*, ed. Wim Tigges (Amsterdam, 1999).

physical presence as paint. In proposing a comparison between Rouault's paintings and such literary constructions I am not suggesting that Rouault's work is 'literary' as opposed to 'painterly', but that the complexities of meaning as it manifests itself in Rouault's painting can be better understood through comparison with these 'moments', than through painterly models that tend towards an emptying of meaning. (The result, of course, is a blurring of genre boundaries without necessarily suggesting the intrusion of one genre into another.[61]) The implication is that there is a kinship between Rouault's oeuvre and these writers in their double concern to reject former models of meaning whilst drawing upon these very models to establish a new mode of signification that tests the limitations of representation.

In the opening to Woolf's short story, 'The Mark on the Wall' (1917), a 'normative' and more conventional form of imagining – aided by the enclosed domesticity of the scene – is established as Woolf stares at the fire. This imaginative play, which she describes as 'an old fancy, an automatic fancy, made as a child perhaps' – is interrupted by the 'small round mark, black upon the white wall'.[62] The mark breaks in, it is hard to define, and because of this it prompts a new imaginative exploration, tenuously held together as an associative web extending from the physicality of the mark itself. 'In certain lights', Woolf writes, 'that mark on the wall seems actually to project from the wall.'

> Nor is it entirely circular. I cannot be sure, but it seems to cast a perceptible shadow, suggesting that if I ran my finger down that strip of wall it would, at a certain point, mount and descend a small tumulus, a smooth tumulus like those barrows on the South Downs which are, they say, either tombs or camps. Of the two I should prefer them to be tombs, desiring melancholy like most

[61] On the necessity of this 'blurring' see Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp.205, 238, and Reed, *Manet, Flaubert and the Emergence of Modernism*, pp.1-20.
[62] Virginia Woolf, 'The Mark on the Wall' (1917) in *Virginia Woolf: Selected Short Stories* (London and New York, 2000), p.53.

> English people, and finding it natural at the end of a walk to think of the bones stretched beneath the turf...[63]

The meanderings of Woolf's thought appear, initially, to be highly subjective and accidental, but they are not without perimeters. The physicality and uncertainty of the mark initiate various directions of thought or signification but just as they circle out from the mark, so they always end up back at the irreducible mark. The networks of thought that emanate are also contained by the literary, linguistic, and cultural frameworks within which everything – from the mark, Woolf, the genre of the short story, and the conventions of the novel against which this narrative is opposed – is contained.

At the same time, the mark evades classification or possession by total knowledge: 'as for the mark, I'm not sure about it' Woolf continues, '... if I got up and looked at it, ten to one I shouldn't be able to say for certain [...] Oh! dear me, the mystery of life; the inaccuracy of thought!'[64] None of this demolishes it as a *real* mark in-itself: 'now that I have fixed my eyes upon it', Woolf writes, 'I feel that I have grasped a plank in the sea; I feel a satisfying sense of reality [...] Here is something definite, something real. Thus, waking from a midnight dream of horror, one hastily turns on the light and lies quiescent, worshipping the chest of drawers, worshipping solidity, worshipping the impersonal world which is proof of some existence other than ours.'[65]

When Woolf was writing 'The Mark on the Wall', she was, as Maud Ellmann notes, 'elated with the discovery that she could do away with narrative duration, presenting "violent moments of being" instead of interposing the contrived continuities of the conventional

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[63] Ibid., p.57.
[64] Ibid., p.54.
[65] Ibid., p.59. This is also a dig at 'common sense' philosophy, see Ann Banfield, 'Time Passes: Virginia Woolf, Post-Impressionism, and Cambridge Time, *Poetics Today*, Vol.24, No.3 (Fall, 2003), pp.471-516; and Banfield, *The Phantom Table: Woolf, Fry, Russell and the Epistemology of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

novel.'[66] Such 'sudden shocks', or 'exceptional moments', Woolf wrote in 'Sketch of the Past', 'function as a form of "revelation".'[67] However, such moments are not straightforwardly revelatory.[68] They are moments in which events are collapsed, ripped from the old literary or narrative devices that gave their contents structure and direction, in a manner analogous to the way in which Rouault's thick marks violate a surface that formerly gave way to a straightforward, even mimetic, representation. Both the 'moment' and the 'mark' simultaneously violate the old order (narrative duration or the 'transparent' surface) and indicate an impulse towards a new unifying strategy by taking the place of the characters and their stories. If, as violations, they speak to the modernist rupture between signifier and signified (as Woolf wrote later in *Between the Acts* (1941), the "shiver[ing] into splinters of the old vision; smash[ing] to atoms what was whole"[69]), it is never only about rejection or destruction, but is also suggestive of a hope of regaining an underlying, hidden, unified understanding of the world, of constructing, or reconstructing, meanings. This is often about borrowing from or holding onto the past.

This section examines the constructions, reconstructions, borrowings and rejections of meaning mobilised by the thick marks of Rouault's surfaces by taking two moments in his life that might also be described as 'violent moments of being'. They are moments that allow visible changes in his painting to be attributed to significant personal experiences: the first is the context of Rouault's birth in a cellar in Belleville, and the second is the period from 1898 to 1901, often described as a crisis, during which his painting underwent a significant change. This change, as Schlosser notes, was widely regarded by hostile critics as a 'fall', a story of 'Paradise Lost' (a fall notably associated with physicality), and by more sympathetic

[66] Ellmann, *Nets of Modernism*, p.91.
[67] Hermione Lee, 'Introduction' to Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being: Autobiographical Writings* (London, 2002), p.vii.
[68] André Gide's moments of revelatory blindness are exemplary of this, and we shall return to these in more detail in Chapter Four, particularly *The Pastoral Symphony* in which Gertrude's blindness reveals the blindness of those around her.
[69] Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts* (Hogarth Press, 1941, repr. London, 2000), p.109.

reviewers as a 'deep transformation', which 'took place in his mind'.[70] However, I will depart from the usual treatment of these histories by examining Rouault's accounts of them as constructed moments. Whilst they seem to construct a narrative of singularity – seized upon by those biographers building a tale of the solitary genius and seeking to explain Rouault's difficult works on account of his 'unusual' nature and deeply-held beliefs – in fact, if the ways in which Rouault constructs these moments are deconstructed, looking for what is collapsed into these moments, they offer no such unification, but reveal a complex entanglement of the visual, the social, and the political that can also be said to be at work in his paintings. Examining these structures or resonances or remnants of meaning allows Rouault's work to be situated more usefully in a wider modernist context. Part of what differentiates his work from Fauvism, for example, is the way in which Rouault brings certain recent 'histories' – through his own history – into play. In examining the crisis Rouault experienced following the death of Moreau in 1898 I will also argue that there are significant points of continuity between Moreau's Mallarméan symbolism and Rouault's post-1900 mark-making, continuities that have epistemological and interpretative consequences for understanding Rouault's painting. I will take these 'moments' in the order of their re-construction, or re-enactment, by Rouault, who described his 'fall' (as an adult artist) first, and his birth second.

The Fall: Rouault's 'crisis'

It was the death of Gustave Moreau, of stomach cancer, on April 18, 1898, that precipitated Rouault's 'fall'. In 1891 he had enrolled at the Ecole des Arts Décoratifs for evening classes and the following year moved to study full-time in Elie Delauney's studio at

[70] Schlosser, *Jazz Age Catholicism*, pp. 222-223.

the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.[71] Six months after Rouault arrived, a new master was appointed to the studio: Moreau. This change was crucial for Rouault who, according to his biographer Bernard Dorival, had 'been shocked by the credo of the two professors of painting, Jean-Léon Gérôme and Léon Bonnat, who had adopted the belief held by their colleague William-Adolphe Bouguereau that "for an artist whose sole ideal is the expression of the truth in nature, the only kind of representation is of nature itself."'[72] By contrast, Moreau encouraged his students both to appreciate the old masters and, in familiarizing themselves with contemporary developments, to develop their own pictorial styles.[73] In 1896, the critic Roger Marx wrote that 'in the very heart of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts a hotbed of revolt has been ignited; every insurgent against routine, everyone who intends to develop along the lines of his own personality has gathered under the aegis of Gustave Moreau.'[74] In his *Souvenirs Intimes,* Rouault wrote that under Moreau he gained the conviction that in order to call oneself a painter one must do more than simply copy nature; each canvas must be endowed with the 'necessary richness' of colour and substance without which the picture would seem abbreviated, incomplete, inadequate.[75]

Moreau was clearly much more than just a tutor to a Rouault; he became a mentor, a friend, and – testified to by Rouault's writings – a much revered father-figure. In turning to fine art, Rouault had gone against the wishes of his own father, Alexandre Rouault, a cabinet-maker who varnished pianos for the company Pleyel.[76] From 1885 to 1890, Rouault had been an apprentice to stained-glass makers, an occupation aligned with the artisanal status of his father. Rouault's turn towards the Catholic faith during this time – influenced by Moreau's

[71] See Courthion, *Rouault*, pp.16 & 374.
[72] Bernard Dorival, *Rouault* (New York, 1984), p.11.
[73] Kang, *Rouault in Perspective*, p.12.
[74] Roger Marx, *Revue Encylopédique*, (April 25, 1896), in Dorival, *Rouault*, p.11.
[75] Dorival, *Rouault*, p.12.
[76] Kang, *Rouault in Perspective*, p.8, and Claude Roulet *Rouault, souvenirs* (Neuchâtel, 1961), p.79, and Waldemar George and Geneviève Nouaille-Rouault, *L'Univers de Rouault* (Paris, 1971), p.52.

spiritual leanings, and Rouault's friendship with the Benedictine oblate, Antonin Bourbon, who also studied at Moreau's studio, and with Father Vallée from whom Rouault received his first communion around 1897[77]– was also a move against his father. Alexandre Rouault, despite his Catholic upbringing in Brittany, had turned away from Catholicism under the influence of Lammenais, a priest who called for reform within the church, arguing that the church must accept the egalitarianism of the 1789 Revolution and take a more socially conscious path.[78] Lammenais' works, Soo Yun Kang notes, 'were to have a profound influence on men and women who were essentially devout but whose liberal political views made it impossible for them to accept the teachings of the Church at mid-century and later.'[79] For these reasons Rouault was initially sent to a Protestant school, but his father, on learning of the severity of the punishments dealt out there, moved him to a secular school.

Moreau's death affected Rouault profoundly: leaving the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, he seems to have felt a great sense of loneliness, exacerbated by his parents' departure to stay with his sister in Algeria for a year.[80] 'I was unknown and poor' he wrote later, 'my master Gustave Moreau had died, my family departed for Algeria to join my widowed sister. During that time, I lived a cloistered life.'[81] Pierre Courthion writes that the painter felt the loss deeply and that a period of mental and physical illness followed – probably not aided by Rouault's lack of money during this time.[82] Rouault described it as 'a most violent moral

[77] Bernard Dorival and Isabelle Rouault, *Rouault: l'Oeuvre peint*, Vol.1 (Monte-Carlo, 1988), pp.103-4 and Kang, *Rouault in Perspective*, p.30.
[78] Bernard Reardon, *Liberalism and Tradition: Aspects of Catholic Thought in Nineteenth Century France*, (Cambridge, 1975), pp.62-112.
[79] Kang, *Rouault in Perspective*, p.10.
[80] *Rouault : Première période 1903-1920*, pp.183-4 .
[81] Georges Rouault, *Sur L'art et sur la vie : le métier de peindre* (Paris: Denoël et Gonthier, 1971), p.78.
[82] Courthion, *Rouault*, pp.50-56.

crisis', during which he 'experienced things that cannot be explained in words. And I began to paint in a manner of outrageous lyricism, which baffled everyone.'[83]

As already indicated, Rouault's account of this crisis is usually read as straight evidence, but it is a highly constructed narrative, one that resembles other accounts of the period. Consider, for example, the similarities between Rouault's description of the correspondence between his inner experience and a crisis of expression, and Hugo von Hofmannstahl's 'Letter of Lord Chandos' ('Ein Brief' (1902)). (To be clear: I am not suggesting that one influenced the other, but that their similarities demonstrate the degree to which Rouault was working within literary conventions.) Hofmannstahl's work is a fictional letter written from Philip Chandos to his patron, Francis Bacon, in which Lord Chandos writes, with eloquence, of his inability to express anything in language. Chandos describes himself as having 'lost the ability to think or speak coherently about anything at all',[84] an affliction which, as Mary Jacobus explains, 'renders the ordinary vertiginously magnified.'[85] Rouault too, claimed to have found himself left with an increased sense of empathy or sensitivity towards the world. Both Chandos and Rouault intend their descriptions of their respective crises to suggest the incompatibility of language and experience.

They both take a position of silence – Rouault's 'things that cannot be explained in words' are left unsaid, as well his declaration that 'nous faisons un art muet',[86] and Chandos' choice of silence when faced with the decay of the classical code, with a language that is no longer an expression of harmonious relation between a being and the world.[87] Both envisage new, previously unknown, languages: for Rouault the 'baffling outrageous lyricism' of his

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[83] Quoted in Charensol, *Georges Rouault, l'homme et l'oeuvre*, p.23, and Kang, *Rouault in Perspective*, p.40.
[84] Hugo von Hofmannstahl, *The Lord Chandos Letter and Other Writings*, trans. Joel Rotenberg (New York, 2005), p.121.
[85] Mary Jacobus, *Romantic Things: A Tree, A Rock, A Cloud* (Chicago, 2012), p.50.
[86] Rouault, 'Soliloques', *Sur l'art et sur la vie*, p.92.
[87] See Patrizia Lombardo's discussion of this in 'History and Form' in *The Three Paradoxes of Roland Barthes* (Georgia, 1989), p.20.

'new' style of painting, and for Chandos, 'a language of which I know not one word, a language in which mute things speak to me and in which I will perhaps have something to say for myself some day when I am dead and standing before an unknown judge.'[88] That, ironically, both Rouault and Lord Chandos are able to express their inability to express, speaks to the self-reflexivity emerging in twentieth-century modernism, and becomes a means of representing the unrepresentable, of describing that which is not yet named or understood.

Rouault's account of this 'most violent moral crisis' allows him and his biographers to create a dramatic turn in his career. The crisis is an emotional one, and becomes a revelatory, life-changing moment. Amongst modernists, he is by no means alone in this: for example, in October 1892, the Symbolist poet Paul Valéry famously claimed to have undergone a similarly transforming moment of crisis. Like Rouault, Valéry considered himself acutely sensitive, afflicted by 'his most cruel and detestable gift'.[89] Valéry's crisis culminated in the 'Nuit de Gênes': an existential collapse during a night of severe storms, thought to have been precipitated by the death of his mentor Stephane Mallarmé, which forced Valéry (according to his own account) to re-evaluate his aesthetic purpose. Valéry chose literal silence: in 1898, he stopped publishing altogether until 1917. Valéry's 'Grand Silence' allowed him to reject what he saw others to have already carried to perfection, namely the work of Poe, Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Wagner, and the Catholic Mass, with which he had formerly been engaged.[90] Rouault, too, turned away from his former Symbolist master, Moreau, during his crisis – and, like Valéry, he attributed this, not to what Matisse more

[88] Hofmannstahl, *The Lord Chandos Letter and Other Writings*, pp.127-128.
[89] Ned Baston, 'Towards a biography of the mind', *Reading Paul Valéry: Universe in Mind*, eds. Paul Gifford and Brian Stimpson (Cambridge, 1998), p.22.
[90] Baston, *Reading Paul Valéry*, pp.22-24.

practically described as 'removing some of the slag of tradition',[91] but to an inner experience that revealed his aesthetic project in a different light. 'A kind of outbreak occurred', Rouault wrote, 'I began to paint with frenzy.'[92]

However, Rouault's 'silence' and his insistence upon his 'mute art' are no straightforward rejection of tradition. This kind of silence, a silence often associated in modernism with objects or things that take the place of narrative, is loaded with significance; it allows the almost undetectable intrusion of subversive elements.[93] When Rouault claims that his is a 'mute art' ('nous faisons un art muet'), far from rejecting the art historical past, he brings it *back in*. These are not his words but a borrowing from Poussin.[94] They also nod to Moreau's oft-repeated comment on the eternal *eloquence* of this mute art ('l'éloquence éternelle de ce langage muet'[95]), which in itself challenges the 'emptying of meaning' associated with formalist claims about this kind of emphatic facture, and which, attached to Rouault's project, implies that he saw his blunt, mute, materialist terms as, at least in part, communicative.

So, this traumatic crisis-scene can be seen as a construction that collapses the history of Rouault's development into a single dramatic visualization. Importantly, it provides Rouault with a way of departing from the relationship with Moreau as artistic guide and mentor, and of re-envisaging his painterly vocabulary. But it is no simple patricide: Rouault's 'departure' from Moreau is more complicated than the narrative of the 'fall' allows. Although there was undoubtedly a rapid and significant change in Rouault's painting between 1898 and

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[91] Henri Matisse, *Henri Matisse: Ecrits et propos sur l'art*, ed. Dominique Fourcade (Paris, 1972), p.20, n.78; cited and translated in Yve-Alain Bois, 'On Matisse: The Blinding: For Leo Steinberg', *October*, Vol. 68, (Spring, 1994), p.104.
[92] Charensol, *Georges Rouault, l'homme et l'oeuvre*, p.23 and Kang *Rouault in Perspective*, p.40.
[93] I am indebted to Pat Rae here, for her discussion of this kind of silence and its properties of resistance in George Orwell's *1984* at the 2013 T.E. Hulme Colloquium in Oxford, and for our subsequent conversations about 'silent things'.
[94] 'Moy qui fais profession des choses muettes' ('I who profess mute things'). Nicolas Poussin, in Christopher Braider, *The Matter of the Mind: Reason and Experience in the Age of Descartes* (Toronto, 2012) p.116, also in T.J. Clark, *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing* (Yale, 2006), p.5, translated as 'I who make a profession of mute things'.
[95] Gustave Moreau, *L'Assembleur de rêves : écrits complets de Gustave Moreau*, (Paris, 1984), p.183.

1901, the signs were already there on the surfaces of his earlier canvases, and the work that emerges from this moment has a complex 'borrowing' embedded in it, from both Moreau, his artistic father-figure, and Alexandre Rouault, his actual father and a socialist artisan.

By the 1890s, 'Symbolist' was used to describe what Clark has called an incoherent and fragmentary matrix of painters, including Vuillard, Bonnard, Denis, Serusier, Gauguin, and van Gogh. At least, Clark writes, 'the word directed viewers to the essential issue now at stake in painting, which was the nature and purpose of the pictorial sign, and especially its relation to the material world.'[96] Moreau, specifically, was a Symbolist in the Mallarméan vein, following Mallarmé's dictum that, against Naturalism and the Realists, the faithful copying of external detail could never represent 'reality'.[97] For Mallarmé, 'The ideal is to *suggest* the object. It is the perfect use of this mystery which constitutes the symbol. And the object must be gradually evolved in order to show a state of the soul...'[98] In 1886 Jean Moréas re-articulated this in his 'Symbolist Manifesto' as 'to clothe the Idea in a perceptible form.' Literary subject matter, such as classical, mythological, and biblical scenes were used in conjunction with oriental, dream-like, and esoteric imagery to evoke the invisible realities of the Idea, 'hidden' behind the exterior of the material world.[99]

Rouault's painting of 1895, *The Child Jesus amongst the Teachers* [fig.17], shares many of the characteristics associated with Moreau's most celebrated works, such as the *Salomé* series of 1876. The painting depicts the story in which Jesus engages in discussion with the teachers in the Temple, and astounds them with his precocious learning and wisdom.

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[96] Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, p.79.
[97] See Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism*, p.215.
[98] Stéphane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, eds. H. Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry (Paris, 1945), p.869. See also *The Symbolist Movement in the Literature of European Languages*, ed. Anna Balakian (Budapest, 1982 repr. 2000), p.266; and Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (California, 1995), p.36.
[99] Jean Moréas, 'A literary manifesto – Symbolism' (1886), in *Symbolist Art Theories: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Henri Dorra (Berkeley, 1994), pp.151-152. See also Edward Lucie-Smith, *Symbolist Art* (London, 1972).

The scene is framed and decorated by a grand architectural setting, adding, along with the attention to the patterns and glow of the stone floor and fabrics, to the sumptuousness of the work as a whole. The theatrical setting, the exaggerated postures of the characters, and the jewel-like colours all resemble Moreau's work. The head of Christ is haloed with light, more subdued but equally effective as that of the head of John the Baptist in Moreau's *Salomé and the Apparition of the Baptist's Head* [fig.18]. Rouault's work, entered into the Salon des Champs-Elysées, was applauded by the critics, who likened him to Rembrandt who, they considered, alone 'would be able to decipher the enigmatic form'.[100]

However, a version of the kind of thick, roughly applied facture discussed in the post-1902 surfaces above is already in evidence – if overlooked here by the critics – in *The Child Jesus amongst the Teachers*. Patches of the dark background and the lower left foreground area are applied in a thick, scumbled manner, and parts of the architecture are marked out, as also in *Coriolanus* (1894) [fig.19], by single wide brush marks that retain the texture of the brush. Keen though several Rouault scholars are to distance the modernist Rouault from this period, and from Moreau,[101] this facture is also at work in Moreau's painting. Although the decadence of Moreau's symbolism was a renunciation of eighteenth-century progress, spiritual and material (something also embraced by the occultism of Huysmans and Peladan), Moreau's surfaces were increasingly foregrounding their materiality.[102] Moreau was constantly experimenting with technique and medium,[103]and placed great importance upon plastic expression – he did not, in fact, think of himself as a literary painter.[104] He once

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[100] Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism*, p.215.
[101] Courthion, *Rouault*, p.56 ; Dorival, *L'oeuvre peint* Vol.1, p.30 ; Venturi, *Rouault* (Geneva , 1972), p.27; Charensol, *Georges Rouault, l'homme et l'œuvre,* p.21.
[102] Pat Turner, 'Gustave Moreau' in *Makers of Nineteenth Century Culture: 1800-1914*, ed. Justin Wintle, (London, 2002), p.500. Turner writes that Moreau was making 'addition upon addition to his surfaces'.
[103] Kang, *Rouault in Perspective*, p.12.
[104] Lucie-Smith, *Symbolist Art*, p.66; it seems likely he would have had mixed feelings about his appearance in Huysmans' *A Rebours*.

explained his work as aiming towards a noble poetry of living and impassioned silence, writing:

> How admirable is that art which, under a material envelope, mirror of physical beauty, reflects also the movements of the soul, of the spirit, of the heart and the imagination, and responds to those divine necessities felt by humanity throughout the ages. It is the language of God! ...To this eloquence, whose character, nature and power have up to now resisted definition, I have given all my care, all my efforts: the evocation of thought through line, arabesque, and the means open to the plastic arts – that has been my aim![105]

Influenced, as were many modernists, by early mosaics and Byzantine enamels, Moreau's works, like Rouault's, often disconcerted the public, and after various attacks by the critics he exhibited less and less, stopping completely after 1880. Huysmans, for example, described Moreau as the creator of 'disquieting and sinister allegories made more to the point by the uneasy perceptions of an altogether modern neurosis.'[106] Moreau's *La Parque et l'Ange de la Mort* (1890) [fig.20] distinctly flattens the sense of depth through a heavily painted ground that encases rather than lies beneath the crudely demarcated figures and horse. The sun, a thick circle of paint, anticipates the moon of Rouault's *Polichinelle*. In *Jupiter and Semele*, a large-scale oil painted by Moreau in 1895 [fig.21], Pat Turner observes that 'the paint is so thick it almost becomes a relief sculpture'.[107] Other examples of this brutish, depthless facture in Moreau's work include the undated *Meretrix* [fig.22] in watercolour on paper (showing the same experimentation with media as Rouault) and *Thomyris et Cyrus* (oil on canvas) [fig.23] in which the painterly texture of the landscape takes over to the extent of rendering the group of tiny figures in the bottom left corner an afterthought or irrelevance, added as a remnant of Moreau's previous practices.

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[105] Ibid.
[106] Lucie-Smith, *Symbolist Art*, p.64
[107] Pat Turner, 'Gustave Moreau' in *New Makers of Modern Culture*, vol.2 ed. Justin Wintle (Oxford & New York, 2007), pp. 438-439.

These sketch-like works, loose and increasingly painterly, some bordering on abstraction or pure colour studies, were never on public display during Moreau's lifetime. Hidden at his home, they were found after his death in 1898, and his former students rushed to see them.[108] Rouault was his executor, and the first curator of the Moreau Museum, and as such would have had unlimited access to all Moreau's work. Péladan's 1905 comment that it was better Moreau had not lived to see the anarchy of his students reflects Péladan's own preference for 'myths and dreams', and underestimates Moreau's own innovative practices. It seems more likely that Moreau would have been proud of his 'aesthetic sons'. Aspects of Rouault's 'darkness' are also at work in Moreau's painting, particularly the kind of darkness often written out of discussions of Rouault's work – a sadistic violence evident in works such as Moreau's *Prometheus* (1869) [fig.24], which caused an outrage at the Salon, and in which an aged Prometheus is alive but bound, suffering the vicious attacks of a predatory bird.[109]

If Rouault's thick facture can be observed in Moreau's surfaces, is it also possible to find Moreau's 'symbol', or at least the remnants or repercussions of it, in Rouault's experiments with mark-making and his unstable, oscillating surfaces? In 'The Double Aspect of Symbolism', Paul de Man analyses what he sees as two apparently contradictory concerns that haunt nineteenth-century notions of the symbol: the first is a growing anxiety about the increasingly difficult task of the artist or poet;[110] the second is 'the extraordinary claim that poetry is man's only way of salvation out of an inner division which threatens his very being'.[111] Critically, according to de Man, what these concerns reveal is a rupture:

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[108] Kang, *Rouault in Perspective*, p.16.
[109] See Turner, *New Makers of Modern Culture*, p.438.
[110] 'Comment la litérature est-elle possible?' asks Mallarmé. See Mallarmé, 'La Musique et les Lettres', *Œuvres complètes*, p.645.
[111] Paul de Man, 'The Double Aspect of Symbolism', *Yale French Studies*, No. 74, 'Phantom Proxies: Symbolism and the Rhetoric of History' (1988), p.5. Although, as de Man notes, this combination is arguably present amongst some of the earlier Romantics.

> a world that has been split and in which [the poet's] consciousness is pitted, as it were, against its object in an attempt to seize something which it is unable to reach. In terms of language ...this means that he is no longer close enough to things to name them as they are... The word, the logos, no longer coincides with the universe but merely reaches out for it in a language which is unable to *be* what it *names* – which, in other words, is *merely* a symbol.[112]

The question that arises for de Man, and which makes his analysis pertinent to the discussion of the construction of painterly marks, is not how this separation occurs but how it is *responded* to. This is key to understanding Moreau's 'Mallarméan' symbolism as a formative influence upon Rouault's surfaces.

Finding himself in this state of separation and solitude, the poet's initial impulse is to restore, via poetical language, the lost unity between consciousness and the natural world. This, essentially, is how the Baudelairean symbol operates. It is 'a statement of identity. Baudelaire tells us that one thing is exactly like some other thing: "La Nature est un temple", for instance, or the innumerable comparisons introduced by the conjunction "comme".'[113] This symbol is founded upon a belief in the fundamental unity of all being, a unity not immediately accessible to us, and not found in the direct apprehension of the 'real' world as perceived ordinarily, but only by means of an act of the imagination.

For Mallarmé, however, 'language does not succeed in this task and ...the poet knows it'.[114] The Mallarméan symbol is not an identification between two entities, but a mediation between subject and nature which retains their separation and introduces a third entity, language, which contains within it their latent opposition. The Mallarméan symbol is therefore always an object in the 'process of metamorphosis into another object or, more

[112] de Man, 'Double Aspect of Symbolism', p.6.
[113] Ibid. p.13.
[114] Ibid.

frequently still, in the process of dissolving into nothing: the sea becoming a boat, a cloud becoming a wing, a finger becoming a candle, the sun sinking behind the horizon, a boat sinking into the ocean, a curtain vanishing like foam on the water.' Mallarmé's things 'act out': in the Mallarméan symbolic object we can observe in its strange transformations, the motion of the mind, to and fro, between the natural world and its own realm. The language, de Man argues, 'reflects this ambiguity of being: it is handled very much as if it were an object, with considerable attention given to its objective qualities of sound, visual appearance, and form – but on the other hand it is altogether determined by the necessities of cognitive consciousness.' If it could succeed, this symbol would establish a true unity – but it can't, and this is the crucial point: 'it always turns out that, when he [the poet] thought to have reduced the totality of being to a status which makes it fit to be expressed in language, he had been deceived by a part of it which he did not reach and which reappears to destroy the certainty he had achieved.'[115]

Mallarmé's symbol reaches out, but fails to seize what it reaches out for. The ambiguity of the state of the 'third entity', the artistic medium, its 'to and fro', contains its continual failure, rendering it an aesthetic of 'becoming' not 'being' (as Baudelaire's might be described) and opening a void below the reaching out for certainty and unity. In 'The Double Session', Derrida draws upon Mallarmé's text 'Mimique' to describe this 'void' and the accompanying uncertainty in terms of the absence of a clear object or referent. 'Mimique' describes a booklet that describes a mime, which in turn is preceded by a quotation from a pantomime in which the protagonist, Pierrot, 'recalls the very action that Mallarmé will describe as being acted out'.[116] In this way, 'Mimique' descends into a giddying play of

[115] Ibid., pp.12-13
[116] Clare Colebrook, 'Deconstructing the Philosophy/Literature Binary', *Understanding Derrida*, eds. Jack Reynolds and Jonathan Roffe (London & New York, 2004), p.78.

textual mirrors that, by writing about an event described after its occurrence and drawing upon a series of disparate texts referring to memories, fictions or anticipation, disturbs what Derrida refers to as 'the mimetic logic of metaphysics: that there is a being or presence that either presents itself in its own image or requires supplementary images in order to appear as true.'[117] In this continual displacement of a clear, foundational signifier Mallarmé's writing is not opposed to truth, but places the emphasis upon the *process* that comprehends or seeks to comprehend truth and the failure of that process. According to Derrida, this comprehension 'is discreetly but absolutely displaced in the workings of a certain syntax, wherever any writing both marks and goes back over its mark with an undecidable stroke. This double mark escapes the pertinence or authority of truth: it does not overturn it but rather inscribes it within its play as one of its functions or parts.'[118]

The range of mythological and mystical sources for Moreau's painting can be seen to operate in a similar way, placing the emphasis upon the effects generated by the painting itself. They cannot be said to be on the verge of dissolving into nothing, because of the materiality of paint as opposed to language, but the glittering aesthetic effects of Moreau's canvases often threaten to overcome the subject matter, and this increases with his growing attention to the painterly medium – the 'third entity' – and its properties. This goes further in the case of Rouault's marks and surfaces. Rouault's paintings of clowns seem to reach out for representation, but always show it to fail at the same time, to founder upon or to be caught up on matter. Matter is the intermediary between the painter or subject and the object world, sitting between those two aspects that cannot be brought into unity, and articulating their separation: which is to say that paint-matter 'contains within it their latent opposition'. The

[117] Colebrook, *Understanding Derrida*, pp.79-80: In 1910, the *Paris-Journal* called Rouault's work 'chaos', an 'exasperating disequilibrium of both the brain and the eye', merely the death-throws of an outdated Symbolism: perhaps what the critic picked up on with such a description was that Rouault's painting can be as giddying a play of visual mirrors as Mallarme's 'Mimique'.
[118] Jacques Derrida, 'Double Session (1972)', *Dissemination*, trans. B Johnson (Chicago, 1981), p.193.

obdurate physicality of Rouault's marks, which at times forcefully threaten to overcome signification, have their own process of meaning-making inscribed within them. Signification is wrapped up with the marks, within their syntax, which, in displacing the authority of a clear signifier, places the emphasis – in Mallarmean fashion – upon reaching out towards meaning or meanings. It is also the case, as we will see, that the brute physicality of Rouault's surfaces introduces a 'realism' that is absent from Symbolism, but what is important here is that that the sense of fracture in meaning described in terms of Rouault's marks is already present in Mallarmé's symbol.[119]

The aftermath of Rouault's 'crisis' is not a straightforward rejection of the past, but an intimate reworking, taking in and reusing, reshaping, of various aesthetics, such as the decorative, jewel-like encrusted surfaces, pattern-making, and literary themes. It is also the case that, although Rouault left behind the idealized mythological subjects favoured by Moreau's symbolism, he still dealt for the most part in generalized 'types', never reverting to the specificity of Toulouse-Lautrec's Paris. To reduce Moreau to an 'over-refined intellectualism', as Courthion does, attributing Rouault's rejection of this 'temptation' to his 'firm Breton faith' (a view that Courthion supports with an anecdote about Rouault later

[119] When Rouault began producing a series of prints to accompany the text of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*, the majority of the images are taken not from Baudelaire but from Rouault's own established images from 1902-1918. Consequently, it can be argued that he produces a Mallarméan accompaniment to Baudelaire. Circa 1918, Rouault proposed to his dealer and publisher, Ambroise Vollard, that he illustrate, in a series of black and white prints, Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*. The infamous book of poems, which considers the existence of demonic powers in the modern world, had, apparently, been kept on his bedside table and he often recited them to his children. (François Chapon, *Rouault: L'Oeuvre gravé*, Vol.2, p. 41 and Kang, *Rouault in Perspective*, p.189.) He was a little wary of Baudelaire's work, writing later that 'Respectful of the thoughts of others, even if they are the opposite of my own, I hesitated for a long time before living in the atmosphere of *Fleurs du Mal*. While I have been wrongly described as the last of the Romantics, I did understand the sensitivities of this author.'(Rouault, 'Charles Baudelaire', *Sur l'art et sur la vie*, p.75) Rouault never finished the project; by 1927 only 14 engravings were complete, and although he took it up again in 1936, it was interrupted in 1939 by the death of Vollard. Despite his close involvement with Symbolism under Moreau, Rouault does not visit the question of Baudelaire's Symbolism in his illustrations – in fact, with the exception of the images of Satan and of corpses; the images are all derived from Rouault's 1902-1914 work. (See Kang's iconographical discussion, *Rouault in Perspective*, p.211.) It seems most likely, taking into account his sympathy with Baudelaire's 'sensitivities', that his interest in *Fleur du Mal* was rooted in its criticism of society, which chimes in many ways with Rouault's own critique of modernity as he moved away from the idealized and mythological subjects favoured by Moreau towards subject matter taken from contemporary Parisian life. Remembering that Rouault had also illustrated stories depicting Jarry's 'Ubu' character also suggests that he was not afraid of contentious or socially shocking subject matter, and after the horrors of the First World War, there seems to have been a dark bestiality in Baudelaire's work that simultaneously shocked and attracted Rouault.

recognising himself in Gauguin's *Yellow Christ* [fig.25]),[120] is to underestimate Moreau's role as mentor and painter. That said, Rouault was undoubtedly 'freed', to some extent, by Moreau's death, in the sense that the end of any close relationship revolving around creative work can be said to loose or free the participants. It seems significant that it was only after Moreau's death that Rouault began to write, an activity in which he became almost as prolific as in his painting for the rest of his life.

If the first signs of a significant change, of a turn towards a kind of 'realism', or social responsibility, in Rouault's work are to be located through the beginnings of the critical distrust of Rouault's work, then they occur before, and not after, Moreau's death and Rouault's moment of crisis. Having achieved widespread acclaim the year before with *The Child Jesus amongst the Teachers*, Rouault entered *The dead Christ wept over by the holy women* [fig.26] to the 1896 Salon and into the competition for the *Prix de Rome*. It caused, wrote Roger Marx, 'a huge stir'.[121] Although some of the so-called Rembrandt-like qualities of Rouault's previous works remained, Rouault's painting was deemed to have taken a turn for the worse: 'the severe layout of the arrangement and ...the choice of this rich, greenish tonality spread out everywhere... adds such a dramatic horror.'[122] The 'greenish hue' combined with the more imposing composition that foregrounds the dead body of Christ suggests, instead of the rosy tones that had offered hope in *The Child Jesus amongst the Teachers*, the melancholic and nightmarish world of the sixteenth-century painter Matthias Grünewald, whose images of Christ tend to concentrate upon the suffering humanity of the body, or, to borrow W.G. Sebald's description from his prose poem *After Nature*, 'the

[120] Courthion, *Rouault*, p.56.
[121] Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism*, p.216.
[122] Roger Marx quoted in Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism*, p.216.

shrieking of a pathological spectacle'.[123] Marx's use of the word 'greenish' also references the greenish, pale colour of the fourth horseman of the apocalypse – Death, or the pale rider – again suggesting the green hue of a corpse instead of the glow of the risen Christ, which anticipates the horror experienced by the critics in the face of what they saw as the lack of transcendence in the physicality of Rouault's work.

Over half a century earlier, Gustave Courbet (1819-1877) had made a similar move away from idealisation and symbolism towards a new physicality in paint – but with the crucial difference that Courbet's project was fundamentally materialist. In Courbet, the brute materiality of the paint is used, in for example *The Stonebreakers* (1849) [fig.27] or *The Source of the Loue* (1864) [fig.28], to replicate and signify on an analogous level the material qualities of the physical things represented, such as the stone and the gravelly ground. There is, of course, an allegorical level too, where this heavy materiality comes to represent the labour of the stonebreakers, but fundamentally the painting rests upon an instrumental relation to the material world. Rouault's surfaces make no such claim, and yet, in his move away from mythological and timeless biblical scenes to use a cruder subject matter and way of painting, the parallel to Courbet is significant.

It was impossible, at the end of the nineteenth century, to use such thick painterly terms without invoking some of the values and associations Courbet had so famously invested in them. Courbet's thick impasto had rejected the metaphysical, stating firmly – via his palette knife – that art was not mentally conceived but physically constructed.[124] In 1861 Courbet wrote that painting is 'an essentially concrete art form ....consist[ing] only of the representation of real and existing things... An abstract object, not visible, nonexistent, is not

[123] W.G.Sebald, *After Nature*, trans. Michael Hamburger (London, 2002), pp.26-27.
[124] Frédérique Desbuissons, 'Courbet's Materialism', *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol.31, No.2 (2008), p.255.

within the domain of painting'.[125] Turning away from the art of the academies, Courbet painted the 'lower' genres; still life, landscape, and portraits – all of which became the staple diet of the avant garde thereafter. It was seen as a democratization of art, of art reclaimed by, and directed to represent the lives, of the people who made it. 'Matérialiste', 'barbare', and 'socialiste' were used to insult Courbet, who was accused (equally reductively) of reducing everything to matter.[126]

Departing from Moreau, who disliked Courbet, Rouault deeply admired *L'Atelier* [fig.29] and *The Burial at Ornans* [fig.30], although he had certain reservations, writing: 'What a painter is Courbet, despite his lack of taste sometimes!'[127] Rouault went on to identify with Courbet, adding that he too had been left, misunderstood, in the shadows – '"Brute naturalist", they said'. Rouault's development of an overt application of pigment, and especially the use of heavy layers, is, I think, a conscious attempt to 'use', to press into service, some of the honesty and realism – and empathy for the lower classes – which he found in the pictorial methods of Courbet's work. To find echoes of Courbet in Rouault's developing mark-making, then, is to see in Rouault's 'crisis' a deliberate 'lowering' of the terms of his painting, both of the subject matter and finesse of his technique.

However, Rouault reaches out to Courbet in Mallarméan fashion: reaching-out but failing to grasp or enclose that which he seeks out. The echoes of Courbet's materialism are embedded, as discussed above, in the *surfaces* of Rouault's work, showing that whilst he invokes the recent history of impasto painting Rouault does not – or cannot – access the concrete surety of meaning and 'reality' of Courbet's work. In rejecting these key aspects of Courbet's materiality, a painting such as *Tête de clown tragique* turns the question back to the

[125] Ibid.
[126] J.M. Pryzblyski, 'Courbet, the Commune, and the Meanings of Still Life in 1871', *Art Journal*, Vol.55 (1996).
[127] Rouault, *Sur l'art et sur la vie*, p.34.

possibility of whether paint-as-matter can claim the stable inherence of meaning. Rouault's answer is maybe, but if so, not in the same way or to the same ends as Courbet.

Rouault, as has been said, does not reject Symbolism – he is, in a way an outdated Symbolist – but what he changes (updates, perhaps) is the emphasis upon materiality, which begins to bear, in itself, in its unrefined unfinished-ness or becoming-ness, in its insistence upon its own physical presence, the challenge to mimesis. Materiality begins to matter to Rouault in ways only hinted at in Moreau's work, and which indicate a different thread of inheritance. Another way of putting it might be to say that Rouault is no longer interested in the 'clothed idea' (arguably Baudelarian), but in the function and significance of the 'clothes'.

Such 'dialogues' are rarely wholly or easily reconcilable in Rouault's painting. Marx's review was also the first to invoke Honoré Daumier (1808-1879) as a reference point for Rouault's work. Although Marx's comparison can be said to emphasize the increasing physicality I have suggested is already emerging in 1896, it is also a comparison that misaligns Rouault's work. Rouault deploys the echoes of Daumier's social realism in the materiality of his marks which can be said to resemble the haggard surfaces of Daumier's sculptures, but without laying hold of the concrete politics or realism of Daumier's work. As with Courbet, the relationship between Rouault and Daumier remains on the surface. Describing Daumier's most famous satiric sculpture, *Ratapoil* [fig.31], Clark writes that 'the broken surface, marked with the comb at every point, seems to eat into the solid figure, making it tenuous and fragile. That is why the sculpture conjures up skeletons and the dance of death: the wrinkled trousers and the great billow of the creased tail-coat are mimicked, on a smaller scale, by the folds and openings of every surface, so that there seems to be no flesh

inside the clothes.' [128] This juxtaposition of weighty corporeality and tenuous fragility nods towards the instability of the surface of *Clown au tambour* or *Tête de clown tragique*, as the subjects are enslaved by the glutinous substance that at once embodies the clown or figure but simultaneously deprives it of this 'body', eating away at its solidity by exposing its construction mark by explicit mark. But where Daumier's point was a pessimistic satire of Napoleonic imperialism, the instability of Rouault's surfaces is not directed towards any such external reference but is bound up with the operation of the surface itself, and the question of painting and of making meaning. In this sense, Rouault's work is defiantly modernist by comparison.

Politically, this comparison with Daumier also, as Schloesser notes, 'placed Rouault in the "laicist" camp, a social context far removed from – indeed bitterly opposed to – what was conceived to be "religious painting".'[129] Yet, Rouault's Catholicism was becoming more important to him, and in 1901, still suffering after the death of Moreau, he went to live for six months at Ligugé Abbey where Huysmans, by then living as an oblate, had set up a community of artists and writers with the intention of producing 'serious' (a dig at the Nabis) sacred art. In the same year that Rouault met Huysmans, he also discovered the work of Huysmans' former friend Léon Bloy, discovering *La Femme Pauvre* as he went through Moreau's possessions. In Bloy's vitriolic criticism of the bourgeoisie and compassion for the destitute Rouault found what he believed to be an authentic voice. To many commentators, it was this encounter that, it seemed, brought Rouault back to Daumier's art, as introduced to him by his maternal grandfather, and his father's socialist politics,[130] but newly endowed, via Bloy, with profound religious significance. Retrospectively, for Rouault, this was clearly so.

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[128] T.J.Clark, *Absolute Bourgeois : Artists and Politics in France 1848-1851* (London, 1973, repr. 1982), p.117.
[129] Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism*, p.216. Schloesser states that this is Claude Roger-Marx, the son of Roger Marx, but it has to be the father as the son wouldn't have been old enough.
[130] See Kang, *Rouault in Perspective*, p.10, Rouault, *Souvenirs intimes* (Paris, 1926), p.84; George and Nouaille-Rouault, *L'Univers de Rouault*, p.52; Courthion, *Rouault*, p.56.

But Rouault only appears to have read Bloy for the first time in 1902, several years after his painting had turned explicitly to embrace the 'lower' aspects of modernist art.

It is also noteworthy that that two of Rouault's earliest works, *Descent from the Cross* (1894) and *the Child Jesus among the teachers* (1895), take their titles and general compositions from the sixteenth-century woodcuts by Albrecht Dürer, suggesting that Rouault was already moving to align himself with both Dürer's Catholicism and his artisanal status as a printmaker and as the son of a goldsmith. This move is consolidated by his 1925 self-portrait, entitled *L'apprenti ouvrier* [fig.32], which explicitly represents the artist as an artisan or labourer. Rouault rarely depicts labour in the sense that Luce or Signac did, although many of Rouault's figures are 'workers' of some kind. Matter and labour are intrinsically united in Rouault's marks, their weighty materiality associating these marks with the repetitive labour of the worker rather than an elevated conception of the artist at work.

The Cellar

Once he began to write, after Moreau's death, Rouault frequently referred to the dramatic circumstances of his birth in a cellar in Belleville on 27 May 1871 towards the end of 'The Bloody Week', during which the French government forces brutally suppressed the Commune. In his memoir, *Sur l'art et sur la vie: le métier de peindre*, he writes 'I was born in a cave, in a time of foreign and civil war. That is why, I imagine, that I have been called "painter of Darkness and Death" – in other words, cursed painter.'[131] Another version,

[131] Rouault, *Sur l'art et sur la vie*, p.16.

particularly exemplary of Rouault's palimpsestic style of writing is contained in a letter from Rouault to Jacques and Raïssa Maritain, written on 15 January 1946.[132]

> Birth: born in a cellar in Belleville – do I make this up? No certainly it is very real, in the cellar, 27 May 1871. The Siege of Belleville ... not by the Germans but by the armies of Versailles (civil war) – I was nicknamed 'the Shell' – I have a piece in an old drawer – and then 'the Throat' – because of cruel sufferings that it would be tedious to enumerate here: the frozen Seine, famine and many others of too personal a subject: rat at 3 francs – cat 9 or 10 francs and we had to skin them, but it lasted six weeks not six years as this time and was limited to France (but in Paris, living was as hard) – especially as my mother could digest nothing of the horrors given to her.[133]

The dramatic rhetoric and telegraphic phrases are typical of Rouault's writing:[134] it enables him to merge several historical moments into one, and intimately to intertwine his personal story with a grander historical narrative. In this account, he integrates three historical events: Rouault's date of birth initially places the scene very specifically in the last days of the Paris Commune, which lasted from 18 March 1871, when the disaffected National Guard (who had previously been mobilised to fight the Prussians – the 'foreign war' of Rouault's first description above) joined forces with the inhabitants of Montmartre against what would thereafter be known as the Versailles troops, until Sunday 28 May, ten days after Rouault's birth. However, Rouault's scene immediately moves back in time to describe the circumstances of the Siege of Paris, which began the year before on 19 September 1870; two days after 150,000 Prussian troops had surrounded Paris.[135] Thirdly, the phrases 'six weeks not six years' and 'limited to France' references the immediate history of the Second World War. The occupation of Paris, yet again, causes Rouault to connect these moments.

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[132] Both World Wars prompted Rouault to reiterate even more frequently this scene, presumably because he saw in it the same horrors and problems.
[133] Rouault to Maritain, reprinted in *Sur l'art et sur la vie*, p.175. Punctuation as original.
[134] Preserved here at the expense of the quality of the translation
[135] See John Milner, *Art, War and Revolution in France 1870-1871: Myth, Reportage and Reality* (Yale, 2000) and Robert Gildea, *Children of the Revolution: The French 1799-1914* (London, 1999), pp.229-245.

Of course, the 1870-1871 events cannot be Rouault's own memories, but he fully inhabits the narratorial voice as if they were and makes the memory-image his own. Some of these details must have been family anecdote: his mother seeking safety from the bombardment in the cellar, and the nicknames the child Rouault was given – 'shell' ('Obus'), possibly because Rouault arrived during the bombardment, and 'the Throat', which in the original French is 'le Gueulard', the name of the hole at the top of a blast furnace through which it is fed and from which gas escapes, and which is probably a reference to the crying and starving child.[136] Both Obus and le Gueulard, in turning the child into objects of war and industry, bring urban modernity and war to bear upon what should be a comforting, maternal scene. Instead, the mother figure is unable to provide for the child because she cannot stomach the disgusting things she is given to eat, and the womb-like image of the cave becomes a dark, freezing cellar.

This dark, industrial imagery recalls Vauxcelles' 'blacking and pitch', which, along with Coquiot's later description of Rouault's paintings as 'coal-daubed', become not mere descriptions of the appearance of the paint-matter but statements that engage with the significance of the brute materiality of the paint. This language unites matter and labour: the cellar (sometimes more abstractly 'the cave', usually dictated by the specifics/abstraction of the rest of the sentence as the French *cave* means both cave and cellar), the place of maternal labour, also resembles the pits and caves of coal mining. It is these associations that connect the cellar scene to the thick, viscous terms of the marks. Apart from the significance of the date, which few French readers would have missed, Rouault's reconstruction of his birth is not a commemoration of the Commune, nor a revolutionary call to arms, nor even a record of its particular bloody horrors – the massacres, the bodies, the graves – but a series of details

[136] George Orwell uses a similar manoeuvre in *1984*, where 'Dummy', a puppet-person is reduced to a larynx. George Orwell, *1984* (London, 1949 repr. 2004), p.7.

that emphasize the plight of a suffering poor in a time of violence without taking an explicitly political stance on the situation.

Unlike the generation of Signac and Luce, who were born ten years before him, Rouault did not remember the Commune, and did not invoke it in the early years of the twentieth century as a politically ideological manoeuvre.[137] We might tentatively, and somewhat cruelly, go so far as to describe Rouault's reconstruction as a series of clichés, resembling, as they do, the kind of popular images published at the time, such as *The Queue for Rats' Meat* by Cham (pseudonym of Amadée Charles Henri, Count of Noë) [fig.34], printed in *Le Charivari* on 8 December 1870, and Daniel Vierge's *Scenes of the bombardment 1871* and *Scene in a cellar during the bombardment 1871* [figs. 35 & 36], published in *Le Monde Illustré* and *The Graphic* respectively, as well as the oil painting *A Sewer Rat served as Food during the Siege of Paris*, (15 January 1871) [fig.37] by Auguste Charpentier, Gustave Doré's pencil and wash drawing *The Overturned Cradle* (1871) [fig.38] and Auguste Lançon's etching *A Cellar in the Rue d'Enfer* (10 January 1871) [fig.39]. Rouault's maternal grandfather, Alexandre Champdavoine (formerly a postman),[138] collected reproductions of contemporary art, and at the centre of this collection were the works of Manet, Courbet, Daumier, three of the best-known artists to be involved in both the Siege and the Commune, making it very likely that Rouault was familiar with the prints and drawings which emerged from these events.

However, Rouault's reconstruction achieves two things: firstly, using this history – importantly, at the kind of *distance* found in the Mallarméan symbol – Rouault characterizes himself as a specifically *Parisian* painter, as a child of one of the darkest moments of Parisian

[137] See Alastair Wright, 'Mourning, Painting, and the Commune: Maximilian Luce's A Paris Street in 1871', Oxford Art Journal, Vol.32, No.2 (2009), pp.223-242.
[138] Roulet, *Rouault, souvenirs*, pp.84-94, Kang, *Rouault in Perspective*, p.11.

history; and secondly, he aligns himself (again nebulously, not directly) with the French worker, with an oppressed and poverty-stricken lower class forced, literally, underground, by modern life. Without surrendering their irreducible materiality, Rouault's marks engage in abstract terms with an industrial narrative that aligns Rouault's work at the level of the mark with the kind of imagery at work in naturalist accounts of the labouring classes – as for example, in Émile Zola's 1885 novel *Germinal*.

One of the most remarkable features of *Germinal*, writes Robert Lethbridge, is the 'widening of perspectives': apparently based upon two major coal-strikes in 1869, the real model is a strike at Anzin, which Zola went to observe in 1884, and it is also clear that the savagery of the Commune prompted Zola to write a novel about revolutionary action in a contemporary setting. In a manner that echoes, albeit in a form tied to the devices of naturalism, the collation of associations in Rouault's marks, the novel is not tied to the specific events of 1869 or 1884, but 'accommodates the conflicts of the century extended, by a process of repetition, from 1789 onwards.'[139] The novel's richness, as with Rouault's paint-matter, lies in what Lethbridge calls its 'associative texture'. There are noteworthy correspondences between Zola's novel and Rouault's painting, beginning with the opening to the novel, which in its own way is almost as disorienting as Vauxcelles' experience of Rouault's 'dark' works:

> Crossing the open plain, wading through the thick, dark ink of a starless night, a solitary figure followed the highway from Marchiennes to Montsou, which cut its paved pathway through ten kilometres of beet fields. The man could not even see the black earth beneath his feet, and his only sense of the vast, flat horizons came from the gusting March wind, blowing in wide swathes as if sweeping across the sea, but icy cold from its passage over leagues of marchland and barren earth. Not a tree marked the sky with its shadow, and the

[139] Robert Lethbridge 'Introduction', Emile Zola, *Germinal* (1885), trans. Peter Collier (Oxford, 1993), p.xi.

> paved road jutted forward like a pier straight out into the murky waves of this world of shadows.[140]

The effect of this opening, with the passages that follow, is to strand us, and the subject, in a strange, dark world, without any introduction as to how it might be negotiated. It is unfamiliar and hostile, with an emphasis upon the physicality of the environment.[141] As the man approaches the pit-head, gradually making out more fearful sights and sounds, Lethbridge writes that 'the reader is confronted by with a fantastic vision, alerted to a monstrous presence barely seen... Hallucinatory silhouettes are synonymous with material shapes.'[142] This is a vocabulary we are familiar with by now; but here it is applied to an industrialized landscape, with its fires and mouth-like pithead, a combination that contrives to bring symbolist-like qualities to mundane materialism.

Colliers and the coal-pit often stand in modernism for the corruption of the relationship between the worker and the land in the name of capitalism, and for the mechanization of the land to fuel, or feed, the growing urban populations. There is a further aspect to this: coal is the product of labour, but it is also waste, the dead remains of past centuries, which connects capitalism to the idea of waste.[143] Rouault's marks can look like the fossilized, ossified, even petrified remains of painting, and the descriptions of these 'dark mistakes' often sound like descriptions of studio detritus rather than painting. (Recall

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[140] Zola, *Germinal*, p.1.
[141] This also has a precedent in Rouault's 1897 painting, *Paysage de nuit.*
[142] Lethbridge, 'Introduction', *Germinal*, p.xiv. See also Delia de Sousa Correa, *The Nineteenth-Century Novel: Realisms* (Milton Keynes & New York, 2000), pp.357-400.
[143] The connection between excrement and money is made by Freud in his analysis of Ernst Lanzer, known as 'the Rat Man'. See Freud, 'On Transformations of Instinct as Exemplified in Anal Eroticism' (1917) in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol.7, p.131, and Ellmann, 'The Rat on the Couch', *Nets*, pp.24-26. A similar connection is made in Charles Dickens' 1865 novel *Our Mutual Friend*, which revolves around a fortune made from London's rubbish. The fortune goes to a good, kind-hearted employee, Mr Boffin, also known as the Golden Dustman, but the dust, the source of wealth, which stands in several mounds in the yard of the Boffins' house, exerts an immoral influence upon those connected with it.

Matisse's phrase about 'removing some of the slag of tradition'.[144]) At the same time, other critics have described his surface facture as jewel-like, as 'encrusted with blobs, layers and striations of solid paint'.[145] As both mess and gemstone (which also echo the realist/symbolist combination of influences), the marks enter into this dark materialism, in which value is entwined with waste matter. This intertwining of a base horizontality is replicated in Rouault's practice. At some point during the early 1900s, Rouault rejected easel painting, and took to working at a table – this preference for the horizontal, for the craftsman's bench over the perpendicular easel was probably a practical essential given the sheer weight of material that Rouault was applying to often insubstantial supports such as paper, but it also stresses the 'lowering' of his art [figs.40-43].[146] This practice establishes a different relationship between the artist and his materials, and makes visible the kind of insistent horizontality that Rosalind Krauss finds in Jackson Pollock's 'drip paintings', which, even when hung on a gallery wall, retain traces of paint that speak to their creation on the floor instead of the easel.[147]

The 'cellar', the context of the Commune, and the industrial associations of Rouault's facture, when considered alongside Zola's text, suggest alternative ways of making sense of his work. And once we are attuned to these alternatives, we hear other echoes of earlier political and radical art and writing. For example, the violence noted in Moreau's 1869 *Prometheus*, which prefigures the kind of sadism Greenberg saw in Rouault's work, had an intermediary in Daumier's 1871 *France – Prometheus and the Eagle – vulture* [fig.44], in which the predatory bird is the Prussian eagle attacking the vital organs (Alsace and Lorraine)

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[144] Matisse, *Henri Matisse: Ecrits et propos sur l'art*, p.20, n.78.
[145] Gaffney, 'Georges Rouault: "The Monk of Modern Art"', p.388.
[146] Rouault's experiments in mixed media also shun, or muddy, the purity of oil on canvas usually the domain of 'high' art, or Salon art. The exact date of his change in practice is unclear, there is a painting by Léon Lehmann of Rouault in 1911 working at a table, but it seems more likely he is drawing. Several later photos show him working standing over tables heaped with canvases.
[147] Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Massachusetts and London, 1994), Chapter 6. There are exceptions to this in Rouault's oeuvre, such as later images of the Veronica (discussed in the last chapter) which, in a manner appropriate to the icon, seem to have been painted on an easel. The paint, especially around the crown of thorns, has been allowed to drip vertically, suggesting blood and sweat and linking the physicality of the paint to the physical origins of the icon.

of France, the contemporary stand-in for the figure of Prometheus. It is both vicious and violent, the flung-out arms of France and the dark thick marks that indicate the action of the eagle presenting a more visceral and immediate violence than Moreau's painting. Here, as in *The Bordeaux Assembly* (1871) [fig.45], is Daumier's caricatural and metamorphic line, hovering between the comic and the tragic: in both these lines and the other marks in these works, there is an animality or bestiality that transforms the subject matter into a much darker prospect. This animality is also found in the anthropomorphic descriptions of the mines in *Germinal,* and in the aforementioned *The Queue for Rats' Meat*, in which the people in the queue adopt rat-like behaviour that describes the destitution of their situation. Daumier's distinctive skill is to put this animality – and more generally the sense of materialized political struggle - into the materiality of his drawings. Rouault's work is less directly legible, less clearly politically aligned. But it resonates nevertheless with such precedents. (Like Daumier, he will also be interested in the interface between the animal and the human: I will address the question in the fourth chapter).

Similarly, Rouault's clowns, which are usually read as derivations of the *commedia dell'arte* or the puppet theatres, find parentage in works from the same traumatic period in French history. Rouault's *Polichinelle*, for example, has another source in Manet's Polichinelle. This appears in Manet's 1873 painting *Ball at the Opéra*, and his 1874 colour lithograph *Polichinelle* [fig.41], which was thought to be a caricature of Marshal MacMahon (who commanded the French troops against the Prussian and became the first president of the Third Republic) and was seized by the police.[148] The absurdity of Polichinelle with his stick, writes Milner, 'may reflect upon the absurdity of making a president from the officer who led the French army to defeat at Sedan and later suppressed the Commune with such ferocity, an

[148] Milner, *Art, War and Revolution in France*, p.200.

action whose extremity Manet is known to have deplored.'[149] The historical distance between Manet's and Rouault's images depoliticises Rouault's version, or at least removes it from the specific politics of the original. However, in the statuesque 'portrait' Rouault produces of Polichinelle, as well as in his decision to paint this clown (who had a history in French painting) in highly modernist terms, echoes remain both of the absurdity of Manet's image and of its political undercurrents.

The image of himself Rouault presented to the world also resonates with perhaps unexpected precedents. In his writing about his birth and his youth, hunger becomes a significant aspect of Rouault's aesthetic. He writes: 'From Belleville to Montmartre I wandered, by day, by night, barely supported by my two feet', and later describes himself as 'a pale and thin adolescent', adding in the letter to Maritain that he resembled a carcass, painfully thin, a mere thirty kilos.[150] The image of the emaciated artist could not be further from that of another key player – alongside Daumier and Manet – in the imaging of the Commune: Gustave Courbet. Frédérique Desbuissons has described how 'the palette knife was only one of the concrete signs' which contributed to the view of Courbet formed by his contemporaries. 'The most important of these signs was the artist's body and its manifestations... From the late 1850s, the contemporaneous bloatedness of Courbet and the thick impasto of his painting largely contributed to the widespread currency of the image of the fat painter.'[151] This became linked to moral judgements of the artist, who was seen to lack discernment, leading a gluttonous lifestyle. His particular taste for beer – in copious amounts – contributed to the perception of him and his work as crude.

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[149] Ibid.
[150] Rouault, *Sur l'art et sur la vie*, pp.18 & 177.
[151] Desbuissons, 'Courbet's Materialism', p.257.

Rouault, as I say, seems diametrically opposed to such corpulence. But the emphatic materiality of his paintings recalls, at least to some degree, that of his predecessor. The result – as with Daumier and Manet – is that a precedent is invoked whilst at the same time the meaning of that precedent is rendered unstable. Rouault's application of paint resembles the glutinous marks of Courbet's work, but does not bespeak the corporeal materialism of the artist. Again we witness the inherent epistemological uncertainty of Rouault's aesthetic, in which matter does not offer concrete surety in its weighty physical presence. In his asceticism, Rouault opposes both Courbet's materialism and Moreau's opulence, whilst pressing these associations into play as critique. The same disparity can be found in Zola's *The Belly of Paris,* in which the fat and the thin are frequently contrasted, and which has particular aesthetic significance as hunger frames the escaped prisoner Florent's view of the overflowing markets of Les Halles. He is accompanied by the painter, Claude, whose gaze is entirely devoted to making of a painting and who sees the foodstuffs purely in terms of aesthetic effect. By contrast, Florent's hunger prevents any such aesthetic creativity; he feels pain and misery in the face of such material excess.[152]

This flickering between opposites is analogous to the Mallarméan symbol, which is always in the 'process of metamorphosis into another object or, more frequently still, in the process of dissolving into nothing'; it also describes the operation of the cellar in its role of constructing the rebirth of Rouault's painting. Rouault's birth is specifically placed, by him, in a moment deeply associated with violence and death, and the cellar is as much like a tomb as it is womb-like. And yet, it is from this dark cellar – or more accurately from the reconstruction of this cellar – that Rouault's art rises after the 'fall'. It is perhaps significant,

[152] Kate Tunstall argues that to read this novel is 'to be placed in a position analogous to that of the spectator of Holbein's *The Ambassadors*, with its notorious anamorphosis; for, as the narrative perspective shifts between Claude and Florent – as the descriptions evoke Impressionist, Rococo and Dutch aesthetics – so the death's head disconcertingly flickers in and out of view.' Kate Tunstall, 'Crânement beau tout de même: Still Life and *Le Ventre de Paris*', *French Studies*, Vol. LVIII, No.2 (2004), p.179.

then, that Hofmannstahl's Lord Chandos also describes a cellar. Like Rouault's, it is a cellar he largely imagines because has he no direct recollection of it; indeed, Chandos, it seems, has never actually been in the cellar. Having had 'a generous amount of rat poison spread in the milk cellars of one of my dairy farms, I went out riding... thinking no more about the matter.'[153] But suddenly, the cellar engulfs Chandos' sensibilities: 'suddenly this cellar unrolled inside me, filled with the death throes of the pack of rats. It was all there. The cool and musty cellar air ... the shrilling of the death cries echoing against mildewed walls.'[154] The nurturing, milk-filled, notion of the dairy is replaced by a scene of death. There is also an inadequate maternal presence: 'A mother was there, whose dying young thrashed about her. But she was not looking at those in their death agonies... but off into space, or through space into the infinite, and gnashing her teeth.'

This violated, gnashing world replaces Chandos' pre-fall world; coming apart just as language had fallen apart for him, into 'isolated words' and 'dizzying whirlpools'. But it is in these shadowy, secret, underground worlds that Chandos and Rouault rediscover the stuff of meaning – a source of a 'mysterious, wordless, infinite rapture'.[155] However, whilst both Chandos and Rouault find a sense of deep empathy within the imagery of their respective cellars – Chandos writes that he does not feel pity for the rats, but a 'vast empathy, a streaming across into those creatures' – they also both take a sadistic pleasure in the darkness and violence of these moments. The vision of the dying rats in the cellar is, to Chandos, 'more divine, more bestial' than the destruction of Alba Longa or the image of Carthage in flames,[156] which indicates a kind of literary enjoyment in the scene.

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[153] Hofmannstahl, *The Lord Chandos Letter and Other Writings* p.129.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid. p.125.
[156] Ibid. p.129.

We have seen, then, that Rouault's work involves a fundamental indeterminacy at various levels. At that of the mark, it oscillates between being "mere" mark and being representation. At that of meaning, it suggests ties to earlier traditions of politicized art whilst at the same time rendering such meanings indeterminate or opaque. And again at the level of meaning, even such basic questions as whether or not his images bespeak compassion or cruelty remain undecidable. Compare the critics' disgust, often expressed in terms of physical revulsion, at Rouault's work, which I have suggested posits a perceived absence of transcendent meaning belied by the insistent narratives of pity woven into his oeuvre. This is clearest in the response to Rouault's most socially provocative subjects, his paintings of prostitutes. The critics' disgust was paramount here: these images were described as 'thick gelatinous masses of flesh', as 'epileptic toads', and as 'dug-up corpses'. It is these remarks which are most often recuperated by narratives of pity, in which the violence of the surface is directed against the society in which such figures suffer. But the physicality of Rouault's marks as well as the dominating dark palette have a kind of richness (Vauxcelles' 'caviar', perhaps), which at the level of the mark and surface suggests a certain pleasure in the construction. There is a darker side to both Chandos' and Rouault's empathy in that the former is also responsible for the massacre, and in Rouault's case, if the patches and slashes of paint that violate the flesh of the prostitutes and clowns are an empathetic representation of these downtrodden figures, this aesthetic violence has been done by the painter. Yet again the evidence of the surface complicates its significance – in this case, both aesthetically and ethically.

We might here recall Vauxcelles' review, which can now be seen as an attempt to encapsulate both the visual materiality of the surface and the polysemy of meanings emanating from the initially inscrutable paint-matter. That Vauxcelles' poses this attempt as a

series of questions is significant: this, in itself, speaks to the deep instability and irresolution of these works. Vauxcelles senses meaningful directions but cannot, it seems, countenance the drawing together of these aspects in one canvas. Such irresolution, I have been arguing, can be thought of in terms of the rupture and the grasping epistemology of the Mallarméan symbol, an argument that introduces 'distance' into a discussion that, in part one of this chapter, insisted upon 'closeness'. However, they are, inevitably, inextricably linked. To the extent that his mark-making also begins from an inherent rupture, or what de Man called 'the acute awareness of an essential separation between his own being and the being of whatever is not himself',[157] Rouault continues in a vein opened by Symbolism. Uncertainty and ambiguity were already embedded in his work, although undoubtedly Rouault began to change the terms of its presence in painting. To borrow de Man's terms again, his *response* to that essential division changes, but, like Mallarmé's response, it is ethically and epistemologically dark. The symbol is *not* a direct equivalent of the mark, but the latter inherits the fundamental instability of the symbol: both 'hide' elements of their own being, both 'reach' to express that which they are unable to be or name, but through varying operations. The Mallarméan symbol disturbs mimetic logic, but the mark or patch of paint tears the mimetic and non-mimetic apart whilst simultaneously binding their contradictory work.

In the final part of this chapter I turn to two further examples of Rouault's painting, *Jeu de massacre [La Noce à Nini Patte en l'air]* (1905), and *Parade* (1907-1910), to draw these arguments together. Far from attempting to find another unified, or even coherent, approach to Rouault's oeuvre, this account will continue to explore its interpretative indeterminacy and undecidability. It will continue to address the nuances of the surfaces, but

[157] de Man, 'Double Aspect of Symbolism', p.6.

also begin to show how aspects of Rouault's painterly experiments accord specifically with particular strands of thinking associated with modern philosophy and with anxieties about the condition of modernity.

Part Three: Interpretative Indeterminacy and Modernity

As discussed in the introductory chapter, *Jeu de massacre* [fig.2], subtitled *La Noce à Nini Patte en l'air*, appeared on the famous pages of *L'Illustration* in November 1905 alongside various Fauvist works, including Matisse's *Femme au chapeau*, from the Salon d'Automne of that year. Even by Rouault's standards, *Jeu de massacre* is a strange and difficult work. Painted in Chinese ink, watercolour and gouache on paper, it is dominated by a dark blue wash and rough, cursive black lines that are made stranger by the absence of activity depicted by this busy surface.[158] The composition is made up of horizontals: a foreground bench with a box of balls distances us from the subject and a dark flat background punctuated by posters creates a parallel space at the top of the painting. In the central section, a line of figures is depicted in a loose, sketchy manner, a mixture of dislocated patches and lines.

Although the line of figures is contained from above and below, it continues out of the picture to right and left, suggesting that the line-up might go on and on. The line of figures is a peculiar group: their faces are very alike, briefly indicated in a blocky, scribbled manner that homogenises and dehumanises them. Their collective identity is hard to define: Kang

[158] Sarah Whitfield points out that Rouault's apparently swift notation becomes, at times, a kind of script. Sarah Whitfield 'An Outrageous Lyricism' in Sarah Whitfield and Fabrice Hergott, *Georges Rouault: The early years 1903-1920* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1993), p.13. Rouault himself wrote to Andre Suarès that 'I have a kind of *handwriting* in painting.' *Georges Rouault-André Suarès Correspondence* (Paris, 1960), p.35, letter 25.

suggests that they are well-dressed members of the bourgeoisie,[159] but although their hats and attire might be said to support this, they are a grisly group, and the distinctive hat and checked trousers of the man on the right suggests instead that he is a clown. In front or on-top-of, since perspectival depth is lost in the confusion of jumbled lines that fuses foreground and background, is a larger, seated woman dressed in red: in appearance, she is very like those behind her, but seated and leaning to the side as if bored. Her identity as a cashier or stallholder is supported by her resemblance to the figures in a work by Rouault from the previous year, *Caissières de cirque forain III* (1904) [fig.5]. The scene as a whole is generally understood to be based on a stand (called *Jeu de massacre*) found at fairs and markets filled with show-case dummies at which customers throw balls to win prizes.[160] The French version of this game traditionally represents a bridal group with the bride in the middle.[161] One of the posters behind the figures/puppets announces the wedding, 'La Noce à Nini' ('the wedding of Nini'), and, not least because it is one advertisement among others, turns the solemnity of the wedding into a mockery of the ceremony and celebrations; it becomes a scene associated with both material transactions and violence (a social commentary that Rouault would have found supported by his recent reading of Leon Bloy, who was notoriously vitriolic towards the bourgeoisie).[162]

There are several more points of reference to add to the working of this picture. To begin with, it is not just anyone's wedding, but the wedding of Nini Patte en l'air, a well-known dancer at the Moulin Rouge during the 1890s alongside La Goulue and Jane Avril,

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[159] Kang, *Rouault in Perspective*, pp.107-110

[160] There is a similar work by Rouault: *The Bride (Aunt Sally's)*, (1907), now in Tate Britain, depicting the bride and between two men, that was originally exhibited in 1907 as *La Mariée (fantoches)*. It was then known as 'The Bride', but on seeing a photograph of it in August 1953, Rouault decided he would like to change the title as it seemed to him misleading: the picture does not represent a real bride. He suggested *Têtes à Massacré*.

[161] Kang describes it as 'pitch-ball puppets' (Kang, *Rouault in Perspective* p.107) and Sarah Whitfield calls the scene 'Aunt Sallys', which is the English version of this game. (Whitfield, 'An Outrageous Lyricism', p.15.)

[162] See Kang, *Rouault in Perspective*, pp.107-110

and particularly famous for performing the Can-Can – hence her name, which means Nini 'legs-in-the-air'.[163] This turns the bourgeois finery into costumes (the clown makes more sense, therefore) and the whole scene becomes an act, based in the imagery and artifice of the popular entertainments of Paris. It also, in reverse, points to the puppet-like nature of these performers, whose names describe their physicality, in this case to the point of separating body-parts and endowing them with a degree of autonomy.[164]

It is not clear how to read this fracturing of the bourgeois/performer's body. On one level it suggests a pseudo-machinic aesthetic strongly connected with modernism, but on another, in the puppets' ambivalent state between life and death, and in keeping with the polysemy of Rouault's canvases, it seems to nod towards a tradition in painting in which the dead Christ is prefigured through the limp body of a sleeping child. Sarah Whitfield has suggested yet another reference: Rouault may have had the violence and pity of Goya's *The Straw Manikin* [fig.47] in mind – a tossed figure with a broken neck, suspended above a circle of smiling faces (he would certainly have known the image in reproduction).[165] And we could add yet more references, including the mundane world of commercial board-games: *Jeu de massacre* was the name of a board-game invented in France in the 1890s, a game whose board features a fairground with the 'Jeu de massacre' stall clearly illustrated, complete with puppets and cashier [fig.48]. Rouault presumably had this in mind: *Jeu de massacre*, then, or 'The Killing Game' or 'Game of Destruction', draws attention to the

[163] On the history of the Moulin Rouge see Maria Kristina Wascher, *An Exploration into the History of the Moulin Rouge, from 1889 to the Present* (Illinois, 2008) and Robert Burleigh, *Toulouse-Lautrec: The Moulin Rouault and the city of light*, (Chicago, 2005).

[164]As Hergott points out, the scene also resembles the shooting-range that the fictional character Ferdinand Bardamu discovers in the Bois de Boulogne in Céline's 1932 novel *Voyage au bout de la nuit.* See Fabrice Hergott, 'The early Rouault' in *Georges Rouault: The early years*, p.25: 'A fake wedding party: in the front row metal figures of the bride with her bouquet, plus the cousin, the soldier and the red-faced groom. In the second row, more guests, looking as if they had been slaughtered a few dozen times' L.F. Céline, *Le voyage au bout de la nuit* (Paris, 1981), p.79.

[165] Whitfield, 'An Outrageous Lyricism' p.15.

'game-playing' element of this work – both in terms of the puppet game of the fairground stall and the games that Rouault is playing by intertwining shifting meanings and references.

The main point here is that while the picture seems to invite an effort to unravel the layers of signification – apparently offering a 'way through' to meaning – the layers negate such an 'unravelling' by blurring the distinctions between each. Thus the boundaries between the spaces of the game, the theatre, the fairground, and the 'real' are muddied, each leading from one point of reference into another in a manner that thwarts a conclusive reading and contrives to place the emphasis upon the artifice of the scene on every level: from the visible construction of the painting to the costumed figures. The interpretative 'work' of the viewer is frustrated or short-circuited, continually leading back to the surface, literally and metaphorically. This 'game-playing' is important. The fundamental instability of the notion of 'play', which, with its basis in chance contains both affirmative purpose and destructive indeterminacy, underlies and undermines *Jeu de massacre*. This is true at the level of content – people or puppets; alive or dead; game, theatre or reality – and at the level of form – the scribbled lines, the confused spaces and the contradiction between the 'hasty' appearance of the surface and the stasis of the figures.

This notion of 'play' disrupts the idea of the disinterestedness of art, the idea that art belongs to a privileged or separate sphere by bringing together art and life not through an art that embraces the subject of daily life (as in other modernist practices) but through the commonality of 'play as reality' to both art and the everyday. This proximity between art and play appears in one form in the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche.[166] Refusing to accept the everyday world as indisputably 'real', Nietzsche took the entire world – as it appears – to be

[166] NB. 'Play' is not a new concept in aesthetics, it predates Nietzsche, appearing, for example, albeit in different ways in both Kant and Schiller.

an illusion, where play is not merely an integral part of culture but is cosmic, encompassing all human activity in a play world commensurate with art.[167] That Rouault was familiar with Nietzsche's idea is suggested both by his friendship with Maritain (who had read widely in German philosophy, including Nietzsche) and by his use of the alternative title 'Superman', which suggests an allusion (satiric given the works he used it for) to Nietzsche's Ubermensch.[168]

To reiterate, then, the 'game-playing' of *Jeu de massacre* can be said simultaneously to produce and to destroy 'meaningful' readings of the painting. First, the work can be read as an absurdist comment upon an alienated, dehumanized society populated by puppet-like figures (in 1935 Anthony Blunt appeared to pick up on this social commentary, describing Rouault between 1905 and 1914 as 'the greatest satirical artist living'[169]). Secondly, the multi-layered effect of the painting creates a darkly comic – somewhat surrealist – atmosphere in which the possibilities of meaning and communication are both questioned and threatened. Third, the combination of these entertainments, references, and narratives (anticipating Post-Structuralism) creates what was described in the previous section in Derrida's terms as a giddying play of textual mirrors that displaces any notion of an underlying 'truth' or 'reality'.[170] These equally valid, interpenetrating, contradictory, and inconclusive readings render the search for meaning nonsensical and emphasize the constructedness of the scene. At the level of the paint, the effect is to make the surface

[167] Susan Laxton, 'From Judgment to Process: The Modern Ludic Field' in *From Diversion to Subversion: Games, Play and Twentieth Century Art*, ed. David Getsey (Pennsylvania, 2011), pp.11-12 (she has *Thus Spake Zarathustra* particularly in mind)
[168] See Schloesser, *Mystic Masque*, pp.85, 96 & 238.
[169] Anthony Blunt, *The Spectator* (18 Oct. 1935)
[170] On play and structures, see Derrida, 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London, 1978), pp.278-294.

materiality the unstable central space in which these cyclical repetitions take place.[171] Taken into the game, the viewer is kept 'on the surface' of these works because there is ultimately no way 'through', just round and round, *mise-en-abyme*.[172]

Painted several years later, *Parade* (1907-10) [fig.49] also uses mixed media: oil, ink, and gouache on paper mounted on canvas. It mobilizes fewer layers of reference (there is no writing, there are less specific scenes of reference than in *Jeu de massacre*, and the title is an oft repeated one in Rouault's oeuvre) and it is painted in a looser fashion with an increased sense of space – and dislocation – between marks, patches, and lines. However, despite the increased dynamism of the surface, there is no logic to the visible layers of painterly marks – they do not add up to a unifying sense of rhythm as could, for example, be said of the repetitive nature of Van Gogh's mark-making. Once again Rouault's lines operate over and under patches of colour – black, blue, red and yellow – applied inconsistently, with a lack of care or precision, in a scuffed, dry-brush technique in some areas, and in a more fluid manner in others (dictated, at least to some extent, by which medium is in use in which area; water-based or oil-based, or a layer of one conflicting with its opposite).

This lack of coherence is disconcerting, and the viewer is, again, kept on the surface. To some extent the dynamism of these marks and lines might be said to articulate the activity of the two clowns in the foreground, one of whom is banging a drum with a monkey perched upon it whilst the other waves some kind of baton. But at the same time, the topography of the surface has an autonomous presence or construction unrelated to the qualities, textures or

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[171] These repetitions can be aligned with Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence, which, as Laxton writes 'is characterised as a "world of play", and the "Overman" in his celebration of the situation, is the most powerful of players.' Laxton, *From Diversion to Subversion*, p.12

[172] It is interesting to note that in 1971, Eugene Ionesco (1909-1994) wrote a play entitled *Jeu de massacre*: Ionesco's work is typically absurdist, he replaces conventional dialogue with nonsense spoken by puppet-like characters, and linear narrative is replaced by repetitions and a sense of acceleration. His works are intended as a critique of the bourgeoisie and as expression of the alienation, anguish, and strangeness of reality. There is no evidence that he knew Rouault's work, but what is interesting is the continuing presence of this 'game-playing', and the reference to this particular game, in French avant-gardism, and especially in absurdist theatre.

details of the subject matter. The precedent of *Jeu de massacre* also tells against equating the surface to the activity of the subject matter in this way. Nor is this incoherence resolved by attempting to read the surface as a seismographic trace of the painter's activity: the painterly marks evidence – deliberately and overtly – the making of the work, but they cannot be read backwards in time as if an expressive record or narrative of the bodily movement of the artist.[173]

As in *Jeu de massacre*, there are indications of other activity across the scene: figures, walls or doors and posters, are gestured to in the designated but depthless background. However, the space is more chaotic. In opposition to the horizontals that dominate *Jeu de massacre*, the hats and costumes of the clowns in *Parade* are uncontained by the composition, bleeding out of the painting, creating a sense that the content has been squeezed into a limited space and a short moment in time. This agitation and sense of forces contained have led to comparisons between the cursive surfaces of *Jeu de massacre* and *Parade* and the Expressionism of Wols,[174] whose later interest in brush marks and in a relief-like surface appears visually to have much in common with Rouault's work. [175] For example, writing of *Parade*, Whitfield concentrates upon the monkey as an exemplification of this energized space, describing the scribbled indication of the animal's presence as not immediately recognisable, but as 'a loosely knitted bundle of lines and colour patches', a 'high-pitched energy massed within this small area of paint ...like a microcosm of the energy stirred up in

[173] 'Let us not forget', writes Jacques Lacan, 'that the painter's brushstroke is something in which movement is terminated.' Lacan, 'What is a picture' in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London, 1977), p.114. Colette Soulages, the wife of the painter Pierre Soulages, recalled entering his studio unannounced one day, surprising the painter in the act of 'dancing as though in a trance'. For Soulages, this was a source of ongoing embarrassment: according to Natalie Adamson, it became 'indissolubly linked to his apprehension that any kind of dynamic, graphic mark upon the canvas would be interpreted as an expressive corporeal trace and read backwards in time.' This, Soulages feared, would restore narrative figuration, and render the painting merely seismographic. See Natalie Adamson, 'Vestiges of the Future: Temporality in Soulages', *Art History*, Vol. 35, No.1 (February 2012), p.142.

[174] Wols was part of the generation that followed Rouault's (also including Fautrier, Dubuffet, and Soulages), and painting mainly during the 1940s.

[175] Whitfield, 'An Outrageous Lyricism', pp. 20-21.

the surrounding space.'[176] However, although she describes this as Wols-like, even here Rouault's work is tied to his subject matter, albeit in ways that break with many of the conventions of representation or figuration, whereas Wols' work is abstract, improvisatory and experimental to a point where figuration is wholly nullified, and is explicitly engaged with the 'informal'.[177]

However, the comparison with Wols' indirectly offers another approach to the surface of *Parade*. Florence de Mèredieu employs a similar vocabulary to Whitfield's in her discussion of the 'swarming' materiality of the multiplicity of layers in Wols' work that disturbs any clarity of form and order. Echoing Whitfield's 'loosely knitted bundle', de Mèredieu describes the overall effect as like a 'skein' (*écheveau*). This skein represents 'an order too complex to be easily understood'. It is an 'entangled, superposition of different orders' that might be 'perfectly legible when taken separately, but which become intractable when combined into a single skein.'[178] De Mèredieu suggests that this skein-like quality has an affinity with Bergsonian *durée*. Henri Bergson's understanding of duration, first described in his 1889 doctoral thesis 'Essai sur les données immediates de la conscience' (published as *Time and Free Will: An essay on the immediate data of consciousness*), is of the immediate experience of existence as temporal; as a qualitative multiplicity continually progressing and continually changing – a time that is *lived*, in which states, events, actions, and emotions merge into one another to create a multiplicity of sensation and experience bound up in a unity of time that moves forwards unceasingly. Such dynamism, Bergson writes, is

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[176] Whitfield, 'An Outrageous Lyricism', p.21.
[177] On the 'informal' or 'informe' see Krauss, '"Informe" without conclusion', *October*, Vol. 78 (Autumn, 1996), pp.89-105; Krauss and Bois, *Formless: A User's Guide* (New York, 1997); Paul Hegarty, 'As Above So Below: Informe/Sublime/Abject', *The Beast at Heaven's Gate: Georges Bataille and the Art of Transgression*, ed. Andrew Hussey (Amsterdam, 2008), p.73; and also Nina Parish, *Henri Michaux: Experimentation with Signs* (Amsterdam, 2007), pp.65-66.
[178] Florence de Mèredieu, *Histoire matérielle et immatérielle de l'art modern et contemporain* (Paris, 1994, repr. 2011), p.291.

'repugnant to the reflective consciousness'.[179] It can only be grasped intuitively, in a pre-conceptual, pre-intellectual state of mind – such, Bergson writes, as the moment of falling asleep. The logic of the human intellect, however, is 'the logic of solid objects'[180] and experience is understood by imposing fixed spatial categories on this flux. Thus, in the action of stretching an elastic band, the movement in time (duration), is continuous and indivisible. But it can be – and is – replaced by a spatial line that represents the motion and which can be broken down into points laid out in homogenous space to capture the movement as a series of fixed moments. This spatial line, this image, is incomplete; it is not an image of duration, it is an image of the work of the reflective consciousness – work of which we are usually unaware. What de Mèredieu is implying, then, is that the swarming complexity of the skein-like surface – taken all at once – presents us with an image of duration that defies our attempts to extract, to still, and to analyse its component parts, thus forcing us to confront the world *as disorder, intuitively*.

It is not implausible to read Rouault in this light – it has an historical purchase, as Bergson's widespread popularity and influence was at its height in the first decade of the twentieth century and many artists, including Matisse, were deeply interested in the implications of Bergson's philosophy.[181] In his writing Rouault refers on several occasions, albeit indirectly, to Bergson's notion of *durée*, particularly the image of a continuous flux beneath a frozen surface, and the necessity for the artist to dive below the surface.[182] Moreover, *Parade* does force a confrontation with disorder and the 'unfinished' quality, the

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[179] Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An essay on the immediate data of consciousness*, trans. F.L. Pogson (New York, 2001), p. 9.
[180] Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (1907), trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York), 1911, p.ix.
[181] See Mark Antliff, *Inventing Bergson: Cultural Politics and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (Princeton, 1993), and Antliff, 'The Rhythms of Duration: Bergson and the Art of Matisse', in *The New Bergson*, ed. John Mullarkey (Manchester, 1999), pp.184-208.
[182] In *Sur l'art et sur la vie*, Rouault writes that 'in this life of tricks and traps I learned to dive' (p.18); which seems to draw directly upon Bergson's own imagery of the diver plunging beneath the surface of 'solid logic' into the flux of life. Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1903), trans. T.E. Hulme (London, 1913) – also discussed in chapter 2 where, as I point out, Rouault's article on Rodin draws on Bergson.

visibility of the layers of daubs and lines suggests a state of coming-into-being.[183] Although the notion of picturing *durée* is always problematic, and, potentially paradoxical,[184] since the nature of a painting necessitates finite boundaries, even these are potentially disrupted in Rouault's canvases by figures and marks that seem to spill out of their frames. And I would add that de Mèredieu's reading does not necessarily endorse the picturing of *durée* but an interpretation that is equally repugnant to the reflective consciousness; that defies order, that is too complex to be fully understood, and which must therefore be 'grasped', not according to ordinary knowledge, but wholly and intuitively.

However, to locate *Parade* too firmly in relation to the concept of *durée* and the context of Bergonism in the early twentieth century is to suggest an interpretive stability where there is in fact only indeterminacy. For the imagery of the surface as loose knitting or a tangled skein is equally suggestive of other interpretative possibilities connected to what we have described as the 'game-playing' aspect of Rouault's work, and which we might best characterize as a 'puzzle' element of his mark-making. Note de Mèredieu's hint that within the complexity of the skein there *might* be individually comprehensible strands; a hint that, Theseus-like, we might follow a thread out of the darkness of the labyrinth. (To 'follow a thread' or 'to lose one's thread' are, after all, statements about the presence or absence of coherence.) This seems mistaken. *Parade* immediately frustrates any such route towards clarity – the heterogeneity of the threads and patches of the surface refuse such an unravelling. They cannot be cut up to be understood. Undone, or extracted, each mark or thread means nothing. Again a contrast with Wols' surfaces is useful: Serge Guilbaut

[183] I am reluctant here to use the word 'finished', not only because of the 'unfinished' look of many of Rouault's works, but also because he refused to call most of them 'finished', holding onto as many as possible and returning to them over and over again.

[184] Something Bergson himself wrote about in the anecdote of drawing in 'Intellectual Effort', in *Mind-Energy*, trans. H. Wildon Carr (London, 1920), pp. 186-230.

observes that, in themselves, Wols' lines 'do not define anything in particular ...the drawings unravel out as when one pulls a thread out of an old pullover, and that line wilts, erases itself'.[185] [fig. 50] In *Parade*, Rouault's lines do – albeit roughly – define particular things, and if the surface seems to unravel (take for example, the high-pitched mass of lines that is the monkey) it is an unravelling that re-ravels, a deconstruction that reconstructs the monkey caught in the web of lines and patches.[186]

The 'chaos' of the surface of *Parade* has been read both by contemporary critics including Waldemar George and by art historians including Kang as Rouault deliberately evoking a Rabelaisian 'carnival dialect',[187] where 'carnival' stands for subversion through laughter, parody, the grotesque body, the comic debasement of authority, and the language of the market-place.[188] Derived from a medieval tradition, Carnival days or feast days turned the status quo upside down. Dressing-up temporarily suspended the normal social hierarchies and allowed the living out of an almost utopian, liberating experience in which all social types were mocked, and any behaviour, however crude or radical, became acceptable for a day.[189] The sixteenth-century French writer François Rabelais most closely recreated the carnivalesque in literary terms through his famously grotesque characters Pantagruel and

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[185] Serge Guilbaut, 'Abstract Expressionism and Tachisme', *Abstract Expressionism: The International Context*, ed. Joan M. Marter (New York, 2007), p.44.

[186] This is analogous in operation to Cixous' discussion of constructive violence in which damage 'de-damages'. Cixous describes works of art that are difficult or dissident in character as 'violent operations', but where 'operation' is the word 're-inscribed' by Derrida in *Voiles*, in which he turns the word back upon Cixous' own text, *Savoir*, which takes as its central theme an eye operation. Derrida, she writes, 'squeezes out [*exprimer le jus*] its violence' by playing, as he always does, 'as he always signs', upon all the applications and resonances of the word, including, in English, the 'surgical operation'. Derived from the Latin *opus*, Cixous continues, it is the thing that is made – a term still in use in music – but at the same time it goes with the operation that is the way of making, the making of an *oeuvre*. Keeping within the French idiom, *oeuvre* can also be a military operation, a *manoeuvre*. Violence is restored: 'the French word secretly associates *oeuvre*-making and a form of violence, but a form of violence that is not necessarily destructive; a violence which would be at once productive or which could be curative. A surgical operation is supposed to redeem, improve, or else limit damage, but one limits damage through damage. Hence this ambivalence, this damage in order to de-damage, this deconstruction of damage is carrying itself out.' Helene Cixous, *Poetry in Painting: Writings on Contemporary Art and Aesthetics*, (Edinburgh, 2012), p.8.

[187] See George, *L'Univers de Rouault*, pp.12-13 (he makes a particular connection between Rouault's *writing* and Rabellais) and Kang pp.68-70.

[188] See *Carnival and the Canivalesque: The Fool, the Reformer, the Wildman, and Others in Early Modern Theatre* eds. Konrad Eisenbichler and Wim Husken (Amsterdam, 1999) p.29.

[189] See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his world*, trans. Helene Iswolsky, (Cambridge Massachusetts, 1968) – published after George's account, but drawn upon by Kang.

Gargantua. In his emphasis upon accentuated physical characteristics such as protruding bellies or swollen thighs (see, for example, *Lutteur* (1905)) [fig.51], Rouault should certainly be seen as working within this tradition, not least because it appears to be a part of the 'lowering' of the terms of his art from the idealised figures of his early work.[190]

However, I would argue that whilst it seems right to say that Rouault transposes something of this carnival sentiment into his many images of the circus and of clowns, the result is not a celebration of the anti-bourgeois freedom of the circus but a much darker interplay of the strands of modernity that embed the carnivalesque qualities within the picture of modern life that these works develop. Rouault's own characterization of modernity in 1947 as a world in which 'Everything moves faster, people barely have time to heave a breath before giving up their ghost'[191] suggests that his use of the carnivalesque might be described as a subversive resistance to modernity, or as the inevitable, perhaps nihilistic, characterization of an accelerating urban society. In this light, the chaotic surface flickering with activity can also be read as analogous with – or at least echoing with – the spatio-temporal compressions of modern urban life, an 'adrenaline aesthetics' in which the sensations of energy represent the experience of a modernity that now lacks a solid base.[192]

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[190] The carnival spirit appealed widely to the subversive, anarchist tendencies of the avant-garde, and can be seen in the work of Diaghilev, Stravinsky, Picasso and Jarry – see Patricia Leighton, *Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism 1897-1914* (Princeton, 1984).

[191] 'Stella Vespertina': text reprinted in *Sur l'art et sur l'art vie,* p.108. (The text was originally published accompanied by 12 lithographs.)

[192] Enda Duffy describes this 'energetic' emphasis in modernist art and literature as arising from a newly developing interest in both human and mechanized energies, and the relationship somatic behaviours and modern society. In the early nineteenth century, electro-chemistry revolutionized society, proposing, or so it seemed, that the fundamental nature of all matter was electrical, and, almost a century later, it is also key, according to Duffy, that in 1904, Albert Einstein described matter as energy – this supported, Duffy argues, an 'adrenaline aesthetics' in which the sensations of energy represent the experience of a modernity that now lacks a solid base. (See Enda Duffy, *The Speed Handbook: Velocity, Pleasure, Modernism*, (North Carolina, 2009)). Baudelaire's painter of modern life, after all, must 'enter into the crowd as though it were an immense reservoir of electrical energy' (Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (London, 1965), p.24). At the same time, in a society shifting from labour to technological service industry, a shift that renders human energy obsolete in the face of the machine, human energy is internalized and is cast, by art and literature, as stress or excitement – as in, for example, Katherine Mansfield's short story Bliss, in which the protagonist, Bertha, is propelled through the text in a series of pulses of emotionally charged energy that uplift and excite her, rendering her at times almost matter-less. (See also David Trotter 'Modernism Reloaded', *Affirmations of the Modern*, Vol.1, No.1 (Autumn, 2013).) Or the attention to heart rates, ticks, and nervous expressions used by writers such as Edgar Allan Poe or Wilkie

While the surface of *Parade* might be said to fetishize this energetic modernism, it simultaneously encloses the neurotic anxiety of this materialization of an external world.[193]

To evoke threads and wool to describe the surface of *Parade* is also to suggest a literal materiality that is highly appropriate to Rouault's work, not least in that, historically, discussions of sewing or weaving tend to place the emphasis upon the craft, upon the activity of making.[194] The stitch that mends, that draws together, sews up or over holes and gaps keeps meaning trapped in the texture and on the surface. This materiality recalls the stories 'hidden' in the woven threads of Arachne and Philomela's tapestries. In 'Un ver à soie' ('A silkworm of one's own'), Derrida opposes this materiality – represented for him by the woven prayer blanket – to the obsession in Western philosophy with veils and shrouds, and with the 'striptease' or 'revelation' (paradoxically close to 're-veiling') of truth or meaning.[195] This is another way of conceptualizing the binding of materiality and signification in Rouault's surfaces: on the one hand, their explicit construction, mark by painterly mark, sets the meanings discussed above in motion, but on the other, their refusal to unravel or unveil withholds an ultimate or stable meaning or solution. The surfaces remain open to the possibilities of meaning, staging but not fulfilling (as in Mallarmé's symbol) the

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Collins, and later, Marcel Proust, to enhance the physical intensity of experience. In these practices there occurs a kind of fetishism of speed – the apotheosis of which might be said to be the notorious terms of the Futurist manifesto, in which the 'love of danger, the habit of energy and fearlessness' are sung; the 'beauty of speed' is acclaimed in a 'hymn [to] the man at the wheel'; and the 'absolute' is declared now 'because we have created eternal, omnipresent speed.'(Filippo T. Marinetti, 'The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism', first published in Italian in Milan in 1909, reprinted in French in *Le Figaro*, 20 Feb. 1909; reprinted in Marinetti's *Selected Writings*, trans. R.W. Flint and Arthur A. Coppotelli, ed. R.W. Flint, (London, 1971), pp.39-44)

[193] Jacques Rancière describes this as 'the physiological character distinct to modern man: *le nervosisme* (neurasthenia)'. Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, trans. Zakir Paul (London & New York, 2013), p.169.

[194] Lilane Weissberg, 'Ariadne's Thread', *MLN*, Vol.125, No. 3, (April 2010: German issue), pp.661-681.

[195] Jacques Derrida 'A silkworm of one's own', in Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida, *Veils*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington, (Stanford, 2001), 17-93; also, in *On Touching: Jean Luc Nancy*, Derrida writes that the opening paragraphs of Nancy's *Corpus* resist comment or paraphrase or gloss: 'They are too rich, and their stitches too tightly woven.' Derrida, *On Touching: Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford, 2005), p.60. Brian J. Reilly writes that 'Derrida was fond of alluding to the moment in Goethe's *Faust* when the philosopher arrives at a scene of weaving. He arrives after the movement of the weaver's shuttle ("this is the delay of the philosopher") and analyzes its function. As Goethe writes and Mephistopheles says, "Students from every land think highly of this reasoning, and yet not one of them has become a weaver". Reilly, 'Derrida', *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century French Thought*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York, 2005), p.504.

process of comprehension. It is this indeterminacy that turns the opacity of the mark into an object of 'mystery' instead of a 'puzzle' – a theme that will become increasingly important in the following chapters.

Conclusion: Puzzles, Mystery, Aporia

Despite his association with the nascent detective genre, Edgar Allan Poe's tales are more concerned with exposing misconceptions of knowledge than with solving puzzles. Poe himself wondered what the ingenuity was in 'unravelling a web which you yourself [the author] have woven for the express purpose of unravelling?'[196] It has been argued that in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, Poe's concern with revealing the misconceptions that made things 'mysterious' in the first place, risks the detective, Dupin, actually explaining away the very strangeness that the Gothic tale was supposed to celebrate.[197] However, Poe's tales rarely offer a full solution: famously in *The Purloined Letter* there are significant blanks in the explanation – for example, what was *in* the letter? – that redirect the problem from puzzle towards mystery. Drawing a similar distinction, Rouault's close friend, the Catholic philosopher, Jacques Maritain, whose work is central to Chapter three, described the puzzle as:

> a logical difficulty, a tangle of concepts, twisted by a mind which another mind seeks to unravel. When the tangle has been unravelled, the difficulty solved, there is nothing further, nothing more to be known. For the only thing to be discovered was how to disentangle the threads. When Oedipus has discovered the key to the riddle, he can proceed on his way leaving the Sphinx behind him.[198]

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[196] Edgar Allan Poe cited in David Van Leer, 'Introduction', in Poe, *Selected Tales* (Oxford, 1998), p.xx.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Jacques Maritain, *A Preface to Metaphysics: Seven Lectures on Being* (London, 1939), p.5.

On the other hand, 'mystery', for Maritain, is 'the most exact description of reality'. Mystery, he is at pains to stress, is not 'the implacable adversary of understanding'; nor is an intelligible mystery a contradiction in terms (these, Maritain argues, are unreal oppositions introduced by Cartesian reason). In the act of understanding, according to Maritain (and Aquinas and Bergson to whom he is indebted here), the intellect *becomes* what is other than itself, and in the case of mystery, it plunges itself into the unknowable, attempting to grasp an 'inexhaustible reality'.[199]

The uncertainty or indeterminacy, or undecipherability, of Rouault's surfaces resist the puzzle paradigm, and take a step towards a more mysterious approach.[200] An approach that, at the same time as positing a 'new' form of visual description and therefore also proposing a new relationship between painting and so-called 'reality', also doubles the emphasis upon the surface as artifice. The concept of artifice is important for Rouault's oeuvre. Derived from the Anglo-Norman and Middle French *artifice* or *artefice*, it is the action of making, workmanship or craftsmanship, and the product of that action, an object or piece of work. It has since acquired the negative associations of the modern use of 'artificial', and is therefore also artfulness, cunning, trickery – a manoeuvre or device intending to deceive or trick. All of these resonances are entwined in the materiality of Rouault's marks because, as we have seen, the moment at which the marks seem to reveal themselves in an 'honest' declaration of themselves as something made (as opposed to the 'deception' of mimetic illusion), which has the immediate appearance of a 'truth-claim' or act of demystification, is also the same point at which this 'revelation' is found to be wrapped up in a dense nexus of potentially signifying schemas. That is to say, the laying bare of its

[199] Ibid., p.3.
[200] However, as should be clear by now, the 'abstraction' of Rouault's work is not absolute: his thick paint rejects convention but at the same time it takes these new terms to task.

materiality is found to be another dissimulating strategy within the mark. If there is a truth claim, it is in the rejection of such truth-claims and the ironic reflection this offers upon the ideology of demystification. This is a vital part of the disorientation and ambivalence in the relation between the physical mark and what it lays claim to or signifies – the result is an apparent impasse, or, more accurately, a state of aporia.

This aporia is enhanced by the conjunction of these marks with subject matter that depicts images designed to 'stand-in' for other realities, or which stand in relation to another reality or idea. The clown is exemplary of this, as a masked figure used to critique, parody and philosophize on so-called reality, but the images of Christ operate in the same way – an image of a physical being standing in for a higher power – as do the circus women and prostitutes, who all play a part in worlds that hover between the accepted and unacceptable, the real and unreal, the outside and implied-inside of society. Such playing with the notion of artifice through artifice is the subject of the next chapter, which will consider other models of the relationship between surface and depth explored in Rouault's writings and painting – and the further complications these bring to the question of his materiality.

Chapter Two: Surfaces and Depths

> At the fall of dusk, after a lovely day, when the first star, shining in the heavenly vault sent a tremor through my heart, an entire world of poetry was born to me. That circus wagon of wandering gipsies halted on the roadside, the old jade browsing the sparse grass, the aging clown seated beside his van patching his glittering motley-coloured costume, *the contrast* between these scintillating garments of entertainment and this life, *of infinite sadness*, loomed before my eyes... And then I blew up the picture, and I suddenly recognised who the 'clown' really was. It was I, you, practically *all of us*... this richly spangled costume is a gift dealt out by life; we are more or less all of us, *somewhat clowns*, wearing a 'spangled costume'. But if we are suddenly caught unawares the way I caught the old clown, why then, oh God! Who'd dare deny that his heart would be rent with infinite compassion? I have the mania, or the failing (if indeed it be a failing; in any case it is a source of ceaseless agony) of *stripping everyone of their glamorous or pompous spangled costumes*, be he the King or Emperor: with my own eyes I must peer into the soul of the man before me and the more exalted his position, the more humbly worshipped he be, the greater my misgivings for his soul... I have let myself be carried away by my intimate thoughts. I know this road is fraught with danger, with pits and snares everywhere and once embarked upon this path it is more perilous to try and turn back than to continue one's trek... To draw the essence of your art from the sight of an old crock (man or horse), supposes either 'boundless vanity' or 'deepest humility', according to the clay you are made of.[1]

This is Rouault, circa 1905, in a particularly sentimental mode, writing to Edouard Schuré (1841-1929), a French theosophist, philosopher, writer, and music critic – notably associated from 1873 with Nietzsche, and a supporter of Richard Wagner.[2] It may be that Rouault's style was particularly overwritten here in an attempt to approximate the mysticism and dramatic style of the other's writing, but his prose reaches this kind of pitch elsewhere, and showy, self-consciously apologist phrases, such as 'I have let myself be carried away', recur

[1] Rouault, letter to Edouard Schuré, circa 1905. The original is lost, but it was published in *Le Goéland* (June 1951) and reprinted in *Sur l'art et sur la vie*, p.150.
[2] Paul M. Allen, 'Introduction' to Edouard Schuré, *The Great Initiates* (London, 1980).

in his correspondence with Andre Suares and Maritain.[3] This passage is often quoted in the Rouault literature, and is usually taken as a statement of intent or even a manifesto of kinds. There is a sense that it articulates how Rouault would like his art to be understood,[4] but I would suggest that his critics have been too quick to apply the sympathy and compassion expressed here to the difficulty of Rouault's subject matter. The clown here is understandably pitiable, but the nostalgia, symbolism and particularity of this piece of writing is difficult to reconcile with the analyses of Rouault's surfaces in the previous chapter – it does not, for example, account for the explicit materiality or obscurity of the surfaces of paintings such as *Tête de clown tragique*.

The previous chapter argued for the integration of signification and materiality, the cognitive and the physical, in Rouault's increasingly thickly painted surfaces: an integration that departs from both materialism and reductive critical claims of transcendence. Such 'transcendent' readings of Rouault's work include Gaston Diehl's 1945 review, which argued that Rouault recast his models 'into types of eternal values':

> From his early beast-like figures he has passed to hieratic motifs... singular features have been moulded into absolute values, creating with powerful relief beings true to their essence. Characters constantly alike, haunting countenances of Christ or clowns...this ever-narrowing gamut is wide enough for him to convey the innumerable variations of the song of his soul.[5]

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[3] Rouault can be overly-insistent upon his own modesty; it is often claimed by critics that he did not like to speak about his work, but he fact he writes about it continually – accompanied invariably by disclaimers such as 'I should not speak', or 'I cannot write' (recalling the eloquent silence discussed in the previous chapter). Fabrice Hergott also notes this, writing that: 'Rouault is an artist who cannot help returning to himself and to his own image; his modesty does not escape becoming a kind of vanity in reverse, a declarative, even showy humility. Fabrice Hergott, 'With Rouault and Braque: on the inner paths of painting' in *Max Beckmann and Paris: Matisse, Picasso, Braque*, eds. Tobias Bezzola and Cornelia Homburg (Zurich, 1998) p. 129. See also *Georges Rouault – Andre Suares Correspondence 1911-1939*, trans. & ed. Alice Low-Beer (Paris, 1960).

[4] Later versions of it occur in the 1930s, suggesting that Rouault still subscribed to its contents as a vision of his art – even though it continues to sit against the evidence of his canvases.

[5] Gaston Diehl, 'Georges Rouault', *Les problèmes de la peinture*, (Paris : Confluences, 1945) repr. in *Rouault :Anthology of texts*, pp.19-20.

In a similar vein, Pierre Courthion wrote in a 1958 review of twentieth-century art that in Rouault's painting 'a moral order is substituted for a physical order, inner emotion for delectation, intense and significant life for spectacular pageantry'. Rouault, he declared,

> belonged to the spiritual family of Dante, Massaccio, Rembrandt; he was not a mirror reflecting nature as, for instance, Courbet had been, but rather a visionary possessing a transcendental image of reality, who invested everything he painted with a deep-piercing significance. This accounts for the lack of outward variety in his paintings, for the monotonous repetition of the faces of clowns, "Veroniques", landscapes visited, whose worth resides in what they convey rather than what they picture.[6]

What these readings have in common is their insistence upon understanding Rouault as a painter whose meaning elevates his terms, and their argument that this accounts for the 'constant alikeness' and 'monotonous repetition' of the faces or motifs. For Diehl, it is because Rouault does not need variety to express the extent of 'the song of his soul', a reading that privileges the painter's inner emotions and self expression, and similarly for Courthion, what matters is not the variety of what we see – which on the face of it might be considered monotonous – but the worth *invested in* the painting, the meaning that transcends the paint on canvas. The materiality of the canvas is by-passed, as 'pageantry' or 'physical order' for a 'deeper' significance and morality.

Such readings are difficult to reconcile with the actuality of Rouault's work. The kind of transcendence implied by Courthion is a 'seeing through' that corresponds to readings associated with more conventional perspectival compositions – an illusionistic depth that Rouault's thick, depthless surfaces indubitably deny.[7] That said, the physicality of Rouault's surfaces is embedded (significantly if unintentionally) in these readings: in phrases such as

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[6] Courthion, *L'art indépendant, panorama international de 1900 à nos jours* (Paris, 1958), p.69.
[7] See Hanneke Grootenboer on perspective in 'Reading the Annunciation: the navel of the painting', *Art History*, Vol.30, No.3, (June 2007), p.360.

'beast-like figures', 'moulded', 'powerful relief', and in Courthion's distinction between what the works 'convey' and what they 'picture'. Courthion and Diehl, that is to say, sense, though they cannot articulate it, the intertwining of meaning with surface in Rouault's work.

Of course, at least to some extent, Rouault's letter to Schuré supports the concept of his work as 'visionary' and 'possessing a transcendental image of reality'. Rouault's privileging of depth over surface in his written statement in a typically Romantic manoeuvre implies a belief in the penetration to an ultimate reality. This also recalls the 'thing-in-itself' of German Expressionism, which drew upon Arthur Schopenhauer's critique of Kant's permanently inaccessible *Ding-an-sich*[8] to allow it to be revealed through art, a modification based on an idealist notion of absolute spiritual truth.[9] Compare Rouault's 'peering into the soul' and 'stripping' away these outer layers to Franz Marc's (distinctly Schopenhauerian) declaration that art is like 'tearing the veil from the face of a mysterious person', allowing us to 'peep through the cracks in the world's surface'.[10] Or compare it to any number of French Symbolist claims for the visionary nature of art, for art's ability to see beneath the surface of things. But against this idealist transcendentalism, what is also significant about this piece of Rouault's writing is the insistence upon the costume: 'his glittering motley-coloured costume', 'these scintillating garments of entertainment', '*their glamorous or pompous spangled costumes*'.[11] Rouault may go on to lay claim to an interest in depths, but, as we have seen, this is countered by his surfaces, which resist this kind of revelation and insist upon the surface – the costume – in a way that asks, more presciently for painting, *what it means to wear a costume*, what *is* and *is not* a *mask*, and what 'depths' can be divined *in* that surface.

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[8] Kant, *Prolegema to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. P.G. Lucas (Manchester, 1953), pp.75-79.
[9] See Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea* (1819), (London, 1995 repr.2002). NB: 'Idea' is usually translated as 'Representation'.
[10] Cited in *Voices of German Expressionsim*, trans. P.G. Lucas, ed. V.H. Miesel (Manchester: 1973), p.93. See also Anne Fernihough's discussion of this in *D.H.Lawrence: Aesthetics and Ideology*, p.96.
[11] Hans Urs von Balthasar writes, with Rouault's works in mind, that 'it is in the clown that the most open image of human existence is to be found: wanderer without a homeland, unarmed and exposed, in the very ridiculousness of his costume revealed in all simplicity.' Cited in *Exploring Ecclesiology: An Evangelical and Ecumenical Introduction*, eds. Brad Harper and Paul Metzger (Michigan, 2009), p.233.

Approaching his work in this way is to take a more existential than Romantic view of his painting, but one which I would argue allows the works to speak for themselves.

Rather than denying that Rouault's paintings have anything to do with forms of knowledge akin to transcendent meaning, I will argue for their relation to a mode of 'existentialism' that partakes of such meanings whilst at the same time holding them in suspension, embedding them in the materiality of the world and suggesting that they belong to a higher or deeper kind of knowledge, one of an order beyond human cognition, attained non-rationally, and that, arguably, substitutes comprehension with apprehension or a state of un-knowing. Examining Rouault's surfaces from this perspective will allow us to see how it draws together threads of Romanticism and nihilism in what I will argue is an aesthetic based upon a profound sense of limitation. The result, I will suggest, is what we might label 'ascendency' rather than transcendence. The ascendant, as opposed to the transcendent, emphasizes the always in-vain attempt to exceed the material instead of the surpassing of it (much as the Mallarmean symbol dramatized the distance between mind and world rather than their successful union). The ascendant preserves the strife and tension of Rouault's materiality as discussed in the previous chapter, while adding a sense of the surface as a site of constraint and, at times, of anarchy.[12]

The opposition between surface and depth was a prevalent theme in turn-of-the-century philosophy and modernist literature. Key figures in these debates included Freud, Bergson, and Nietzsche, who were concerned with the distinction between 'conscious surfaces and unconscious depths', between the conceptual and the intuitive, between ordinary

[12] In this lies the logic of Pascal's wager or, contemporary to Rouault, Vaihinger's *Philosophy of As If*, a logic that will be seen to be pertinent to Rouault in Chapter four. See Hans Vaihinger, *Die Philosophie des Als Ob: System der Theoretischen, Praktischen und Religiosen Fiktionen der Menschheit* (Berlin, 1911) Vaihinger's *The Philosophy of As-If*, was published in 1911, but written more than thirty years earlier. It anticipates the pragmatic movement of Peirce, James, and Dewey. Frank Kermode, in *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford, 1967) cites Vaihinger in his account of 'literary fictions' as the consciously false (p. 40, see also pp. 37, 39, 41). His work is noted in modern academic guides to pragmatism; see *A Companion to Pragmatism*, ed. by John R. Shook and Joseph Margolis (Oxford, 2006), p. 52.

experience and a hidden realm of mental life of which we are generally unaware. [13] Rouault's surfaces never lose sight of the division between surfaces and depths, and in this sense they enter into the irresolvable conflict between surface and depth that, as the first part of this chapter will suggest, can also be conceptualized in terms of Nietzsche's theory of life as a tragic drama. Building upon the analyses of rupture, uncertainty, and integration in Chapter One, this chapter will examine various relationships between surface and depth proposed by Rouault's writings and painting. I argue that his work explores the surface as a protrusion of depth, as an imposition of order, and as embodiment or corporeality that threatens to descend into materialism. These explorations also indicate how Rouault's Catholicism can be understood as relevant and influential upon his painting, but, departing from the literature that conventionally uses his Catholicism as a starting point,[14] I want to draw out these indications from the works themselves. This will lead to a fuller examination of the theology of Rouault's painting in the next chapter.

The first part of this chapter asks, with reference to Nietzsche, what it means to think of the thick facture of Rouault's surfaces between 1902 and 1910 as mask-like, arguing that the surface-as-mask operates as a visible boundary between an ordered surface and chaotic depths. I suggest that the mask can be understood to represent a metaphysical anxiety, or profound instability, that speaks to the 'anarchy' of Rouault's surfaces and to the futility of the search for stability or truth that, apparently paradoxically, creates space for potential knowledge or insight. The second part of the chapter moves forward in time to consider Rouault's work from 1910 onwards. Examining the notion of surface and depth explored in Rouault's text 'Le Grand Pan (Rodin)' and drawing upon a comparison of Rouault's and Rilke's writings on Rodin, I argue that a fundamental model for understanding Rouault's

[13] Sanford Schwartz, *The Matrix of Modernism: Pound, Eliot, and Early Twentieth-Century Thought* (Princeton, 1985), p.4.
[14] All the existing monographs on Rouault use this approach – see introduction and bibliography.

painterly surfaces as site of longing and constraint can be derived from his writing on the sculptor. Specifically, this is a model that establishes the materiality of the work of art as the limiting factor, but which also shows the surface to be animated by the (ultimately futile) attempt to move beyond those constraints. The third part of the chapter argues that the fractured, increasingly puppet-like and dismembered bodies around which Rouault's post-war surfaces are organised are embedded in a de-animated, materialist conception of the body in modernism. It brings together, that is to say, the broader metaphysical questions posed by Rouault's work with the specifics of his historical context. In the final section I return to wider philosophical questions, suggesting that Paul de Man's 'discovery' of a materialism at the heart of the Kantian sublime offers a productive model for the materialized ascendence/'transcendence' of Rouault's work.

Part One: Masks

In the final entry of 'The Writer's Technique in Thirteen Theses', published amongst other miscellaneous pieces in 1928 as *Einbahnstrasse*, Walter Benjamin wrote that 'The work is the death mask of the conception'.[15] Implicit in this statement are two assumptions. First, and harking back to Bergsonian *durée*, briefly discussed above, it assumes that a kind of art that appears to resist 'completeness' or 'finishedness' and keeps meaning in circulation as the materiality of Rouault's skein-like surfaces have been shown to do, offers a way of keeping the so-called conception alive. Secondly, it privileges the conception over the work of art as an object in itself, and assumes that artistic intuition is superior to the made-thing. These are familiar assumptions which support the derogatory idea of the mask as something false or deceptive, something deadly to truth and something opposed to the impulse at the origin of

[15] Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings:1913-1926*, Vol.1, eds. Marcus Paul Bullock and Michael William Jennings (Harvard, 1996), p.459.

art. Conceptually, then, the mask is often wrapped up in the form/content dichotomy, and this idea of the 'mask' supposes 'unmasking' as another form of the truth-seeking 'revelation' or 'striptease' resisted by Rouault's entangled surfaces. Beginning with an examination of masked faces in Rouault's work, including the 'monotonous repetitions' noted above, this section will consider what it means to think of certain paintings by Rouault as mask-like, arguing that these contentions of falsity or deception or opposition speak to the 'work' of the mask as a boundary between order and chaos.

As the face of *Tête de clown tragique* emerges from the dark paint matter from which it appears hewn, it is impossible to be sure if it is a masked face or a 'real' face. If it seems to lean towards the latter – a strong curved line to the left of the face might indicate the edge of the mask but it is unconvincing – then it is quickly paradoxical: the overt artifice of the surface declares the made-nature of the representation; a face in paint; a kind of mask. This of course could be said to varying degrees of all paintings of faces. What is different or exacerbated in Rouault's case is that the artifice – the marks – does not lie conventionally 'between' a 'reality' and its representation, but is the medium in which all potential realities, materialities, and significances are intertwined interdependently. However, what particularly evokes the notion of the mask is that the face of *Tête de clown tragique* occurs again and again – in, amongst others, *Clown au bandonéon* (1906) [fig.52], *L'Écuyère*, [fig.8] *L'Ivrognesse*, [fig.53] and *L'Accusé* (1907) [fig.54]. The profile of *Clown au tambour* also appears on multiple occasions, including *Les Poulot* (1905) [fig.55]; both as the face of the woman and the man), both the Paris *Parade* [fig.49] and Basel *Parade*, [fig.56] *A Tabarin* (1905) [fig.57], *Fille accoudée* (1906) [fig.58], and *Clown au singe* in which the profiles of clown and monkey, depicted face to face, echo each other. As these examples demonstrate, there is no age, personality or gender discrimination in the use of this 'face' (one of the effects is to 'masculinize' the feminine face, and 'animalize' the male face), which as a result

is no longer where individuality or psychological interiority can be read. This 'defacement' turns his figures into an anonymous people, separating Rouault's project from the nineteenth-century models offered thus far, including much of Daumier's work and the kind of characterization at work in Zola.[16]

Whereas Toulouse-Lautrec's treatment of similar subject matter can be said to have contrasted the individual and their 'role', in Rouault's works the individuality and agency of the people behind the roles has all but disappeared, sacrificed to the role they are playing (enhanced by the fact that most of the titles give the role rather than a name). In one sense – and this is part of what connects the depiction of biblical figures with circus figures and prostitutes – this is because they have become 'concentrated symbols', to borrow Robert Goldwater's phrase.[17] Goldwater is describing the influence of 'primitivism' on the work of the German group, *Die Brücke*, whose work Rouault's painting anticipates in several respects (André Lhote described Rouault's 'distortions' as an example of French Expressionism and considered Rouault to have been influential, before 1910, on the artists passing through Paris who would later be described as German Expressionists[18]). As was the case for Rouault, two of *Die Brücke's* most frequent kinds of subject matter were circus and biblical scenes. Goldwater writes that:

> Superficially these have nothing in common; nevertheless both furnish an opportunity to depict emotion at a level of intensity which is rarely reached in the ordinary routine of daily events. ...Their relation is made symbolic of a type relation, of a basic human relation. ...Elsewhere, then such a clear symbol cannot be chosen, the particular, separate character of the subject is one away with... Above all, the faces are never individualized, the features being given as large un-modelled spots of colour within the area of the head. Often, as in [Emil] Nolde's *Comedy* (1920) ... it is impossible to tell whether or not certain

[16] On the other hand, it accords with their use of metonymy such as when describing the workforce as 'the hands', a similar obliteration of the individual.
[17] Robert Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Art*, (New York, 1986), p.113.
[18] Andre Lhote (1933), in *Rouault: Anthology of Texts*, p.17.

> of the figures are wearing masks, and the undetermined quality of the picture and its power to evoke meanings beyond itself are thereby greatly enhanced.[19]

Also, in *Comedy*, Goldwater notes that despite the ghost-like quality, *this* world has not been completely exorcised: 'the result is that while one is at times uncertain whether or not caricature is intended, the terrible quality of these pictures, [hints] at some underlying, basic reality which would be awful if it could but break through in its full power.'[20]

Thinking of Rouault in relation to German Expressionism offers a way of throwing into relief the difference between the kind of 'primitivism' that is arguably invoked in Rouault's work, and the interest of the central Fauve artists in primitive traditions. From 1904, Vlaminck, Derain and Matisse began collecting African art – the latter extensively. It is likely that Rouault saw this collection, as he remained good friends with Matisse after they left Moreau's studio, and also that he, like the others, had visited the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro, the first anthropological museum in Paris, founded in 1878.[21] The admiration of the Fauves for African sculpture and masks affected their iconography and technique, generally operating as an external influence, a striving for an affect that contained remnants of the romanticism of Gauguin's primitivism.[22] However, Rouault's assimilation of these influences – which in his case are harder to pin down, as images of his studio also show the presence of postcards of Egyptian and Greek art [23] – can be described as an assimilation of form or spirit, a fascination akin to that of *Die Brücke*, in what Nolde called 'its absolute primitiveness, its intense, often grotesque expression of strength and life in the very simplest

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[19] Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Art*, p.113.
[20] Ibid., p.114.
[21] See John Russell, *Matisse: Father and Son* (2001), p.100; Arthur C. Danto, *Encounters and Reflections: Art in the Historical Present*, (1997); Steve Edwards and Paul Wood, *Art of the Avant-gardes* (2004), p.162; and Rupert Richard Arrowsmith, *Modernism and the Museum: Asian, African, and Pacific Art and the London Avant-Garde*, (Oxford, 2011).
[22] This is an over-generalisation: on the nuances of the relationship between Fauvism and Primitivism: See Charles Harrison and Gillian Perry, *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century* (1993); and *Prehistories of the Future: The Primitivist Project and the Culture of Modernism*, eds. Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).
[23] Evidenced by the background of the film by J. Recupero, *Le* Miserere *de Georges Rouault*, CIO Films, 1951.

form'.[24] He imitates, that is to say, not the appearance of African and other non-Western objects but something of what he imagines is their intended effect. The suggestion of masks is not a direct borrowing from another culture, but is utterly de-localized and placed by the artist into a new context of which he is the author, the result of an 'interiorization of the conception of the primitive'.[25] This is a similar argument to that made about the 'carnivalesque': that whilst Rouault may mobilize characters (most obviously the clown) associated with carnivals and similar events, what is more important is the way in which his works perform a destabilization of categories and hierarchies, i.e. the way in which they are carnivalesque in the broadest sense.

In the theatricality of his mask-like faces, Rouault's project is closer to that of the Belgian painter, James Ensor (1860-1949), than to his French Fauvist contemporaries. Ensor (who is also credited as an influence on German Expressionism and whose career has surprising parallels with Rouault's), produced a body of works, including *Scandalized Masks* (1883) [fig.59] and *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (1888-1889) [fig.60], in which the mask is used to combine a personal sense of angst with what Elaine Shefer describes as a 'fin de siècle melancholy'.[26] Like Rouault, Ensor was interested in the figure of the mocked Christ[27] as an apt motif for the condition of modernity, and his work is also dominated by a subject matter that includes clowns, puppets, and allegorical figures. Patricia Berman describes *Christ's Entry into Brussels* as 'a bitter, eloquent, and satirical painting, [whose] manifold themes, like its cryptic form, narrate modernity itself.'[28] Part of its cryptic quality is generated by Ensor's brushwork: Berman writes that 'flouting contemporary practices of

[24] Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Art*, p.105.
[25] Ibid., p.108.
[26] Elaine Shefer, 'Masks/Personae', *Encyclopaedia of Comparative Iconography: Themes depicted in Works of Art*, ed. Helene E. Roberts (London and New York, 2013), p.579.
[27] Ulrike Becks-Malorny, *James Ensor* (Cologne, 2000), p.43.
[28] Patricia G. Berman, *James Ensor: Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* (California, 2002), p.1.

peinture claire, Ensor troweled on paint using a palette knife, scored it with the end of a paintbrush, applied it wet-on-wet and dry-on-dry, and delicately feathered it'.[29]

In Ensor's painting, as in Rouault's, the combination of theatricality with this thick materiality is disorientating. Stepping back to view the 'wider' picture of *Christ's Entry into Brussels* and stepping forward to view each of its various episodes are both flawed viewings, between which a sense of chaos or pandemonium is generated. Formally, these mask-like faces present thick, immovable slabs of paint, and at the same time, through the visibility of the activity of painting, indicate the presence of a potentially subversive energy. Ensor planned his work meticulously (evidenced by the under-drawing, described by the conservator Mark Leonard[30]), and in this, as well as their size, Ensor's works are related to the large Naturalist paintings of the late nineteenth-century Salons. The rejection suffered by *Christ's Entry into Brussels* (which was not publicly exhibited until 1929) thus signifies a subversion of this genre, which, in a manner akin to the reception of Rouault's 1896 *Christ wept over by the holy women*, 'went too far' for the contemporary audience, not least in its use of religious subject matter for a critique of modernity.

It was André Malraux (1901-1976) who arguably came closest to articulating Rouault's distance from a Fauve-like formalist interest merely in the form of primitive art, and the peculiar integration of materiality and theatricality in his painting. In 1930 Malraux wrote that: 'Rouault's models do not exist: they are but a potentiality, they will be that which his brushwork – at times crude and thickly laid, other times kneaded as in the stained glass windows of Chartres – will make of them... They are not symbols of plastic art: Rouault is not a man who strives to *see*, but a man who strives *to be*.'[31] Rouault, he added, differs from

[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid. p.7.
[31] André Malraux, 'Notes sur l'expression tragique en peinture à propos des œuvres récentes de Rouault', *Formes*, (December, 1930).

practically all the painters of his day because he does not expect to find a balance in his colours, but a *significance*; his art is not expressed in terms of beauty but in terms of existence. At the same time, Malraux divorces Rouault from the particularity and individuality of Daumier's art, and aligns him instead with Grünewald, writing that both depict not human beings but symbols 'by means of which man's spirit is freed from its obsessions; they are an act of exorcism'. Recalling the darkness of Vauxcelles' review but giving this darkness a different guise that is also suggestive of the grasping epistemology of the Mallarméan symbol, Malraux attempted to sum up Rouault's process:

> Finally there is the call of art: because you cherish the value of shapes and are aided by a professional training – you grope in the darkness for other human beings, seeking a bond with the world of differences, to mark the breach between you and the world you accuse, your confrontation with the absolute....

In describing Rouault's characters, Malraux evokes a particular theatrical tradition, writing that: 'Behind this trinity of parodies: the trollop, the clown, the judge, behind all these grim countenances, looms the shadowy cemetery of Basel, that sets its seal on the Dance of Death.' The Dance of Death, or *Danse Macabre*, is a medieval allegorical representation in which a personified Death leads people from all walks of life to the grave. Traditionally including figures such as the Pope, a king, a child, and a labourer, it has an inherent social criticism as it was designed to suggest the equality of all in the face of death. It nods to the 'everyman' quality in the resemblances between Rouault's clowns, Christs and judges, and recalls his self-confessed 'mania' for '*stripping everyone of their glamorous or pompous spangled costumes*, be he the King or Emperor'. The *danse macabre*, like the carnival, combined the omnipresent fear of death (in the fourteenth century, when it originated, exacerbated by the horror of the Black Death) and an accompanying theological desire for penitence, with an almost hysterical desire for amusement in life. Such a representation is

included in the fifteenth-century frescoes at the cemetery in Basel, and it was in Basel in 1526 that Hans Holbein the Younger drew up the designs for his famous woodcut series 'Dance of Death', a series that is often considered to have been influential on Rouault's designs for his woodcut series *Miserere*.

In these echoes of the dance and the carnival we hear again the accusations of chaos and of incomprehensible babbling levelled at Rouault's work between 1900 and 1910 – and the fear, the horror at the darkness and threat to signification which the early critics perceived in his painting. At this point, I want to propose that instead of the carnivalesque or emotional primitivism (but without excluding either), a more apt critical model for Rouault's work arises from Nietzsche – specifically the Nietzsche of *The Birth of Tragedy* (1871, translated into French in 1901) and the dialectical opposition of the Dionysian and the Apollonian.[32] In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche turns to Greek civilization and refigures the concepts of 'Will' and 'representation' as found in the work of his predecessor, Schopenhauer,[33] into 'those two gods of Art', Dionysus and Apollo. Apollo, characterized by Nietzsche as the god of light and the god of images and all plastic arts (i.e. not music, which for Nietzsche, influenced by Wagner, is a very different spirit), represents the fixity of illusion, the boundary between reality and illusion by which art is tempered and contained, a line that 'must not be absent from the image of Apollo, that boundary of moderation, that freedom from more ecstatic excitement, that fully calm wisdom of the god of images.'[34]

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[32] Nietzsche is largely absent from the Rouault literature, exceptions being Schloesser's and Gael Mooney's essays in *Mystic Masque*, ed. Schloesser, pp. 85, 96 &317. Schloesser also draws a comparison – albeit a vague one – between the two in his book on Messian (Schloesser, *The Early Life and Music of Olivier Messian* (Michigan, 2014), p.564.) Other writers, not specifically concerned with Rouault, who have noted the relevance of comparing (not necessarily likening) them, include:, p.20; and Kurt Wais, 'German Poets in the Proximity of Baudelaire and the Symbolists' in *The Symbolist Movement in the Literature of European Languages*. Nietzsche's work was well-received in France, where he was seen as a diagnostician of degeneration and a critic of the frailty of modernism. On the reception of Nietzsche in France, see Michael S. Roth in *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century French Thought*, pp.309-311.

[33] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*.

[34] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music* (1873), trans. Shaun Whiteside and ed. Michael Tanner (London, 1993), p.3.

The Dionysian, Nietzsche writes, is very different. It is analogous to intoxication, and equivalent to the 'monstrous horror' Schopenhauer describes 'which seizes a man when he suddenly doubts his ways of comprehending illusion, when the sense of a foundation, in any one of its forms, appears to suffer a breakdown.'[35] Dionysus personifies an irrational drive to dismantle form and structure, the drive of the savage dance that unifies man at his basest level, a force that erupts into the life of a society and challenges its fragile order.

> Both very different drives go hand in hand, for the most part in open conflict with each other and simultaneously provoking each other all the time to new and more powerful offspring, in order to perpetuate for themselves this contest of opposites which the common word "Art" only seems to bridge, until they finally, through a marvellous metaphysical act, seem to pair up with each other and, as this pair, produce Attic tragedy, just as much a Dionysian as an Apollonian work of art.[36]

It was the preservation through sublimation of savagery in the highest of artistic forms that Nietzsche found and admired in Greek tragedy; what Roger Scruton describes as the 'ability to look the gods of darkness in the face'.[37] The horror of the critics in the face of Rouault's 'black canvases', which they do not know how to look at, can be equated to the 'monstrous horror' experienced by the man who 'suddenly doubts his ways of comprehending illusion, when the sense of a foundation, in any one of its forms, appears to suffer a breakdown', an equation that casts the incoherence of Rouault's painting *not* as a representation of the Dionysian, nor even an interiorized primitivism or an invocation of the carnivalesque, but as arising from the dismantling of conventional form, the inherent oscillation we have described at work in Rouault's marks, and the threat this destabilizing poses to signification, which suggests a savagery at the heart of the work. The 'chaos' of

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[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid. p.5.
[37] Roger Scruton 'Continental philosophy: Fichte to Sartre', *The Oxford Illustrated History of Western Philosophy*, ed. Anthony Kenny, (Oxford, 1993), pp.216-218.

Parade and the endless deferral of meaning in *Jeu de Massacre* can be read in the same way: not as a depiction or personification of the Dionysian, but as a threatening destabilization. If the surface should act as an Apollonian boundary of moderation, as a stable illusion, it is dismantled far enough to reveal that it is an intimate binding of both forces, Apollonian and Dionysian, in contest with each other.

Although it is important to keep in mind the degree to which this aspect of Rouault's work is independent of his subject-matter, it is nevertheless interesting to note that on occasions the Dionysian operation of the works goes hand in hand with related themes. Rouault's *Polichinelle*, or Punchinello, *is* a personification of the contradictory tension between order and underlying violence, as a representation of a theatrical character complicit in all the violence and exuberance of the *Commedia dell'arte* from which he derives, and which was connected originally to the Venetian carnival (and became very popular in France during the Seventeenth Century). But the real power of the image comes not from its subject but from its nature as painting. *Polichinelle*, as discussed previously, has a weighty materiality, a surface almost ossified by the thick painterly marks that construct the clown. It is a painting in which the overwhelming presence of *paint* imposes an order, or stasis upon the surface, yet at the level of marks themselves the surface is deeply unstable, oscillating between paint and clown. The *Commedia dell'arte* was characterized by its masked 'types'[38] and traditionally Polichinelle dressed in white and wore a black mask denoting his representation of both life and death. Although again in Rouault's work it is not clear if the clown is wearing a mask, either way, the face has mask-like qualities in the heavy features and emphatic planes. If this is Polichinelle 'unmasked', the effect of the whole surface in and of itself is mask-like and repressive.

[38] See 'Commedia dell'arte', *Encyclopaedia of Italian Literary Studies*, Vol. 1, eds. Gaetana Marrone and Paolo Puppa (London and New York, 2007), p.499.

Related to the darkness and horror the presence of the Dionysian places at the centre of the Apollonian project, the mask has an inherent fear associated with it. The modern term is understood to derive from the Middle French word *masque*, meaning to cover or to hide the face, which derives from the Medieval Latin *masca* meaning 'mask, spectre or nightmare'. From here the origins are unclear, but the possibilities are all related to performance and artifice, from the Arabic 'buffoon' or the verb 'to ridicule', to the Old French *mascurer*, to 'black the face'. There is always the possibility that there is something fearful beneath the mask – or there is nothing, which is worse (this, I think, is the great fear of Rouault's critics), or there is another mask (*Polichinelle* is made up, potentially, of layer upon layer of masks). Theatrically the mask enables animation, but it stands equally for the inanimate; the dolls that come to life in *Coppelia*, for example, enact such a subject/object dilemma that is a source of uncanniness and fear.

On the one hand, then, the mask represents the search for order. To return momentarily to Benjamin's description of the work as the death mask of the conception, to consider the surface in terms of the mask is one way of bringing the savagery of Rouault's surfaces under control. As a mask, the surface sits at the point of disintegration of its fragile unity, declaring its own deception in dismantling its meaningful structures to a level of obscurity, but refusing to give way to the 'unmasked'. But on the other hand, the mask is an illusion, an instrument of order that inherently admits disorder or chaos. The threat to signification posed by the opaque terms of the surface-as-mask paradoxically opens up a greater threat, one posed by the unknown or even an absence that might be revealed if the surface were to give way. Like the image of the skein in the previous chapter, the surface-as-mask is another way of complicating the search for 'truth' or, in this case, of covering the void or chaos. But it is in this void, or in the acknowledged presence of it, or perhaps even in the form of the covering which is in itself a description of the void, that meaning resides, and

where, if it could be faced, a reading into the unknown would begin. The structure of the surface-as-mask, then, containing the warring principles of destruction and construction, offers another way of understanding the way in which Rouault's surfaces violate the possibility of fixity or certainty. The mask-like surfaces unsettle conventional attempts at interpretation in a manner analogous to that of the skein-like surfaces, but they invoke a different kind of anxiety. The surface-as-mask implies deception – possibly self-deception – in which the mask constrains that which we cannot know or do not want to attempt to know. This formulation indicates the influence of Pascal on both Nietzsche and Rouault.[39] Writing of the futility of the search for stability which is always illusory, Pascal declared: 'Let us, therefore, not seek certainty and stability. Our reason is always deceived by inconstant appearances; nothing can affix the finite between the two infinites [of being and nothingness] that both enclose and escape it.'[40]

Surface and depth are bound up in the notion of the mask, in which the possibility of exceeding the materiality of the surface is confounded by the fiction of the mask as order. Instead, what should be embraced are the potentials suggested by the mask; the non-rationality of the darkness 'behind'. In the next example, the surface is similarly held to be a 'third entity', as we encountered it in Mallarme's terms, but one that is less potentially nihilistic. The material limitations of the surface are also the animating force as the work of art strains against the surface-as-matter. Arguably, considering the surface as a site of constraint in Rouault's writings opens up descriptive or discursive possibilities that are

[39] Nietzsche, T.J. Clark writes, was fond of quoting Pascal, who said 'said that without God – without Christianity – "you, no less than nature and history, will become for yourselves un monstre et un chaos."' T.J. Clark, *Picasso and Truth* (Princeton, 2013), p.190: Rouault refers to Pascal several times in *Sur l'art et sur la vie* (pp.103 & 108) and Courthion writes that Rouault was an avid reader of the *Pensees* (Courthion, *Rouault*, p.53.). See also J.H. Broome, *Pascal* (London, 1965) and Dorothy Eastwood, *The Revival of Pascal: A Study of His Relation to Modern French Thought* (Oxford, 1936).
[40] Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, trans. A.J. Krailsheimer, rev.ed. (New York, 1995), p.199. See discussion of this anxiety and Daniel Rops response in Schloesser *The Early Life and Music of Olivier Messian*, p.209.

unavailable for the thick static surfaces discussed above, but I will endeavour to turn the questions posed by Rouault's writing onto his painting.

Part Two: Rouault, Rodin, Rilke: The surface as a site of longing and constraint

Rainer Maria Rilke's (1875-1926) monograph on Auguste Rodin (1840-1917), written in 1902, whilst the Bohemian-Austrian poet and novelist was employed as a secretary to Rodin in Paris, is well known.[41] Through careful attention to the sculptor's process, Rilke's poetic ekphrasis of his work describes Rodin's discovery of the surface as 'the fundamental element of his art', the 'germ of his world', out of which 'everything must rise'. According to Rilke, the surface, as opposed to narrative or to form or contour, became the 'subject matter of [Rodin's] art, the thing for which he laboured, for which he suffered, and for which he was awake.'[42]

Almost completely unknown, however, is Rouault's writing on Rodin. Rouault was a prolific and, at times, a peculiarly poetic writer. On 16 November, 1910, *Mercure de France*, the literary review revived at the end of the nineteenth century by Alfred Valette and associated with the Symbolist movement, published four articles by Rouault, including; 'Le Grand Pan (Rodin)'.[43] The style of these pieces is best described as free indirect discourse; obscurely poetic even when it becomes clear that Rouault is writing in a fictional first-person voice, as if he is the artist that is the subject of each text. This 'stream-of-consciousness' was so successful in the case of one of the other articles, entitled '"Noli me Tangere" (Cézanne)', that a number of critics assumed it was an account of a conversation that had taken place

[41] See most recently Jacques Rancière, 'Master of Surfaces: Paris 1902' in *Aisthesis*, pp.155-170; also *A Companion to the Works of Rainer Maria Rilke*, eds. Erika A. Metzger and Michael M. Metzger (New York, 2004).
[42] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Auguste Rodin*, trans. Jesse Lamont and Hans Trausil (New York, 1919), p.23. Rilke posits this discovery as occurring during the period that Rodin spent in Belgium, which places it during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1871.
[43] Georges Rouault, '"Noli me Tangere" (Cézanne)', *Mercure de France* (16 Nov. 1910). Reprinted in *Georges Rouault : Forme, couleur, harmonie* exh. cat. ed. Fabrice Hergott, (Strasbourg, 2007), pp.23-25 & 27.

between Rouault and Cezanne, and when it was republished in *Sur l'art et sur la vie* a footnote was added to clarify that, in fact, the two painters had never met, and that the piece was entirely fictional.[44] Although they are prose articles not poems, mythological, theological, and metaphorical figures are woven throughout each piece in a manner that (albeit somewhat awkwardly) resembles the beautiful but difficult nature of Symbolist poetry.

There are some striking similarities between Rilke's and Rouault's texts: Rouault explicitly casts Rodin as Pan, and Rilke clearly suggests an archetypal resemblance between the sculptor and the mythical figure of Pan; they also both dwell upon the mutilated and isolated body parts in Rodin's oeuvre. Although Rilke and Rouault were in Paris contemporaneously, they do not seem to have known each other,[45] but it seems likely that Rouault, who was widely read, would have encountered Rilke's work on Rodin and may well have borrowed some of his interpretation of Rodin from the poet.[46] What is significant to my discussion is that both Rouault and Rilke use Rodin's work as a way of both engaging with and moving away from Romanticism, and Rilke's increasing focus on the surface as subject matter provides a useful comparison to Rouault's version.

The opening of 'Le Grand Pan (Rodin)' is obscure: Rouault launches into his subject with dramatic effect, and describes the god Pan – who, from the title, we assume to be Rodin.

> Attaché à la terre comme Prométhée à son roc, Pan est l'âme même de la Nature ; il peut comprendre, sentir et aimer comme Jupiter dans l'Olympe. Son âme est grande et mélancolique, c'est un demi-dieu enchaîné. [Attached to the earth like Prometheus to his rock, Pan is the very soul of nature; like Jupiter on

[44] *Sur l'art et sur la vie*, p.55.
[45] Rilke appears to have taken no notice of Rouault at all, only in 1915 does his passion for Picasso's pre-1905 images of Harlequin emerge in his letters. As secretary to Rodin he would doubtless have met a lot of people, but his French was initially poor, especially in conversation, and Rouault was notoriously anti-social. See Naomi Ritter, *Art as Spectacle: Images of the Entertainer since Romanticism* (Missouri, 1989), p.153.
[46] I can find no direct evidence of this. Alternatively, it is possible that it was Bourdelle and not Rilke that prompted Rouault's comparison. In 1910, the same year as Rouault's article, Paul Gsell recalled meeting Rodin at the Salon de la Société Nationale in Paris, where they viewed a figure of the god Pan by Rodin's former student Emile-Antoine Bourdelle, which Bourdelle had 'whimsically carved in the likeness of Rodin'. Paul Gsell, *Rodin on Art and Artists* (New York, 1983), p.112.

> Olympus, he has the ability to understand, feel, and love. His soul is great and melancholic, like a chained demi-god.] [47]

These are grandiose terms in which to introduce Rodin: Rouault describes Rodin-as-Pan with reverence, setting up the older artist as an object of admiration – indeed, almost also of myth. Four of the subsequent paragraphs begin with the words 'Ô Pan', and although it is not Rodin who is addressed each time, the effect is to create the sense of a reverent lament. Rilke also casts Rodin as Pan (albeit less explicitly), finding Rodin's archetypal likeness in his evocation of the 'old sage' Pan who was Psyche's mentor. Rilke writes of 'that deep agreement with Nature, which is characteristic of Rodin',[48] implying the same connection between the sculptor and the god as Rouault would, and, as Daniel Polikoff notes, drawing upon the idea of Pan as 'the preeminent God of Nature, the archetypal embodiment of all Nature represents – including endless creativity'.[49] Rouault's opening lines also establish the central themes of craftsmanship and earthly materiality, through the comparison to Prometheus – a Titan worshipped by craftsman and said to have made humankind out of clay – and the deep attachment to the earth of the mountain and cave-loving Pan, god of herds and flocks.

This earthly attachment occurs within an opposition that is typical of Rouault's writing – in this case, the Titan Prometheus is opposed to Jupiter, the god of the skies. Pan, it seems, contains these oppositions, he is like both, and consequently is 'chained' like a 'demi-god'. On the one hand, this dichotomy captures the dual character of Pan, which is absent from Rilke's image of the gentle sage. However, Pan's ubiquitous sexuality and disorderly energies also find expression in Rodin's work, and Rilke found Rodin's skill a necessary

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[47] Georges Rouault, 'Le Grand Pan (Rodin)', *Mercure de France*, (16 Nov. 1910): repr. in *Georges Rouault : Forme, couleur, harmonie*, p.23.
[48] Rilke, *Auguste Rodin*, p.26.
[49] Daniel Joseph Polikoff, *In the Image of Orpheus: Rilke: A Soul History*, (Illinois, 2011), p.335.

power over the 'tormented conflicts... in the realm of the invisible'[50] – a duality comparable to Nietzsche's conception of the necessary suppression by the Apollonian of the Dionysian.[51] On the other hand, the opposition of the earthly and material with a longing for transcendence, and the notion of constraint in 'enchaîné', also describes the condition of the work of art in which expression and meaning are limited by, but also closely wrapped up with, the materiality of the medium.

Writing of Rodin's *L'Eternelle idole* [fig.61] that 'the material texture of this creation encloses a living impulse as a wall encloses a garden'[52], or when describing *La Pensée* [fig.62] as 'a transcendent vision of life that rises slowly out of the heavy sleep of the stone',[53] Rilke articulates a similar notion regarding both the material constraint of the matter of the work of art and the intimate conjunction in the making of the work and in the final object between matter and expression.[54] This concept of an animating force working from within the material is approached by Rouault again in his second paragraph, in which he, addresses a Greek sculpture of Pan directly. Although the voice does not obviously change, there is a sense (derived from the context of the piece as a whole) that this is both Rouault and Rouault's imagining of Rodin reflecting upon the work:

> Ô Pan contemplant ta main brisée et ton corps mutilé, œuvre d'un statuaire grec inconnu, je sais que l'ouvrier qui fit cette œuvre, d'une forme si pure et si parfaite, communie en ce moment avec moi au-delà des siècles. Celui-là comprit la joie de l'effort passionné, la beauté mystérieuse cachée aux yeux profanes, l'ardente vie tout ce qui semble inanimé et mort. [O Pan, contemplating your broken hand and mutilated body, the work of an unknown

[50] Rilke, *Auguste Rodin*, p.35
[51] Gael Mooney reads the reference to the 'demi-dieu enchaîné' as Rouault playing upon the title of another of Jarry's Ubu plays, *Ubu enchaîné*, a play that embodies the union of opposites, in which Ubu, the king of Poland, takes on the role of a slave – at once being enslaved, and, ironically and typically for Jarry's topsy-turvy world, enslaves those he demands to serve. *Mystic Masque*, p.213 n.18. By 1910, Vollard had approached Rouault about illustrating Jarry's character, so this reading is highly plausible, and the irreverence it adds to Rouault's use of mythological figures is a juxtaposition typical of him.
[52] Rilke, *Auguste Rodin*, p.42.
[53] Ibid. p.52.
[54] Ibid. p.38.

> Greek sculptor, I know that the worker who made this work, of a form so pure and so perfect, communes with me across the centuries. He understood the joy of passionate work, the mysterious beauty hidden to profane eyes, the fire of life in all that seems inanimate and dead.]

Rouault also draws a connection here between the classical and the modern – in spirit and impetus – and relates the mutilated sculptures of Rodin's oeuvre – hands, torsos – to the kind of beauty that survives in a statue weathered over the centuries until it has lost its 'finished' beauty to reveal qualities that remain innate, derived from the intimate union of form and material.[55] The dead matter of the stone is brought to life by this internalized expression – something commonly observed about Rodin's work, which was understood to have moved away from academically exact modelling to embrace a spatial complexity and a series of planes and gestures capable of indicating internal forces at work.[56] Rodin, writes Rilke, 'knew well that the most essential element of this work was a thorough understanding of the human body.'

> He explored its surface, searching slowly, until a hand stretched out to meet him, and the form of this outward gesture both determined and was expressive of forces within the body. ...And in the end, this surface became the subject of his study.[57]

Rouault clearly saw Rodin's work through the lens of his own painterly interests. His description of the sculptor's oeuvre and of the classical fragments he imagines him to have contemplated stands in close relation to the nature of his own canvases. The thick embodiment of both the 'spaces' and figures of Rouault's surfaces create surfaces that are

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[55] For Rilke, one of Rodin's greatest innovations was to discover that a sense of entirety is not necessarily reliant upon completeness: 'the artistic whole need not necessarily coincide with the complete thing ...new values, proportions, and balances may originate within the [work of art].' Hence, Rilke adds, the number of hands among Rodin's works – hands that without belonging to a body are alive. Rilke, *Auguste Rodin*, p.39.
[56] Albert E. Elsen and Rosalyn Frankel Jamison, *Rodin's Art: The Rodin Collection of Iris & B. Gerald Cantor*, ed. Bernard Barryte (Oxford, 2003), p.180.
[57] Rilke, *Auguste Rodin*, p.19.

body-like in themselves, moulded and formed. The process, of course, is a two-way one. If Rouault sees Rodin in terms of his own painting, that painting itself is formed in part in response to Rodin. Rouault does not produce studies of single limbs, but in a painting such as *Clown au tambour* the savagely articulated red arm, dislocated from the logic of a coherent whole body which instead is a mass of black and blue patches, echoes Rodin, though perhaps assuming a different significance: the limb takes on an almost machinic autonomy – appearing as much as like a lever as an arm. Similarly, in *Rue de la solidarité,* and *Baptême du Christ* (both 1911) [figs. 63 & 64], the figures are simultaneously fragmented into roughly outlined parts and merged into one organism by a clinging quality, a coherent necessity driven by the thick black marks and opaque patches of the painted surface. It has been suggested that the black lines of *Rue de la solidarité,* and *Baptême du Christ* resemble those of stained glass windows – a reading supported by the fact that Rouault was apprenticed to a stained-glass maker before entering the Ecole des Beaux Arts.[58] However, where this reading reduces the lines to place-holders or contours, understanding these surfaces as analogous to an animated body pays greater attention to the ways in which these surfaces operate as coherent entities.

[58] For this reading see Dorival, *Rouault*, p. 47, and Gaffney, 'Georges Rouault: "The Monk of Modern Art"', p.387. Dorival writes that the lines that 'stretch, snarl themselves in tangles, and dash, as it were, across the paper, tracing, with a sure stroke, arabesques and contours that describe and recapitulate the form, [are] – like the leading in medieval windows – strong points supplying the work[s] with rhythm, cadence, and a decorative quality.' And Gaffney describes the 'mass, solidity and colour of [Rouault's] work is almost opalescent', adding that: 'In all mediums he uses his blacks almost as though they were frames to support and contain the brilliance and daring of his colour... If one examines closely a Rouault canvas, it will be found encrusted with blobs, layers and striations of solid paint, so that not only is the effect like that of stained glass at a distance, but it even looks and feels like glass when one gets near enough to see the surface texture. The paint looks and feels like old, rough and corroded glass by reason of tiny dots of lighter paint which have been splattered all over the colour.' What is particularly interesting about the comparison to stained-glass is that in the first place it inherently denies a sense of depth, by concentrating on the material qualities of the surface and approaching the surface from a more purely aesthetic angle, turning the surface into a decorative object. Whilst this attention to the material qualities of the surface is interesting, it is an approach that brings Rouault's work under control by sidelining the subject matter. Stained-glass is also designed for contemplation, and as a genre employs, in the second place, the transparency, the lighting and the seeing-through as part of its meaning. The metaphysical poet George Herbert explained this concisely in his 1633 poem *Elixir*, when he wrote of the possibility of attaining beatific vision via the contemplation of glass: 'The man who looks on glass/On it may stay his eye; /Or if he pleaseth, through it pass, /And then the heaven espy.'(George Herbert, *The Elixir*, 1633) This possibility dialectically opposes the 'opaque darkness' and all its consequences as experienced by critics such as Vauxcelles in the face of Rouault's paintings.

Rue de la solidarité depicts a destitute family in a rundown street in the suburb of Belleville, while *Baptême du Christ* is, as it states, the scene of the baptism of Christ. Both are contained scenes, painted on round canvases and significantly abstract in composition to need the titles as clarification of the content. However, the abstract and 'contained' effects of these works are predominantly caused by their heavily textured surfaces. The whole surface of *Rue de la solidarité* is fractured into patches (dominated by blue) and short sinewy black strokes that work to tie the surface into a closely woven whole that strains, if not dissolves, differentiation between figure and ground. The figures are indicated by incoherent parts, arms, roughly demarcated faces, and the shape of shoulders, but these merge into the ground because the ground, which includes houses, an indication of a wall and poster, and a patch of sky, is treated in the same bodily way – divided into similarly limb-like bits and pieces and structured by the skeletal-like framework (a kind of deformed grid) that unifies the whole surface.[59]

Haptic associations are created between the limbs of the figures and the shapes in the street, between the eye sockets on the faces and the dark windows on the house fronts. In the same way, the surface of *Baptême du Christ* repeats the sinuous outline of the bodies at the baptism (identifiable as John the Baptist and Christ with two others) in the water, in the suggestion of a tree following the circular edge of the canvas, and in the loose indications of the sky. Many of the shapes within these lines echo the central arm, of John, raised in blessing over Christ. The variation between the surfaces is mainly on account of the media used; *Baptême du Christ* is in watercolour, ink, gouache and pastel – a combination that varies the textures across the surface but reveals the layering – while *Rue de la solidarité* is in oil, which creates a much thicker, more unified texture. This texture, which shapes the

[59] This reading is supported by Gaëtan Picon's analysis of Rouault and by Hergott: see Gaëtan Picon, 'Les lignes de la main', *Nouvelle Revue Française*, (Paris, 1969) and Hergott, *Georges Rouault: The early years*, pp.30-31.

flattened non-modelled space of the painting, emphasizes the embodied quality of the surface in its appeal to the tactile, to human touch, as part of the way vision negotiates these surfaces. In this sense, *Rue de la solidarité*, particularly, resembles the powerful forms of Rodin's figures on *The Vase of the Titans* [fig.65], in which, as in Rouault's painting, narrative, emotion, and relief are all condensed into the gestures and configurations of bodies. The animation of the surface of *Rue de la solidarité* and *Baptême du Christ* arises from this limb-like embodiment of the surfaces – an 'embodiment' that can be understood according to Rilke's analysis of the 'completeness' of Rodin's work:

> Just as the human body is a whole for Rodin insofar as all its limbs and powers respond to one common (inner or outer) movement, so do the parts of the various bodies come together of inner necessity to make up a single organism. An hand lying on the shoulder or thigh of another body no longer belongs completely to the one it came from: a new thing arises out of it, and the object it touches or grasps, a thing that has no name and belongs to no one. [60]

Towards the end of 'Le Grand Pan (Rodin)', Rouault returns to the question of the 'constraint' of the material and posits the animating force as the impulse to *strain* against this chained condition. This time, explicitly writing as Rodin, Rouault explains that it was this very constraint that struck him (Rodin) as 'le grand frisson passionné de mes Titans brisés, pantelants du rêve qu'ils firent d'escalader les cieux [the great passionate thrill of his shattered Titans, straining after their dream of climbing to the heavens].'

In the 1870s, Rodin made several figures for the work known as *The Vase of the Titans*, figures whose powerful forms and gestures express their inner torment, as do the motifs of raised arms and legs, and lowered or obscured heads. Defeated by Zeus (or Jupiter) the Titans were imprisoned in Tartarus, an underworld so dark that its gloom has its own personification – Erebus. This, of course, is the same underworld of Vauxcelles 1904 review,

[60] Rilke, *Auguste Rodin*, pp.40-41.

where he described Rouault as a 'misogynous dreamer who plunges into the depths of Erebus'.[61] Erebus also has an inherent dualism: spawned from the primordial chaos, Erebus later fathered (with Nyx, the goddess of the night) Aether and Hemera, the upper air and day. If, for Rodin, the surface was that from which 'everything must rise': the effect of this imagery in Rouault's writing is to posit a dark, material world from which everything must *attempt* to rise. This narrative of imprisonment and unfulfilled promise of light renders the surface a site (and sight) of tension or constraint, between weighty corporeality and the tenuous fragility of longing to transcend or move beyond the physical and the dark. Rilke writes of Rodin's *L'Eternelle idole* that 'something of the mood of a Purgatorio lives within this work. A heaven that has not yet been reached, a hell is near that has not yet been forgotten.'[62]

This state of tension and of constraint offers a useful model for Rouault's painting. The thick materiality of Rouault's surfaces seemed to his original critics to oppose signification with an opaque materiality that threatened to replace meaning with matter, but, as we have seen, instead of denying signification, Rouault's painting refuses to resolve itself either as representation or as abstraction. It remains uncertainly suspended between the two – a suspension that both acknowledges the materiality of the work and provokes a critique about the assumptions of representative meaning. In *Tête de clown tragique* the clown emerges from the dense paint matter but is never separable from it, so that meaning – the 'clown' – is irrevocably located in the physicality of the surface. It is, as Rilke writes of Rodin's *La Méditation* (*Voix intérieure)* [fig.66] 'enwrapped within itself', in a 'gripping gesture' that 'reaches beyond' itself.[63] The face of the clown and the bodies of *Rue de la solidarité* and *Baptême du Christ* are bound up with the material, the thick paint, in which

[61] Louis Vauxcelles, *Gil Blas*, October 14, 1904.
[62] Rilke, *Auguste Rodin*, p.43.
[63] Ibid. p.38.

they emerge in a manner that resembles the way Rodin's *Caryatid* (1880) [fig.67] bears the heaviness of the marble. Rilke writes of the *Caryatid* that 'the whole stone lies like the insistence of a will that is greater, older, and more powerful, a pressure, which it is the fate of this body to continue to endure'[64] - a statement that plays (as Rodin's work does) upon the tradition of the caryatid as a sculpture that serves as an architectural support.[65] Vitruvius famously suggested that the caryatid represents both the slavery of the women of Karyae and, more generally, the origins of the sculpture in a block of marble.

However, where Rilke consistently insists upon the 'inner' force of Rodin's work making itself visible upon the surface ('Never', he writes at one point, 'was the human body assembled to such an extent about its inner self'[66]), it is not clear that Rouault always understands the surface of the work in these terms. In the middle of 'Le Grand Pan', he departs from the motifs discussed thus far and turns to a vocabulary associated with Bergson, and *durée*. In 1903, Bergson wrote in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* that 'There is, beneath these sharply cut crystals and this frozen surface, a continuous flux',[67] and it is this statement that Rouault echoes in 'Le Grand Pan':

> Comme le plongeur habile traverse les abîmes de l'Océan pour chercher la perle dont une femme coquette et vaine se parera demain, ainsi j'ai pénétré au cœur de la nature pour en extraire la forme cachée nouvelle et sensible [Like the skilful diver who plunges into the depths of the ocean to find the pearl with which the coquettish and vain woman will adorn herself, so I have penetrated the heart of nature to extract new hidden sensible forms]

Rouault's image of the artist as retrieving forms from the hidden depths suggests a process of extraction or abstraction instead of protrusion: instead of someone who allows an inner force

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[64] Ibid. p.52.
[65] Originating in ancient Greece as a female sculpted figure that took the place of a supporting column or pillar.
[66] Rilke, *Auguste Rodin*, p.38.
[67] Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, p.25.

to emerge on the surface, the artist is depicted as a fixer of forms that indicate, but are distinct from, the flux or volume beneath. However, Rouault's imagery also departs significantly from Bergson. Rouault, or Rouault's Rodin (the identity of the speaker here is impossible to determine), is a maker of forms derived from nature, deliberately crafted; forms that, Rouault adds, are 'like the pearl with which the coquettish and vain woman will be adorned'. This sentence turns the work of art from a vision of the depths of nature towards something far more self-consciously decorative – even overtly superficial.

It seems strange that Rouault should add this here after discussing 'hidden mysteries' and the attachment of the artist to the depths of the earth. The 'decorative' was an unstable term in the early twentieth century, and often wielded as a criticism of the superficiality of the overt materiality of the modernist surface. In this sense, Rouault's statement sounds rather like the criticism offered by Georg Simmel in his 1908 essay 'Adornment'. Simmel, who also wrote about Rodin and the aesthetic attractions of mutilation and ruin, observed that the modern allegiance to jewels had shifted from framing or conforming to the idiosyncrasies of the face or body, to a new form of selfhood in which the self is modelled upon the 'markers of prestige' that we have acquired.'[68] Rouault's affirmation of the artifice of art might also be taken as signalling an allegiance to the modernist concern with the status of the surface as opposed to the Romantic emphasis upon depth. This is partly right, but as we have seen repeatedly, he is not interested in mere surface. Rather he mobilizes the notion of the jewel, and relatedly of surface, to deny the possibility of any straightforward reading of the 'interior' of the work. In *this* sense, Rouault's 'pearl' opposes Bergson's 'crystal' imagery: the transparency of crystals (a vestige of Romanticism) can suggest a Kantian or Platonic

[68] See Plotz, 'Can the Sofa Speak?', and Georg Simmel, *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*, eds. David Frisby and Mike Featherstone (London, 2000), p.55-108. Simmel observed that modernity was characterized by a 'painful separation' through which life 'becomes increasingly objective and impersonal', due to the fact that 'objects, in their development, have a logic of their own – not a conceptual one, nor a natural one, but purely as cultural works of man; bound by their own laws, they turn away from the direction by which they could join the personal development of human souls.'

denigration of the material world, a desire to be able to read through the world (or the work of art) to some deeper and purer/more essential meaning.[69] Rouault's statement refuses this idea, and opposes the constructed quality of his painting to the chiselling of sculpture. The tone of longing in Rouault's writing, added to by the fact that the next paragraph begins with the repeated lament 'Ô Pan', suggests that Rouault yearns to be able to do what Rodin did – to bring matter to life – but instead of the elemental force of Rodin's surfaces that reveals an 'inner life', Rouault turns his penetrative vision of nature into layer upon layer of paint.

This tension between conception or meaning and the limiting or constraining presence of paint can also be seen in Rouault's landscapes. *Paysage* (1907) [fig.68] is painted in tempera on card, a choice of materials that renders the surface especially thick, viscous, and weighty. Apart from the upper horizontal quarter, which is more thinly painted in pale blue to represent the sky, the rest is an example of the oscillation in Rouault's surfaces between representation and abstraction. Layer upon layer of mainly horizontal slab-like daubs of paints have been applied, and the scuffed appearance of the pale blues on the surface betrays the texture of the layers beneath. Pale and dark blue and black marks are interwoven, creating a horizontal rhythm broken by the occasional patch of red, and most obviously, by the church steeple in the upper centre that breaks the horizon and the tongue-like path that drops away from the steeple. This tongue, applied in one stroke, does not create a sense of perspective or depth; it does not recede, but is a descending slash of red paint on a flat (albeit heavily textured) plane, roughly denoting a path. The undulations of the surface do not correspond to particular geographical details, but create a sense of the undulations of the landscape – they appear 'felt', or 'filled out', in an empathetic sense,[70] rather than pictured. As such, the sculptural or relief-like qualities of the surface could be described as the protrusion of inner

[69] See Fernihough, *DH Lawrence: Aesthetics and Ideology*, p.97.
[70] As in the sense developed by Lipps and then Worringer, see Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy* (1907), trans. Michael Bullock (Chicago, 1997).

volumes, but at the same time, the emphatic 'applied' quality of the layers of paint upon the surface correspond to Rouault's image of the abstracted or extracted forms from the depths of an empathetic experience of nature. Such an experience, however, is not made fully present. Instead it is sensed as a potentiality, something for which the artist longs.

The theme of 'longing' in Rouault's writing has several threads. On one level it has an inherent sense of nostalgia – supported by the elegiac repetition of phrases such as 'Attaché à la terre' and 'Ô Pan' or 'Ô grand Pan' at the beginning of sentences and paragraphs. As the article continues, this nostalgia appears as a longing for a lost sense of form. This kind of longing is also found in a subterranean streak in the collection of essays by György Lukács, published in 1910, the same year as Rouault's article on Rodin. In Lukács, this longing appears as a desire for order, a longing for a form that will complete itself in a future time, but it is also a form of longing that rejects, or implicitly denies, the very possibility of complete form (and therefore order).[71] The elision in Rouault's writing between the modern and the classical – such as in the simultaneous evocation of the 'chained demi-gods' Pan and Ubu, analogous to order and chaos respectively – implies a similarly inevitable failure.[72] For Lukács, form is always in a bind with life: neither the 'truths' or forms of art are in place prior to the act of expression. Examining Lukács' early essays, Butler writes that: 'life gives rise to form, but form is understood to distill life; life wrecks the distillation, only to open us to the ideal that form itself seeks to approach, but cannot.'[73]In this way, Lukács is not only

[71] See Debra A. Castillo, 'Georg Lukács: Forms of Longing', *Criticism*, Vol. 28, No. 1, (Winter 1986), p.89: see also, Georg Lukács, *Soul and Form* (1910), eds. John T Sanders and Katie Terezakis (New York, 2010). These early works by Lukacs are prior to his exposure to Marxism, which led to his conversion to Bolshevism in 1918. In *Soul and Form*, 'soul' retains romantic and spiritual connotations which later became virtually impossible for him.

[72] Rouault adds: 'Si l'Égypte a laissé les grands sphinx mystérieux, la Grèce le Parthénon, le Moyen Âge ses cathédrales, que laisserons-nous ? [If Egypt gave us the great mysterious sphinx, Greece the Parthenon, and the Middle Ages the cathedrals, then what is it, Rouault asks, that modernist art has to offer?]' At the same time, against this nostalgia, Rouault offers an answer – in the form of Rodin's mutilated works – and the article is, to some extent, both an endorsement of modernity as it appears in the figure of Rodin and a lament by Rouault on the inadequacy of his own art to find an appropriate form for the modern age; it is a way of giving authority to Rodin through association with the past, but also of presenting a new paradigm and, in the multiple voices of the writing, of undermining the notion of a single authority – a notion that can be said to be engaged with modernist anxieties about authenticity and self-hood.

[73] Butler, 'Introduction' to Lukács, *Soul and Form*, p.5

narrating a transition from romanticism to realism, but 'excavating the remains of romanticism with the field of a realism irreducible to positivism.'[74] This, I think offers an illuminating perspective to Rouault's process. Rouault's surfaces negate the poetics of romanticism – which brings romanticism close to modernism as its exhausted other – resulting, as we have said, in a state of tension. In terms that bring Lukács' work extraordinarily close to the anxiety of the mask and the straining ascendancy discussed above, this tension or negation is characterized by Lukács as a mask that represents 'the struggle to be recognized and the struggle to remain disguised'[75] or later as a 'gleaming hardness, a soaring gravity'.[76] Rouault's process is, at all junctures it seems, inevitably flawed or grounded.

The change in emphasis between the nostalgic longing of Rouault's writing and the material constraint of his painterly surfaces narrates a transition to a modernism that is opened to both the possibilities of meaning and, in its straining or grasping, to the possibilities of unattainable meaning. The surfaces 'stage' the emergence of meaning and a holding-back. In a parallel move, Rilke's work, undoubtedly influenced by his encounter with Rodin, changed from a highly subjective lyric poetic to the 'thing-poems' (*Dinggedichte*) of *New Poems* (published in 1907), which were crafted so as to shape and form the materiality of both language and poetic form. As Jacques Rancière notes, the poet insisted upon Rodin's work as a new 'mode of materialization for thought'.[77] Bringing Rouault's writing on Rodin to bear upon his painting supports the reading of his surfaces as both an exploration of the expressive possibilities of a surface that lays bare its material conditions, and as painting that

[74] Ibid. p.10.
[75] Ibid. p.112.
[76] Ibid. p.126.
[77] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, p.157.

embraces its state of uncertainty, straining against the very materiality it simultaneously celebrates.

Part Three: The De-Animate Materialist Body

The dislocation of the body parts in *Clown au tambour* and the fragmentation of *Rue de la solidarité,* and *Baptême du Christ* are qualities that become more pronounced in Rouault's work after 1910, and particularly during and after the First World War.[78] In *Trois clowns* (1917) [fig.69], for example, the three figures are fragmented into marionette-like parts, limbs divided and costume-less so that they appear mechanically joined, as if armoured, divorced from the natural movement associated with the human body. Although the limb-like embodiment of *Rue de la solidarité* and *Baptême du Christ* animates these surfaces, it also shifts the meaningful emphasis to the gestural language of the body, and that by 1910 Rouault (like Rodin and Rilke) resists the totality of the ideal body is evidenced in his writing by his reiteration of the incomplete nature of the sculpture of Pan: 'Ô Pan contemplant ta main brisée et ton corps mutilé,'; 'cette main et ce corps mutilé'; 'Ô Pan mutilé'; and finally, raising the mutilated torso to the level of the sublime, 'Ô Pan mutilé et sublime'.

I want in this section tentatively to propose a reading of this aspect of Rouault's work in relation to war and capital, a reading that I will once again bring to bear on more

[78]'The war years – bringing displacement, scarcities, bombings, and uncertain future for his four young children – strained Rouault.' See *Cezanne to Picasso: Ambroise Vollard, Patron of the Avant-Garde* exh.cat. eds. Rebecca A. Rabinow, Douglas V. Druick (Metropolitan Museum of Art New York, 2007), p.163. Rouault did not serve in WWI, but was deeply affected by the hideous slaughter of his generation: during the war years he found it difficult to paint, undertaking the print series *Miserere* for Vollard instead. 'Rouault was instrumental in safeguarding Vollard's stock during the war years. At Vollard's request Rouault spent days scouting the French countryside for a potential safe-house'. He then arranged for the travel and storage of hundreds of works by Cezannes, Degas, Gauguins, Renoirs, and others at Saumer, in the Loire Valley. (ibid. p.164) . See also *A Companion to World War I* ed. John Horne (Oxford, 2012), p 345; *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (Cambridge, 2000); *Violence, Transformation and the Sacred*, eds. Margaret Pfeil and Tobias L. Winright (New York, 2011); *Georges Rouault's Misesere et Guerre: this anguished world of shadows* exh. cat. eds. Holly Flora and Soo Yun Kang (Museum of Biblical Art, 2006) .

metaphysical questions. On account of his Catholicism, Rouault's work is sometimes allied to the politically conservative ideologies associated with the revival of classicism (associated with monarchism and Catholicism) and with a French tradition of art described by Charles Maurras, a dominant figure in *L'Action Française*, as a return to the values of 'order, of rigour... of submission to the rule and to the tradition of classicism.'[79] But Rouault's surfaces speak to a non-rational cognition that Maurras rejected, and his work is embedded in the literary and artistic avant-garde, which, as Henry Mead has pointed out, Maurras condemned. In addition, Rouault's politics embrace a peculiar synthesis of conservatism and socialism that, as a figurehead for the renovation of long-standing conservative attitudes, Maurras opposed.[80] Rouault's puppet-like or mutilated aesthetic, exemplified by *Trois Clowns*, speaks, as this part of the chapter will argue, to both a peculiar modernist materiality and an intrusion of the material that, in its very corporeality, indicates the emphasis upon theological 'fallenness' in his work.

Both Hal Foster and Maud Ellmann have written about the significance of the fractured, mutilated body for modernism. In the aftermath of World War I, in the shock of 'military-industrial mass death'[81], they suggest that it assumes a particular pertinence within a vocabulary of reaction and recovery in the face of the carnage, the 'mud and mutilation',[82]and the 'body-in-bits'[83] of the war. The reaction is two-fold, as both writers identify two conflicting tendencies in post-war art: on the one hand, the machinic tendency of Surrealism,

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[79] For accounts of Action française, see René Rémond, *The Right Wing in France* (Philadelphia, 1971), pp. 233-53; Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism: Action Française, Italian Fascism, National Socialism* (London, 1965), pp. 29-141; Samuel Osgood, *French Royalism under the Third and Fourth Republics* (The Hague, 1960), pp. 54-136; Eugene Weber, *Action Française: Royalism and Reaction in Twentieth Century France* (Stanford, 1962); Edward R. Tannenbaum, *The Action Française: Die-hard Reactionaries in Twentieth-Century France* (New York, 1962); Paul Mazgaj, *Action Française and Revolutionary Syndicalism* (North Carolina, 1979).

[80] Henry Mead, *T.E. Hulme and the Ideological Politics of Early Mode*rnism, D.Phil Thesis (Oxford, 2011), p.171.

[81] Hal Foster, 'Prosthetic Gods', *Modernism/Modernity*, Vol. 4, No. 2, (1997), p.6.

[82] Maud Ellmann, 'More Kicks than Pricks: Modernist body-parts', *A Handbook of Modernism Studies*, ed. Jean-Michel Rabaté, (Wiley, 2013).

[83] Ellmann, 'More Kicks than Pricks'. This is also a plausible reason why Rouault's paintings found a more sympathetic audience in the 1920s. See Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism*, p.230.

which 'specialized in macabre bouquets of body-parts, such as Hans Bellmar's mangled dolls,'[84] and 'looked to the very mechanization of the modern body for a new principle of corporal order'[85]; and on the other hand, 'various returns to the figure, often neoclassical in nature ...[that] proffered the nostalgic balm of an imaginary body that was pellucidly intact'[86] and that 'emphasized the body's defensive musculature'[87]. At base, Foster argues, '*both* tended to treat the body as if it were already dead, an uncanny statue in the first instance, an uncanny mechanism in the second – that is, *as if the only way for the body to survive in the military-industrial epoch of capitalism was for it to be already dead, in fact deader than dead.*'[88]

In this de-animation, in which the body and the machine are bound up in resistance in the name of the natural body or acceleration towards a post-natural body, Foster reads 'the psychic underpinnings of the double logic of the technological prosthesis that governed the machinic imaginary of high modernism: the machine as a castrative trauma *and* as a phallic shield against such trauma.'[89] It is tempting to apply such terms to Rouault's work. The broken figure of the clown on the right of Rouault's *Trois clowns*, with its Christ-like lowered head that is both humble and humiliated, and the limp, broken body of the worker-soldier-clown, might be seen as echoing Foster's trauma, just as the armour-like structure of the prosthetic bodies of this and the central clown shields the identities and bodies – if there are any – underneath. *Trois clowns* was painted during the war years, and this double embodiment increases in Rouault's circus figures, Crucifixion scenes, and landscapes of the 1920s and 1930s. However, the bodies in *Clown au tambour*, or *La Rencontre* (1909) [fig.70], *Baigneuses*, (c.1910) [fig.71], and *Trois juges* (1913) [fig. 72] can be said, as Foster

[84] Ellmann, 'More Kicks than Pricks'
[85] Foster, 'Prosthetic Gods', p.7.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ellmann, 'More Kicks than Pricks'
[88] Foster, 'Prosthetic Gods', p.7.
[89] Ibid. p.8.

says of the Vorticist and Futurist work of Wyndham Lewis and F.T. Marinetti, not only to *predate* the full formation of this subject after the war, but also to '*prepare* it in the sense that they imagine it artistically and incite it politically'.[90] In the case of Marinetti and Lewis, this, in the forms of the exploded and paranoid bodies respectively, imagines and incites the machine as an agent of fascist organization. 'Incitement' is not the right term in Rouault's case, however. His pre-war dismembering of the body can be read as a constriction of the body under capitalism, and – as much modernist 'fracturing' was retrospectively read – as an image of a splintered society that led inevitably to the mutilation (bodily, politically, nationally, socially) of the war.

At the end of his paper, Foster asks whether it could be that the very stake of high modernism involves wagers such as these with reification and death? Rouault's paintings, I think, would answer yes – both at the level of painting (at the level of the surface) itself, and in terms of the figures of modernity he represents. Foster concludes:

> I see such figures of reification and death approached and/or averted everywhere in European art of this time – not only in the dysfunctional automatons of dada and the dismembered mannequins of surrealism (what Lewis called "Hoffmann puppets"), but also in the machinic men of socialist constructivisms and the scarecrow-statues of fascistic neo-classicisms (what Lewis called "robot-men" and "living statues"). This is not to suggest some grand zeitgeist – that this period marches in lockstep to the death drive. But it is to hear, below the noisy appeals of the time, the various quests for the New Man as well as the various returns to the Old Humanism, the insistent call of the inhuman.[91]

If notions of the 'inhuman' seem to resonate with Rouault's work, so too do other aspects of the period's art and literature – for example, the disunity of the 'leaking, bleeding, bruising, swelling, flaking, breaking, rotting' of the modernist body identified by Ellmann in Joyce, Kafka, and Beckett, to name a few. Ellmann links this aspect to the medieval

[90] Ibid. p.9.
[91] Foster, 'Prosthetic Gods', p.30.

grotesque body, 'defined by Bakhtin 'as an unfinished and open body without clearly delineated boundaries', a body replaced by the 'closed' body of the Renaissance. According to this argument, Ellmann writes, 'the medieval imagination was obsessed with the body's holes and orifices, along with its bumps and sores, whereas the Renaissance shifted attention to the skin and musculature.'[92] Against the insistent call of the inhuman, this is a grotesquely human body, but it is also identified with the 'chill rigidity of lifeless matter'. Focusing upon modernist attentions to the 'foot', Ellmann draws upon Georges Bataille's argument that the foot is '"psychologically analogous to the brutal fall of man," because this organ grounds the body in the earth, mocking the head's aspirations to the sky.'[93] In Bataille's essay 'The Big Toe' (1929), he points out 'that our faces rise up into the light whereas our feet sink into the mud; hence we speak of having "feet of clay".'[94] The 'indelible division of the universe' that Ellmann notes here, 'into a subterranean hell and a celestial heaven', recalls the imagery of Rouault's *Le Grand Pan*. For Ellmann, the modernist foot 'testifies to the disenchantment of the world, the subordination of spirit to matter, grace to gravity.'[95]

To briefly pursue this literally: the number of images of feet that appear in Rouault's oeuvre is surprisingly small – many of his works depict figures from the knees or waist up, and in scenes such as *Christ en banlieue* (1920-1924) [fig.73] the figures are indicated so vaguely that we cannot see the feet. In some of the early circus scenes, such as the fan-design *Numéro de cirque* [*La Femme canon*] (1905) [fig.74], the effect is to destabilize the visual space, adding to the irreality of the scene. But by the 1930s, paintings such as *La petite famille* (1933) [fig.75] and *Danseuse* (1939-1944) [fig.76], the figures have the feet of

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[92] Ellmann 'More Kicks than Pricks'
[93] Ibid. Krauss also discusses this in *The Optical Unconscious*, pp.184-6
[94] See Georges Bataille, 'Le Gros Orteil', *Documents*, No.6, 1929 : also in Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939*, (Minnesota, 1985), pp.22-23. See also Winifred Menninghaus, *Disgust: Theory and History of a Strong Sensation*, trans. Howard Eiland and Joel Golb (New York, 2012), p.443; Rina Arya, *Abjection and Representation: An Exploration of Abjection in the Visual Arts, Film and Literature* (New York, 2014); and Jesse Goldhammer, T*he HeadlessRepublic: Sacrificial Violence in Modern French Thought* (Cornell, 2005), p.158.
[95] Ellmann 'More Kicks than Pricks'.

Ancient Egyptian frieze figures, which anchor them within the highly decorative surfaces of these works, but are also detached 'parts' within the parts of the surface. We have also encountered Ellmann's 'foot' in Rouault's writings: in his reconstruction of his youth, Rouault wrote that he 'wandered, by day, by night, barely supported by my two feet', an account that aligns Rouault with other modernist city-walkers such as Joyce's Bloom in *Ulysses*, Woolf's Mrs Dalloway, or Zola's Claude Lantier. Here Rouault's feet connect (reconnect) him to the matter of the modern world, and barely maintain the uprightness of life and spirit.

The relevance of such ideas to Rouault, though, goes deeper than these iconographic links. Metaphorically, I suggest that Rouault's rejection of easel painting operates in a similar fashion to Bataille's notion of the mockery of the head by the foot, and Rouault's increasingly thickly painted canvases, which he stands above with brushes caked in paint, become a mud-like substance into which the painter sinks his hands and tools. The art that follows is a 'fallen' art, an art accused of reducing everything to matter. Ellmann adds that for Bataille, 'Man's secret horror of his foot ...derives from [its] obscene proximity to earth and death, to the dust to which our dust eventually returns.'[96] (Gaeton Picon wrote that Rouault's thick impasto and weighty pigments 'evoke the earth just as our flesh is earth'.) Rouault's embodied surfaces cling onto a kind of unity derived from the sense of an inner necessity or force figured in the multiple encounters between bodies of matter and light in the limb-like surfaces. They strain away from the earth – like the Titans straining after their dream of climbing to the heavens – from disintegration into dust or pure matter. But in the dismembered nature of these limb-like surfaces, in the depiction of prosthetic figures, and the 'de-animation' that this represents, Rouault's work 'owns-up' to its imprisonment in matter.

[96] Ellmann 'More Kicks than Pricks'

We noted above that it is tempting to relate such qualities to Rouault's historical context – to the First World War or to the violence visited upon the worker's body by capitalism. Those resonances are, I think, relevant to his work. But this 'de-animation' can also be understood in terms of wider philosophical and theological concerns. The image of imprisonment has overtones of Gnosticism, which holds that all 'matter' is evil, and that the body is a prison to escape from (a view that encourages a mind-body split). In 'Base Materialism and Gnosticism' (1929), Bataille suggests that Gnosticism manifests 'a sinister love of darkness', a 'monstrous taste' for the obscene, for the lawless, and an obscure demand for an irreducible baseness.[97] It is possible to see Bataille's Gnostic features in Rouault's work: the bodies of women (which will be discussed further in the final chapter) in Rouault's early twentieth century work were described by their original viewers as monstrous and obscene, and in terms comparable to the bumps and sores of the medieval grotesque body. But the straining, limb-like surfaces demonstrate a similar shift away from the grotesque towards the skin and musculature that Ellmann associates with the Renaissance body, and in Rouault's oeuvre this represents the suspension of his work between base materialism and ascendency. This aligns the tension in Rouault's work between surfaces and depths, dark and light, the material and the ascendant not with Gnosticism but with the 'fallenness' of the human condition.

Thinking about Rouault's work in these terms, paying particular attention to the 'bodily' as the key to giving way, or threatening to give way, to a de-animated materialism, allows us to see how the 'transcendental image of reality' that Courthion perceives in Rouault's oeuvre is disrupted. Following Paul de Man, I would argue that this is because this 'transcendental image of reality' is based upon a causation that is ultimately meaningless, that is not of the order of metaphysics, that *cannot* represent the infinite, and which has no

[97] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, p.48.

meaningful relation to the 'effect' that is imposed upon it as its own. Such a disruption – a key aporetic moment – occurs for de Man in Kant's third *Critique*,[98] in which Kant's 'sublime vision' or 'architectonic vision', his 'looking at the world just as one sees it (*wie man ihn seht*)', is revealed to be 'an absolute, radical formalism that entertains no notion of reference or semiosis.'[99] The bottom line, de Man writes, 'in Kant as well as in Hegel, is the prosaic materiality of the letter'.[100]

De Man 'discovers' this materialism in trying to reconcile the concrete representation of ideas with the 'pure ocular vision', which is 'how things are to the eye and not to mind', or '*Augenschein*', or 'the world as one sees it'. Why this concrete representation, 'this incarnation of the idea', has to occur, is first of all a 'quasi-theological necessity', de Man writes, 'that follows necessarily from our fallen condition. The need for aesthetic judgement and activity, although it defines man, is the expression of a shortcoming ...There would be no need for it "if we were creatures of pure intellect".[101]' This incarnation of the idea is mediated by the imagination, which translates the abstractions of reason back into the phenomenal world of appearances and images. [102] It is because of the involvement of the imagination that the vision which is 'how things are to the eye and not the mind' is not a literal vision. It is best described by Kant himself, in the passage that de Man also cites at length:

> If, then, we call the sight of the starry heaven *sublime*, we must not place at the basis of our judgment concepts of worlds inhabited by rational beings and regard the bright points, with which we see the space above us filled, as their suns moving in circles purposively fixed with reference to them; but we must regard it, just as we see it, as a distant, all-embracing vault. Only under such a representation can we range the sublimity which a pure aesthetical judgment ascribes to this object. And in the same way, if we are to call the sight of the

[98] NB: the reading of Kant here is de Man's, and has been taken to task by Jonathan Loesberg but my concern here is de Man's argument.
[99] Paul de Man, 'Kant's Materialism', *Aesthetic Ideology* (Minnesota, 1996), p.128. (Hereafter *AI*.)
[100] *AI* p.90.
[101] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J.H. Bernard (London, 1931), pp.111
[102] *AI* p.84.

> ocean sublime, we must not think of it as we [ordinarily] do, as implying all kinds of knowledge (that are not contained in immediate intuition). For example, we sometimes think of the ocean as a vast kingdom of aquatic creatures, or as the great source of those vapors that fill the air with clouds for the benefit of the land, or again as an element which though dividing continents from each other, yet promotes the greatest communication between them; but these furnish merely teleological judgments. To call the ocean sublime we must regard it as poets do, merely by what strikes the eye – if it is at rest, as a clear mirror of water only bounded by the heaven; if it is restless, as an abyss threatening to overwhelm everything.[103]

Key to this vision is that it lacks teleology or purpose, it is '*aesthetic'*, it is a construct without significance,[104] which de Man calls at one point a 'stony gaze'[105] and at another 'a *material* vision'.[106] The predominant perception in this passage, de Man notes, 'is that of the heavens and the ocean as an architectonic construct.' Jonathan Loesberg writes that for de Man, 'both the presence of the building metaphors and the strange way they operate is part of the special materialism of this passage, a materialism which differs as much from any notion of literalism or seeing nature plain as it does from the usual notion of Kantian form as containing inner significance.'[107] Kant does not transform the sky into a vault; it is not a vision of the sky *as* vault, but a vision of a huge vault. Thus, there is no information, no mimetic or reflective claim upon nature, in the aesthetic vision – hence, de Man can write that 'Kant's looking at the world just as one sees it (*wie man ihn seit*)' is an absolute, radical formalism that entertains no notion of reference or semiosis'[108]: a radical formalism that de Man calls 'materialism'. The final argument for the presence of this materialism in Kant (as opposed to de Man's imposition of it) is the third example of sublime vision given by Kant. 'After lingering briefly over the aesthetic vision of the heavens and the seas,' de Man writes,

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[103] Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, pp.110-11.
[104] Jonathan Loesberg, 'Materialism and Aesthetics: Paul de Man's *Aesthetic Ideology*', *Diacritics*, Vol. 27, No. 4, (1997), p.90.
[105] *AI* p.127.
[106] Ibid. p.83.
[107] Loesberg, 'Materialism and Aesthetics', p.91.
[108] *AI* p.128.

'Kant turns for a moment to the human body: "The like is to be said of the sublime and the beautiful in the human body. We must not regard as the determining grounds of our judgment the concepts of the purposes which all our limbs serve and we must not allow this unity of purpose to influence our aesthetic judgment (for then it would no longer be pure)..."[109]' De Man continues:

> We must, in short, consider our limbs, hands, toes, breasts, or what Montaigne so cheerfully referred to as "Monsieur ma partie", in themselves, severed from the organic unity of the body, the way the poets look at the oceans severed from their geographical place on earth. We must, in other words, disarticulate, mutilate the body in a way that is much closer to Kleist than to Winckelman...We must consider our limbs the way the primitive man considered the house, entirely severed from any purpose or use.[110]

While, as Loesberg points out, severing the ocean from its purposes does not necessarily produce this savage[111] anti-organic materialism:[112] 'severing the parts of the body from their functions really does create an oddly dismembered portrait'.[113] The remains are not an aesthetic of organic form (as for Winckelman) but mere, unanimated, body parts (such as the dismembered limbs and prostheses of Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater*).[114] This, for de Man, is the 'pure materiality of *Augenschein*, of aesthetic vision'.[115] To appreciate the significance of this, de Man adds, 'one must remember that the entire project of the third *Critique*, the full investment in the aesthetic, was to achieve the *articulation* that would guarantee the architectonic unity of the system. If the architectonic then appears, very near

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[109] Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p.111.
[110] *AI* p.88.
[111] T.J. Clark's description of de Man's materialism in 'Phenomenality and Materiality in Cézanne', *Material Events: Paul de Man and the Afterlife of Theory*, p.97, and in 'Freud's Cézanne', *Farewell to an Idea*, p.166.
[112] i.e. an organic reading of the vault still remains possible.
[113] Loesberg, 'Materialism and Aesthetics', p. 94.
[114] Loesberg adds that De Man's comparison of the body viewed as without animating purpose to the house viewed apart from purposes, incidentally, gives new support to de Man's reading of how to take Kant's ocean and sky. The vault might be a metaphor for some purposive unity without purpose but only if we construe the vault according to its purposes. The relevance of the wild man's view of the house becomes clear: he in fact sees vaults as Kant says poets view skies and oceans. And the total effect of such a regard becomes clear when we turn our regard upon the body and see a set of severed body parts' Ibid.
[115] *AI* p.88.

the end of the analytics of the aesthetic, at the conclusion of the section on the sublime, as *the material disarticulation* not only of nature but of the body, then this moment marks the undoing of the aesthetic as a valid category.'[116]

What de Man proposes, then, is a counter-aesthetic of the sublime that, in seeing the world without purpose or teleology, de-animates that world, reduces it to matter. This disruption of the transcendence of the sublime has an equivalent in the order of language:

> Whenever the disruption asserted itself, in the passage in the non-teleological vision of nature and of the body ...whenever, then, the articulation [of the architectonic unity of the system] is threatened by its undoing, we encountered a passage [...] that could be identified as a shift from a tropological to a different mode of language. [...] To the dismemberment of the body corresponds a dismemberment of language, as meaning-producing tropes are replaced by the fragmentation of sentences and propositions into discrete words, or the fragmentation of words into syllables or finally letters.[117]

Such 'aesthetic traps', de Man writes, do not seem to occur in Kant on first sight, but they are there: one will soon find how 'decisively determining the play of the letter and of the syllable, the way of saying (*Art des Sagens*) as opposed to what is being said (*das Gesagte*) – to quote Walter Benjamin – is in this most unconspicuous of stylists.' Note that this reverses the assumption which Courthion insists upon when he writes that the worth of Rouault's paintings resides 'in what they convey' as opposed to 'what they picture'. To make such a reversal, is to say that the transcendence of the vision is undone by being reliant not upon the laws of the mind, but upon the linguistic (or painterly) structures that have their own laws, laws that are not necessarily within the author's control. This is not an unveiling of some

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[116] Ibid. pp.88-89, my emphasis added. T.J. Clark posits this materialism in the painterly units that make up Cézanne's *Mont Sainte-Victoire* paintings, and it is this that I take Clark to mean when he writes of *Mont Sainte-Victoire seen from Château Noir* (c.1900-1904) that it is 'The least habitable, the most anthropomorphized. The most like a body, the least like an organism.' Clark, 'Phenomenality and Materiality in Cezanne' pp.97-98. And also what he means by asking if Cézanne's marks 'end up proposing another account of matter and sign altogether, in which the grounding of painting practice in the stuff of the world – the world of sensations and experiences – gives way to something darker? Something "suspect and volatile", maybe fundamentally blind.' (Ibid. pp.93-93.)

[117] *AI*, p.89.

deeper truth, reality, or knowledge, but the revelation of what Loesberg calls 'an artifice through which to delineate the artifice in that version of aesthetic form that claims to be natural, to be organic.'[118]

There are two main points to be raised from this discussion in relation to Rouault's surfaces: firstly, and broadly conceived, de Man's 'discovery' of a materialism at the heart of the Kantian sublime emphasizes the binding of the prosaic materiality of the letter and the mark to signification and to the work of the imagination. Signification is not eliminated, but limited, and bound – as Rouault's surfaces demonstrate – to the unavoidably concrete terms (and their limits) of art. These concrete terms are also, of course, the basic units of construction of any literary or artistic experience, since without the letter, the syllable, the word, the sentence, and finally the text, could not follow. Secondly, in his discussion of Rodin via Pan, Rouault grounds his own discussion of transcendent visions in the materiality of the earth: Rouault's Rodin is 'Attaché à la terre' but longing for the heavens. If the deep significance that Courthion sees in what Rouault's works convey is aligned to this 'longing', the inherent unattainability and the sense of loss that must be repeated in each demonstration of 'longing' emphasizes the separation between the paint and the 'effect' that is imposed upon it as its own. This is the problem we began this discussion with, that the so-called 'transcendental image of reality' is *disrupted* because it is based upon a causation that is not of the order of metaphysics, but is a concrete incarnation that follows necessarily from our 'fallen' condition.

[118] Loesberg, 'Materialism and Aesthetics', pp.97.

Conclusion: Negation of Permanence

The constraint and longing of Rouault's surfaces, which motivates the remnants of a Romantic aesthetic in pursuit of an interrogation of modernism, question what de Man calls 'the ontological priority of the sensory object'.[119] In Rouault's thick painterly terms there appears, at least initially, to be 'a return to a greater concreteness', and a presence in painting of objects or things that seems to restore to painting a 'material substantiality' which had been partially lost. At the same time, however, and because this concreteness is not that of Courbet's materialism, the structure of painting becomes increasingly complex metaphorically and semiotically. I am invoking de Man's analysis of the imagery of Romantic poetry here, because his argument offers a further and compelling model for understanding Rouault's modernism.[120] For de Man, 'An abundant imagery coinciding with an equally abundant quantity of natural objects, the theme of imagination linked closely to the theme of nature, such is the fundamental ambiguity that characterizes the poetics of romanticism. The tension between the two polarities never ceases to be problematic.'[121]

In brief, de Man's argument is that this poetic language seems to be driven by a desire to draw closer and closer to the ontological status of the object – and the development of the language is determined by this drive – it is essentially a paradoxical movement, condemned in advance to failure. It fails because the existence of the object in poetic imagery is, in itself, a sign and admission of the absence of the object, and because poetic language 'can do nothing but originate anew over and over again; ...unable to give a foundation to what it posits except as an intent of consciousness.' This negation of permanence in an attempt to

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[119] Paul de Man, 'Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image' in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York, 1984, repr. 2013), pp.1-17. (Hereafter *RR*)

[120] It is important to add here that this does not render Rouault's painting *literary*: here, as elsewhere in his work, the conjunction of matter and signification, is involved in a kind of meaning-making that is arguably closer to the concerns of literary modernism in the early twentieth-century than to concerns usually associated with painting.

[121] *RR* p.2.

enforce it becomes an 'endlessly widening spiral of the dialectic'.[122] Of course, Rouault's works offer very different material to the natural imagery de Man is generally concerned with in romantic poetry – such as the rocks and cliffs of Wordsworth's *Prelude* – but the 'concrete' bodily terms of Rouault's paintings discussed above can be read as an attempt to draw closer to the object itself.[123]

As the preceding chapters have been at pains to emphasize, Rouault's facture makes no instrumental claim upon nature. However solid or stable these marks appear, this stability is undermined by the nature of the marks or brush strokes themselves, which are at once critical events, singular and intrusive, and the implementation of threads or structures of signification. In foregrounding the materiality of the painting, Rouault emphasizes the complexity of his painterly vocabulary, which undermines the 'material substantiality' his paintings initially appear to restore. In de Man's terms, Rouault's works are engaged in a negation of permanence in an attempt to enforce it, which becomes an 'endlessly widening spiral of the dialectic'.[124]

This ambiguity, this dialectic, which reasserts the supremacy of the order of nature[125] (the object – the real world is always 'out there', but is received mediated by the imagination), is another way of understanding the tension that keeps meaning in play on

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[122] *RR* p.6.
[123] Jeremy Spencer writes that: 'The body in painting ...would seem to allow us to move beyond the mediations of the ideological realm of artistic representation where medium is no longer the substitute for flesh but is flesh. With its apparent power to restore to us the thing itself directly and in its immediacy we can imagine painting closest to an art of embodiment'; Spencer, 'The Bodies and Embodiment of Modernist Painting', *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, Vol. 5, No. 3, (2006), pp.229-242: Spencer's argument is interesting, but I would argue, as I think de Man does, that this point is based upon a fallacy. On attempts to draw closer to the 'object', see the discussions in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency and Politics*, p.245; *Noesis: Essays in the History and Philosophy of Science, Philosophy of Language, Epistemology and Political Philosophy*, eds. Stephen Rainey & Barabara Renzi (Cambridge, 2005); Keith Lehrer, *Art, Self and Knowledge* (Oxford, 2011); Thomas Baldwin, *The Material Object in the Work of Marcel Proust* (Bern, 2005); Richard Shusterman, *The Object of Literary Criticism* (Amsterdam, 1984); Jeff Mitscherling, *Roman Ingarden's Ontology and Aesthetics* (Ottawa, 1997); and *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, eds. Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek & Graham Harman (Melbourne, 2011).
[124] *RR*, p.8.
[125] Ibid.

Rouault's surfaces – and it could be said to be a particularly nineteenth-century aspect of Rouault's work. De Man writes that:

> Nineteenth-century poetry re-experiences and represents the adventure of this failure in an infinite variety of forms and versions. It selects, for example, a variety of archetypal myths to serve as the dramatic pattern for the narration of this failure; a useful study could be made of the romantic and post-romantic versions of Hellenic myths such as the stories of Narcissus, of Prometheus, of the War of the Titans, of Adonis, Eros and Psyche, Prosperine, and many others; in each case the tension and duality inherent in the mythological situation would be found to reflect the inherent tension that resides in the metaphorical language itself.[126]

Despite the modern urbanity of his subject matter, Rouault's work (supported by the imagery in his writing) can be seen to be working – failing – within this tradition. Certainly it is closer to this ambiguity or dialectic than it is (despite initial appearances) to what de Man calls the 'poetics of "unmediated vision"'. This is the unmediated vision implicit in Bergson, which proposes that matter and imagination may be fused 'by amalgamating perception and reverie, sacrificing ...the demands of consciousness to the realities of the object.'[127] This is also the kind of vision that lies behind narratives of the overt materiality of the mark as an unrehearsed, direct expression of the individual.[128]

De Man is sceptical about such unmediated vision. 'Critics who speak of a "happy relationship" between matter and consciousness', he notes, 'fail to realize that the very fact that the relationship has to be established within the medium of language [paint] indicates

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[126] *RR* p.7.
[127] And, de Man adds, explicit in Bachelard.
[128] See, for example, the discussion of Fauvism in John Golding, *Visions of the Modern* (California, 1994), pp.40-42; the discussion of painting's relationship to the world in Richard Shiff, *Cezanne and the End of Impressionism: A study of the Theory, Technique, and Critical Evaluation of Modern Art* (Chicago, 1984); Catherine Bock-Weiss, *Henri Matisse: Modernist Against the Grain* (Pennsylvania, 2009); Stephen Zepke, *Art as Abstract Machine: Ontology and Aesthetics in Deleuze and Guattari* (New York, 2005), pp.148-149; Richard Brettell, *Impressionism: Painting Quickly in France, 1860-1890* exh.cat (National Gallery, 2000); Brettell and Anne-Birgitte Fonsmark, *Gauguin and Impressionism* exh.cat (Copenhagen, 2006);
René Huyghe, 'Matisse et la couleur', *Formes*. Vol.1 (Jan. 1930); and Alastair Wright's complication and disputation with these claims in *Matisse and the Subject of Modernism*, chapter 2, pp. 55-90.

that it does not exist in actuality.'[129] And Rouault's painting exhibits the same scepticism, never giving itself up, as romantic thought and poetry often did, to the 'nostalgia for the object' that made it 'difficult to distinguish between object and image, between imagination and perception, between an expressive or constitutive and a mimetic or literal language.'[130] Once again his work is closer to Mallarmé: the alternating empathy and alienation that Rouault's surfaces elicit, and which the romantic poet experiences towards nature, become, in Mallarmé, the 'conscious dialectic of a reflective poetic consciousness.' As in Rouault's skein-like surfaces, or the sinewy surfaces of *Rue de la solidarité* and *Baptême du Christ*, even when the object nearly vanishes under the strength of the poetic or painterly language, this dialectic does not challenge the supremacy of nature but reasserts it. Mallarmé's conception and use of imagery is entirely in agreement with this, for him the sea, the night, the constellations etc are not primarily literary emblems, but receive their meaning and function from the fact they are taken from 'au répertoire de la nature'. 'In the poetry,' de Man continues, 'they may seem to disincarnate to the point of becoming pure ideas, yet they never entirely lose contact with the concrete reality from which they spring.'[131] Rouault's surfaces, to borrow D.H. Lawrence's 1929 description of Cezanne's painted apples, acknowledge that 'matter *actually* exists'; stubbornly resisting the dematerializing associated with an aesthetics of transcendence.[132]

Mallarme's consciously poetic language interrogates the world from which his imagery is taken, whilst also experiencing the priority of nature as a threatened failure. Rouault's painting paints in the face of this threat, representing over and over again, in an

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[129] *RR* pp.7-8.
[130] Ibid.
[131] *Ibid*. pp.8-9.
[132] D.H. Lawrence, 'Introduction to these Paintings' in *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D.H. Lawrence*, ed. Edward Macdonald (London, 1936) p.568; cited and discussed in Fernihough, *DH Lawrence: Aesthetics and Ideology*, p.3.

attempt to grasp the 'excess' of meaning.[133] Against the somewhat hedonistic embrace of painterly materiality in the early twentieth century, this, I think, is what Rouault's clown stages: *is* there anything behind the mask, behind the glittering costume? Does artifice amount to more than its own construction? Rouault's painting does not claim or lay hold of the modern world, but reaches out to it, *grasps* towards what meaning there might, or might not, be in it. That this materiality speaks to the 'fallenness' of the human condition and that the object of contemplation must be of a concrete order, mediated by the senses, is the subject of the next chapter.

[133] For another way of thinking about this threat and its containment (or not), see Derrida, 'Economies de la crise', *La Quinzaine Litteraire*, Vol. 339 (August 1983), pp.4-5.

Chapter 3: The Double Nature of Art & The Aesthetics of Jacques Maritain

In his 1883 book, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* Nietzsche offered the following advice to Cartesians: 'To the despisers of the body will I speak my word... soul is only a word for something about the body. The body is a big sagacity, a plurality with one sense, a war and a peace, a flock and a shepherd.'[1] This clear rejection of the split between mind and body theorized three hundred years earlier by Descartes, was part of a significant move in the late nineteenth century towards what Amelia Jones describes as 'an understanding of the body as inexorably enmeshed in the mind or soul and vice versa; the soul... could thus no longer be unproblematically imagined as transcendent or unbounded by corporeality'.[2] Jacques Maritain (1882-1973), one of Rouault's closest interlocutors, was one of those engaged in theorizing alternatives to Cartesianism. Throughout his philosophical, aesthetic, and ethical writings, Maritain argued that the Cartesian concept of man as 'pure intellect', capable of grasping, unmediated, the essences of sensible beings, had disfigured the intellect; that it had separated the rational and irrational, and alienated the intellect from its natural state – not least from the importance of sensory knowledge.[3]

In his first extended work on aesthetics, *Art and Scholasticism* (1920), heavily influenced by his association with Rouault, Maritain wrote, quoting Paul Claudel, that it was the duty of art 'to reconcile the faculties of imagination and sensibility ...to recover "the

[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (Oxford, 2008), p.25.
[2] Amelia Jones, 'Body', *Critical Terms for Art History*, eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, 2nd Edn. (Chicago, 2010), p. 252.
[3] See Raymond Dennehy, 'Maritain's "Intellectual Existentialism": An introduction to his metaphysics and epistemology', in *Understanding Maritain: Philosopher and Friend*, eds. Deal W. Hudson and Matthew J. Mancini (Georgia, 1987), p.219, and Maritain's 1939 critique of modernity, *The Twilight of Civilisation* (1943), which is deliberately Nietzschean in its title. Deal W. Hudson and Matthew J. Mancini have argued that in fact, against what is usually understood to be the driving force of Maritain's philosophy, what his writings express over sixty years is 'more of a call for the restoration and liberation of the intellect than a call to faith', see 'Maritain and the Ambivalence of the Modern World', in *Understanding Maritain*, p.8.

whole man in the integral and indissoluble unity of his double nature", the spiritual and the carnal, as in the intricacies of his nature and supernature, his life on earth and the mystery of the operations of Heaven.'[4] In terms not vastly different from de Man's stipulation, cited in the preceding chapter that the quasi-theological necessity for the concrete incarnation of ideas that constitutes art follows from our fallen condition, Maritain describes the work of art as 'a work at once material and spiritual, like ourselves'.[5] And, prefiguring de Man's line that art is the expression of a shortcoming which there would be no need for "if we were creatures of pure intellect"', Maritain writes that 'the creative idea is not a pure intellectual form' but 'is thwarted by our condition – minds created in a body, placed in the world after creation, and compelled to draw first from created things the forms they use'.[6]

The previous chapters have described the deep uncertainty of Rouault's surfaces, as they oscillate between the irreducible physicality of the painterly marks that construct them and the metaphorically and semiotically complex networks of signification that these marks both implement and are bound up with. I have suggested that by failing to capture the interdependency and dialectical nature of the surfaces the literature on Rouault has tended to create a hierarchy in which either the material intrusion of his painting or the significance of his subject matter is lost. However, the philosophy of art developed by Maritain between 1910 and 1920, during which time he was closely influenced by Rouault, is an attempt to describe such a duality or dialectical condition. Although Maritain is often invoked in studies of Rouault's art, there is a tendency to privilege the transcendent side of his aesthetics (as in

[4] Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, trans. J.F. Scanlan (London, 1930), p.93. This is the earliest translation in English of *Art and Scholasticism*; I use Scanlan's translation in general but these have been informed or modified at times according to my reading of the 1920 and 1927 editions in French, *Art et scholastique*. Scanlan's translation is of the 1927 edition, which contained additional essays including 'The Frontiers of Poetry'. The page numbers refer to the Scanlan edition, which is hereafter referred to as AS.
[5] AS, p.97.
[6] AS, p.70.

fact, Maritain himself would do in later life). Against this bias, I will argue that Maritain raises more complex and potentially useful possibilities for understanding the explicit materiality of modern art without reducing it to its material qualities.

Beginning with an examination of Maritain's 1910 review of Rouault's work, and the central tenets of *Art and Scholasticism*, the first part of this chapter will consider the 'bound' nature of the work of art, asking what it means to understand the work of art, as Maritain does, as a *concrete incarnation* of ideas or vision, that derives, as a necessity, from our 'fallen' condition. At the same time, Maritain insists upon the work as 'meaning more than it is',[7] as straining – like Rouault's Titans – to exceed its binding. That the 'meaning' of the work of art is known through the concrete particularity of the work, 'in the sensible and by the sensible, and not separately from it' indicates a sensory experience or knowledge that exceeds 'pure' vision. The second and third parts of the chapter examine examples of Rouault's work that demonstrate the usefulness of Maritain in reading Rouault's painting. Part two turns to '"Noli me tangere": (Cézanne)', another article published by Rouault in 1910, in which, playing upon the title of the biblical scene in which Mary Magdalene encounters Christ on Easter Sunday, Rouault weaves together questions about the 'presence' and 'absence' of painting, the sensory encounter with art – through 'touch' especially – and the possibility or impossibility of truly 'knowing' or understanding art. The third part of the chapter analyses the significance of the 'Holy Face' – the miraculous impress of Christ's face – in Rouault's oeuvre, probing the notion of mystery, of the collision of the material and immaterial in painting, and extending the discussion of presence and absence through the 'impoverishment' of the image.

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[7] See John W. Hanke, *Maritain's Ontology of the Work of Art* (The Hague, 1973), p.5.

Part One: Jacques Maritain's Aesthetics

Rouault and Maritain were lifelong friends. They were first introduced in 1905 (the year of Maritain's conversion to Catholicism) by their mutual friend Léon Bloy, and from 1912 they lived in close proximity in Versailles for five years, during which time they met weekly.[8] Although in his thinking and writing, Rouault was clearly influenced by Maritain and by his wife Raïssa (a poet) in matters of faith, it is very hard to judge if Maritain's work had any visible influence on the development of Rouault's painting. Maritain certainly gave the painter confidence, however, and support. On the other hand, Maritain was deeply affected by his exposure to Rouault's work and practice, and it was during this exposure that Maritain developed the first fledglings of his aesthetic theory. Bernard Doering goes so far as to say that without Rouault 'we may never have known *Art and Scholasticism* and all the luminous works that followed'.[9] Maritain's early aesthetics, then, are a useful interlocution in approaching the problems of Rouault's paintings as they were formed during a period when Maritain was struggling with his works. Maritain also voices the theological significance of an aesthetics grounded in the materiality of art, a significance that tends to be implicit rather than explicit in Rouault's writing.

Born in 1882, the grandson of Jules Favre (one of the founders of the Republic), Maritain attended the Sorbonne in the last days of the nineteenth-century and was appalled by the dominant scientist and Positivist discourse. An oft-cited anecdote tells of Maritain and his wife Raïssa in the Jardin des Plantes, in 1901, disillusioned and downhearted by the environment at the Sorbonne, declaring a suicide pact if they could find no answer to their

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[8] *Rouault : Première période 1903-1920*, p.213.
[9] Bernard Doering, 'Lacrimae Rerum – tears at the Heart of Things: Jacques Maritain and Georges Rouault', *Essays in Honor of Jacques Maritain*, ed. John Trapani, (Washington, 2004), p.223.

metaphysical anguish. The answer came, in the form of Henri Bergson's lectures at the Collège de France, which the Maritains first attended in 1902, encouraged by their friend Charles Péguy. Although Maritain would later come to reject much of Bergson's thinking – *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*, first published in 1914, being an extended rejection of Bergson in favour of Aquinas via an attempt to reconcile them – Bergson's lectures opened up the possibility of a 'spiritual' perspective on life, of a revival of metaphysics.[10] Under the influence of Leon Bloy, the Maritains converted to Catholicism in 1906.[11] Maritain then went to Heidelberg for three years to study with the biologist, Hans Driesch, and aspects of Driesch's Vitalism can be heard throughout Maritain's philosophy. Crucially for his

[10] Positivism, a term first employed by Auguste Comte to describe his work on a philosophy that was based entirely upon empirical facts, and which outlawed metaphysical hypotheses, became the prevailing philosophy and a major force in nineteenth-century artistic and cultural circles. Such a climate was described by the philosopher and art critic Paul Desjardins as 'a simultaneous invasion of positivism in thought, of naturalism in art, of mechanism and analysis in criticism, of realism and the "hoax" in literature, of agnosticism and indifference, of practical sense in life.' Paul Desjardins, 'Sur M.E. Melchior de Vogüé, a propos de sa réception académique', *Revue Bleue*, xxvi (Jun, 1889), p.713. By the turn of century, however, positivism was gradually losing its dominance, and was challenged by two developing schools of thought: spiritualism (epitomised initially by the work of Henri Bergson) and idealism. The basic distinction between spiritualism and idealism (although there are many texts that blur the boundaries) is significant to Maritain, who finds idealism to be just as laden with problems and temptations as materialism. The central claim of idealism, following Kant, is that ultimately only the mind and its structures exist, whereas spiritualism 'is committed to a genuine plurality of individual persons and, especially, to a distinction between finite human minds and the infinite God that created them.' See Gary Gutting, *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 2001), pp.8-14.

[11] At the end of the nineteenth century in France, the Church was seen as opposed to, even incompatible with, everything modern. However, at the same time Catholicism was beginning to offer artists and intellectuals what one historian has called a 'mystical and romantic defense against the "Reign of Science" that inundated their time.' Catholicism offered a critique of both industrialized modernism and the rationalism encouraged by the Third Republic. This 'rationalism' was believed to be the legacy of the Enlightenment, the culture of which had encouraged a 'philosophical positivism'. In the aftermath of Darwininism, 'there was an emerging consensus that the human person was biologically and socially determined, and that reality was merely the empirical phenomena seen, the scientific observations recorded and interpreted.' The anti-clericism of the state in the early twentieth century (indicated by the 1901 Associations Law, which was used to break up religious congregations that the State worried might harbour unrest, and broke up various artistic communities gathered on account of their shared Catholicism), was concretised by the 1905 separation law that severed all links between the church and the state, acts left Catholicism as an appealing option to those who were looking for an alternative to the political climate of the new century. It became a socially outcast movement, part of an excluded zone already occupied by avant-garde artists who often saw themselves as socially excluded. Catholicism offered a critique of industrialized, mechanized modernism not by avoiding it, but because it was 'inscribed in the midst of fallen, poor humanity; a place of constant struggle where the mysterious irruptions of grace might shine forth or manifest in profound ways.' Ellis Hanson has suggested that it offered a more creative vision of the world, one in which the rational and the irrational could coincide. Its own paradoxes, 'modern and yet medieval, ascetic and yet sumptuous' may have added to its value as an alternative to the rationalized version of the world and what made it seem appropriate to the challenges of art-making in the modern world. See Ellis Hanson, *Decadence and Catholicism*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1998); André Lalande, 'Philosophy in France, 1919', *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 29, No. 5 (Sep., 1920), 413-436; André Lhote, 'Cubism and the Modern Artistic Sensibility', in *The Athenaeum*, No.4664, (Sept. 19, 1919), 919-20; Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, (California, 1993), 155-156; Kenneth Silver, 'Purism: Straightening Up After the Great War', *Artforum*, (March, 1977), 57; also Silver, *Esprit de Corps*, (Princeton, 1989); Robert Gildea, *Children of the Revolution*, (Oxford, 2008); and Mark Bosco, 'Georges Bernanos and Francis Poulenc: Catholic Convergences in Dialogues of the Carmelites', *Logos*, Vol. 12, No. 2, (Spring, 2009).

philosophy of art, it was during this time that he discovered the work of Thomas Aquinas – finding in Aquinas' thought a way of understanding the true nature of the intellect, with its capacity for attaining the 'truth of being', as well as its creative capacity.[12]

In his diary entry for 12 December, 1909, Maritain recorded a visit from Rouault (accompanied by the artist Léon Lehmann (1873-1953), a friend of Rouault's), during which they had a long conversation concerning art, 'apropos of the preface that I am to write for his Exposition', adding that 'I greatly admire Rouault's force and genius'.[13] This was the preface Maritain wrote for Rouault's first solo exhibition at the Galérie Druet in 1910. The preface, which marks the beginning of Maritain's long engagement with Rouault's work, develops ideas that would remain in play – though in radically different form – in *Art and Scholasticism* some ten years later.

Maritain published the preface under a pseudonym, 'Jacques Favelle' (for a while assumed to be an 'unknown' critic). It is unclear exactly why this name was chosen,[14] or whether he or Rouault chose it, but it seems likely to have been in order to support Maritain's presentation of Rouault as a medieval artisan, as 'Favelle' is an early medieval surname, probably derived from nicknames drawing upon the insinuations of the Old French 'fauve', meaning tawny and used for people of dusky complexion, and 'favel', a story or tale, and the name of a horse in a popular medieval cycle of beast tales.[15] It is also striking, through the

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[12] See John G. Trapani, *Poetry, Beauty, & Contemplation: The Complete Aesthetics of Jacques Maritain*, (Washington, 2011), 21 and John M. Dunaway, *Jacques Maritain*, (1978), 18

[13] Jacques Maritain, *Carnet des Notes*, (Paris, 1965), p.70.

[14] There is also some evidence that 'Favelle' was a Huguenot surname, (see Charles E. Lart, *Huguenot Pedigrees*, Vol. 1, (London, 1924)) which would make it an odd choice for the Catholics Rouault and Maritain to agree upon, unless it was the reference to religious persecution that they wished to draw upon (France at the time being 'officially' secular).

[15] In England the name was first recorded in 1160, during the reign of Henry I, also known as 'The Builder of Churches', which, perhaps merely coincidently, echoes Rouault's description of himself as of 'the Age of the Cathedrals' [Surnames.enacademic.com/19912/Favelle]. In *Cahiers Jacques Maritain*, 12 Nov, 1985, p.10, n.12, Nora Possenti-Ghiglia also notes that 'Favelle' concealed 'Favre' – Maritain was the grandson of Jules Favre.

relation to 'fauve' in Favelle, that Maritain's pseudonym also recalls the 'Fauvism' of 1905, to Vauxcelles' 'wild beasts', with which Rouault was linked (albeit problematically). In bringing together the medieval and the avantgarde, Favelle – whether Maritain and Rouault intended it or not – contains the difficult duality of Rouault's work. Also of note, is that this 'constructed' aspect of Maritain's writing on Rouault was repeated in 1924, when in the same year that Rouault was photographed wearing an old clown's hat and a year before he painted the self-portrait entitled *L'Apprenti-ouvrier* [figs.31 & 31a], in which he is also wearing the hat, Maritain described Rouault as a 'lunatic clown' in appearance.

Maritain's preface began with a question apparently designed to quell the kind of accusation that appeared widely in the criticism discussed in Chapter One. 'The very subject matter of M. Rouault's paintings seems astonishing at first sight',[16] and then, listing the subjects of Rouault's works, including 'the strange assembly of sinister heads', clowns, judges etc, asked if these had been designed for the amusement of the public. Maritain went on to answer firmly: 'No, all of this work is serious, absolutely opposed to a mean kind of caricature and derision.'[17] Although Maritain acknowledged the shock and horror that Rouault's works could provoke – causing, he wrote, the viewer to 'laugh involuntarily' – he stressed the sincerity of the works, their profundity and depth of emotion. As Schloesser notes, this is a somewhat tepid defence (a defence that recalls Greenberg's derision of critics who resort to 'profound' as an unqualified statement of validity), but although it seems that Maritain quickly turns away from discussing the subject matter of Rouault's work, there are references throughout the review that indicate attempts to bring this difficulty into the bigger

[16] Jacques Maritain (Jacques Favelle), *G.Rouault*, Préface du catalogue de l'exposition Peintures et céramiques de G. Rouault, Paris ; galerie E. Druet, 21 février – 5 mars 1910, repr. in *Rouault : Première période 1903-1920*, pp.200-201.
[17] Cited and trans. in Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism*, p.226.

picture Maritain is attempting to draw. For example, having described Rouault as a medieval artisan in his love of his work, his tools and his skill, and in his alienation from the Academies, Maritain wrote that Rouault's works created 'unwittingly, a sequel to the medieval Dance of Death and to the beggars of Callot'.[18]

The choice of Jacques Callot is telling: the sixteenth-century French printmaker depicted a range of subjects very similar to those of Rouault's oeuvre – including clowns, drunkards, beggars, etc., often with a caricatural element, which Maritain appears to overlook (Callot's works were dark, his figures seen as 'soulless ruffians'[19]). The comparison to Callot suggests Maritain's attempt to bring Rouault's subject matter under control, canonized, legitimized. (Although, note 'unwittingly', which gently implies that Rouault might not have meant his works to be so dark). But Maritain's claim for Rouault's 'realism' is potentially jeopardised by this reference to Callot, who is also considered to be a founder of the theatrical painting genre.[20] It is also suggestive that the example is French; the literature on Rouault more frequently draws comparisons with the fifteenth-century German tradition of woodcuts,[21] and Maritain's choice of Callot might be seen as arising from his involvement – albeit difficult – at this time with the nationalist organisation *Action française*, which encouraged the locating of French art and literature within a strong national heritage. [22] In a

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[18] *Rouault : Première période 1903-1920*, pp.200-201: Jaques Callot (c.1592-1635) was a printmaker and draftsman from the Duchy of Lorraine, most famous for his prints series *Les Grands Misères de la guerre*, which influenced Goya's *The Disasters of War*, and for prints of *Commedia dell'arte* figures and grotesque caricatures of dwarves.
[19] Elaine Shefer 'Masks/Personae', *Encylopaedia of Comparative Iconography : Themes depicted in works of art*, ed. Helene E. Roberts (New York, 2013), p.579.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Donna M. Stein, *L'Estampe Originale : Catalogue Raisonné* (New York : 1970), p.12. Also mentioned by Dorival, Courthion, and Doering.
[22] See Bernard Doering, *Jacques Maritain and the French Catholic Intellectuals*, (Indiana, 1983). At the time, writes Doering, the 'adamant anti-republicanism' of the Popes Pius IX and Pius X, linked the Church in France with 'the anti-democratic forces of reaction'. In France, Catholicism was seen as highly conservative, pro-monarchy, and out of date – the condemnation by Rome of the movement of the Catholic liberal movement did nothing to help this. The association of the Church with anti-Semitic sentiment, the nationalistic call for 'La France aux Français', and the position Catholics such as

not dissimilar vein, Maritain also insists that Rouault 'does not find inspiration from some abstract system or literary emotion, but from life, from the life of his time and his country'.[23] In this way, Maritain's preface is dedicated to the same combination of medievalism and modernity found in Rouault's own construction of his life and work.

A key passage in the preface, which begins again with an attempt to see continuity in Rouault's work (against the frequent accusation that he had suddenly switched direction at the time of his 'fall'), takes us to the heart of what, ten years later, became some of the main points of *Art and Scholasticism*.

> From *The Child Jesus Among the Teachers* (1894) to his ceramics and engravings filled with common subject matter (judges, prostitutes, clowns, and peasants), he [Rouault] struggled in the same sense, trying to awaken in the material [*la matière*] all of its *representative* virtues, insistently, by all means, working with the material, in order to decide how to *clothe the form* [*revêtir la forme*] in the most exactly evocative way. [...] As much as it is true that he endeavours to represent the most immediate objects and beings, M. Rouault does not intend to make *a textual transcription* of their traits; he knows that *the truth is never found in the copy*. In addition, he never sees things from the aspect of their ordinariness; he has *an imaginative vision of them*, he *contemplated them immediately in the world of their greatest reality* – and it is in this world that he paints them.'[24]

Charles Maurras took as anti-dreyfusards, seemed to render the Church and Catholicism irrevocably estranged from the modern artists, writers, and intellectuals opposed in every way to these positions. Maritain's own association with Maurras and the right-wing *Action Francaise* remains a difficult and potentially murky fact in his intellectual development – however, he later broke with Maurras completely in 1925 and wrote extensively against anti-Semitism. Elsewhere Doering writes that 'Yves Congar recounts his memories of the meetings of the *Cercle Thomiste* at Maritain's home, first in Versailles and then in Meudon. ...Everyone seemed sympathetic to *Action Française* and more or less shared in its massive over-simplifications, its solid disdain for others, its brutal conviction of being right and of possessing the truth. ... But, there was another Maritain, the artist, the revolutionary, the friend of Péguy, the Dreyfusard, the free spirit... the Maritain of *Art and Scholasticism* and all that followed.' Bernard Doering, *Lacrimae Rerum – Tears at the heart of things*, in *Essays in Honor of Jacques Maritain*; see also Yves Congar, *Journal d'un Théologian*, (Paris, 2000). [22] For accounts of Action française, see Rémond, *The Right Wing in France*, pp. 233-53; Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism: Action Française, Italian Fascism, National Socialism* (London, 1965), pp. 29-141; Osgood, *French Royalism under the Third and Fourth Republics*, pp. 54-136; Eugen Weber, *Action Française: Royalism and Reaction in Twentieth Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962); Tannenbaum, *The Action Française: Die-hard Reactionaries in Twentieth-Century France*; Mazgaj, *Action Française and Revolutionary Syndicalism*.

[23] Maritain/ Favelle in *Rouault : Première période 1903-1920*, pp, 200-201.

[24] Ibid. – my emphasis

Maritain combines the language of symbolism – specifically, Moreas' call to 'clothe the Idea in a perceptible form' in the 1886 Symbolist Manifesto[25] – and the immediacy of Bergson's 'intuitive experience', described in *Time and Free Will: An essay on the immediate data of consciousness* (1889) and *Objects Given Immediately to Consciousness* (1899).[26] In doing so, he develops two important ideas. First, that while the 'greatest reality' of things is not revealed by ordinary perception or by copying external details (a 'reality' that later, in terms derived from Aquinas, Maritain would describe as a 'mystery' – 'the most exact description of reality'[27]), it is nevertheless the case that this reality is found in things, in a world of solid stuff that exists in itself and outside of our experience. Second, that it is crucial to place emphasis upon working *with* the matter of the work of art, an emphasis that recalls Maurice Denis' 1896 assertion, in 'Notes sur la peinture religieuse', of the need to root Symbolism in sensation, tradition and the materiality of the medium; the need to 'fuse matter and idea, sensation and spirit'.[28] The similarity is not surprising, since both Maritain and Denis were drawing upon Bergson and Aquinas (a Thomist revival was apparent from the late 1880s, and Denis was a part of this[29]), but Maritain is keen to distinguish himself from Denis. Despite describing Rouault as a medieval artisan, Maritain claimed he only resurrected the 'spirit' of the Middle Ages,[30] and objected to Denis' tendency to nostalgically emulate the 'look' of

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[25] See Chapter one p.29
[26] See Chapter one p.10
[27] Maritain, *Preface*, p.3.
[28] Katherine M Kuenzli, *The Nabis and Intimate Modernism*, (London, 2010), p.128.
29 Late nineteenth-century Catholicism is often branded as idealist, and the Thomist renaissance overlooked, [Studies such as Debora L. Silverman's *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Search for Sacred Art*, (New York, 2004) are guilty of this to some extent] but in fact it was a critical factor in Symbolist theory because of its emphasis on the importance and validity of sensory, material experience. It was also more well-known than accounts of its influence might suggest; the support of Thomism, Katherine Kuenzli notes in her recent study of this period, 'constituted part of Pope Leo XIII's attempt to modernize church doctrine' (unlike the efforts of his successor Pius X), and in 1879, Aquinas's works became the 'official' philosophy and theology of Catholicism. In the 1890s, Maurice Denis had discovered the teachings of Aquinas, and Thomist doctrines were embedded in the aesthetics of the Nabis. See Kuenzli, *The Nabis and Intimate Modernism*, p.134.
[30] AS, pp.81-82.

medieval art and to advocate a 'return' to medievalism (this was also part of Maritain's objection to being grouped with the neo-Scholastic movement of the 1920s). [fig.77]

Maritain also found Denis' symbolist conception to be confused, in that Denis understood the goal of art to be the production of emotional states, the creation of 'a mystic state, or one at any rate analogous to the mystic vision', whereas for Maritain this was merely the effect, 'a mere repercussion' of the making of a work of art, '*not* its *object* or its *end*'.[31] And after quoting the Symbolist Claudel on the double nature of man, Maritain moves to separate himself from Symbolism again by adding that art 'will not free itself from language' or from the *work* of art[32] – a statement which also indicates that for Maritain, as for de Man, art is reliant upon, or bound up with, the linguistic and painterly structures of the work of art and their laws.

What the passage above illustrates, and what becomes clearer in *Art and Scholasticism*, is that Maritain's understanding of the work of art contains two irreconcilable elements bound together inseparably. On the one hand, it is the making of a physical work, 'an object, [that] must always maintain its consistency and its proper value as an object'[33]; on the other hand, it will 'swarm with meanings, and say more than it is'.[34] It will contain the revelation of a 'greater reality', a 'transcendent' vision even, that Rowan Williams describes as 'rooted in the sense of an unfinishedness in "ordinary" perception, a recognition that the objects of perception were not exhausted by what could be said about them in descriptive,

[31] AS, p.158, n.131.
[32] AS p.94.
[33] AS p.33.
[34] Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (New York, 1955), p.93.

rational and pragmatic terms.'[35] To understand this paradox (analogous to the oscillation of matter and meaning in the materiality of the mark, and to the clown-paint relationship described in *Tête de clown tragique*), I will briefly examine how these elements are dealt with in *Art and Scholasticism*, before turning to how – if – they are reconciled by Maritain, and what conclusions this might indicate as regards the epistemology of Rouault's materiality.

Firstly, a brief note on the text. The language of *Art and Scholasticism* is, at times, peculiarly archaic (as is the title, amongst the many manifestos and treatises on art published in the 1920s).[36] The book is a multi-faceted, complicated, and occasionally incoherent attempt to bring Maritain's understanding of Scholastic philosophy (the central figure of which is Aquinas, whose work *Summa Theologiae* Maritain often paraphrases) to bear upon modern art.[37] It is also useful to note that Maritain can be understood to have returned to a

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[35] Rowan Williams, *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love*, (London, 2005), p.x.

[36] As a title *Art et Scholastique*, or *Art and Scholasticism*, only partly declares the nature of the book. 'Modern Art and Scholasticism' might have been more indicative, or even 'Art and Baudelaire' if one was to go by the most frequent references. As it stands, the existing title might be one of the reasons why Maritain's first major work on aesthetics is relatively widely known amongst historians of Catholicism, or neo-Thomists, or indeed amongst theologians, but generally unknown to historians of artistic modernism. It has been seen as part of the 'rappel à l'ordre' or what Yves Alain Bois has called the Parisian art history that 'was vitally concerned only with the Middle Ages' or an aesthetics that repeats the investigation of the beautiful. See Yves Alain Bois, *Painting as Model*, (Massachusetts, 1993), p.67. However, *Art and Scholasticism* is much more than this; 'prise en conscience' rather than 'rappel à l'ordre' is a better way of locating it. Maritain's work is a philosophy of art that looks forward not back and which offers a reading of modern art that is deeply engaged with some of the central aesthetic debates of the early twentieth century – for example, his theories have much in common with the ideas of thinkers such as Wilhelm Worringer (considered to be a significant influence on German Expressionism and geometric abstraction) in the emphasis upon the specificity of works of art, and the belief that mimesis is not natural to creative activity (a belief that both share with Alois Riegl). Historians Hudson and Mancini have recently suggested that to look closely at any aspect of his work is to be aware of a subtle counterpoint 'between his traditional spirituality and philosophical realism, on the one hand, and his full engagement with the perplexities of modern life, on the other.' See Hudson and Mancini, 'Preface', in *Understanding Maritain: Philosopher and Friend*, p.xiv. Maritain's friendships with such diverse figures as André Gide, Jean Cocteau, Gino Severini, Marc Chagall, Emmanuel Mounier, and Erik Satie, to name but a few, can be taken as indicative of this full engagement with the perplex currents of modernity.

[37] Scholasticism is generally defined methodologically. Louis Roy describes the 'Socratic propensity to ask logically linked questions', and a critical engagement with the Bible, the liturgy, and the role of symbols as some of the major factors that shaped Scholasticism. See Louis Roy, 'Medieval Latin Scholasticism: Some Comparative Features', in *Scholasticism: Cross-Cultural and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. José Ignacio Cabezon, (New York, 1998), pp.20-22. This approach to thinking came about in the twelfth century, and became the basis of an ardent search to understand or get a glimpse of the truth, accompanied by an attitude of 'discriminating openness to all expressions of truth, be they biblical, Greek, Roman, patristic, Byzantine, post-Christian Jewish, or Arabic'. Maritain's descriptions in his letters as to what he is reading, as well as the notes to *Art and Scholasticism*, and those to his last book on aesthetics, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (1956), reveal a similarly wide-ranging field of sources, and his own open-mindedness in engaging with texts or works of art of almost any origin could be attributed to his interest in Scholasticism. The central figure associated with Scholasticism is

notion of the 'unity of the arts', so that when he speaks of art he means literature, painting, sculpture, etc., and according to which poetry takes primacy. This is a unity clearly opposed to the dominant understanding of artistic modernity, in which the arts disperse, following Gottfried Lessing, each returning to the conquest of its own medium and its autonomous form of expressionism.

However, at the same time Maritain also insists upon Rouault's 'plastic preoccupation'[38] or 'exclusively plastic eloquence',[39]and the need to work *with* the materials of the art in question, indeed at times he seems to endorse a kind of 'truth to materials'. Art, he reminds us, 'consists not in imitating but in making, in composing or constructing, and that according to the laws of the very thing to be placed in being (ship, house, carpet, coloured canvas or hewn block of marble).'[40] There are, he adds, works of art 'that attack matter in order to conquer it, to impose upon it a form which it has only to receive – the art of Michelangelo, for example, torturing marble like a tyrant.'[41] The two views are not necessarily mutually exclusive: Maritain's project in *Art and Scholasticism* is to understand creative activity (in the human sphere), and to develop a theory of art that explains the nature of art both in generalised universal terms and in its particularised concrete form.

The arts, writes Maritain in the opening pages of *Art and Scholasticism*, 'involve *the making of a work*' and therefore, 'wherever you find *art* you find some action or operation to

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Thomas Aquinas, whose work – most famously the *Summa Theologiae* – demonstrates such a search for truth, and intellectual consistency, and which is founded upon a belief that 'faith and reason could be reconciled'(something deeply important to Maritain at the point at which he discovered Aquinas).

[38] Jacques Maritain, *Georges Rouault* (Beaverbrook Newspapers Ltd., 1958), p.4.

[39] Maritain's 1924 review of Rouault's work, repr. in *Rouault: Anthology of Texts*, p.14.

[40] AS, p.43.

[41] AS, p.35.

be contrived, some work to be done.'[42] Crucially, art, 'is before all intellectual, and its activity consists in impressing an idea upon a matter'.[43] This is one of the major claims of Maritain's philosophy of art, that art is not an experience or an object as such, but the work done in bringing an idea or intuition ('drawn from' the world of 'created things') into 'knowable' form – that is to say, in material form.[44]

Following Aquinas, Maritain understands the mind to be highly active, with a voracious appetite for knowledge of being. Although the mind is to be understood as a 'complete self-subsisting whole', it operates very differently according to whether 'it has knowledge for the sake of knowing or for the sake of doing.'[45] Knowledge for the sake of knowing is the operation of the Speculative Order. The speculative intellect grasps things initially, and immediately, through its *sensory* (i.e. bodily) experience of the world, in an '*immanent* action' (in a manner closely associated with Bergsonian intuition) so as 'to become itself, in a way, all things'; the intellect seizes upon this intuitive data, conceptualising and understanding it. (Again, underlying this is Maritain's assumption of a realistic epistemology – what can be known and is known exists independently of our knowing it.)

Art belongs to the Practical Order.[46] The practical order is knowledge oriented towards doing, and is itself divided into two distinct spheres: action and making. The sphere of action is ordered towards common ends of human life, and is the sphere of morality or of

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[42] AS, p.4.
[43] AS, p.8.
[44] It is important to reiterate that although this sounds symbolist, Maritain is not advocating the kind of sensation or fusion of matter and idea of Symbolism, but a manifestation of a *creative* idea – i.e. an idea that was and is always wrapped up in the making of a work. This is a nuanced difference, but again it posits the work itself as meaningful or potentially meaningful instead of an exterior meaning to which the work points.
[45] AS, p.5.
[46] AS, p.3.

human good.[47] The sphere of making is different. According to scholasticism, 'Making' is defined as '*productive action*' and it is 'ordered to such-and-such a definite end, separate and self-sufficient... and it relates to the peculiar good or perfection not of the man making, but of the work made', in other words, the work of art taken by itself.[48] Art is 'work *to be* done' rather than work done, because art is understood as knowledge oriented towards making, an impulse or activity, *not* the final work itself.[49]

Maritain's claim for art is that there is a kind of experience or intuitive knowledge of the world that is of such complexity that it cannot be 'known' in abstract form through the imagination or through intellectual concepts, but is expressed (and, as John Hanke observes, is essentially oriented to being expressed[50]) through the *concrete particularity* of a physical work of art. The initial 'idea' or intuition, then, is a formative one, because *it is oriented towards making*. It is held in the mind, but, crucially, is it not *known* by the intellect until it is brought into being in the work of art. It becomes intelligible *through* matter; 'in the sensible and by the sensible, and not separately from it.'[51] What the idea is *not*, in any way, is a Platonic idea or a mental image or a plan held in the mind and of which the work of art is a

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[47] AS, p.5.

[48] AS, p.6. In the notes Maritain somewhat mischievously adds Oscar Wilde's dictum that 'The fact of man being a poisoner is nothing against his prose'. AS, p.117 n.20. Of course the opposite is also true, that a good man is not necessarily a good artist, and Maritain goes almost as far as to suggest that in being occupied in being a good man it is very possible he will be insufficiently devoted to his art to be a good artist. Of course, Maritain is more than aware of the moral danger here in establishing this autonomy; it is easy in the case of the artisan, for example the shipbuilder, to see that the 'end' of his art must take precedence, he must build a good ship, but in the case of the fine arts it is also easy to see how Maritain's remarks were misinterpreted as advocating the decadent notion of 'art for art's sake'. He addresses this problem directly in a later book *The Responsibility of the Artist*, writing that '*Art for Art's sake* does not mean Art for the work, which is the right formula. It means an absurdity, that is, a supposed necessity for the artist to be only an artist, not a man, and for art to cut itself off from its own supplies, and from all the food, fuel and energy it receives from human life. ...When Art operates, it is man, a particular man, who operates through his Art. ' Jacques Maritain, *The Responsibility of the Artist* (Gordian Press, 1972), p.11.

[49] This inevitably leads to some vocabulary issues, as Maritain does use the phrase 'work of art' to mean the final product that contain the labour of the artist; I shall use 'work of art' to mean either and hope that the context makes it clear – there are occasions where its ability to mean both is useful.

[50] Hanke, *Maritain's Ontology of the Work of Art*, p.97.

[51] AS, p.21.

copy. Maritain will later use phrases such as 'creative intuition' or impulse, which perhaps better indicate the nature of this creative or formative idea. In the notes to *Art and Scholasticism* it is described as:

> a simple view, although virtually very rich in multiplicity, of the work to be done apprehended in its individual soul, a view which is as it were a spiritual germ or *seminal reason* of the work, closely related to what M. Bergson calls *intuition* or *dynamic* schema, concerning not only the intelligence but also the imagination and the sensibility of the artist... and therefore inexpressible in concepts.[52]

In stating that there is an experience of the world that is only expressible – and intelligible – through the material work of art, Maritain is positing the work of art as an object through which a deeper, spiritual reality may be perceived. The 'creative intuition' or 'formative idea' contains *more* than the material appearance of things – in fact, Maritain writes, it contains, albeit obscurely, 'the secret laws of being', the 'hidden significances' that God alone knows fully. It is only 'a mere atom of divinity, hardly glimpsed, obscure to our own eyes'.[53] Writing about Rouault in 1958, Maritain says that it is true to say of his paintings that each one is a 'picture-story of the mystery of things – of some interior aspect and meaning caught in the reality of the visible world'.[54] Like Martin Heidegger in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Maritain proposes that the artist discloses a world through the act of recomposing that world: Art, he writes, 'does not derive from itself alone what it imparts to things; it spreads over them a secret which it first discovered in them, 'in their invisible

[52] AS, n.93.
[53] AS, p.70.
[54] Maritain, *Georges Rouault*, p.3.

substance or in their endless exchanges and correspondences.' (This, Maritain adds, is what Wilde, 'choked by the paper roses of his aestheticism' failed to understand![55])

Although the vision or idea informing the work-to-be-done will give to that work 'meaning' which will transcend the work as a physical thing, it is only through the artist's focus upon the variations that come from the materiality of the work – colour, texture, solidity, density, etc. – that the work of art is made susceptible to the revelation of such meaning. Another way of putting it, to use Hanke's formulation, would be to say that the work has to be a *physical* thing, because this is how such knowledge is made available to the senses, but it will have meaning, 'derived from this knowing – which surpasses that of physical organization.'[56] Hanke compares this to the model of literary metaphor: 'Through the very process of creating, something which is contained as unknown in the obscurity of emotive intuition may be brought to light and expressed by means of what is already known.'[57]

In this way, Maritain binds together 'the way of saying' and 'what is being said', or Courthion's 'what is pictured' and 'what is conveyed'.[58] It also places the body at the centre of the processes of art, because the 'obscure knowledge' from which art arises is perceived *in its obscurity* through the senses – through the totality of the body, through the integral and indissoluble unity of man's double nature. Furthermore, it is through the same sensory perception that the 'obscure knowledge' or 'hidden significances' embedded in the work of

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[55] AS, p.74.
[56] Hanke, *Maritain's Ontology of the Work of Art*, p.99.
[57] Ibid. p.96.
[58] There is something of Driesch's vitalism here: central to vitalism is the idea that 'life' is irreducible to matter, and that there existed a life-principle that animates matter, that exists only when in a relationship with matter, but is not of itself of a material nature. See Jane Bennett, 'A Vitalist Stopover on the way to a New Materialism' in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, p.48.

art are perceived by the viewer; 'in the sensible and by the sensible, and not separately from it' (as opposed to conceptually, 'extracted' by the intellect). In this, Maritain's project has something in common with the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, for whom the work of art resembles the object of perception in that it represents 'a totality of flesh in which meaning is not free ...but bound, a prisoner of all the signs, or details, which reveal it'.[59]

A tension arises from this binding together of the inexhaustible and the limited or bound, of course, because the ability to bring this unknown intuition of the mystery of things to light is limited both by the materials of art and by the human limitations of the artist. Although the artist does not 'know' his vision, it is what drives him, and it is what causes the artist to strain towards perfection, to the creation of the work that fulfils itself as far as his limitations, his 'fallen' condition will allow. This, Maritain adds, is the source of the ultimate frustration of great artists – for example, he writes, Cézanne's frustration at the inadequacy of his 'means' to express: 'Hence his complaints at his incapacity *to realise*... and his touching regret at "not being Bouguereau," who, at any rate, did "*realise*".'[60] (Maritain greatly disliked Bouguereau, and admired the struggle he perceived in the work of Cézanne, and in Rouault's work.)

This is a familiar tension: it resonates with Rouault's evocation of an imagery of imprisonment in his writing on Rodin, and the straining, within the surface, between weighty corporeality and a longing to transcend or see beyond the physical. Labouring this point to some extent, I want to briefly consider Maritain's repeated articulations of this tension, as his varying imagery and vocabulary demonstrate the ways in he brings threads of nineteenth-

[59] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception* (1948), trans. Stéphanie Ménasé, ed. Thomas Baldwin (New York, 2004), p.95. See also the discussion in Jacobus, *Romantic Things*, p.34.
[60] AS, pp.140-141.

century and modernist aesthetics into complex relation with his underlying theological schema. I will then go on to explore the questions of knowledge and obscurity in Maritain's thought more closely, and argue that these illuminate the difficult epistemology – or epistemological challenge – of Rouault's surfaces.

Perhaps most importantly, Maritain went on to characterize this tension as a necessary state, in which art resists both the tendency in modernism to dematerialise aesthetics (evident in the turn towards abstraction), and an equal resistance to the temptation – Greenberg-like – to surrender all to the conditions of the materials of art.[61] Roughly correspondent to 'idealism' and 'materialism', Maritain figures these as the two potential suicides of art. The first is 'the suicide of an angel – through forgetfulness of matter'.[62] This suicide, or self-

[61] Roger Fry 'discovered' a similarly important material 'resistance' in a set of Byzantine enamels. In 'An Appreciation of the Swenigorodskoi Enamels', written in 1912, Fry argues that there is an affinity between the Byzantine enamels and modern art evident in their concern with permanence and form – something that was absent when the 'more or less complete representation of natural appearance was regarded as the only efficient mode of artistic expression'. Now, he says, we can once again appreciate them as expressive forms of us – but he is immediately confronted by a paradox: the enamels, which depict the heads of the Apostles, 'are oft-repeated traditional types; types established and accepted... And yet no one could think of these heads as being merely derivative and second-hand. They have no taint of the pastiche or the replica. They have in a high degree that vitality which is peculiar to works of creative art.' Knowledge of the psychology of the modern artist, according to Fry, suggests that 'only original invention has this vital force; that whenever the artist accepts the idea of another he is overtaken by a peculiar discouragement and uneasiness. However much he tries to conceal this... it betrays itself in deadness, emptiness, and the flaccidity of form.' Fry can only assume that the artist requires resistance – in his view, this arises for the modern artist out of the 'intractability of phenomena' and the difficulty of 'the proper organisation of that chaos of sensation into expressive form.' Here Fry's formalism dominates the terms of his thinking, but when he address the Byzantine artist, his evaluation approaches closely a similar kind of tension between the straining of art towards an end and the resistance of the material as articulated by Maritain: 'The artists who executed the Swenigorodskoi enamels, may, one supposes, have had for stimulus the difficulty of the material in which they wrought. To make this rigid and resistant material continually more and more elastic, more subtly responsive to their ideal demands, may have afforded the necessary stimulus. And this problem was not one of mere craftsmanship, but of incessant choice and co-ordination of the design. More and more the general idea of these type-characters of the Virgin and the Apostles had to be condensed, intensified and purified of all that was superfluous and redundant in order that they might admit of perfect execution within the hard limits of the material.' At one time, Fry concludes, these enamels would have been barbaric, but what is now evident – to him at least – is 'the extreme modernity, the complete self-consciousness, one might almost say the sophistication of these artists... The artist had from the first a clear grasp of his idea, and has realised it by perfectly ascertained methods.' What Fry's notion of resistance captures is the sense that medium as resistance, as a limitation, is an invigorating state of tension; he also inadvertently suggests the same dualism that Maritain is getting at – the formative idea of the artist versus the activity and its plastic means. Fry, of course, assumes that the 'idea' is a pseudo-Platonic one, and that there is, according to his privileging of form, a pseudo-Kantian 'aesthetic' transcendence. Where Fry sees the artist as having 'from the first a clear grasp of his idea' and realising it 'by perfectly ascertained methods', Maritain, as we have seen, understands the artist to be groping in the dark, struggling with both his methods and the obscurity of his idea to bring the work of art into being. Roger Fry, 'An Appreciation of the Swenigorodskoi Enamels', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol. 21, No. 113 (Aug. 1912), pp.293-5.

[62] AS, p.71.

destruction, follows from the very essence of art; from the fact that art (understood as the 'formative idea'), aspires to an almost inhuman condition, 'a straining after a gratuitously creative activity, entirely absorbed in its own mystery and its own laws of operation, refusing to subordinate itself either to the interests of man or to the evocation of what already exists.'[63] But only 'on the high summits of Divinity' can art exist in such an abstract state; in us, in mankind, 'the creative idea is not a pure intellectual form' but 'is thwarted by our condition – minds created in a body, placed in the world after creation, and compelled to draw first from created things the forms they use'.[64] However 'inhuman' or 'angelic' its aspirations might be, art is 'essentially human' in its means and depends for its existence upon man, 'in whom it subsists, and on things, which are its nourishment.' Poetry, writes Maritain (meaning the fine arts in general, and quoting Boccaccio), is ontology, and being, as it is, of man, 'it can no more fence itself off from things than he'.[65] Maritain specifically criticizes the tendency he sees amongst the 'Parnassians, then by the Symbolists and Mallarmé, perhaps also, in a different sphere, by Max Jacob and Erik Satie', to see 'the content of the work of art, the material to be shaped, the artistic *thing*, the lyrical and intellectual stuff' as some 'irksome burden, an impurity to be got rid of.'[66]

The second suicide, of course, consists of the opposite – of an art that has abandoned its straining towards its own ends, that utterly subordinates itself to the human conditions of its existence, which is to say the subjective and material conditions of causality. 'A too flabby resignation to its conditions of existence,' writes Maritain, in provokingly fleshy terms, 'is

[63] AS, p.72.
[64] AS, p.70.
[65] AS, p.71.
[66] AS, p.99.

also suicide for art; the sin of materialism.'[67] Maritain emphasizes the necessity of this 'straining' in art, by adding that:

> To order contemporary art *to exist* as abstract art, discarding every condition determining its existence in the human subject, is to have it arrogate to itself the aseity of God. To require it *to tend* to abstract art like a curve to its asymptote, without rejecting the servitudes of its human estate, but ceaselessly overcoming them, by straining its created bonds to the extreme limit of elasticity, is to require it to realise more fully its radical spirituality.'[68]

This straining, he writes offers the possibility of a reinvigoration of modernist art. If, he adds, 'art grows stronger in accepted servitudes; it is by fighting against them.' This, it seems, is how the tension between the two suicides is to be understood: '[Art] must have the opposition of matter. The more obstinate and rebellious the matter, the better will art, by its success in mastering it, realise its own ends.' Quoting the novelist André Gide (1869-1951), Maritain concludes that:

> Art is always the result of some constraint. To think that it rises higher in proportion as it is free, is to think that what keeps the kite from climbing is the string to which is attached. Kant's dove, which thought it would be able to fly better without that wind keeping its wings back, fails to realise that for it to be able to fly at all, it needs the resistance of the air on which to lean its wings.'[69]

I mentioned above that it mattered that *Art and Scholasticism* and Maritain's subsequent writings on Rouault were written after the First World War: it is possible to read

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[67] AS, p.72.
[68] AS, pp.70-71.
[69] AS, p.100. This is a direct quotation of Gide's words from a lecture 'The Evolution of the Theatre' originally given before La Libre Esthétique of Brussels on 25 March 1904. It was later collected in André Gide, 'The Evolution of the Theatre', *Four Lectures* in *Pretexts: Reflections on Literature and Morality* (New York, 1959; repr. New Jersey, 2011) p.63.
Journals: 1889-1913 (details), p.114. In 1903, Gide wrote: 'Kant's dove. Still better: the kite that thinks it could climb without the string...'

in this advocacy of a 'middle way' for aesthetics a fear of extremities in the aftermath of the war, and to see Maritain's determination to recover 'the whole man in [his] integral and indissoluble unity' as a resistance to the mutilated, dismembered, 'body-in-bits' discussed in the previous chapter.

Maritain also continually opposes the work of the artist to the technological, mechanized labour of modernity – hence his insistence upon the value of the work ethic of the medieval artisan.[70] He is deeply critical of the power of the bourgeoisie in the twentieth century, and describes modern society as being '[f]ounded upon the two *unnatural* principles of the *fecundity of money* and the *finality of the useful*. . . . [I]mposing on man its puffing machinery and its speeding up of matter, the modern world is shaping human activity in a properly inhuman way, in a properly devilish direction.'[71] Against this, Maritain writes in particularly visceral terms that: 'The artist must be in love, must be in love with *what he is doing* ...[so that] his work proceeds from his heart and his bowels as from his lucid mind.'[72] These claims closely resemble Marx's description of the externality of alienated labour.[73]

A (perhaps surprising) parallel also emerges between Maritain's writing on art and Heidegger's: it arises from their epistemological claims for the work of art, in Maritain's out-of-the-ordinary 'not-knowledge' perception and the ability to 'uncover or return' an awareness of being-in-the-world that Heidegger finds in the work of art.[74] The similarities

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[70] AS 16-17, 81
[71] AS 30
[72] AS 38
[73] 'First, the fact that labour is *external* to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself, but denies himself... The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself.' Karl Marx, 'The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844' in *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, trans. T.B. Bottomore (London, 1963), p.110.
[74] See Neil Cox, 'Braque and Heidegger on the way to poetry', *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, Vol.12, No.2 (2007), p.104.

between them are rarely, if ever, mentioned,[75] perhaps in part because Heidegger is a much-evoked philosopher of modernism, whereas Maritain is more usually associated with what might be roughly described as 'anti-modernism'.[76] Examining the parallels between them will therefore be of the utmost use both in embedding Maritain within the wider philosophical climate of his day and in opening up ways in which Rouault's own work might be brought into relation with this climate.[77]

Heidegger, like Maritain, had a deep interest in the problems of painting – and not just from a theoretical distance. In a paper that takes up the task of reading-together Heidegger and the painter Georges Braque, whom Heidegger deeply admired, Neil Cox describes a complex relationship between philosopher and painter that resembles that of Rouault and Maritain – a relationship in which neither is an 'illustrator' of the other's ideas, but in which there are coincidences in interests, and in which the philosopher's thinking might be said to have taken in the painter's work at various points.[78] (Rouault and Maritain were, as has been said, very close friends and met often, whereas Heidegger only met Braque on one occasion.) For example, without drawing a line of influence, Cox notes the similarity between Heidegger's claim in 1925 that 'the unobtrusive useful things that form our environing world

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[75] I can find no examples of such a comparision.

[76] That Maritain wrote a book called *Anti-modernism* has not helped his reputation as a relevant thinker for modernism, but in fact, as Brooke Williams Smith argues, the book is as 'ultra modernist' as it is anti. See Brooke Williams Smith, *Jacques Maritain: Anti-Modern or Ultra-Modern?* (New York, 1976). See also Barbara L. Kelly, *Music and Ultra-modernism in France: A Fragile Consensus 1913-1939* (New York, 2013), p.210; Stephen Schloesser, 'Maritain on Music: His Debt to Cocteau' in *Beauty, Art and the Polis*, ed. Alice Ramos (Washington, 2000), p.188; Schloesser, 'The Rise of a Mystic Modernism' in *The Maritain Factor: Taking Religion into Interwar Modernism*, eds. Rajesh Heynickx & Jan de Faeyer (Brussels, 2010), p.36

[77] Rilke, as we saw in the previous chapter, became increasingly preoccupied with the question of 'thingness' and Heidegger is said to have claimed that his philosophy was simply 'the unfolding in thought of what Rilke had expressed poetically'. Fernihough argues that in Rilke's 1907 letters on Cézanne the central tenets of Heidegger's aesthetics are present. (Fernihough, *DH Lawrence: Aesthetics and Ideology*, p.123) This adds to the complex relations which I suggest links Rouault to Heidegger, via Rilke and Rodin. See J.F. Angelloz, *Rainer Maria Rilke* (Paris, 1936); Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne*, ed. Clara Rilke, trans. Joel Agee (London, 1988); and Erich Heller, *The disinherited mind: Essays in Modern German Literature and Thought* (Cambridge, 1952).

[78] Rouault and Braque were exhibited together at the Tate Gallery, London in April, 1946.

only find their first leap forward in our perception when they no longer work, when they are not in their usual place, when they are not longer "ready-to-hand",' and an aphorism by Braque, 'The idle plough rusts and loses its every day meaning', written in a notebook that Heidegger read in the 1950s.[79] (A 'not working' that again recalls Vauxcelles' encounter with Rouault's work.) Heidegger argues that when 'things' have a use, or what he calls in *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1935) 'equipmental being', their material characteristics are completely hidden or disguised behind their usefulness. In the work of art, however, the 'thing' can 'rest in its own thing being': 'The unordinary that surrounds every work [of art]', writes Heidegger, 'is the seclusion into which the work sets itself back, setting up only its own world.'[80] A 'bringing-forth' in the sense of a work of art is a 'bringing into appearance and concrete imagery', and bringing-forth 'brings hither out of concealment forth into unconcealment'.[81]

The question, then, is *what is brought forth*, and Heidegger's language of 'unconcealment' is not immediately helpful: in his discussion of van Gogh's painting of shoes, Heidegger describes the nature of equipment as the 'way the shoes are' for the peasant woman he imagines to have worn them. As equipment, Heidegger writes, they '*belong to the earth*', but in the work of art the '*earth*' properties are not *hidden by their usefulness* but appear as properties in themselves – the properties of the shoe, size, fit, condition etc attain a permanent and inexhaustible nature as materials, colours, textures: 'metal comes to glitter and

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[79] Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*, trans. Theodor Kisiel (Indiana, 1985), p.188, cited in Cox, 'Braque and Heidegger on the way to poetry', p.105.
[80] Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art' in *The Heidegger Reader*, ed. Günter Figal, trans. Jerome Veith, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2007), p.135.
[81] Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (London, 1982), pp.10-11.

shimmer, the colours to shine, the sounds to ring, the words to speak'.[82] This notion of 'earth' is bound up with Heidegger's notion of 'world'. To try and put it simply, *earth* stands before us and devoid of its mask of 'usefulness', *earth* is 'much more than nature as we ordinarily conceive it – it is that totality of being against which *world* appears'.[83] And '*world'*, he writes, 'is what is always out of the ordinary; in knowing it, we do not know what we know. (...world [is] never an object that *stands* before us, but rather the non-object that we investigate.)'[84] Thus, what is brought forth, via the isolated representation of things in their thingness in the work of art (*earthed*), is *not* another 'thing', distanced, detached and for which the work of art is a sign, but a revelatory moment, a flash (*worlding*) in which 'truth' or the hidden knowledge of being is momentarily broken open. What the work of art offers is 'a mortal glimpse of the immortal, a revelation of being from the horizon of our particular mode of being in the world.'[85]

Taking Braque's painting *La Sarcleuse* (1961-63) [fig.78][86] as an example, Cox writes that 'while for the farmer the weeding machine is a tool like any other ...in Braque's picture it becomes perhaps an entity that expresses the essential human dialogue with the natural cycle.'[87] Importantly, this bringing-forth is also based upon strife: as the work of art '*worlds*' – as it opens to us that which is out of the ordinary – the '*earth*' retreats or withdraws into concealment. The ensuing tension or dynamic between revealed and concealed being, is a darker and more complex antinomy than the tension at the heart of

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[82] Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time*, p.187; in Cox, 'Braque and Heidegger on the way to poetry', p.107.
[83] Cox, 'Braque and Heidegger on the way to poetry', p.107.
[84] 'Origin' in *The Heidegger Reader*, p.135.
[85] Cox, 'Braque and Heidegger on the way to poetry', p.109. Cox points out that theological resonances are often found in Heidegger's later writings, those that in fact can be considered as having been thought through in the ambit of Braque's art.
[86] This last painting by Braque is widely thought to recall van Gogh's last painting, a work, Cox says, Heidegger admired in part because it was painted in the September (the month of his birth).
[87] Cox, 'Braque and Heidegger on the way to poetry', p.107.

Maritain's aesthetics, but for both, this strife is necessary, essential even. That Heidegger thought so is indicated by a note he made in the margin of the first draft of *The Origin of the Work of Art*: 'There must be conflict – i.e., there must be a work.'[88]

Heidegger's claim that 'the artist possesses the essential insight for the possible, for bringing the hidden possibilities of beings into the work, and thus making humans see what it really is with which they so blindly busy themselves',[89] draws upon an understanding of the work of art that has, in fact, much in common with Maritain's claim that 'M. Rouault ...never sees things from the aspect of their ordinariness' and that Rouault's works offer a 'picture-story of the mystery of things – of some interior aspect and meaning caught in the reality of the visible world'.[90] Both suggest, Maritain nearly a decade before Heidegger, that the work of art can reveal, in Maritain's words, 'the secret rules of being': but Maritain is clearer from the start that what the work of art brings into obscure perception has a spiritual dimension, as 'the hidden significances that God alone sees glittering ...Resemblance, but a spiritual resemblance. Realism, if you like, but transcendental realism.'[91]

Most significantly, both Maritain and Heidegger understand the perception opened by the material work of art to be an obscure one. In the notes to *Art and Scholasticism*, Maritain offers this summing up:

> It might be said that, without being a form of knowledge and precisely because it is not a form of knowledge, art makes up for the deficiencies in our direct intellectual knowledge of the particular, which is the privilege of the angelic mind. It expresses the particular not in a mental word or concept, but in the

[88] *The Heidegger Reader*, p.150.
[89] Heidegger, 'The Projection of Being in Science and Art' (1931), in *The Heidegger Reader*, p.107.
[90] That said, despite its Scholastic vocabulary, Maritain's work offers a more practical understanding of art (and indeed was found to be by a number of artists) ref while the abstraction of Heidegger's formulation renders it a difficult tool for the analysis of individual paintings.
[91] AS, p.75.

> material work it makes. And by way of the senses it leads the creative mind of the artist to an *obscure* experimental perception – incapable of speculative expression, of individual realities apprehended as such in the bosom of the universe itself.[92]

Neither Maritain nor Heidegger suggests that such a perception is nonsensical or meaningless, but for both it is 'unknowable'. It is, as Maritain writes, 'precisely because it is not a form of knowledge' that it opens such deep veins of meaning in the world. It is, he wrote some years later, 'poetic knowledge' in which such awareness itself is made into a means of *grasping* the world.[93] Malraux described a similar 'grasping' epistemology when he said in his discussion of Rouault's work that 'you grope in the darkness for other human beings, seeking a bond with the world of differences, to mark the breach between you and the world you accuse, your confrontation with the absolute.'[94] For both Maritain and Heidegger, such a grasping is understood to be towards darkness, towards the incomprehensibility of mystery in itself. For Maritain, this 'obscurity' is much less 'dark' (to use the term in all its foreboding and difficult sense) than Heidegger's. For Heidegger it is the alienation from the world that has led man to understand it as standing-reserve and there is a sense that what is also restored in Heidegger's work of art is an originary incomprehension, even awe. For Maritain, obscurity and mystery hold the certainty of 'exalted splendour' or the 'splendour of Grace'. However, what they have firmly in common is the understanding of artistic 'disclosure' as a *bringing-near* of things and persons as sources of the mystery of being. For them, it is, as Robert E. Wood puts it, 'in the arts that such awe gains essential expression'

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[92] AS, p.150, n.117 – my emphasis added.
[93] Maritain, *Georges Rouault*, p.3.
[94] André Malraux, 'Notes sur l'expression tragique en peinture à propos des œuvres récentes de Rouault', *Formes*, (December, 1930)

against the 'dominating thrust of modern science [that] tend[s] to move us away from the sustaining ground of awe into the realm of cognitive and practical mastery.'[95]

Art, then, escapes this domain through its assertion of its own materiality, which limits human assumption and presumption by presenting limitations; it is this that overcomes the paradox and in obscurity opens the possibility of an expression of mystery or awe. Williams adds that this is why Maritain can 'insist that the surface meaning of a poem (or presumably, any product of art) may be accessible and clear or the opposite, without this affecting its clarity as a work.' [96] Williams' continues:

> The obscurity or indeterminacy of a poem at the intellectual level can indeed be a strength, since it becomes free to signify more to the reader. Maritain refers to Eliot's *Ash Wednesday* as an instance of poetic clarity – in a way that Eliot himself would have happily endorsed. When asked by an undergraduate what he [Eliot] meant by 'Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper tree', he famously replied, 'I mean, "Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper tree". The signification of the words is neither conceptual nor representational; it is the positing of a world in which these words "catch" and establish certain relations or resonances'.[97]

What is required of the viewer or reader of art and literature, according to Maritain, is only that they lend themselves to the terms of the art, so as to open their own perception to that offered by the work of art, akin to the manner in which the intellect, in Maritain's account of 'mystery', plunges into the mystery, the 'other' that it cannot assimilate.

Despite the 'darkness' of this mystery or obscurity, both thinkers use the word 'shining' to describe the perception brought forth by the work of art: however, this 'shining'

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[95] Robert E. Woods, 'Aquinas and Heidegger: Personal Esse, Truth, and Imagination' in *Postmodernism and Christian Philosophy*, ed. Roman Theodore Ciapalo (Washington, 1997), p. 280.
[96] Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, p.30. See AS, p. 59.
[97] Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, pp.30-31.

should be understood as the inverse of metaphors of light that suggest either the 'light' or 'illumination' of reason, or some kind of window or transparency on to the noumenal.[98] And in *Art and Scholasticism*, Maritain writes that:

> By *brilliance of form*[99] must be understood an *ontological* splendour which happens to be revealed to our minds, not a *conceptual* clarity. There must be no misunderstanding here: the words *clarity, intelligibility*, and *light*, used to characterize the part played by *form* in the heart of things, do not necessarily indicate something clear and intelligible to *us*, but rather something which, although clear and luminous *in itself*, intelligible *in itself*, often remains obscure to our eyes either because of the matter in which the form in question is buried or because of the transcendence of the form itself in the things of the spirit.[100]

In articulating a way of understanding the work of art in which the physical work maintains its consistency as an object and is simultaneously able to say more than it is, to 'swarm with meanings, and say more than it is', Maritain's aesthetics offer a way of understanding the obdurate materiality of Rouault's marks, the intrusion of a prosaic materiality, and the 'straining' or longing inherent in the surface described in the first two chapters, as necessarily bound up. That Maritain speaks of the necessity of resistance, of a tension between these aspects (encapsulated in the paradoxical phrase 'transcendental realism'), doesn't seek to overcome the obvious separation between paint-as-matter and a grasping, mysterious epistemology, but to describe that separateness-in-closeness as a double nature bound up with a 'fallen' philosophical tradition and with the limited and 'bound' condition of its maker. Most importantly, Maritain's – and Heidegger's – terms resist the kind

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[98] See Heidegger, 'Cézanne' from *Gedachtes for René Char* (1971-1974) in *The Heidegger Reader*, pp.310-311. Again, Fernihough makes a similar observation about Heidegger's use of the word 'shining'. See Fernihough, *DH Lawrence: Aesthetics and Ideology*, p.158.
[99] By 'form', here, Maritain means the 'formative idea' of the artist – an example of the inconsistency of his vocabulary.
[100] AS, p.23.

of reductionist accounts associated with both painterly and theological modernism. For Maritain, the allegiance to matter and the allegiance to meaning are fundamentally compatible.[101]

Rouault also writes of the artist's search for the 'hidden mysteries' of art. For example, in *Stella Vespertina*[102] (where we should understand 'beautiful' to mean that which 'shines' or 'means profoundly'), he writes that 'what is beautiful remains hidden and it has always been so. It must be worthy of the search and perseverance until death. There will always be pain and torment for one who engages in this quest, but also profound joy.'[103] Elsewhere Rouault opposes the content of art to scientific knowledge, writing of Orpheus and of the fleeting shadow of Eurydice as a dark and silent vision, but one which 'scientists', 'jugglers of words' will want to make 'speak', as they want to photograph the unknown face of Joan of Arc and explain her sacrifice.[104] It is in these moments, opposing the conscious search for meaning, that Rouault (and arguably Maritain) is at his most mystical – his, it seems, is a nocturnal search, supported by a vocabulary of words and images of the night or the dark. (Yet again, Vauxcelles' underworld can be seen as an apt critique.) However, Rouault's turn to these other stories or myths or fictions throughout his writings, as in *Le Grand Pan (Rodin)*, suggests a reliance upon fabrications or falsities that might initially seem to be counter to this pursuit of 'truth'. And yet, the impossibility of achieving truths is, in itself, demonstrated by an appetite for fiction or myth or parable that acknowledges itself as

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[101] See Heidegger, 'The Projection of Being in Science and Art' in *The Heidegger Reader*, pp.104-107. It is worth noting that neither Heidegger and Maritain are concerned with the presence of what could be called 'the founding presence of a human subject', although Maritain acknowledges that there will also be remnants of the artist in his work, not because he deliberately 'put' them there but because he has thrown himself wholly into his work.
[102] Meaning 'Evening Star'.
[103] From Rouault's text 'Stella Vespertina', repr. in *Sur l'art et sur la vie*, p.108. *Stella Vespertina* is also the title of an illustrated book by Rouault from 1947. The text was by M. l'Abbé Maurice Morel, and the illustrations comprised 12 héliograuves (coloured). It was printed by Draeger Frères and published by Galerie René Drouin.
[104] *Sur l'art et sur la vie*, p.89.

fabrication. Rouault's whole project, literary and painterly, can be seen as a fictional construction that seeks to express a grasping cognitive process while simultaneously 'fictionalizing' what might otherwise be taken as fixed structures of reason. Paradoxically, Rouault's search for hidden truths is based upon fictions, whilst acknowledging that such fictions are necessary in a world we cannot wholly understand.[105] This structure is replicated in the polysemic materiality of Rouault's paintings, and in the notion of the mask.

This also emphasizes the line of continuity that I have already argued can be drawn from Rouault's early Symbolist work to the materiality of his twentieth-century work. The change in painterly process, the foregrounding of paint-as-matter, signals a change from the evocation of a kind of mysticism, which we might associate with Denis' terms, to a Maritainian emphasis upon the integrity of the work of art as a physical object, oriented towards its own, painterly ends. This physicality, which draws upon the sensory, realigns Rouault's mysticism with Maritain and Aquinas.[106] It also renders Rouault's theology, in regard to his painting, a negative or apophatic theology. The nature of reality becomes a void, a site of both spiritual deprivation and enlightenment, a site that at once limits human understanding and celebrates 'lack' as a positive value (as opposed to the positivism of reason).[107] This might also suggest that those critics who contended that Rouault's work was essentially inexplicable, including André Lhote and A.M. Cocognoc,[108] had in fact sensed

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[105] It seems likely he was influenced in this by his reading of Pascal, who used vignettes. See Christopher Braider, *The Matter of Mind: Reason and Experience in the Age of Descartes*; Alexander Gelly, *Unruly Examples: On the Rhetoric of Exemplarity* (Stanford, 1995); Louis Marin, *On Representation* (Stanford, 2001).

[106] As opposed to the mystical tradition derived from Dionysius in which the object of contemplation must be mystical cognition. See Colleen Jaurretche, *The Sensual Philosophy: Joyce and the Aesthetics of Mysticism* (Wisconsin, 1997), p.24.

[107] See Jaurretche, *The Sensual Philosophy*, p.12. In this tradition, John of the Cross writes of 'the happy night of incomplete possibility'.

[108] Andre Lhote, 'Rouault', *L'Amour de l'art*, Vol.4, no. 12 (December 1923), p.779 ; A.M. Cocognoc, 'Rouault', *L'Art Sacre*, Vol.5-6 (January-February 1964), pp.4, 6.

(albeit unwillingly and perhaps unwittingly, as in the case of Vauxcelles) something of these deeper claims in his art.

In the rest of this chapter I want to examine two aspects of Rouault's oeuvre that demonstrate and develop the association between his work and Maritain's aesthetics. These are, first, another article by Rouault from 1910, '"Noli me tangere": (Cézanne)', and, secondly, his paintings of the Holy Face. Both of these are explicitly concerned with questions of presence: the material presence of the work of art; the presence of the artist, and the presence through absence of meaning. They are, in different ways, examinations of what has been described as the double nature of art, of the bodily presence of art as both material and spiritual. Inevitably, the questions raised build upon and deviate from Maritain's thought as the work of art itself intervenes in what is, at times, an idealist aesthetic. Although Maritain wrote at length on the themes described above he rarely engaged with individual works and in fact where he did the results are somewhat disappointing.[109] However, with Maritain's aesthetics in mind, and building upon the close readings of Rouault's paintings in the previous chapters, the next two parts of this chapter will propose a revised and nuanced way of understanding the theological aesthetic of Rouault's painting.

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[109] The closest Maritain comes to a concrete example is in 1958, when he writes of Rouault's *Christ and Two Disciples* (1935) that it is: 'A striking example of the exclusively pictorial *poetry* of Rouault... which conveys to our eye and to our heart, in one single intuitive flash, the nostalgic clamour of a world illumined by the blood and compassion of its Saviour. Through its musical intensity of colour and its liberty of emotional idealism this canvas is in my opinion one of the most revealing works of Georges Rouault.' Maritain, *Georges Rouault*, p.6. *Christ and Two Disciples* is a strange work, the 'musical intensity' probably refers to the arrangement of largely red slabs of paint that build the scene, and which are interrupted by an emphatically vertical central line to the work. The figures, three again, disappear out of the bottom of the canvas, while a tower and moon are placed more conventionally in the upper third of the painting. Maritain's description, beyond emphasizing the pictorial poetry over the literary qualities he is keen to reject at this point in Rouault's work, moves quickly away from the painting to his own non-specific schema. In fact, *Christ and Two Disciples* is a difficult work: it has a raw quality and an embodiment that recalls *Rue de la solidarité,* and *Baptême du Christ*. This is also present in *The Humane Landscape* (1928) which has much in common with *Christ and Two Disciples*. *The Humane Landscape* is ostensibly a view of a city, but with structures fluid enough to suggest limbs and colours suggest bodies and flesh. The figures and the buildings are swallowed up by these forms. In *Christ and Two Disciples*, the raw, brick-like or bodily red is applied most intensely to the womb-like shape that leads, as a path, from the disciples to the strikingly phallic structure of the church or tower that is the central feature of the painting. The bodily components of this work are visually dominant, and yet overlooked by Maritain.

Part Two: *Noli me tangere* : Cézanne, Rouault, Nancy

If the 'foot' stands for the disenchantment of modernism, and the 'grounding' that the materiality of the body represents, the dominant body-part in the many images from across the history of art entitled *Noli Me Tangere* is, usually, the hand. *Noli me Tangere*, most often translated as 'do not touch me' or 'touch me not', is taken from St John's Gospel (20.17, King James Version). It is spoken by Christ to Mary Magdalene at the moment she recognizes him – having previously mistaken him for a gardener – on Easter morning outside the empty tomb. It is the only biblical scene whose title is an utterance to have gained the same status as a scene or pictorial motif as a *Resurrection* or *Last Supper*.[110] In itself, it is a deictic expression; it indicates a vague context but requires the complete phrase: 'Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father'. The message 'do not touch me', and the desire and prohibition of the scene, is often expressed in the conversation of the hands – as Barbara Baert notes, 'that there is a *prohibition* on touching needs to be illustrated by a near-touch or at least by an inclination to touch.'[111]

The resonances between this scene and the condition of painting are profound: it is a scene about the presence of absence, or the termination of presence in an about-to-be absence. It is a scene, Jean-Luc Nancy writes in his prolonged meditation on it, in which Christ speaks, makes an appeal, and leaves. 'He speaks in order to say that he is there and

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[110] See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Noli Me Tangere: On the Raising of the Body*, trans. Sarah Clift, Pascale-Anne Brault, and Michael Naas (New York, 2008), p.12.

[111] Barbara Baert, 'Touching with the Gaze: A Visual Analysis of the *Noli me tangere*' in *Noli me tangere: Mary Magdalene – One Person, Many Images*, ed. Barbara Baert (Leuven, 2006), p.45. Jean-Luc Nancy adds that the phrase 'says something about touching in general, or it touches on the sensitive point of touching ...precisely the point where touching does not touch and where it must not touch in order to carry out its touch (its art, its tact, its grace): the point or the space without dimension that separates what touching gathers together, the line that separates the touching from the touched and thus the touch from itself.' Nancy, *Noli Me Tangere*, p.13.

that he is leaving immediately. He speaks in order to say to the other that he is not where he is believed to be; he is already elsewhere, while nonetheless being present: here, but not right here.'[112] In paintings of the scene, one could argue, the image of Christ is 'raised' in place of his absent presence – he cannot be touched, but the act of looking, manifested in painting, is endless.

There is an irony, too. Paintings are generally *not* touched, but they can, as Waldemar George wrote of Rouault's work, be 'perceptible to touch', where 'touch' is 'read' as a combined sensory knowledge.[113] (This irony is extended in paintings of Doubting Thomas in which Thomas' 'proof' by touch is 'untouchable'.[114]) Touch and sight are inextricably linked in the act of painting, which is a touching of brush upon canvas, drawing from the visible (usually) to create something that will be looked at. Thus we often talk about what the painterly-touch *looks* like, especially in discussions of 'materiality'. Like Gloucester in Shakespeare's *Lear*, we 'see it feelingly'. The painter who paints this scene, writes Nancy, 'adds the following: my hands reach out toward the apparition that does not appear, toward the departure that undoes the entire scene, toward the resemblance that does not allow itself to be recognized, toward the darkness that shares with the light its concealment from representation, toward a canvas and a motif that repeats for me: "Do not touch me".'[115] *Noli me tangere* is also a scene of insight, a flash of vision that exceeds what was originally seen. Mary Magdalene thinks she is speaking to the gardener, and in the moment that she realises it is Christ he is *also* the gardener, the empty tomb, and a departing presence. It represents an

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[112] Nancy, *Noli Me Tangere*, p.11.
[113] Waldemar George in *Rouault: Anthology of Texts*, p.15.
[114] See Mieke Bal on the wound, eye-catching and fascinating whilst simultaneously frightening the viewer away in Caravaggio's *Doubting Thomas*. Mieke Bal, *Reading 'Rembrandt': Beyond the Word-Image Opposition* (Cambridge, 1991), pp.19-23.
[115] Nancy, *Noli Me Tangere*, p.49.

attitude to meaning that *rejects* total comprehension and the possession or 'holding' of knowledge, in favour of receptiveness and interaction.[116]

In Rouault's 1910 article, '"Noli me tangere": (Cézanne)', it is Cézanne who speaks, which casts him as the departing Christ-figure. 'Do not approach me, do not touch me' ('Ne m'approche pas, ne me touche pas'); 'I carry with me all the beauty that the world ignores or disregards...'[117] Then, again, beginning a new sentence: 'Do not approach me, do not speak to me: words and deeds are in vain, I am silent, old, and helpless ... it took suffering to achieve what I had to do down here.' Yet again, he echoes the phrase: 'Do not approach me: I'm the leper approaching men and men have fled.' This reiteration continues, as it becomes clear that Rouault's Cézanne is indeed departing (Cézanne, of course, was dead by 1910), and he is indeed Christ-like, as Rouault emphasizes Cézanne's dedication to his painting, and fears that with his demise certain aesthetics heights are no longer attainable. With Cézanne's departure, it seems, a feeling for the beauty in things, and an expression that aims 'discreetly' for the 'absolute' might also disappear. Rouault's Cézanne is also a suffering Cézanne, alienated from society and infirm.

To a large extent, Rouault draws upon what was well-known about Cézanne: his solitary existence, his commitment to his work, and – less well-known – Cézanne's commitment to Catholicism. These are the qualities in Cézanne that Rouault most admired. However, Rouault's repetition of 'Do not approach me, do not touch me', also (presumably deliberately) alludes to Cézanne's hatred or phobia of being touched: it seems likely that, by 1910, this information was relatively widely known through Emile Bernard's anecdote about

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[116] See E. McLaughlin, 'Noli me tangere: Bonnefoy, Nancy, Derrida', *French Forum*, Vol. 37, No.1-2 (2012), pp.183-194.
[117] Rouault, '"Noli me tangere' (Cézanne)', *Mercure de France*, 16 novembre 1910, reprinted in *Georges Rouault : Forme, Couleur, Harmonie*, p.25.

Cézanne's morbid fear of the touch of human hands, which Cézanne likened to *grappins*, the multi-pronged grappling hooks used to anchor ships.[118] (The phobia was allegedly rooted in a childhood memory of being kicked from behind.[119]) The repeated 'touch' of the text upon the subject of 'touching', but an undesired, repelled touching around the figure of a notoriously solitary painter, at once 'purifies' painting from 'touch' while simultaneously orienting painting and the painter entirely around touch and presence.

Rhetorically, Rouault's repetition, nine times, of 'Ne m'approche pas,' echoes the use of *Noli me tangere* as a trope in the Gregorian chant, and the effect here is similarly mesmeric. Rouault also uses this phrase, particularly when in conjunction with 'do not speak to me' or 'I cannot teach you anything', to preserve or shield the painter against criticism, or to keep his works from being 'explained away'. This is confirmed by a rare affirmative sentence in which Rouault's Cézanne says: '*Do* leave those alone who speak after my death on behalf of my poor corpse' – an attempt to distance himself from those who would appropriate or impose their readings upon the painter's work (when he adds that 'there will always be an after battle', this is presumably a dig at the multiple claims that had been made over the previous five years to lay claim to Cézanne's legacy). In the final lines, Rouault's Cézanne writes: 'Do not approach me, do not touch me, I want to die in peace away from the noise and the lie of life', which aligns Cézanne momentarily, not with Christ, but with the

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[118] Susan Sidlauskas, *Cézanne's Other: The Portrais of Hortense* (California, 2009), p.160; and Ulrike Becks-Malorny, *Cézanne* (2001), p.19; Clark, 'Freud's Cézanne' in *Farewell to an Idea*, p.150.
[119] See Clark, 'Freud's Cézanne' in *Farewell to an Idea*, p.150; See also: Alex Danchev, *Cézanne: A Life*, (London and New York, 2012); T.J. Clark, 'Madame Matisse's Hat', *London Review of Books*, vo1.30, no.16 (14 August 2008), pp.29-32; and *In Visible Touch: Modernism and Masculinity*, ed. Terry Smith (Chicago, 1998), p.32.

blinded Oedipus, who retreats to a grove near Colonus when he is on the verge of death and says to those who are following him: 'Come on, but touch me not'.[120]

Nancy notes that in the original Greek of John, Jesus' phrase is given as *Mē mou haptou*, which, in a similar usage, the verb *haptein*, (to touch) can also mean 'to hold back, to stop'.

> Christ does not want to be held back, for he is leaving. He says it immediately: he has not yet returned to the Father, and is going toward him. To touch him or to hold him back would be to adhere to immediate presence, and just as this would be to believe in touching (to believe in the presence of the present), it would be to miss the departing [*la partance*] according to which the touch and presence come to us.[121]

In seeking meaning, then, we are told that we *cannot* seize upon it; we cannot lay hold of a meaning within this finite life. What the scene shows is the 'emptying out of presence'; it is *not*, as the Resurrection is *not*, a return to life. The Resurrection is about the raising of the body, the appearance or visibility of the inexpressible, the *excess*. But it is raised to reach for this meaningfulness *in its embodied materiality, as the body itself*. The body that theology will later call 'glorious' is, writes Nancy, 'shining with the brilliance of the invisible'. But it 'shines' as Maritain's and Heidegger's works of art 'shine': 'this uprising or insurrection is a glory that devotes itself to disappointing you', *it refuses to be seized*, its 'brilliance is nothing other than the emptiness of the tomb'. The resurrection is not a return to life; but a 'dark glory, whose illumination merges with the darkness of the tomb.' [122] Representation binds to the material presence of painting in Rouault's (and arguably Cézanne's) work, just as the

[120] Sophocles *Oedipus at Colonus*, trans. Eamon Grennan & Margaret Rachel Kitzinger (Oxford, 2005), p.96. This is also noted in Nancy, *Noli me tangere*, p.14.
[121] Nancy, *Noli me tangere*, p.15.
[122] Ibid. p.16.

resurrected body is bound to the empty tomb, to the departure of the presence of corporeal body. Thus, Nancy writes, the painter of such a scene 'puts the truth of "resurrection" to work: the approach of the parting, in the ground of the image [*au fond de l'image*], of the singular of truth. It is thus that he *paints*... which is primarily to say that he "represents" in the proper sense of the word: "to intensify the presence of an absence as absence."'[123]

As warnings against intervention in a state of becoming, 'do not touch' or 'do not hold back', also resonate with the art of Cézanne and Rouault, which is often described as left in a state of 'unfinish', which often *looks* 'unfinished' as in demonstration of a state of becoming (inviting the kind of Bergsonian interpretation explored in the previous chapters), and which tallies with their respective treatment of their work not in terms of individual pieces but as an ever-evolving lifelong project. In Rouault's case, he was particularly reluctant to ever describe a work as finished (the histories of his relationships with Vollard and Diaghilev involve several anecdotes according to which they had to lock Rouault out of his own work spaces and 'steal' the works they were owed[124]). The article could also be read, not as the finite departure of Cézanne, but as the departure of the painter from every canvas he paints. Following Nancy's reading of absence at the heart of the presence of painting, this state of becoming might be seen as an attempt to avoid closing the possibility that meaning might still be caught in the canvas, might *not* have departed. At the same time, it is the departure of the painter, the departure of presence that leaves its absence in paint, which

[123] Ibid. p.51.
[124] When Rouault finally settled with the Vollard estate that they would return his paintings, he attempted to 'finish' a number of them, and burned the rest.

opens the possibility of meaning *in* the emptiness of the painted canvas as in the emptiness of the tomb.[125]

Rouault doesn't paint a traditional *Noli me tangere* scene – not one that is given that title. He also rarely paints hands, and so the scenes of 'encounters' between Christ and another figure which might be attributed to this scene rely upon body language, and as they tend to have been painted after 1920 when Rouault's figures were increasingly puppet-like and dismembered, they lose the desire and repulsion of the scene. There are nevertheless points of intersection between what Rouault gestures towards in his text and the nature of his visual work. Note, for example, that up until the late nineteenth century, 'noli me tangere' was used to mean cancer of the eyelids, or any condition causing persistent ulceration of the skin.[126] Without over-reading the significance of these words to Rouault, the resonance with his works' invocation of notions of blindness and of a wounded or scarred surface is suggestive. There are also iconographic echoes, for example in a print in the *Miserere* series, 'Seigneur, c'est Vous, je Vous reconnais' (1920-1927) [fig.79]. As the title indicates, the print depicts a scene where Christ is recognised. This is not a conventional noli me tangere – the other figure is male, so cannot be Mary Magdelene – but the hands are clearly defined and correspond to the gestures associated with more traditional *Noli me tangere* images. An indication of light around the head of Christ shows that this is the resurrected Christ, and Christ's restraining hand gesture, against the desire of the other to touch him, is particularly distinctive.

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[125] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes et al. (Stanford, 1993), p.348. Nancy describes painting as that which presents presence and 'always, saying nothing, says: here is this thing, and here is its presence, and here is presence, absolute, never general, always singular.' But, he continues, the *discretion* of presence 'is what the thing does not appropriate in its presentation, what withdraws from presentation, and in presentation. It is – insofar as one can say *is* – the very thing that painting... how shall one say it? ...doesn't present, but *paints*.'

[126] Rouault may have had his friend Huysmans in mind here, as he went blind before dying of mouth cancer.

In as much as *Noli me tangere* is about 'touch' it is also about the 'untouchable'. This can be a metaphor, as discussed, for the condition of painting, but taken more metaphorically the 'untouchable' can also refer to the lowest category of society. Rouault's clowns and prostitutes, which could be described as the heterogeneous, monstrous waste products of society, are such a group.[127] These 'untouchable' outcasts, have, ironically, been 'touched' by the brush of the painter and rendered 'untouchable' once again as a work of art – a symbolic 'raising of the body', perhaps. Fabrice Hergott writes that the 'elevation' of the layers of Rouault's painting should be taken in its Christian sense: 'He painted on sheets of paper which he gradually covered with fine layers of pigment. In the course of the realization, these increasingly heavy sheets were glued onto canvas, or, when they became very thick, onto wooden panels. Thus there occurred a veritable ascension of painting.'[128] Hergott's description is too literal, and 'fine layers' seems inappropriate for Rouault's brutish facture. But Hergott's notion is nevertheless suggestive, both in its evocation of a move from the identification of symbols within the painting to the painted-object itself as a new kind of symbol, and in its highlighting of the grounding of the ascendance of painting within the materiality of the work. The elevated matter of the painting could be said to visualize the grasping or reaching that it has been argued is at the heart of Rouault's, and Maritain's, epistemology.

That said, we might counter this ascension with Rouault's move from easel to table, the horizontality of which implies a veritable lowering of painting. This relationship between

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[127] Mary Magdalene, the sister of Lazarus, was a 'fallen woman' whose faith redeemed her, and which Christ respected; furthermore, as regards the kind of 'knowledge' of this scene, this was a time when women could not give evidence in courts of law because they were considered to be unreliable – thus the 'knowledge' of Mary's recognition of Christ is not empirical proof of a 'worldly' kind.

[128] Hergott, 'With Rouault and Braque: on the inner paths of painting', p.118.

'high' and 'low' (which brings the discussion of modernist narratives of the 'low' in Chapter One to bear upon this point), the 'untouchable' and the 'raised', is another unresolved tension in Rouault's work – one that maps onto the double nature of Maritain's aesthetics. It is a tension raised by the pairing, on purely visual grounds, of two paintings by Rouault: *Filles* (1909) [fig.80] and *Christ aux outrages* (1912) [fig.81]. The latter, *Christ aux outrages*, is an image of the 'wounded' Christ and resembles the tradition of devotional images of Christ known as the 'Man of Sorrows'. Despite its dark brown, it is the most 'fleshly' of Rouault's depictions of Christ; the addition of a reddish brown, an ochre, and white which have been dragged across the thick surface, create a raw quality to the surface of the body. An example of an *andachtsbilder* image, the Man of Sorrows is usually depicted from just below the waist, wearing a loin cloth and with the wounds of the Crucifixion on his body and hands clearly visible.[129] Rouault's work is in oil, visibly thick and encrusted in places, and made up of the kind of layers Hergott referred to: it is a work on paper mounted on canvas. The wounds of the Crucifixion are not clear, but the title indicates this is a violated, wounded Christ, and this is paralleled in the dense painterly facture that violates the surface of the painting. The painting is vertical but also particularly flat, an effect created by the thick ground of the same dark brownish hues as the body, and by the eyes, which are, as usual in Rouault's work at this time, slab-like marks that might indicate the closed lids of death or might, as across his other subject matter, be a way of keeping the viewer on the surface by obliterating the signifiers of interiority. These effects force the work to oscillate between the tradition of the *andachtsbilder* image and paint-matter. The physicality of the work, both

[129] The phrase 'Man of Sorrows' comes from Isaiah 53 verses 3-5, which is taken to be an example of a prefiguration of Christ in the Hebrew bible: 'He is despised and rejected of men, a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. And we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed.'

painterly and bodily, is emphasized by its striking resemblance to Rouault's *Filles*, another oil on paper, in which two women stand side by side in positions alike to that of the figure in *Christ aux outrages* but slightly twisted, and, like him, are shown from the groin upwards. The raw qualities of these bodies is increased by the use of a red, applied in slabs and scraped along the lines of the body, which is particularly harsh in effect.

The similarity between these works poses the question as to whether painting 'raises' the body, in this case by aligning the 'wounded' bodies of the prostitutes with the tortured body of Christ, which might be seen as a redemptive connection, extending the piety associated with the Man of Sorrows. At the same time, the comparison emphasizes the physicality of painting, suggesting the precariousness of a presence of excessive meaning which is inseparable from this fleshly, bodily matter. This brings us to the images of the 'Holy Face' in Rouault's oeuvre, which exemplifies this precarious border between the material and immaterial.

Part Three: The Holy Face

Like the popular associations of *Jeu de massacre*, the *Noli me tangere* scene, and the devotional tradition of the wounded image of the 'Man of Sorrows', Rouault's use of 'the Holy Face' draws upon yet another tradition and order of image-making – in this case, one that questions the 'authority' of both the painting and the painter.[130] In his paintings of the Holy Face, Rouault combines the notion of the image *not* made by human hands, 'an

[130] The images of the holy face in Rouault's oeuvre tend to be treated as expressionist images of the face of Christ – calm in the face of suffering. See for example Kang, *Rouault in Perspective*, p.176.

acheiropoieton'[131], with an explicit painterly materiality that declares, above all, that it *has* been made by human hands The image of reference is the *sudarium* of St. Veronica, often called the Veronica or the Vera Icon. *Sudarium*, from the Latin, *suder* 'sweat' refers to its place in the narrative of the Passion – a history that only became relatively stable in the fourteenth century.[132] The story goes that a woman called Veronica saw the tortured Christ on the road to Calvary and, in an act of pity, wiped the blood and sweat from his face with a cloth (sometimes described as her veil). To reward her compassion, Christ left on Veronica's cloth a perfect imprint of his features.[133]

The story, as Hans Belting writes, contains several points of significance for the history of theological images: firstly, as portrait after the *living* model it is distinct from the so-called portraits of invented fictitious gods, and therefore is evidence of Christ's historical life and of what Belting calls 'the reality of his human nature'. Secondly, the miraculous authenticity of the image prevents any equation with human-made gods, or idols. And lastly, this 'gift' of the human image of Christ can be taken as 'proof' that he wished to have images made of himself. Thus, adds Belting, 'not only the genuineness of the image but also the appropriateness of venerating it were proved legitimate.'[134]

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[131] See Joseph Koerner, 'Not made by Human Hands', *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago, 1993), pp.80-126; Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A history of the image before the era of art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago, 1994); C. Stephen Jaegar, *Enchantment: On Charisma and the Sublime in the Arts of the West*, (Pennsylvania, 2012); and Brad Harper and Paul Louis Metzger, *Exploring Ecclesiology: An Evangelical and Ecumenical Introduction*, especially pp.207-237.

[132] See Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture*, p.81 and Gerhard Wolf, 'From Mandylion to Veronica: Picturing the "Disembodied" Face and Disseminating the True Image of Christ in the Latin West' in *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, eds. Herbert L. Kessler & Gerhard Wolf (Bologna, 1998).

[133] 'The cloth itself was termed the Veronica partly because of a felicitous homonymy. As Gerald of Wales writes in his Speculum ecclesiae (c.1215), "Some say that Veronica signifies, in a play on words [vocabulo alludentes], simultaneously the true icon [veram iconian]." Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture*, p.82.

[134] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, pp.208-209.

Against Maritain's model of art as a 'failed incarnation' that emphasizes the mediating role of the work of the artist and of the work of art in bringing to intelligible form a complex vision, the Veronica, as an *acheiropoetos*, is an unmediated image, described by Joseph Koerner as 'the dream of an autonomous, self-created image, a picture produced instantly in its perfect totality, outside the bodily conditions of human making', an image that 'through its mode of production, fashioned without human hands enters into a special elevated status among things in the world.'[135] Its origination, then, is as miraculous – and as 'inhuman' – as the Annunciation. In this vein, as people are understood to be made in the image of God to which they aspire (with Christ as the exception, being not image but divine incarnation), the Vera icon is the icon of icons, the 'mimetic ideal'[136] towards which all paintings should aspire: this sanctifies the human labour of the painter of Christ, but at the same time it might be seen to promote the kind of painting that *erases* the evidence of human making, that aspires to leave its bodily conditions of human making behind.

Rouault painted a number of images of the Veronica throughout his career, including *La Sainte Face* (c.1912) [fig.82], several versions in the *Miserere* print series (including images such as *Le juste, comme le bois de santal, parfume la hache qui le frappe* (1922-1927) [fig.83] that depict the performative, devotional role of the image), *Passion* (1935) [fig.84], *La Sainte Face* (c. 1939) [fig.85], *La Sainte Suaire* (1939-1945) [fig.86], and *Sainte Face (harmonie cuivrée)* (c.1953) [fig.87]. These paintings all contain indications of a second 'ground' that represents the cloth, or framing devices that suggest either the cloth or an icon-like appearance to the image. Like the clowns, whose portraits often assume a similar icon-

[135] Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture*, p.84.
[136] Ibid. p.85.

like appearance, the iconography is both simple and hardly varies. The faces are outlined in thick black lines, with a crown roughly indicated amongst the thick marks that make up Christ's chin-length hair. In the early images, drips of blood can be seen on the forehead. The facial features are simple, a long nose, eyes that are usually mere shapes and appear shut, and a beard – all of which again are outlined in thick black. This repetitive iconography, I suggest, opens up this category of paintings to include faces of Christ such as *Christ aux outrages* (1904-1909) [fig.88] which depicts the same face but without any representation of the cloth. However, the exploration of *Jeu de massacre* or *Noli me tangere* indicate that Rouault was not consistent in applying the frames that make certain references explicit, and that the absence of a particular indication of a context does not remove either the possibility of a reference more obscurely suggested or the relevance of the associations that might arise from that connection. What does change chronologically across this type of painting is the ground and surround (cloth-like or not) which begins as a simple line or flat area of paint and becomes a thickly painted, colourful and ornate design that is Byzantine or mosaic-like and which, viewed close-to, gives the appearance of a *papier-maché* frame.

These framing devices distance the face that they enclose, and 'slow' the approach to it – is it no longer an immediate image, exceeding its space as in many of Rouault's more 'theatrical' portraits. This alteration in reception renders it a more thoughtful image in an enclosed and separate space that resembles the spaces of sacred images. The earliest image, *La Sainte Face* (c.1912), is different: it appears immediately to be a painting within a painting, but, as ever in Rouault's paintings from this decade, without a sense of depth. This lack of depth emphasizes the self-referential nature of the depiction of an image in the painting, a strategy that makes the material conditions of the *painting* explicit *over* the bodily presence of the subject, which is rendered as a physical presence *only in paint*.

Far from hiding the conditions of making, then, Rouault's paintings of the Veronica or Vera icon (in accordance with the general direction of his oeuvre) work against the legend of that image and are all but overwhelmed by the evidence of their construction. On one level this contradicts the theology outlined briefly above by emphasizing that the image is made by man, not by the miraculous intervention of the divine. Whilst the Veronica was held to be able to 'reproduce' itself, a reproduction that explained the proliferation of so-called *acheiropoieton*, it did so not by human hand but by further miracles, by a mode of unmediated reproduction that was believed to imprint the image onto pieces of cloth or paper that were laid over the original likeness. By distancing his paintings from this kind of image, Rouault clearly does not appropriate the miraculous for his work. But his Veronica images do not entirely reject the theology associated with the story, for in their pronounced materiality they emphasize another side of the original event: namely the physicality of the blood- and sweat-stained cloth at the heart of the tale.

In doing so, Rouault's images emphasize once again the 'fallenness' of the work of art articulated in Maritain's philosophy of art. This has two results. First, there is a kind of humility in Rouault's work in this sense. Part of Maritain's criticism of painting since the Renaissance was its aseity to God, an arrogance leading to falsity that Maritain sees in any form of art that tries to 'hide' its material factual nature. Second, it emphasizes the gap that necessarily exists between the human realization of thought in the material image and the thing towards which the images gestures but that it can never reach (the 'shining', or that which remains untouchable). These images are wrapped up in the 'idea' or 'fiction' or history of the representation of the Veronica as a way of describing the 'void' into which art, according to Maritain, enters. The Veronica is the exemplar of the visible and invisible; it is an image where what is 'seen' and what is 'known' is taken to the imaginable limits of that

relationship. I would go so far as to suggest that the repetition of this image in Rouault's oeuvre operates as an allegory for the grasping epistemology of failure that I have argued underlies his modernism.

This epistemology is also at stake in Rouault's paintings of the Crucifixion, which can be read simultaneously as depictions of the fallen, physical condition of the incarnate Christ and, especially when depicted in Rouault's limb-like surfaces, as a reflection upon the condition of painting. In this sense, the incarnation becomes another model (like the Titans) for the imprisonment of painting in matter. For example, *Crucifixion* (c.1917) [fig.89] depicts Christ on the cross, a figure whose demarcated limbs are on the verge of appearing marionette-like, and the parts of which are absorbed into the multiple parts – by which I mean slabs of paint, solid areas of colour, and raw brush marks – that both divide and unify the work. It is one of the few works in Rouault's pre-1930 oeuvre that does resemble stained glass. The figures at the foot of the cross are difficult to identify immediately beyond their gestures: one kneels in prayer, the other gazes towards the lowered face of Christ. Christ's body is de-animated in this work not only by the armour-like structure of the body but by the use of a thick white oil upon a blue ground that makes the body stand out but does not embody it, creating instead a deathly inhuman pallor. There are indications of a frame within the work itself, which in itself is a kind of figure of death, as it distances the scene and 'sets' the scene up as a construction within a construction. Taking this scene according to what it immediately seems to say, it is a painting embedded in Crucifixion scenes; the hint of a window, of a frame, the gestural body language of Christ and the figures at the foot of the cross are wrapped up in artistic conventions.

Christ en croix (1920) [fig.90] dispenses with the framing devices of *Crucifixion* and the result is a more impressive sense of the body, depicted closer to the picture plane and extending out of it. It also places the viewer with the figures at the foot of the cross, a complicity that relates the physicality of the painting to our own embodiment. But again, the dominant blue ground, empties the body of life, de-animating it and turning it into a motif both maintained and imprisoned by the painting. The same is true – truer, even – of the mutilated, dismembered Christ-like figure in *Trois Clowns* (1917) [fig.69]. The mode of expression of these works – their *Art des Sagens* or the *way* of saying, as de Man put it – is so emphatically painterly, that it is difficult to move past the strokes of paint that form the figures and cross. They are, according to de Man's materialism, depictions of the unavoidably concrete and limited terms of art. They represent a translation of the Crucifixion into the dark, de-animated bodily terms of modernism, a translation that asks *if* these highly modernist terms *can* open painting to the kind of presence desired by Maritain and Heidegger. The repeated faces of Christ, painted in the same slab-like terms, the constructions in paint of the Crucifixion, and the masked face of the clown-as-Christ, contain the incarnate body of God but are not *ensured* as meaningful by this concretion in paint. They are 'disappointing' in the sense described above by Nancy: resurrection is a glory that devotes itself to disappointing you', *it refuses to be seized*, its 'brilliance is nothing other than the emptiness of the tomb'.

This 'emptiness', however, is re-inscribed with meaningful significance by analogy with the notion of kenosis, or the 'self-emptying' of the incarnate Christ in taking on humanity (this notion will be extensively considered in the next chapter). Echoing Christ's

effacement of the glory of his own image, through which Christ indicates not his own face but the trace of God,[137] the icon or painting of Christ 'impoverishes' itself – a claim that also accounts for the explicit materiality of Rouault's work. Key to this notion of impoverishment, is that the image gives up its own prestige, impoverishes itself and imposes limits on itself so that the 'veneration' is brought back not to the 'made' image, but to the invisible prototype.[138] As Jean-Luc Marion writes:

> The self-affirmation of the image, like all others, yields only in front of an abandonment: it is precisely because the icon is not given for itself, but rather undoes its own prestige, that it perhaps demands veneration – veneration that it does not seize but rather lets pass through it to the invisible prototype.[139]

Marion also argues that contemporary art contains a systematic impoverishment in schools such as minimalism, *art povera*, the ready made, etc. The strategy of these approaches is intended to give the gaze a problematic liberty that can be compared to the impoverishment of kenosis.[140] The use of banal materials as part of this impoverishment or undoing of prestige can be seen in Rouault, as Vauxcelles' 'caviar, blacking, and pitch' testifies to. Rouault's materiality, then, can be understood to be in dialogue with this kenosis that is ordained by Christ. It is important to add that this understanding of the image as insufficient in itself and, instead, returning itself to an Other, does not undermine the discussion thus far of the displacement in Rouault's work of the sense of a foundational signifier. The two are reconcilable in that, according to the kenotic model, the 'other' cannot be known or seized. For both Maritain and Rouault the complex interrelationship between the

[137] Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, trans. James K.A. Smith (Stanford, 2004), pp.61-62.
[138] Ibid. pp.63-64.
[139] Ibid. p.62.
[140] Ibid., p.63

material and the transcendental was inherent to their understanding of the dynamic meaning of Christ's incarnation for spiritual and moral creativity.

Conclusion: Recognition and Mystery

The Veronica revolves around recognition: Veronica's recognition of Christ's suffering and need, Christ's recognition of Veronica's compassion, and the recognition of the original and subsequent viewers of the invisible mystery within the visible reality of the Veronica. Epistemologically, the Veronica brings forth a 'theology of the sign', as Koerner writes:

> the Holy Face, as true icon of Christ and therefore as perfect match between image and model, *signum* and *res*, resembles the original divine signature on the face of man, as a being made in the image and likeness of God. To venerate the Veronica, believers sign themselves with the cross (the sign of signs), so that the Incarnation of God in the suffering Christ is met by the *imitatio* of his Passion in Christian piety. The end point of this growing proximity of signs to their referents, this sublimation of likeness into identity, is the unmediated vision of God, the "face to face" of I Cor.13:12. The Veronica prepares believers for this movement from mirror to reality, *signum* to *res*, by aiding their future recognition of the face of faces.[141]

That Rouault's images of the face of Christ have the same face, a face derived from the archetypal signifier in art for the face of Christ, and that Rouault replaces this face in similar 'saint-face' compositions with the face of the clown, indicates that his paintings 'know' their limits – they do not claim to represent the face of God, what can be 'learnt' from them is that that human sight *cannot* see that far, human expression fails in reaching out towards the

[141] Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture*, p.86.

unknown. The bafflement of the viewer in front of an obscure painting by Rouault might even be read as analogous to *imitatio* of the Passion in the face of the Veronica. The analogy prompts a further question: to what extent does 'meaningfulness' in such materially emphatic works of art require an a priori belief, even faith, that the work and processes of art 'mean' more than they literally are?[142] This is Nancy's caveat regarding the parable.

According to Nancy's analysis, the structure of parable simultaneously offers a text to be interpreted and a 'true story': the truth and the interpretation are made identical to each other and by each other, but not in such a way that the truth will appear 'in the ground [*au fond*] of interpretation, nor in that other way according to which the truth would be as infinite and multiple as are the interpretations always begun anew.'[143] Truth, then, must be understood 'otherwise', in a way that is manifested by the 'thought' of the parable. When Christ explains the use of parables, his answer ('that they are meant for those to whom it is not "given... to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven"') suggests that the parable might be expected to 'teach', to open the eyes of those who do not see. But, Nancy continues, Christ says nothing of the sort:

> To the contrary, he says that, for those who hear them, parables fulfil the words of Isaac: "By hearing, ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing yet shall see, and shall not perceive." And it is precisely in this context that he makes one of his most well-known and paradoxical statements: "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath." Thus the object of the parable is first to sustain the blindness of those who do

[142] On the theological resonances of modern art see Rowan Williams, 'God and the Artist' in *Grace and Necessity*, pp.133-170; David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: the Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, 2003); and Karsten Harries, 'Art, Beauty, and the Sacred: Four Ways to Abstraction' in *Meanings of Abstract Art: Between Nature and Theory*, eds. Paul Crowther and Isabel Wünsche (New York and Oxford, 2012), pp.241-254.
[143] Nancy, *Noli me tangere*, p.5.

> not see. It does not proceed out of a pedagogy of figuration (of allegory or illustration) but, to the contrary, out of a refusal or denial of pedagogy.[144]

This is a description of the condition of receptivity: the parable restores the sight of those who already see, and the hearing to those who hear – 'It gives back the gift of sight or its privation, in truth'.[145] Echoing Maritain's call for the viewer to 'lend themselves' to the terms of the work of art in order to open their perception to it, Nancy writes that there 'is no "message" without there first being ...an address to a capacity or an aptitude for listening. ...It is a warning: if you do not understand, do not look for the reason in an obscurity of the text, but only within yourself, in the obscurity of your heart.'[146] It is in this that Nancy, and I think Maritain, find an essential relation to modern art[147] – 'he who has already entered into the proper listening of this text and has therefore entered into this text itself, into its most intimate movement of sense or of passing beyond sense and into its *unworking*.'[148] It is this 'unworking' that the analyses of Rouault's paintings throughout these chapters have grappled with, and attempted to address *as* beyond 'sense' (where sense is understood as convention or habitual perception).

Nancy closes this discussion with a provocative distinction between 'belief' and 'faith': belief, he argues, 'sets down or assumes a sameness of the other with which it identifies itself and in which it takes solace' while faith 'lets itself be addressed by a

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[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid. p.7.
[146] Nancy, *Noli me tangere*, p.9. Previously, Nancy writes that between the image and sight there is not imitation but 'participation and penetration'. 'There is an excess of visibility, or, more precisely, there is a double excess of visibility and invisibility.' p.7.
[147] In a sense, Nancy adds in parenthesis, 'this little book is attempting to clear the way, however slightly, for this hypothesis ...The excess of its [modern art's] truth does not have the indeterminate character of a general less that, in some way out of proportion with each particular case, would suggest a regulatory principle. Its excess is always primarily that of its provenance or address.' Ibid. pp.8-9.
[148] Ibid. p.9. In a sense then, we might add that the painting forms its own viewers.

disconcerting appeal through the other, thrown into a listening that I myself do not know.'[149] This account of 'faith' accords with the model of a grasping epistemology in Rouault's works – an aesthetic that reaches into the unknown.

[149] Ibid. p.10.

Chapter Four: Doubt and Obscurity

The double and fallen condition of Rouault's painting and its nocturnal epistemology described thus far has been seen to accord with Maritain's understanding of an obscure awareness that is itself 'made into a means of *grasping* the world'.[1] In Maritain's schema, as in many of Rouault's works, obscurity and mystery hold the certainty (albeit unknowable) of 'exalted splendour' or the 'splendour of Grace', but there are aspects of Rouault's oeuvre that appear to threaten this: aspects that seem to posit an overwhelming physicality or a potentially irredeemable aesthetic and ethical darkness. Arguably, it was precisely this possible absence of transcendence or meaning that filled the original critics with horror. This horror was paramount in the face of Rouault's paintings of prostitutes, which were described as 'thick gelatinous masses of flesh', as 'epileptic toads', and as 'dug-up corpses'. Maritain himself acknowledged this darker side of Rouault's work, describing what he perceived to be an emphasis upon sin and degradation in certain paintings as evidence of 'an almost Jansenistic *purity* that can however turn into cruelty.'[2] As if fearful as to where this train of observation might take him, however, Maritain quickly sought to negate and distance these dark terms by adding (in a manner that recalls Vauxcelles' caveat[3]): 'Under this appearance of brusqueness, or even brutality, lies a heart that is never indifferent or disdainful to man's woes. This is the source of those grim, forbidding images, more hideous than common caricature, whereby, in a certain (already remote) period he sought to unburden his outraged soul.'[4]

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[1] Maritain, *Georges Rouault*, p.3.
[2] Ibid. p.5. See also Jacques Maritain, *Art and Poetry*, trans. E.P Matthews (London, 1982).
[3] See Introduction p.4.
[4] Maritain, *Rouault: Anthology of Texts*, p.14.

Beginning with *Filles (ou deux nus)* (1905) and *Filles (ou deux prostituées)* (1906), as exemplary of this aspect of Rouault's painting, the first part of this chapter will argue that the critics were right to recognise a vulgar physicality, an emphasis upon flesh and paint that might indeed be described – at least initially – as a flabby resignation to matter. Once again, however, this emphasis upon paint-as-matter or matter-as-flesh does not offer the concrete surety of Courbet's materialism. Instead, as I will argue, what Rouault's painting posits here is the potential emptiness of materialism: what if, he asks, this is it? What if this is the rotten embodiment of a rotten, spiritually empty world? A world that means no more than it literally is? At its darkest, its most 'bodily', most literally 'fleshly' and most unsettling, what Rouault's work proposes between 1902 and 1920 is an aesthetic based upon *doubt*. This is the kind of doubt, the 'what if' of Easter Saturday – what if this, the body, is it? – that permeates the work of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, which Rouault deeply admired. I will suggest that the emphatic physicality and materiality of Rouault's paintings of bodies can be compared to Dostoyevsky's kenotic theology and to the notion of blasphemous or profane terms as a radical form of acknowledgement of the holy.[5]

The questions of recognition and of *iurodstov* (holy foolishness) raised by this discussion are extended in the second part of the chapter to Rouault's paintings of criminals in court; beginning with several images from 1907 entitled *Le Condamné*, and turning to two of Rouault's later works entitled *Homo homini lupus*. Drawing upon the resonances of this latter title and Derrida's *The Beast and the Sovereign*, this section will investigate animality in Rouault's painting, and the implications for the ethics of his project. It will also consider an aspect of Rouault's later paintings as yet unmentioned in any of the literature – that the imagery central to works such as the two *Homo homini lupus* paintings and *Petite*

[5] See Rowan Williams, *Dostoyevsky: Language, Faith, and Fiction* (London, 2008), p.226.

Magicienne (1949) is drawn from that of the tarot. In returning to 'game-playing' these later paintings re-stage questions associated with artifice and knowing or not-knowing.

The final part of the chapter returns to the terms of the criticism of Rouault with which we began in Chapter One; to the accusations that Rouault's work is dark, blind, and mad. Taking these to be valid observations, this section will consider how these qualities are figured in Rouault's work and what kind of 'world claims' they posit in Rouault's painting. In particular, the notion of 'not-knowing' is re-examined through the themes of vision and blindness, specifically in relation to the sightless subjects of Rouault's works, arguing that these complicate questions of truth and falsity in ways that bring doubt and scepticism to bear upon his project. The central argument here is not that Rouault's works are nihilistic, but that the ever-present possibilities of emptiness or of a nihilistic darkness are necessary to the uncertainties and tensions that keep meaning in play in Rouault's emphatically painterly project.

Part One: Flesh, Doubt, and Kenosis

Filles (ou deux nus) (1905) [figs.91 & 92] are oil on paper, and is painted on both sides so that the image is mirrored, in the case of the figure nearest to us, almost exactly. (Both sides are signed by the artist.) Once again, the figures are cut off by the edges of the paper, one is seated, the other standing, and in the case of the latter – as in most of Rouault's images of standing nudes – the area of the body shown resembles his images of the Man of Sorrows. The oil is applied loosely, and thinly, in areas, so that the paper appears as the ground of the image, covered in scumbled patches of dryly applied oil, patches whose colour attaches them to the subjects, and whose marks operate independently and contribute to the depthlessness of the scene. The context is ambivalent; the double title suggests these could

have been models in the studio, perhaps when Rouault was sharing with Marquet and, due to a lack of finances, they offered street prostitutes a warm refuge in return for their acting as models.[6] Somewhat ironically, this anecdote is often offered as evidence of Rouault's sympathy but in fact the inherent disparity within it between the artist and the model speak to an uncomfortable power relation that rather contributes to the dehumanizing of Rouault's models. Thick blue lines (which prompted one reviewer to accuse Rouault of 'unrestrained Cezannisms'[7]) roughly sketch the shapes of overly-pronounced bellies, echoed by the breasts, the line of the shoulder and the round top of thighs. The faces are devoid of individuality, heavy, even brutish, and in these images particularly masculine, with the addition of a grim monumental, lithophitic quality. In the 'verso' of these images, the paint beneath the blue lines and the patches of orange and red, is predominantly green, adding a ghoulish atmosphere reminiscent of the greenish hue of *The Dead Christ Wept Over by the Holy Women*.

Filles (ou Deux prostituées) (1906) [fig.93] is a darker work, also of two women, who in this case are clearly prostitutes: they are both sitting and there is some indication of a background room and seats. The dominant figure in this painting is perhaps the most grotesque example of this type of work by Rouault; again the fat belly, breasts, and buttocks are swollen, the face is a masculine mask, and the overwhelming effect is the presence of a hulk of a figure whose contours are on the verge of disintegration or dissolution into matter. This is achieved, perhaps counter-intuitively, in watercolour: dark slab-like outlines leave the body relatively unmarked (for Rouault) with a light wash in areas over visible paper. Ironically, as in *Tête de clown tragique*, some of the parts of the image that should, mimetically, be most 'substantial', such as the thigh or buttocks, are in fact almost empty of

[6] Kang, *Rouault in Perspective*, p.41.
[7] Anon. *Gazette de la Capitale* (1910) in Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism*, p.222.

paint. As in *Filles (ou deux nus)* there is an emphasis on matter and on flesh, not because of an instrumental relation between paint-matter and flesh, but due to the invocation of the fleshly through a paint-matter that asserts itself whilst at the same time laying bare (literally and metaphorically) the squalid, porous, and scatological materialism of the body.

These paintings, perhaps above all, seem to epitomise the 'fallen' quality perceived by the critics in Rouault's work, and when they were exhibited in 1910, the reaction was visceral. The reviewer in *Gazette de le Capitale* wrote that Rouault's nightmarish apparitions were 'ugly, grimacing, and obscene', and *La République* decided that it must be Rouault's intention to 'strike us with horror': his vision of humanity was intolerable, so 'attached to defects, to sluts, to monstrosities' that he must secretly desire that his viewers follow him in 'detesting and condemning them as he himself does'. 'No M. Rouault!' the outraged reviewer went on, 'life is not made exclusively of hideousness, humanity is not inevitably ugly and repugnant or grotesque.'[8] The writer and critic, Gustave Coquiot (1865-1926), who was also secretary to Rodin (before Rilke),[9] wrote that 'as soon as Rouault gets hold of a woman, he leaves her to marinate in vinegar, in acid, in order to make her dry up like a stick, or swell like a bladder.'[10] He described Rouault's images of women as 'gutter venuses' – a combination of 'high-art' and urban life that indicates his view that Rouault's art had 'fallen' (as had the women) – and continued by describing them as 'crouching…in poses assumed by epileptic toads… [presenting] their fat bellies adorned with brushwood instead of soft hair'.[11] These descriptions recall Ellmann's discussion of the 'leaking, bleeding, bruising, swelling, flaking, breaking, rotting' modernist body that resembles the medieval grotesque body, a

[8] Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism*, p.224.
[9] Coquiot was also one of the first French art critics to write favourably about Marc Chagall, a painter whom Maritain came to admire and write about. See Maritain, *Art and Poetry*; Benjamin Harshav, *Marc Chagall and his Times: A Documentary Narrative* (Stanford, 2004), p.333. Coquiot also disliked Degas' paintings of prostitutes: see Hollis Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in the French Art of the Impressionist Era* (Getty, 2003), p.128.
[10] Gustave Coquiot, *Des Peintres Maudits* (Paris, 1924), also in *Rouault: Anthology of Texts*, p.17
[11] Ibid.

body taken over by its holes and orifices, its bumps and sores.[12] However, in fact, Coquiot's terms go further, insinuating a dark animality.

In a painting such as *Filles (ou deux prostituées)*, this animality describes both Coquiot's disgust, by lowering the human to the animal, and the sense that the thickening fragments of contours, the bare patches of paper, and the spilling out of the frame of the gigantic shapes represent a disintegration of the body from bone and structure to uncontained flesh or even meat. Such a descent into matter has also been identified by Gilles Deleuze in the paintings of Francis Bacon (1909-1992), particularly his depictions of the figures at the foot of the Cross, which Deleuze describes as a 'becoming meat'.[13] Bacon's later project is different on many levels, but there are affinities between his work and Rouault's in their deformations of bodies and emphasis upon an unstructured fleshliness. The American author and critic John Updike linked Rouault and Francis Bacon as painters who saw that people are meat.[14] In these paintings by Rouault, this sense is literally heightened by the colours – including the deathly green – of this work and of *Filles (ou deux nus)*, and also by the raw quality of the slightly later work *Filles* (1909) [fig.80], discussed in the previous chapter. This, it seems, is matter on the verge of losing its power as constraint, a becoming-flesh that occurs in Rouault's painting in the period before he 'rebuilds' the body, marionette-like.

The critical question here, then, is whether this abandonment to the flesh is, or at least might be, accompanied by an abandonment of God.[15] Kenneth Clark described these images of the body in a language of fallenness and abandonment, arguing that what Rouault's figures

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[12] Ellmann, 'More Kicks than Pricks'.
[13] Gilles Deleuze *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (London and New York, 2005), pp.15-20. See also Timothy Mathews, 'Space, Place and Virtuality: Gilles Deleuze with Francis Bacon and Alberto Giacometti', in *Porous Boundaries: Texts and Images in Twentieth Century French Culture*, ed. Jérôme Game, (Bern, 2007), p.14.
[14] John Updike, *Facing Nature: Poems* (New York, 1985), p.18.
[15] Michael Hardt, 'Exposure: Pasolini and the Flesh', *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, vol.24, no.3 (1997), p.78; also quoted in Zdebik, *Deleuze and the Diagram: Aesthetic threads in visual organization* (London, 2012), p.153.

generate is a sense of shame, because they shatter and profane the feelings of joy and desire felt at the sight of the idealised human body, for which Clark offers Giorgione's and Botticelli's Venuses as examples (a poignant contrast to Coquiot's description of Rouault's 'gutter Venuses'). Into this dream of the ideal enters its antithesis: 'the sublimation of desire is replaced by shame at its very existence; our dream of a perfectible humanity... is rejected in favour of lumps of matter, swollen and inert.'[16] This shattered dream of a perfectible humanity also finds its origin in the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden in *Genesis*: a story central to histories and philosophies of shame.[17] In 1900, Freud described childhood as an analogous paradise – albeit in terms of mass-phantasy – where 'the sense of shame is unknown'. He continues: 'This is why in paradise men are naked and unashamed, until the moment arrives when shame and anxiety awaken; expulsion follows, and sexual life and cultural development begins.'[18] Similarly, in his interpretation of *Genesis*, St Augustine had associated the awakening of shame with the awakening of lust, and it is the accompanying 'bodily disobedience' that gives proof of man's disobedience to God.[19] Rouault's nudes, then, in replacing the idealised but also sexualized body of Venus with 'lumps of matter' that invoke disgust rather than lust are a ghastly version that generate a sense of shame firstly in the fallen condition of mankind, and secondly, as Clark says, by shattering the illusion of the idealised body and replacing it with a mirror of flesh.

However, the necessary 'other' of the shame paradigm, the ideal or the dream of perfectible humanity, keeps the transcendental inherent in the fleshly disgust of the body.

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[16] Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (New York, 1956), p.45.
[17] See Robert Metcalf, 'Unrequited Narcissism: On the Origin of Shame', *Studies in the History of Ethics*, Vol.8, (2006).
[18] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), trans. & ed. James Strachey (London and New York, 1955 repr. 2010) p.263.
[19] Augustine writes: 'It is right, therefore, to feel very much ashamed of lust ... When in consequence their disobedience was chastised by a corresponding punishment, there appeared in the movements of their body a certain shameless novelty, which made nakedness indecent. It made them self-conscious and ashamed.' Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XIV, chap. 17, see Metcalf, 'Unrequited Narcissism', p.2.

Instead of excluding these works from Rouault's oeuvre (as Maritain wanted to do), or recuperating them through recourse to the painter's character (like Vauxcelles), or allowing their darkness to 'taint' his other output (from Greenberg's perspective), these paintings can be read as proposing a more radical version of the 'straining' or 'grasping' or 'departing' relationships between paint-matter and meaning explored thus far. In this case, meaning is present through a forceful making-absent or self-emptying. In the discussion of the Holy Face in the last chapter, the icon was described as derived from the kenosis of the image, from the impoverishment of the image that in undoing its own prestige demands veneration.[20] In these bodily paintings (in all senses), the relationship is complicated since their materiality can be understood to translate into kenotic terms in a double manoeuvre: as both an emptying and a filling-up. The affirmation of the plenitude of the material, the fullness of flesh, writes Michael Hardt, results from the 'self-emptying or *kenosis* of Christ, the evacuation of the transcendental'.[21] Once again the emphasis is upon the consciousness of material limitations, a consciousness that does not annihilate the possibilities of meaning from painting apparently wrapped up with those limitations, but which, in resigning itself to these limitations, renders meaning precarious.

This precariousness arises from the constant anxiety inherent in this double condition, which can also be characterized as the paradox of the Cross: the paradox that God became a human being.[22] The self-emptying of kenosis seeks to overcome the heresy that Christ thereby became 'less' divine, by understanding God-as-man to have given himself up to flesh, which veils divine attributes. Thus Christ is resigned to the human condition and can suffer as man. This self-emptying is derived from Phillippians 2:7: 'Who, although He

[20] Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, p.62.
[21] Hardt, 'Exposure: Pasolini and the Flesh', p.78.
[22] See Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Love Alone: The Way of Revelation* (London, 1970).

existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.' In this, then, it is the difference or separation between the material and the spiritual, the flesh and the transcendental, that is crucial. It can be understood as regaining or opening up a new space for meaning in the 'distance' that is preserved between matter and the transcendental.[23] But at the same time, in Rouault's paintings, there is the constant threat or possibility that nothing is recovered, that the descent into matter is in fact absolute. Yet again we encounter the recurring, and unsettling, tension in Rouault's painting between reality, presence, and meaning.

The theology of this approach to these works preserves the integrity of the material condition of art that has been vital to this thesis and offers another formulation of the *possibility* of meaning. Clark seems to indicate this kind of reading when he suggests that Rouault's images of women can be explained through the neo-Catholic doctrines of Léon Bloy, according to which 'in the lukewarm materialistic society of 1900, absolute degradation came closer to redemption than worldly compromise.'[24] But he cannot understand why Rouault should have approached these questions through the nude. For Clark, writing in 1957, these 'monsters of depravity' represented the 'last violent twist in the history of the nude' (they might now be said to represent the first stages in the twentieth century's renegotiation of the nude). They are more like the Cnidian Venus, he adds, an *objet de culte*, a monstrous idol 'inspiring us with fear rather than pity'.[25] However, to read *Filles (ou Deux prostituées)* with an understanding of kenosis is not to see degradation brought closer to redemption in Clark's terms, but to perceive it as signalling the redemptive through an act of

[23] See James D. Herbert, *Our Distance from God: Studies of the Divine and the Mundane in Western Art and Music* (California, 2008).
[24] Clark, *The Nude*, p.45.
[25] Ibid.

resignation. This, paradoxically, brings redemption closer through an evacuation of transcendence, and in this light the nude makes sense. The nude, idealised and sentimentalised in the history of painting, is shown, in this monstrous version, to be a substitute: the monstrous idol, in denying the visibility or representation of the transcendental, refuses the substitution. In this refusal, a void is opened, in which the possibility of the transcendental returns, though always accompanied by the possibility of nothingness.[26]

It is this intrusion of doubt that is also found in Dostoyevsky's novels, particularly *The Idiot* (1868). On 7 July 1911, Rouault wrote to André Suarès (1868-1948) – a French poet and critic associated from 1912 with the influential cultural journal *Nouvelle Revue Française* and its then editor, André Gide – that he was reading Dostoyevsky 'with great reverence', continuing: 'I feel and discover at every moment new beauties, and what beauties, unknown and wonderful... in the midst of the most tragic and sordid realities...'[27] This reference is significant: it speaks to the anchoring of indications of the transcendent in the broken and defaced,[28] and to Rouault's recognition of the paradox of the Cross in Dostoyevksy. Hans Urs von Balthasar has also described both Dostoyevsky and Rouault as 'witnesses' to this paradox: specifically in Rouault's work in his attempts 'over and over again to catch a glimpse, in the fool and the clown, of the head "all covered with blood and wounds".'[29] These attempts to catch a glimpse of the holy in the broken and defaced, or in the

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[26] Stephen Bann, *Ways Around Modernism* (New York and Oxford, 2007), p.72. See also Harold Bloom, A *Map of Misreading* (Oxford, 2003).

[27] *Georges Rouault – André Suarès Correspondence 1911-1939*, p.15. Suares was one of the pseudonyms used by Félix André Yves Scantrel. Rouault's correspondence with Suarès had begun earlier in 1911, and would last until 1939. The correspondence is, in general, oriented around Rouault's concerns about the success of his painting, and Suarès, although only three years older than the 40-year-old Rouault, adopts the role of mentor. Suarès' view of man's anguish is caused by conflicting physical and spiritual forces; his subjective criticism reflects a personal identification with varying elements in Nietzsche, Pascal, Goethe, and Montaigne. See Maurice Martin du Gard, 'Un poète intellectuel: André Suarès', *Harmonies critiques* (Paris, 1936), pp.138-48.

[28] Williams makes a similar point in relation to Dostoyevsky, see Williams, *Dostoyevsky*, p.225.

[29] Balthasar, *Love Alone*, p.41.

symbols of defacement and brokenness, are underlined by the visual associations described in the last chapter between *Filles* (1909) and *Christ aux outrages* (1912) [fig.81]. As noted, the associations work in both directions: emphasizing that suffering requires flesh and blood, and negotiating the materiality of presence and kenosis in painterly and bodily matter.

The Idiot revolves around the physicality of the body, and has been described as a novelistic exploration of what it means to be flesh.[30] The novel follows the 'saintly idiot' Prince Myshkin, who returns to Russia from a clinic in Switzerland where he has been treated for, but not cured of, an epileptic condition. Ripped from isolation and exposed to humanity and its sins – which he is fundamentally unequipped to make sense of – Myshkin's hopeful innocence is mocked, and instead of the salvation or redemption he endeavours to bring to the world around him, he begins an inevitable decline within the morally corruptive society of late-nineteenth century Russia, until epilepsy and naivety give way, in the end, to madness.

At the centre of *The Idiot* is the image of Hans Holbein the Younger's 1521 painting, *Christ in the Tomb* [fig.94]. It is also called *The Dead Christ* by Dostoyevsky and *Christ taken down from the Cross* by Karamzin in his *Letters of a Russian Traveller* (1801), which Dostoyevsky would have read: Karamzin wrote of this painting that 'one doesn't see anything of God. As a dead man he is portrayed quite naturally. According to legend, Holbein painted it from a dead Jew.'[31] The original hangs in the Kunstmuseum in Basel, and Dostoyevsky's wife, Anna, wrote in her diary of the strong impression the work made on her husband in 1867 when they made a specific visit on their way to Geneva to see the painting: 'This painting, from the brush of Hans Holbein, portrays Jesus Christ, who has suffered inhuman torture, has been taken down from the Cross and given over to corruption. His

[30] See Richard Pevear, 'Introduction' in Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Idiot*, (London, 2001).
[31] See W.J. Leatherbarrow, 'Introduction', Dostoyevsky, *The Idiot*, trans. Alan Myers, (Oxford, 1992), p. xxi. Hereafter all quotations from this edition.

swollen face is covered with bloody wounds, and he looks terrible. The painting made an overwhelming impression on my husband...'[32] In the novel, this reaction is given to Myshkin, who having seen the original in Basel is struck by a copy of it he sees in St Petersburg: 'Over the doorway into the next room hung an oddly-shaped picture, some five feet wide and no more than ten inches high. It depicted the Saviour, just taken down from the cross.' 'I saw that picture abroad and I can't forget it', Prince Myshkin says, and later: '"That picture!" cried the prince, struck by a sudden thought. "That picture! A man could lose his faith looking at that picture!"'[33]

The description emphasizes the horizontality of the painting; which in turn emphasizes the base physicality of the depicted body, and the question that hangs over the whole novel is that posed by the painting: what if Christ was only a man? What if he suffered, died, and was left a bruised, lifeless corpse?[34] The inherent doubt raised by Holbein's image is described most fully in the following passage, which is worth citing at length:

> The picture shows Christ, just taken down from the cross. I believe artists usually depict Christ, whether on the cross or taken down from it, as still retaining a trace of extraordinary beauty in the face; they seek to preserve this beauty in him, even during the most terrible agonies. There was no hint of beauty in Rogozhin's picture [*Christ in the Tomb*]; it is an out-and-out depiction of the body of a man who has endured endless torments even before the crucifixion – wounds, torture, beatings from the guards, blows from the populace, when he was carrying the cross and fell beneath it, and finally the agony of the cross... this is nature unadorned, truly how a corpse must look, whoever it may be, after such agonies. ...In the picture the face is terribly mangled by blows, swollen, with terrible, swollen, bloody bruises, the eyes

[32] Cited in Pevear, 'Introduction' p.ix.
[33] Dostoyevsky, *The Idiot*, Part Two, Chapter 4, pp.228-229.
[34] It is, as Pevear writes, the question of the Resurrection – underlined by the name of the heroine, Nastasya Barashkov: where Nastasya is short for Anastasia and *anastasis* is 'resurrection' in Greek, and Barashkov is from the Russian for 'lamb'. Pevear, 'Introduction', p.ix. Pevear also points out that the three main male characters of the novel, the saintly 'idiotic' Myshkin, the passionate and earthbound Rogozhin, and the consumptive nihilist Ippolit, are each defined – and define themselves – in relation to this painting.

> open and unfocused; the whites wide open, gleaming with a kind of deathly, glazed lustre. But it's odd; as you look at this corpse of a tortured man a most curious question comes to mind: if a corpse like that (and it must certainly have been exactly like that) was seen by all of his disciples, his future chief apostles, and seen by the women who followed him and stood by the cross, by all in fact who believed in and worshipped him, how could they have believed, looking at such a corpse, that the martyr would rise again? The compulsion would be to think that if death was so dreadful, and nature's laws so powerful, how could they possibly be overcome? ... Looking at that picture, one has the impression of nature as some enormous, implacable, dumb beast, or more precisely, strange as it may seem – in the guise of a vast modern machine which has pointlessly seized, dismembered, and devoured, in its blind and insensible fashion, a great and priceless being... [35]

This passage resonates with both the 'becoming-flesh' of Rouault's early paintings and the dismembered, de-animate bodies and surfaces described in relation to the modernist 'body-in-bits' in Chapter Two. It describes the fearful question presented by the physicality of Rouault's painting at the level of his wider project and specifically in paintings such as *Filles (ou deux nus)* and *Filles (ou deux prostituées)*. If there are affinities between the man of sorrows and the bodies of the down and outcast in *Filles* (1909) and *Christ aux outrages* (1912), then equally, this articulation of doubt begins a process that might be called 'desymbolization' – the deconstruction of the analogy between the degraded body and the suffering Christ by emphasizing the difference.[36] In the context of Rouault's wider project this introduces a reading that acknowledges the darkness, and the tension caused by this darkness, in his work. Instead of the unreservedly redemptive readings of Courthion, for example, this approach necessarily considers the possibility of doubt as well as resurrection. By emphasizing the separation of the material and the spiritual, this reading also continues to stress the failure of the painted canvas: painting is an imitation of kenosis, but a failed one,

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[35] Dostoyevsky, *The Idiot*, Part III, Chapter 6, pp.429-430.
[36] See Sarah Young, *Dostoyevsky's 'The Idiot' and the Ethical Foundations of Narrative: Reading, Narrating, Scripting* (London, 2004), p.3

and in acknowledging its own materiality it opens a space that, as in Maritain's aesthetics, grasps towards the possibility of mystery and divinity. The irony of a painting that acknowledges its vulgar physicality is that it represents in visible, 'incarnate' terms that can be understood, but which simultaneously threaten to overcome utterly or drown in matter the 'other' or 'more' they wish to open up to.

Dostoyevsky's language of de-animation, of corpses and rotten flesh is echoed in an article by the Belgian critic Georges Chabot,[37] written in 1928, in which he described Rouault's paintings of prostitutes as:

> …thick gelatinous masses of flesh, vacillating flesh, upon which no genuine kiss will ever be pressed again, flesh that seems rotten, abscessed… For the man of sensibility, it is as though the artist were confronting him with dead women, or with dug-up corpses, for they have now entered into the realm of the abstract.[38]

But Chabot's text also performs a manoeuvre that gestures towards the transformation of the material, or the opening of the material onto another realm – through the material. This manoeuvre is significant in indicating a way in which the criticism of Rouault can be read as a dialogue that 'uncovers' the holy in the profane.

Writing against the narratives of pity that immediately seek to redeem these paintings, Chabot dwells upon the disintegrating corporeality he perceives. Like the blasphemer, he has, as Williams observes, '*decided* to treat the visible image of the holy as if it is not what he knows it is'[39] or as what other critics and sympathisers have decided it is. This exhibits, in a

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[37] Chabot was an influential critic in the early twentieth century about whom little is now known – he too wrote on Chagall. See Courthion, *Rouault*, p.39.
[38] Georges Chabot, *Revue d'Art* (Antwerp, September 1928). Chabot was asked to contribute to a special issue of *Cahiers d'art* in 1928, and this seems to have prompted articles on Rouault by him elsewhere that year, including in the Belgian journal.
[39] Williams, *Dostoyevksy*, p.226.

radical form, what is involved in acknowledging the holy. Such profanity or blasphemy (and this might be said to be true of Greenberg's vitriol) acknowledges the manifestation of the holy in the material world, 'apprehended as transmitting and embodying eternal reality – but doing so in the only way in which eternal reality as Christians see it can be so embodied, that is, in habitually hidden and always questionable form.'[40] Chabot's text makes the opening of this process clear in his isolation of the images and the ambivalent 'realm of the abstract'. The overly-determined flesh that he sought, or so it seemed, to amplify or venerate in itself, gave way to something that the critic could not articulate or hesitated to clarify. 'Abstract', usually associated in this period with the emptying of signification, provides the kenotic 'evacuation' that, according to the paradox of the Cross, belongs with the affirmation of the plenitude of the material.

Having connected Rouault and Dostoyevksy as 'witnesses' to this paradox, Balthasar locates this 'grasping in faith' in the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855),[41] and in a similar vein, Gerard O'Collins notes that Kierkegaard's comparison of the incarnation to the story of a powerful king who disguises himself as a lowly servant is replicated in Rouault's portrayal of Christ as a clown.[42] These comparisons, albeit fleeting,[43] draw attention to the associations between the kenotic motifs discussed above and the questions of disguise, recognition, and 'masking' discussed in Chapter Two. The kenotic offers another way of articulating the 'clothed idea' in existentialist as opposed to Symbolist terms: in Rouault's

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[40] Ibid.
[41] Balthasar, *Love Alone*, p.41.
[42] Gerald O'Collins, *Incarnation* (London, 2002), p.64.
[43] Such comparisons between Rouault and Kierkegaard tend to be fleeting: see William A. Dryness, *Rouault : A Vision of Suffering and Salvation* (Michigan, 1971), p.36; Stanley R. Hopper, *The Way of Transfiguration: religious imagination as theopoisesis* (Louisville, 1992), p.67; Hans Küng, *The Incarnation of God* (London,1987), p.99; Theodoere L. Prescott, *A Broken Beauty* (Michigan, 2005), p.xv; Schloesser, *Mystic Masque;* Courthion, *Rouault*, p.99; Ileana Marcoulesco, *Georges Rouault: The Inner Light* (Houston: Menil Collection, 1996), p.6. There are striking and significant affinities between their projects, particularly their mutual struggle to find a suitable aesthetic or rhetoric or form in which their respective arts might oppose the nineteenth-century 'overproduction' of knowledge (see Koerner); and their combination of questions – and critiques – of the aesthetic, the ethical, and religious in an attempt to show existence and the work of art as a constant striving towards an unachievable reconciliation with the infinite via a transubstantiation of the finite world.

paintings of bodies I have argued that this is based not upon the affinity between humanity and God, but upon the radical difference between them.[44] The problem this raises, as indicated by the dialectical retrieval of the holy through the blasphemous, is the question of recognition – or lack of recognition – and another version of 'not-knowing'.

Kierkegaard is a significant voice here, as he represents an 'aesthetic' tradition in which we might also situate Rouault, a tradition in which the literary or painterly are employed to 'play out' or experience or interrogate theological and epistemological limitations. For example, the pseudonym Johannes *de silentio*[45] under which Kierkegaard wrote *Fear and Trembling* (1843) – another example of an eloquent silence – represents Kierkegaard's use of irony (inspired by that of Socrates), which he held to productively undermine knowledge claims and to induce a level of self-awareness or agency in the reader.[46] As well as pseudonyms, which were intended to displace the idea of a stable authorial authority 'behind' the texts (as were ambiguous titles such as *Either/Or*), Kierkegaard also employed aspects of fairytales, parodies, satire, humour, and a form of deconstruction that – as in Rouault's use of fictions and myths, or different visual orders such as the icon, and the popular game – worked to make his work obscure and as a result deliberately to disrupt conventional forms of knowledge. In this 'method of indirect communication',[47] Kierkegaard was concerned to reclaim the 'actual' darkness of the world and – against Hegelianism – to re-establish the distance between human knowledge and the mind of God.

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[44] See David R. Law, *Kierkegaard's Kenotic Christology* (Oxford, 2013), chapter 4.
[45] Allegedly borrowed from the Grimm's fairytale 'The Faithful Servant', in which he not silent either: see Alastair Hannay 'Introduction' in Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*: 'Dialectical Lyric by Johannes de silentio', trans. Alastair Hannay, (London, 1985, repr. 2003), p.10.
[46] In his dissertation, *On the Concept of Irony with constant reference to Socrates*, Kierkegaard argues that it was his use of irony that enabled Socrates to force his discussants to think and to activity engage with their own responses.
[47] See Roger Poole, *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communicaation* (Virginia, 1993).

In *Philosophical Fragments*, written under the pseudonym Johannes Climacus, he describes the limitations Christ took upon himself in becoming man as analogous to the king who hides his royal status in order to be with, and not to overwhelm, the servant girl he loves. The king cannot reveal his true identity, it can only be hinted at, and this represents the powerlessness of the incarnate Christ who, once incarnate, is bound by his lowly condition. It is this 'bound' condition that Climacus explores through the notion of the 'servant god', and which brings about unity by descent.[48] As in Rouault's paintings of bodies, Kierkegaard's emphasis is upon the bodily, material human condition as one that is vulnerable and precarious: a condition subject to physical torments and suffering and which intrinsically confronts the precipice or void between life and death, doubt and promise.[49] It is this that allows Kierkegaard finally to understand Christ's cry of abandonment from the Cross – it *is* a cry of abandonment, a cry that epitomises the total concealment and emptying of kenosis.[50] Key to understanding Rouault's clowns in this light is that the descent must be low enough – materially and socially – so that he can address all human beings regardless. Rouault's clowns, vestiges of the nineteenth-century symbol of outsiderness, of exclusion, and of pathos, epitomise this figure. That they are depicted in thick, heavy paint exacerbates their bound condition and also, by analogy, represents the equally necessary 'low' and material conditions of expression – anything 'higher' would be a deception.

Closely related to this concern with 'disguise' is *iurodstvo*, or holy foolishness, which can be understood as an emulation of kenosis. By rendering various clowns Christ-like, as in *Trois Clowns* (1917), Rouault draws upon this tradition in which 'foolishness' (anti-social behaviour, childish or 'innocent' behaviour, and sometimes, as in *The Idiot*, epileptic

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[48] Søren Kierkegaard (Johannes Climacus), *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. & ed. Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (Princeton, 1985), p.30.
[49] See Prescott, *A Broken Beauty*; Peter Selz, *New Images of Man* exh.cat (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1969).
[50] Law, *Kierkegaard's Kenotic Christology*, p.76.

behaviour) has been used, especially in literature, as a way of flouting a society's conventions in order to suggest the absurdity of that society. It is sometimes described as 'foolishness for Christ': the behaviour of an outcast that demonstrates an inner 'goodness' or naïve nature. Such figures are often the victims of a society too harsh for them to survive within, and on occasion the 'fool' will behave in a shocking or depraved manner in order deliberately to challenge society. The role of 'fool' is often bestowed upon difficult or subversive forms of behaviour by society as a way of integrating or condoning their actions. When, later, Rouault began to paint the head of the clown as icon-like, as in *Pierrot Noir* (1948-1953) [fig.95], this naivety is translated into the almost child-like simplicity of the image and the manner in which it is painted. However, this foolishness is fundamentally doubtful, since as a disguise or emulation it contains the possibility that it is an empty gesture – a gesture in paint that fails to embody anything more than its own emptiness or its separation, as material, from the spiritual.

At the same time, both Rouault and Dostoyevksy employ a tragicomic vocabulary, which arguably invokes this 'foolishness' as a social critique. For example, even in some of Rouault's darkest images of the circus, such as *L'Ivrognesse* or *l'Ecuyère*, aspects of the mark-making approach or hint at a caricatural line, and in 1910, *Les Nouvelles* reported that contemporary life seemed to attract Rouault, but he 'regarded it with bitterness', choosing for his 'disillusioned observations' figures 'intent with tragedy and sorrowfully comic' – these, the critic finished, he draws in 'a violent caricature style with a terrible pessimism.'[51] Rouault's point, I think, is twofold: this is painting that seeks to *undermine* the world as it is perceived – or phantasized, imagined, or re-imagined – rather than art that seeks to transform the world. This leaves it at once open to meaning more than it is, but at the same time it

[51] Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism*, p.223.

operates not as a parable but a dark satire. For instance, Rouault would have known that to employ the figure of the prostitute in this period was to invoke contemporary fears associated with degeneration and syphilophobia: through this 'satire', Rouault offers a biting commentary on the potential emptiness of modern painting, and by association, of materialist modernity. Under this paradigm, the bodies in Rouault's paintings are not the victims of such a society, but 'lumps of matter' or rotten embodiments of its spiritual emptiness.[52]

That, for Dostoyevsky, the emphasis upon the flesh and the 'dumb beast' is an attack upon the spiritual emptiness at the heart of modern society is indicated in Part III of *The Idiot,* in which he has Lebedev, 'a self-styled interpreter of the Apocalypse'[53] condemn 'the entire spirit of these last centuries', which 'in its scientific and practical totality, is really accursed'.[54] There must, he continues, have been an idea greater than all the horrors of earlier centuries – famine, plague, etc – a binding idea that enabled mankind to bear these hellish things, an idea 'which directed men's minds and fertilized the springs of life!' But now, Lebedev declares, 'Show me anything resembling that power in our age of depravity and

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[52] As Kang points out, Rouault painted these images at the height of 'syphilophobia' in Paris, and prostitutes became closely identified with the idea and fear of syphilis. See Kang, *Rouault in Perspective*, p.52; and Abraham Flexner, *Prostitution in Europe*, (New York, 1954). The 'dirty' (Courthion notes that the 'dirty blue laundry water' of Rouault's works has an unhygienic overtone – see Courthion, *Rouault*, p.102) bulking bodies of Rouault's women resemble equally repellent descriptions of prostitutes in Huysmans novels – on the one hand, these bodies can be seen as having the signifiers of the disease (such as lesions and rashes) written onto them in a manner that might be seen as akin to contemporary theories of genetic degeneracy. Kang notes that between 1890 and 1914 there was a great deal of discussion about the 'natural primitiveness of the whore'. In Chapter One, it was suggested that the 'encrusted ...blobs, layers and striations' (Gaffney, 'Georges Rouault: The Monk of Modern Art') of Rouault's paint can look – and sound – like studio detritus, and here that detritus is bound up with the representation of 'social detritus', an analogy that had also been made, in reverse, by the nineteenth-century theorists of degeneracy, Max Nordau and Césare Lombroso. (See Césare Lombroso, *Criminal Man*, trans. & ed. Mary Gibson & Nicole Hahn Rafter (North Carolina, 2006) and Max Nordau, 'Degeneration' in *Art in Theory 1815-1900: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charles Harrison, Paul Wood & Jason Gaiger (Oxford, 1998), pp.798-806.) Ellmann explains how Nordau 'fulminated that the "outer crust" of humanity was cracking into "cold, vitrified, scoria", and accused modernist painters – '"impressionists", "stipplers", "mosaists", "pappilloteurs", "quiverers", and "roaring" colourists of degrading literature and painting into crazed dermatologies of spots and blotches.' Lombroso felt that regeneration was possible only by scrubbing clean the 'blemished page' like the 'disfigured skin', removing the marks of a 'polluted heritage'. Ellmann, *Nets of Modernism,* p.159. Rouault's *Filles*, made up of 'spots and blotches' represent exactly the 'degenerate' types that Nordau and Lombroso would annihilate. On the other hand, Huysmans, along with Edmond de Goncourt and Zola (See Huysmans' *Marthe, histoire d'une fille*, (1876), Goncourt's *La Fille Elisa* (1877), and Zola's *Nana*, (1880) – Kang makes a similar point in *Rouault in Perspective*, p.49) portrayed a 'fatalist vision' of the prostitute as 'an irredeemable victim of a cruel world' (Kang, *Rouault in Perspective*, p.49) in the light of which, the 'wounded' bodies of Rouault's women can be read as written upon by the modern world – akin instead to the bodies of martyrs. They are disgusting, but not disgusted: tortured by, but not responsible for, the failings of society.

[53] Leatherbarrow, 'Introduction', *The Idiot*, p.xvi-xvii.

[54] *The Idiot*, Part III, chapter 4.

railways...' and finally, prefiguring Maritain's terms, he finishes: 'The riches are greater but the force is less; there is no more a binding principle; everything has grown soft, everything and everyone grown flabby!'[55]

Once again, these circulating meanings and resonances in Rouault's work cannot be resolved. In closing this part of the chapter, I want to suggest that the radical separation of the material and spiritual central to this approach to Rouault's paintings is another articulation of the limitations of 'knowing' and of corporeality. The paradox of the Cross, and by analogy the paradox of this kind of painting, is overcome not by unravelling or 'knowing' but by resignation. Arguably, this is the most significant point of convergence between Rouault's project and that of Kierkegaard. The silence of the pseudonym 'Johannes *de silentio*' is also a reflection of the underlying theme of *Fear and Trembling*, which is that faith is an expression of the *limits* of thought and that whatever faith is, if anything, it cannot be spoken about. At the end of the 'Preamble from the Heart' section of *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard writes that his intention thereon (having written a series of disorienting chapters that include a preface, 'Attunement', and a 'Speech in Praise of Abraham') is to extract the 'dialectical element' from the Old Testament story of Abraham's journey to the mountain to sacrifice his son, Isaac; 'in order to see how monstrous a paradox faith is, a paradox capable of making a murder into a holy act well pleasing to God, a paradox which gives Isaac back to Abraham, which no thought can grasp because faith begins precisely where thinking leaves off.'[56]

Kierkegaard's discussion is based upon a progression of existential stages – the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. The aesthetic is characterized by immediacy, and by sensuous experience, the primacy of possibility over actuality, the fragmentation of the

[55] Ibid.
[56] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, p.82.

subject of experience, and a nihilistic wielding of irony and scepticism. The ethical, to which the aesthetic gives way, is critical of the aesthetic because it is not oriented to the good of the 'universal', which is society or a greater good. Abraham's act cannot be justified in either stage – he is not a tragic hero whose action have some wider purpose, nor ethically is his act any good to anyone, in fact it is no more than murder. If Abraham's act is not to be simple, or even compound, murder, there must be what Johannes *de silentio* calls "the teleological suspension of the ethical", in which the ethical life becomes subservient to some other 'higher' end or *telos*. [57] This is not to say that Kierkegaard is suggesting that such acts are justifiable through faith. It is not a literal description of what the faithful should do to prove their faith, but an allegorical expression of the religious consciousness in which absolute *resignation* (a resignation akin to Max Weber's notion of disenchantment[58]) of what is personally wanted or hoped for (the 'absurd') precedes the leap of faith. Isaac, then, is returned to Abraham on the strength of the absurd – he is returned in a manoeuvre that resembles the parable: the listener receives the message he was listening for.

The parallel with Rouault is on the one hand obvious – like Kierkegaard, Rouault was a religious man whose religion informed his resistance to the values he saw and disliked in the rise of modern capitalism. Following Romanticism, but distancing themselves from the aesthetics of the Romantics, they both proposed a form of expression or representation that on one level was an attempt to restore an intuited knowledge of the unknown. In pursuing this comparison, Rouault's work can seem belated – a continuation of a nineteenth-century project with which he had much in common. But at the same time, Rouault's obscurity is also concerned with the darkness within humanity, an addition to his project that demonstrates his

[57] See Hannay, 'Introduction' to *Fear and Trembling*, p.16.
[58] See Max Weber, *Weber: Political Writings*, eds. Peter Lassman & Ronald Speirs (Cambridge, 1994) and Wolfgang J Mommsen and Jurgen Osterhammel, *Max Weber and his Contemporaries* (Oxford and New York, 2006), p.563. T.J. Clark also draws upon this disenchantment in his introduction to *Farewell to an Idea.*

proximity to two World Wars and which links his project to others such as that of Freud, and to a type of engagement with subjectivity that Kierkegaard did not envisage. The next part of this chapter will argue that as well as admitting, even emphasizing, the 'honest' materiality of the limited human condition, Rouault's project also interrogates the notion of a different animality, a darkness or 'beast' within man.

Part Two: *Le Condamné* and *Homo Homini Lupus*

Where the separation of human materiality and divine transcendence in kenosis and in the tradition of *iurodstvo* can be said to 'liberate' the material humanity of man, there is a less compassionate notion of the human condition in Rouault's work. This 'other' version is based upon an animality that liberates the 'beast' within man (as opposed to the human being within man[59]) and draws upon a narrative of darkness in which, as Michel Foucault writes, man finds 'one of the secrets and one of the vocations of his nature'.[60] Foucault finds this exemplified in the image of the gryllos (a monstrous image of the conjoined heads of a youth, a bearded man, a satyr, and a ram), an image of human madness that hinges upon a notion of animality. According to Foucault, in the Middle Ages, 'the legions of animals, named once and for all by Adam, symbolically bear the values of humanity', but this is reversed during the Renaissance, when 'the beast is set free' to acquire 'a fantastic nature of its own': 'it is now the animal that will stalk man, capture him and reveal him to his own truth. ...Animality

[59] See Harriet Murav, *Holy Foolishness: Dostoyevsky's Novels & the Poetics of Cultural Critique* (Stanford, 1992); and Ronald D. Le Blanc, *Slavic Sins of the Flesh: Food, Sex and Carnal Appetite in Nineteenth Century Russian Fiction* (New Hampshire, 2012).
[60] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, trans. Richard Howard (London and New York, 2001), pp.17-18.

has escaped domestication by human symbols and values; and it is animality that reveals the dark rage, the sterile madness that lies in men's hearts.'[61]

This bestiality appeared briefly in Chapter One, in the accusations of monstrosity levelled at Rouault's early work, and in the morphological animality of Daumier's work, in the animal-like qualities of the anthropomorphic descriptions of the mines in Zola's *Germinal*, and through the rattish characterization of the people in Cham's *The Queue for Rats' Meat*.[62] These reactions to the 1870-71 Siege and Commune expressed a sense of horror at the actions of man in unrestrained circumstances. This horror is bound up with the notion of the monstrous as revealing of the combination of the animal and the human.

There are two veins in Rouault's oeuvre that can be read as variations upon the institutionalisation of the fear associated with this bestiality. The first is his depictions of categories of exclusion, which includes the paintings of prostitutes discussed above. These paintings, as we have seen, elicited fearful responses which, arguably, are based upon the sense of an irretrievable or irredeemable darkness bound up in human form. Where, in part

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[61] Ibid. p.18. According to Foucault's analysis, this sense of 'madness', then, is not loss of sense altogether, but an overturning of the conventional orders of 'sense'; a 'madness' that has haunted the previous chapters, and which in Rouault's work takes two forms. Firstly, in the figure of the clown a notion of madness more familiar to the late Middle Ages – a figure that Michel Foucault describes as a 'Madman' 'Fool' or 'Simpleton [that] assumes more and more importance. He is no longer simply a ridiculous and familiar silhouette in the wings: he stands centre stage as the guardian of truth' (Ibid. p.11) – and secondly, in Rouault's application of paint, a version that corresponds more closely to a nineteenth century image of 'medieval horror' that, again in Foucault's words, 'rose up once again, leading to a new panic among the metaphors of terror'. (Foucault, cited in Lynne Huffer, *Mad for Foucault: Rethinking the Foundations of Queer Theory* (New York, 2013), p.53) This second version bears witness to the rupture between madness and reason in an era that attempts (via the asylum) to confine the 'mad' and to silence the experience of madness 'in the composure of a knowledge which, knowing too much about madness, forgets it.' Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, p.xiv. The 'face of madness', according to Foucault, has haunted the imagination of Western man from the fifteenth century – evidenced by a long dynasty of images, from Bosch's *The Cure of Madness* and *The Ship of Fools*, to Brueghel's *Dulle Griet*; images that take up 'the intermingled themes of the Feast and of the Dance of Fools'. (Ibid. p.12) In these themes, Foucault argues, 'death' is replaced by madness; 'fear in the face of the absolute limit of death turns inward in a continuous irony; man disarms it in advance, making it an object of derision by giving it an everyday, tamed form, by constantly renewing it in the spectacle of life, by scattering it throughout the vices, the difficulties, and the absurdities of all men.' (Ibid. p.13) In the note to this discussion, Foucault adds that in this sense, madness is a continuation of the experience of leprosy and the figure of the leper – whose exclusion, he writes, 'showed that he was, as a living man, the very presence of death.' (Ibid. n.4) The leper appears as a precursor for the 'holy fool' or madman, because at the same moment that he is removed from the world, outcast from society, his existence was seen as a constant manifestation of God – a sign both of the anger and grace of God. As an example of this, Foucault offers Brueghel's lepers who 'attend at a distance, but forever, that climb to Calvary on which the entire people accompanies Christ. Hieratic witnesses of evil, they accomplish their salvation in and by their very exclusion: in a strange reversibility that is the opposite of good works and prayer, they are saved by the hand that is not stretched out.'

[62] See Wright and Hanafi on monstrosity in Chapter One.

one of this chapter, this was retrieved, dialectically, as a radical expression of the holy in the profane, the tension around which that retrieval was oriented was also shown to support other necessarily oppositional readings such as a dark satire of the emptiness of society. Another reading, which extends this critique, is based upon the notion of locating or representing (paradoxically) the fear of the unknown in an excluded class. This, as we will see, is exemplified by three of Rouault's paintings from 1907, all entitled *Le Condamné*.

A model for this animality and its exclusion is contained in the history of the phrase *homo homini lupus*: 'man is wolf to man'. The presumed origin of this phrase is Plautus (254-184BC), and his comedy *Asinaria* where it was used to propose, or to *prosopose*, as Derrida puts it in his examination of the saying in *The Beast and the Sovereign*, 'the figure of the wolf, the face of the wolf, the mask of the wolf, onto what is most unknown in man'.[63] The fear inherent in this notion of the unknown 'beast' in man is transferred to the fear upon which sovereignty and the state are based – a fear which is described by Thomas Hobbes in the *Leviathan* (1651). According to Derrida, Hobbes' use of the phrase *homo homini lupus* is an invocation of the wolf as:

> a way for man, within his human space, to give himself, to represent or recount to himself this wolf story, to hunt the wolf by making it come, tracking it ...in a fantasy, a narrative, a mytheme, a fable, a trope, a rhetorical turn, where man tells himself the story of politics, the story of the origin of society, the story of the social contract, *etc*.: for man, man is a wolf.[64]

The 'social contract' between man and society is founded upon this fear since, *because* of man being a wolf to man, men, as Jacques Ville summarizes it, are fearful of their lives,

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[63] Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Vol. 1, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago, 2009), §Session 2, 61. Originally published as *Séminaire: La bête et le souverain, Volume 1 (2001-2002)* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2008).
[64] Derrida cited in Jacques de Ville, 'Deconstructing the Leviathan: Derrida's *The Beast and the Sovereign*', *Societies*, Vol.2 (2012), p.362

'therefore they institute the sovereign to protect them and then they obey the law that they have instituted through fear of being punished if they break the law, thereby "moving from one fear to another"'[65] – a 'double bind'[66] that, as Derrida notes, renders 'being the subject of one's fear and being the subject of the law or the state, [and] being obliged to obey the state as one obeys one's fear' basically the same thing.[67] As a result, the sovereign and the beast are equated.

The human sovereign 'stands in' for God, or the 'absolute sovereign', to whom the human sovereign remains subject. Thus, writes Derrida, modern sovereignty 'retains a profound and fundamental theological and religious basis.'[68] This is even the case, as in the French Revolution, when sovereignty is handed over to the people, because it is essentially a metonymic substitution in which power and fear are handed over to another 'sovereign'. The sovereign and the beast are both excluded from society – they share a 'non-response', in the case of the sovereign a 'right' not to answer or be responsible, in other words to be 'above' the law even as he or she personifies it, and in the case of the 'beast' the inability to communicate. According to this paradigm, the dissolution of the bodily structures of *Filles (ou deux nus)* or *Filles (ou deux prostituées)* can also be read as analogous to the drive to self-destruction of the 'wolf within'. Exclusion of these figures, which are then muted (an imposed sign of the unknown) and must bear the burden of the 'mask of the wolf', defines the homogeneous order of a society of which such figures are the heterogeneous margins.[69] In Rouault's work, with the exception of his painting of Bloy's bourgeois characters the Poulots

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[65] de Ville, 'Deconstructing the Leviathan', pp.361-362.
[66] Derrida also draws upon Montaigne's invocation of this phrase, see Derrida *The Beast and the Sovereign*, p.58.
[67] de Ville, 'Deconstructing the Leviathan', p.362
[68] Ibid.p.366.
[69] See Krauss on Bataille and exclusion of the abject in Krauss, '"Informe" without conclusion' and Krauss and Bois, *Formless: A User's Guide.*

[fig.55][70] (which Bloy hated, believing Rouault to 'hate' this bourgeois couple too much), this central social category – the bourgeoisie – are absent: depicted by their assumed opposition to the beasts.

Ironically, the social contract described by Derrida, is based (as Derrida points out) upon the contradictory logic (in Hobbes) of excluding both beast and God from the covenant whilst maintaining God as the model of sovereignty.[71] Diametrically opposed to Kierkegaard's disguised God (a system that also equates the lowly and the powerful), this concept of society excludes God while being intensely aware – in terms that recall Nietzsche – that the death of God is not, as Williams puts it 'a rational conclusion which will allow humanity to pursue its proper goals and attain its proper happiness at last without interference'.[72] Instead, the idea of God is invoked to exploit the terrifying gap in the coherence of the human mind: God 'must' exist as an idea of judgment that can be appropriated by the state, by a stand-in sovereign, just as the wolf within 'must' exist and thus is represented by another muted and in this case, animalized, class. God and the beast are used, in the double bind described above, in a scenario based upon fear. In an exemplary deconstructive manoeuvre, God, the human sovereign, and the animal-class are excluded from society but at the same time are inscribed in the very structures and operations of that society.

At this point, I want to turn to the three paintings entitled *Le Condamné* from 1907 [figs. 96-98]. Depicting scenes from a court of law, in which a criminal is surrounded by

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[70] Rouault painted *Monsieur et Madame Poulot* (1905), a couple from Bloy's novel *The Woman who was Poor* (date). Outraged, Bloy wrote in his diary that 'for nothing on earth would I accept such an "illustration" as this'. In 1907, Bloy added in a letter to Rouault: 'Today I have two things to say to you, and only two... First, you are attracted solely to what is ugly; you appear to have a sort of vertigo of hideousness. Second; if you were a man who prayed, a religious man, a communicant, you could not paint those horrible pictures.' Courthion, *Rouault*, p.103-104.
[71] See de Ville, 'Deconstructing the Leviathan'.
[72] Williams, *Dostoyevsky*, p.227.

figures of authority, the *Le Condamné* paintings are dark works in thick oil – which adds both to the emphasis upon bodily presence in the works and to the intensity of their appearance. The palette is limited to blacks, browns and blues, with interjections of white that denote clothing (particularly the distinctive uniforms of the French Republican judiciary) and a fleshy-orange turning to red which, against the dark vaguely articulated ground, makes the flesh of the faces stand out in a particularly meat-like fashion. Adding to this emphasis upon flesh is a curious detail in *Le Condamné* [2], where the fastenings on the front of the tunics of the officials are marked out in red in a way that simultaneously gives them the appearance of ribcages. The effect of this is to embed a version of Derrida's 'double bind' within these figures: the absent 'God' as an idea of judgement is brought together with fleshly animality in these representatives of the state. This invocation of God and the beast for human purposes is a parody of the self-emptying of kenosis, a parody that Rouault's paintings turn into a sceptical criticism of society and move towards a deeper criticism of the human condition.

All of these works depict horizontal rows of half-figures, mainly shown from the waist up, and with the faces most visible – the faces are all constructed along similar lines, and this, combined with the fleshiness of the painting, represents a homogeneity that calls into question the 'right' of man to condemn man. Rouault's suspicion of this society is evident in that these figures are all rendered animal-like, 'raised' only by their uniforms that dictate their acceptance of the law, a 'raising' that – based upon costumes and the critique of 'costume' in Rouault's oeuvre – is extremely fragile. In addition, the fact that, in *Le Condamné* [1], the criminal is flanked by two officials creating a trio, recalls the motif of Christ on the cross flanked on either side by two criminals – a reversal of the configuration in *Le Condamné* (taken at face value) that adds a layer of irony to the work. There are two other aspects to this: first, that the criminal could be replaced (by a change of costume) by any of

the other figures reduces the sense of a difference between them, suggesting instead they might all be capable of taking his place. Secondly, the 'crime' is not represented, which, in conjunction with the literal darkness of the work, can be read as an invocation of the fear of man himself, of the unknown or 'bestiality' within. In this sense, then, these are images of the judicial violence that replaces the primitive violence of which man is afraid and by which man is controlled – these are paintings of the process of exclusion that is also the process by which the state is maintained.[73] Equally excluded are the figures of authority in the *Le Condamné* paintings and *Juges* (1908), and the others that follow in this theme, such as *Trois juges* (1913) [fig.99] and *Trois juges* (c. 1920) [fig.100]. These are figures whose role it is to judge others and to represent the fear of punishment required by society. In carrying this burden – and, recalling the figure of Pontius Pilate, lacking to a degree in individual agency – they are as excluded as the criminals they condemn. Between the figure of the criminal and the figure of the judge is an absent mass, a bourgeois society at whom Rouault's deeper suspicion is aimed.

This critique was both increased and altered, aesthetically, in the work that followed each war, as Rouault's fears and insights were heightened and exemplified by yet another such catastrophic event. The terms of expression appear to change dramatically: the 1907 paintings belong to the 'fleshly' bodies described above; the post-First World War work turns to the dismembered marionette-like body, and in the aftermath of the Second World War, Rouault uses a vocabulary of symbols that refuse the evocation of a 'beyond' of Symbolism but speak to Rouault's apparently increasing sense of a renewed failure of humanity to grasp (or even to attempt to grasp) the interrelation of the material and spiritual, and the creative and epistemological potentialities of this relation. Thematically, he does not desist in his

[73] See Rene Girard on primitive and judical forms of violence in *On Violence: A Reader*, eds. Bruce B Lawrence and Aisha Karim (North Carolina, 2007), p.334.

critique of society, but arguably increasingly turns towards an examination of the potential darkness, violence, and emptiness of the human condition.

This is particularly explicit in the two works entitled *Homo homini lupus*: the first is a print from the *Miserere* series (1922-1927) [fig.101], depicting a walking skeleton surrounded by skulls; and the second, from 1944-1948, is an oil painting of a hanged man [fig.102]. Both images are stark, the strange figures of the skeleton and hanged man standing out through the white of the bones and the shirt against the darkness around them and the empty spaces (albeit in the later painting, thickly painted) that enclose the central figures. The structure of the skeleton recalls both the rib-cages of the *Le Condamné* paintings and the emphatic limbs of the marionette-like clowns, for example in *Trois clowns*. In black and white, this image is usually, and justifiably, taken to be a comment upon the waste of the First World War – as is the whole of the *Miserere* series. The title indicates this: it is a reduction of *Miserere mei, Deus* (Have mercy on me, O God), from Psalm 51, and is also used to describe prayers for mercy, or lamentations.[74] Rouault's repetition of the title 'Homo homini lupus' in the 1940s implies an affinity between these post-war moments which is then confounded by the obvious visual differences between the works. The effect is to suggest a continuous thematic thread accompanied by a sense that expression, or the necessary expressive terms, had profoundly changed.

Homo homini lupus (1944-1948) has various lines of inheritance within Rouault's oeuvre: it is dominated by a more intense version of the rich, greenish tonality that appeared in *Filles (ou deux nus)* and which again can be compared to the hue that Roger Marx identified as the source of dramatic horror in Rouault's 1896 painting, *Christ wept over by the*

[74] These, as is the famous *Miserere* by the seventeenth century Italian composer Gregorio Allegri, are part of the Tenebrae (meaning 'shadows' or 'darkness') services held at dawn on the last three days of Holy Week and during which candles are gradually extinguished. Rouault's use of this title has multiple resonances in the aftermath of the First World War, and of relevance to this discussion is that, once again, the emphasis is upon darkness and darkening.

holy women. The surface here is, as in most of his paintings by this period, thickly painted, the green ground shaped around the figure and the structure of the gallows – architecturally more like that used in the game hangman[75] – which emphasizes the rectangle of the canvas (actually paper stuck onto canvas) and echoes the rough frame Rouault has painted onto the surface. The effect of the surface facture is a sense of homogeneity; an integration of these disparate visual features into a topography that encloses them. Once again it appears to be about negotiating the surface rather than finding a way through.

The figure, the structure, the rough indication of a landscape, a house enveloped in flames, the sun and the moon, are all outlined in the same thick black marks we have already seen to be at work in Rouault's oeuvre. These pieces of imagery establish another link with the earlier work, since, like the skeleton, they are derived from the symbolic images on tarot cards: specifically, the Sun, the Moon, the Tower, and the Hanged Man.[76] The skeleton resembles the figure of Death from the tarot deck – an association which is repeated in an even closer resemblance in the unfinished 1936-1939 work *Squelette au clair de lune* [fig.103]. In bringing together the 'aesthetic orders' of the tarot cards and modernist painting, Rouault once again 'lowers' his painting to a visual form that belongs in the world of games and tricks and also brings into his painting a signifying regime that binds fortune and games, and which has a distinctly dark side in its claims to look forward; the result, in Rouault's case, is a form of painting whose last resort seems to be an apocalyptic memento mori for two post-war worlds.[77]

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[75] The game 'hangman' was invented in the early nineteenth century.

[76] See Emily E. Auger, *Tarot and Other Meditation Decks: History, Theory, Aesthetics, Typology* (North Carolina, 2004).

[77] Many modernists were interested in esoteric and occult traditions, including to some extent, Rouault, but his interest was largely in Christian mysticism. Maritain compared the possibilities of meaning in art to alchemy, although he was careful to distance the artist from the magician and to stress that the materials never substantially 'changed': Apollinaire regarded art 'as comparable to the *grande oeuvre* of alchemy', and Matisse, Branscusi, Braque, Picasso, Gris, can all be seen as mining 'magical ideas'. See Urszula Szulakowska, *Alchemy in Contemporary Art* (Surrey, 2011) p.25. Joyce Medina writes that: For Cezanne, cardplaying was both a very modern activity and a timeless reference to idleness and greed, evil and chance. It

That Rouault should choose, in this painting, and in others such as *Petite Magicienne* (1949) [fig.104], to draw upon the imagery of tarot is a strategy that in some respects differentiates this period of his work from his earlier painting, but it does not, however, mark a complete rupture with the past: this painting continues in the game-playing vein of *Jeu de Massacre*. Where, in *Jeu de Massacre*, meaning was endlessly and nihilistically deferred, in *Homo homini lupus* the 'game' of fortune telling is associated with a real, seemingly inevitable, vision of death. Joyce Medina argues that Cézanne unites the separable images of the game and skull to associate fortune and death in a richer and more complex narrative than the traditional *vanitas* or memento mori subjects.[78] Another parallel can be drawn with *The Waste Land* (1922), in which T.S. Eliot uses the tarot card image of the Hanged Man to construct the image of the waste land as a place of spiritual emptiness. Eliot devotes a section of the poem to a tarot pack reader, Madame Sosostris, and draws a connection between the Hanged Man of the cards, and the Hanged Man defined in James Frazer's 1890 encyclopaedia of comparative religions and mythology, *The Golden Bough*, as an ancient fertility god, sacrificed to resurrect the fertility of the barren lands of his barren people. After yet another war, Rouault, I think, is making a similar point about the decay of human culture and society: Eliot draws upon the notion of a blighted ruler and a necessary sacrifice, and the associated pagan fertility rites, as a way of describing a time between the death of an old king, and before the birth of the new one.[79] This is a familiar motif, for example, in the story of King Oedipus of Thebes and the passion of Christ, and it corresponds to the eschatological time in which, as I have argued, many of Rouault's works exist.

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carried the simple meaning of gambling and also specific allusions to certain forms of card games, such as the tarot and more unusual fortune-telling cards, with their different "plots", and to other forms of cards, such as *leger-de-main* cards, which were themselves decorated with optical illusions and hidden imagery, of which a most important recurring figure was the skull.' Joyce Medina, *Cezanne and Modernism: The Poetics of Painting* (New York, 1995), p.167.

[78] Medina, *Cezanne and Modernism*, p.167.

[79] Rouault's *Le Vieux Roi* (1937) might be brought into this schema too.

Eliot also represents the 'darkness within', the 'wolf' that is the repressed truth of man and the obstacle to redemption, in *The Wasteland*.[80] In the poem, the emptiness and barrenness of modernity are attributed to the duality of the human condition through the image of a dog. One of the central themes of the poem is the continuation of barrenness that Eliot opposes, in an obscure 'joke', to the fertility of the resurrection. Echoing the kenotic motif, where the miracle of the resurrection was to turn the corpse into a seed, the corpse that is buried in the second section of *The Waste Land* does not suggest a return to life, but a continued emptiness, represented by a dog – which in turn represents the brute within the human – digging up the corpse, and instead renewing the presence of death: 'O keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men, / Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!'[81] This condemnation of the human condition is reiterated at the end of the second section of the poem in Eliot's echo of the final line of Baudelaire's first poem in *The Flowers of Evil*: '"You! Hypocrite lecteur! – mon semblable, – mon frère!"'[82] By the 1920s, Rouault had approached Vollard about illustrating Baudelaire's work, which makes it conceivable that he too was influenced by this formulation of the concerns which he was engaged in representing in the years after the First World War. This closes the distance between Rouault's and Eliot's work – as does Eliot's interest in Maritain's work.[83]

Using the imagery of the tarot in relation to the theme *homo homini lupus*, these paintings revisit the problem of representing the unknown. The symbols of the tarot are, inherently about knowing and not-knowing. That Rouault's thick application remains is

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[80] See T.S. Eliot, 'The Wasteland' in *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (Ontario and London, 2010). It is a recurring theme within modernist art and literature: one of its most famous and influential incarnations is Freud's account of the Wolf Man, first published in 1909. See Sigmund Freud, *The Wolfman and Other Cases*,trans. Louise Adey Huish (London, 2002).

[81] Eliot, 'The Wasteland', p.67. Eliot cites the dirge from John Webster's play *The White Devil* (1612) but substitutes the dog for Webster's 'wolf ... that's foe to men'.

[82] Ibid. 'You! Hypocritical reader, my double, my brother.'

[83] Eliot also read Maritain, and in the late 1920s, after reading *Art and Scholasticism*, travelled to Paris to try and meet Maritain. See Rafey Habib, *The Early T.S. Eliot and Western Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1999), p.62.

harder to understand, it has even less of a purchase upon the subject matter than ever. As an effort towards making, and towards making-sense or making-meaning, however, this re-staging can be read as an effort, increasingly aware of its own futility, to grasp the grasping-epistemological possibility of painting that insists upon the inherence of meaning in its materiality.[84] In itself, the explicit presence of paint continues to represent the possibility of an overwhelming – drowning – materialism.

As with most of his sources of imagery, such as his use of the *Commedia dell'arte*, Rouault's use of tarot images is not specific to any particular deck, and the motifs he borrows occur in most versions – used for game or divination – and, in Rouault's work, are combined with the iconography of his own oeuvre. Harking back to the carnival resonances of works such as *Parade*, there is a 'carnivalesque' aspect to the tarot – the Fool is one of the major cards to feature in almost all tarot decks, and is often 'trump' card.[85] It is important to emphasize that Rouault is not painting tarot cards – he is invoking the pictogrammatic language of the tarot as a narrative strategy. Once again, he plays with the relationship between seeing and knowing. It is like the Rouault of *Jeu de Massacre* to obscure the levels at which the painting is striving to make meaning so that the surface of the painting is rendered utterly unsecured and uncertain, we are not shown cardplayers or a game or cards but are given something of a card already 'in play' – it is another version, a more obscure, abstract version, of the condensed narrative of the 'moment of being' or the 'scribbled picture puzzles' or 'thought-images' or *denkbild*. The 'game' aspect of the image is enhanced by the

[84] In the 1930s and 1940s, Rouault's painting becomes somewhat repetitive; he reuses motifs, particularly of Christ and the clown, and his application of paint doesn't move away from his experiments of the previous decades. Against the next generation's exploration of *informe* and abstraction, and even against the formal experiments of his contemporary, Matisse, Rouault's painting might seem to contain a degree of belatedness, as the vestiges of a former avant-garde moment whose point has been made or lost. However, as painting moved further away from subject matter towards 'purer' abstraction, Rouault's painting re-presents the epistemological problem of painting by revisiting the obdurate surface materiality of his early work in conjunction with a subject matter of symbols that are inherently about knowing and not-knowing.

[85] In Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, (the grotesque connection of this to Rouault's figures was discussed in Chapter Two) Gargantua plays *tarau* which is thought to be version of tarot.

resemblance of the gallows in Rouault's painting to the stick-drawings of the game 'Hangman', (a game concerned with fortune and death) in which every false answer adds a limb to the figure and to lose is to 'hang' a whole man.

The tarot card sits between possibilities; it supplants 'reality' with a suspended time, which again recalls the eschatological 'moment' of Rouault's earlier works. The tarot card, and the signifying structure in which it belongs, occupies a liminal space between the ordinary and an Other reality in a manner that resembles the oscillation inherent in the surface. Emily Auger writes that the tarot functions in a space:

> conceived as a meta-mythic heterotopian space where the potentials of life, death, and other kinds of transformation and association between things, people, and events are intensified. The Tarot operates as a doorway enabling a conversion or some other epiphany, understood to be a part of a journey towards enlightenment.[86]

This brings us back to the image of the Hanged Man, which also represents a moment of 'in-betweenness'. Hanging, and the hanged man (rarely are women pictured hanging in art, Rembrandt's *Woman Hanging to a Gibbet* being a notable exception), are recurring images in art, united almost always by a sense of horror. This, as Janice McCullogh points out, can be attributed to the fact that the scene projects 'the frightening moment of the ultimate light and dark, the on and off of life... To identify with the figure suspended between heaven and Earth is to dangle at the precipice of the unknown'.[87] She adds that the scene unites the 'perpetual force of gravity' with 'the infinite release from it', and this scene can be read as analogous to

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[86] Auger, *Tarot and Other Meditation Decks*, p.84. Auger adds that 'The cards and card figures may act as agents of the other reality's superior justice system, sometimes by empowering the will of the individual'.

[87] Janice McCullogh 'Hanging' in *Encyclopaedia of Comparative Iconography: Themes depicted in Works of Art*, p.387. Arthur Koestler has suggested that what we recognise in the scene of hanging is that 'the gallows is not merely a machine of death, but the oldest and most obscene symbol of that tendency in mankind which drives it towards moral self-destruction.' Koestler, *The Ghost in the Machine* (London, 1989), p.125. This 'tendency towards destruction' unites the image of the hanged man with the discussion of the significance of the title – *Homo homini lupus* – and a reading of the painting that might be summarized as: Man punishes man for what man is.

the condition of the painterly surface, suspended between heavy material presence and the absence of meaning, complicated by what is visible and invisible.

The use of the tarot symbols can be understood as another, more abstract, version of the kenotic motif. Instead of foolishness or matter, the theological is 'cloaked' in the terms of another, profane, order. That Rouault returns to the use of games suggests a resurgence of the sense of futility in his work that had dissipated slightly in the years since *Jeu de massacre* and *Parade*. That he retains the same thick material presence of paint in conjunction with this symbolic vocabulary reinforces the obdurate and obscure approach to meaning of his earlier work. These later paintings re-articulate the knife-edge between fullness and emptiness in Rouault's painterly project. In the final part of this chapter I want to turn to the potentially difficult ethics of these articulations of 'blindness' and of the 'void' that simultaneously separates and draws together the visible and invisible, material and immaterial, in Rouault's painting.

Part Three: Darkness, Blindness and Madness

The resistance to conventional clarity, and thus to the 'possession' of knowledge through vision, represents a wider 'reclamation' by the modernist project in opposition to the scientific and positivist project of the nineteenth century, which, in seeking to replace the unknown with the known threatened the existence of uncertainty.[88] Koerner describes this reclamation as a modern ideal of 'dwelling in a world without knowing it'.[89] This breaks the connection between knowledge and certainty that, since Descartes, had been oriented towards increasing certitude, illuminating obscurity and thus domesticating the world. Maritain was accompanied in this opposition to scientific epistemology by his immediate predecessors, including Bergson and Nietzsche.[90]

This oppositional obscurity contained a *longing* for an unknown world, a longing touched upon in Chapter Two in relation to Lukács, which builds upon the Romantic critique of the Enlightenment, exemplified in Ludwig Feuerbach's 1872 aphorism that 'in unknowing man is at home with himself, in his native place; in knowledge, he is in exile'.[91] Rouault's project has certain aspects in common with the Romantic interest in obscurity, particularly in its 'mechanisms of distortion', which, as Brian Tucker notes, do not really work like poetic figures or render an idea more vivid or concrete by referring it to a related image, but, as the word 'distortion' suggests, function to render ideas and images obscure and unrecognisable.[92] But where Romanticism sought to incite in the viewer the kind of dizzying experience of the unknown associated with the sublime, Rouault's reclamation of obscurity through his surfaces, marks, and 'blind spots', does not necessarily claim to take the viewer *beyond* the

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[88] See Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (California, 1994).
[89] Joseph Koerner, 'Hieronymous Bosch's World Picture' in *Picturing Science/ Producing Art*, eds. Caroline A. Jones and Peter Galison, (London, 1998), pp.297-323.
[90] H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought 1890-1930* (London, 1959), pp. 33-66. John Burrow, *The Crisis of Reason: European Thought, 1848-1914* (New Haven, 2000), pp. x-xv.
[91] Feuerbach cited in 'Hieronymous Bosch's World Picture', p.299.
[92] Brian Tucker, *Reading Riddles: Rhetorics of Obscurity from Romanticism to Freud* (Maryland, 2010), p.13.

ordinary world, and certainly not by means of an induced affect or sensation (Maritain's criticism of Symbolism). Instead, Rouault's thick painterly surfaces 're-make' the world in terms that plunge us back into the dirty, messy, and incomprehensible. In this, Rouault's work could be said to show us *the world we dwell in but as we do not know it*.

However, there is an ethical precariousness to this account of obscurity. When Vauxcelles asked what sort of light there was in Rouault's studio, and wondered 'what over-smoked glasses conceal nature and life to this misogynous dreamer who plunges into the depths of Erebus?',[93] he raised the question of the threatening ethics associated with darkness and obscurity which is opposed to the moral imperative associated with bringing things to light. The same threat is posed by the failure of the 'civilizing' mission of imperialism in Joseph Conrad's novel, *Heart of Darkness* (1899), which turns a blank space on the map into a space of darkness, and turns the unknown into the 'unspeakable'.[94] It is inherent in Joyce's darkened blind[95] which, in obstructing vision, is both a sign of the death of the priest in the house and a cloak over the priest's disgrace (which the child-narrator does not understand), a cloak that also represents the metaphorical blind that has been drawn over the sexual scandal by the characters in the story, rendering it unspeakable. 'Greek tragedy is blind', writes Johannes *de silentio* in *Fear and Trembling*, its effect resembles the impression given by a marble statue 'that lacks the power of the eye'.[96] This is because, according to Kierkegaard, in Greek tragedy, concealment and recognition – upon which, as Aristotle noted in the *Poetics*, the plot of tragedy turns – are 'based upon a fate in which the dramatic action

[93] Vauxcelles, *Gil Blas*, 1904.
[94] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin, 1995).
[95] Joyce, 'The Sisters' in *Dubliners*, see chapter 1, p.2.
[96] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, p.111.

disappears from view, and from which it acquires its obscure and enigmatic origin.' In other words, concealment and disclosure or recognition are *not* the hero's free acts.[97]

Blindness appears as an inability to 'see', to 'understand', a bigger picture; a lack of knowledge that, in these examples, implies that what is concealed is fearful and – if concealment is perceived – induces a state of fearfulness in the viewer. Such blindness also associates the lack of knowing with a lack of agency, which is another source of fear, not least because it implies that the power to conceal or the decision to conceal lies with an unknown authority – an authority whose ethics, by which is meant the desire to do good or evil, is also unknown. This is the 'fate' of Greek tragedy and the 'unspeakable' darkness in Joyce and Conrad. The vitriol inspired by Rouault's 'dark' works reveals a similar outrage directed at the painter who is perceived to have assumed the authority to obscure or conceal the world or meaning of his paintings. In this sense, the viewer is placed in the position of the protagonists and audiences of Greek tragedy, at the mercy of fate. The accusations of babbling or hallucinating can be seen as attempts to negate this fearful obscurity in the absence of recognition. Recognition, or an assumption of recognition – as in Vauxcelles' resort to Rouault's 'integrity and noble character' – would redeem or recuperate the state of darkness. To recognise is to name and to name is to know; to make 'speakable' and therefore containable. To be the one who recognises is to be empowered, and to have power over the thing that was formerly unknown.[98] Appealing as this might be (especially in the face of the examples above); it is, as we have seen, this mastery that Maritain's aesthetics and Rouault's painting overturn.

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[97] For example, Kierkegaard writes, in Greek tragedy: 'A son murders his father, but not until later learns it is his father. [Oedipus] A sister is about to sacrifice her brother, but at the decisive moment discovers that is who it is. [Iphigenia]' In modern drama, he adds, fate is given up as an idea, drama is more reflective, and 'concealment and disclosure then become the hero's free act, for which he is responsible.' Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, p.111.

[98] This is literally the case in the examples of Oedipus and Iphigenia.

In this final part of the chapter I want to consider the ambiguous relation between deliberate concealment and the representation of the darkness that 'reclaims mystery' in Rouault's painting, and the critical reaction to this. This ambivalence, or doubt, is evident (as mentioned briefly in the previous chapter) in Rouault's repeated references in his writings to Orpheus. Rouault's Orpheus longs for the 'shadow in the night', the 'fleeting shadow'[99] that is Eurydice, and can be compared to Maurice Blanchot's Orpheus, who 'does not want Eurydice in her daytime truth and her everyday appeal, but wants her in her nocturnal obscurity, in her distance, with her closed body and sealed fact – wants to see her not when she is visible but when she is invisible...'[100] This also poses the question of whether the desire of Rouault's painting to picture the darkness of the world exceeds the desire to convey this knowledge to the 'light' of day, or comprehension (even obscure comprehension). That this question even arises, and potentially remains as another unresolved tension in his work, is a threatening aspect of Rouault's oeuvre – and is very probably behind some of the original critical accusations of darkness, of hatred even, and of distress in the face of his dark canvases. In this slippery relation of knowing and not-knowing, – which has affinities with Derrida's reflection upon the 'heavily equivocal, also undecidable, and no doubt untranslatable' phrase *faire savoir*, which raises questions about what it *means* to 'make to know', 'what is meant by this coupling of two such charged verbs, "make" and "know"?' and 'what is one making known when one says *faire savoir*?'[101] – revelation and concealment are no longer dialectically equated with truth and lies or ill-meaning falsity. They form a more complex whole.

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[99] *Sur l'art et sur la vie*, p.91.
[100] Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Nebraska, 1982); quoted in Alessandro Carrera, 'Blanchot's Gaze and Orpheus's Singing: Seeing and Listening in Poetic Inspiration' in *Panorama: Philosophies of the Visible*, ed. Wilhelm S. Wurzer (London, 1992), p.45.
[101] Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, p.61.

Nietzsche is an important alternative interlocutor in exploring this ambivalent darkness, and is another neglected context from Rouault's contemporary intellectual milieu. Christopher Forth has described a 'Nietzsche vogue' amongst the French avant-garde in the years before the First World War.[102] On the one hand, this reaction was conservative: The political movement *Action Française* embraced the right-wing elements of Nietzsche's thought, seeing him as an enemy of anarchism and a defender of 'aristocratic' values (elements taken mainly from *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887)).[103] On the other, Nietzsche was received as an anarchist, a 'nihilist', and, as Mead points out, a representative of *individualisme*.[104] This division in the reception of Nietzsche crudely mirrors the orientation of criticism of Rouault: he has been linked, on account of his Catholicism and his friendship with Maritain, to the Catholic Right in pre-War France (an affiliation that tends to overlook the nuances of both Rouault's and Maritain's work); and in the original criticism from the early years of the twentieth century, Rouault was characterised, along with the Fauves, as an anarchist.

For Nietzsche, the incessant drive to truth is a 'will-to power', because 'the so-called drive for knowledge can be traced back to a drive to appropriate and conquer'.[105] In *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), he envisages the 'philosophers of the future' as attempters:

> A new species of philosophers is coming up: I venture to baptize them with a name that is not free of danger. As I unriddle them, insofar as they allow themselves to be unriddled – for it belongs to their nature to *want* to remain riddles at some point – these philosophers of the future may have a right, it

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[102] Christopher Forth, *Zarathustra in Paris: The Nietzsche Vogue in France, 1891-1918* (Illinois, 2001), pp. 15-44.
[103] See Pierre Lasserre, 'La Morale du Nietzsche', *Mercure de France* (Paris, 1902) and Reino Virtanen, 'Nietzsche and the Action française: Nietzsche's Significance for French Rightist Thought', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 11.2 (1950), 191-214.
[104] Mead, *T.E. Hulme*, p.85. See also *I Am Not A Man, I Am Dynamite! Friedrich Nietzsche and the Anarchist Tradition*, ed. by John Moore & Spencer Sunshine (New York, 2005) and Jules de Gaultier, 'Nietzsche et la pensée française', *Mercure de France*, (Paris, 1904).
[105] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Translator's Preface' to Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Spivak (Maryland, 1976), p.xxii.

> might also be a wrong, to be called attempters. This name is itself in the end a mere attempt and, if you will, a temptation.[106]

Vanessa Lemm argues that 'the double meaning of attempt (*Versuch*) – as experiment and as seduction/temptation (*Versuchung*) – indicates that philosophy as Nietzsche envisages it in the future is an experimental attempt to approach truth with the awareness that one will never fully grasp or possess it: "The novelty of our current views on philosophy is the conviction which no other age had before us: *that we do not possess the truth.*"'[107] Again, although this appears to cohere with what we have been saying about the epistemological claims for Rouault's work, in fact it represents the search for 'truth' quite differently. Nietzsche's text also contains a 'danger', the darker caveat that 'the pursuit of truth as an experimental play of seduction and temptation requires the philosopher to become a seducer (*Versucher*) and experimenter; someone who does not reveal truth but conceals it.'[108] Working in the opposite direction to the pursuit (albeit futile) of truth proposes that the 'truth' to which that pursuit has been directed is itself a falsity or fiction – concealment has a double role in obscuring 'truth' and simultaneously maintaining the notion of a 'truth' to be sought.

Painting, especially the obdurate and obscure terms of Rouault's painting, might be understood as presenting itself as Nietzsche's 'attempter', his philosopher of the future, and in baptizing such painting as a non-possessor of truth it becomes subject to the same dangers. In their pursuit of truth through experimental play, the painter and/or the painting become seducer and experimenter: it is, after all, in their nature to *want* to remain riddles at some point. Yet there is an ethical difficulty in the *intent* to conceal – *wanting* riddles to remain

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[106] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), trans. Judith Norman, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann (Cambridge, 2002), p.42.
[107] Vanessa Lemm, *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy: Culture, Politics, and the Animality of the Human Being* (Fordham, 2009), p.123.
[108] Ibid.

riddled turns the painting into an untrustworthy source, a site of meaning that might not be as open to the viewer as it is generally claimed to be, or indeed might actively work against the interests of the viewer by actively *concealing*.[109]

Previously, in 1878, six years after Feuerbach's statement and eight years before his vision of the 'attempters', Nietzsche had differentiated between the obscuring of *ideas* which, in darkening individual understanding, might reveal the '"pure and honest" pursuit of "untruth"'[110] from the obscurity that obscures existence. In *Human, All Too Human* he wrote that: 'The essential element in the black art of obscurantism is not that it wants to darken individual understanding, but that it wants to blacken over our idea of existence.'[111] Both *Human, All Too Human* and *Beyond Good and Evil* are written as collections of aphorisms: Nietzsche's choice of the aphoristic genre here links him to the French tradition of the aphorism – as epitomised by La Rochefoucauld and Pascal; moreover as a style aphorism contains a mode of argument and insight, and foregrounds an obscurity, that doubly represents his point. Richard Grey writes that the aphorism depicts the modernist scepticism towards enlightenment reason, making it a highly modernist form, and Jean-Michel Rabaté relates it to the modernist interest in epiphanic moments, claiming that the aphorism shows that there *is no* revelation, but that the *structure* of the aphorism brings one closer to the possibility of the revelatory moment.[112]

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[109] This recalls the Freud of *The Interpretation of Dreams* who hints that the 'unplumbable' spot in every dream, the spot he designates the dream's 'navel', is on account of the interpretative information about the dream that he is withholding, a hint he makes at the same time as asking the reader to accept the point of obscurity as an innate element of the dream. Also, note that the ethical difficulty here regards painting not Nietzsche, for whom, as the title suggests, these moves are beyond the established moral spheres. Rouault's work, though, is not.

[110] Lemm, *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy*, p.122.

[111] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human* (1878), trans. & ed. Marion Faber & Stephen Lehmann (Oxford, 1994), p.220, §27.

[112] See Richard Gray, *Constructive Destruction* (Tübingen, 1987); Jean-Michel Rabaté, '"A Cage went in Search of a Bird" How do Kafka's and Joyce's aphorisms move us?', conference paper, *Moving Modernisms* (Oxford, 2012); and John W. McGinley, *The Dreadful Symmetry of the Good: A Sustained Meditation, in and by Writing* (New York, 2009).

The difference between the darkening of understanding and the blackening of existence is, arguably, at stake in Rouault's use of the tarot imagery and in *Jeu de massacre*. In the latter, the layers of interpretation that are intertwined on the skein-like surface, 'layers' that have no distinct depth-related hierarchy and that obscure the viewer's attempt to decipher a way 'through' them by operating as a dark referential play, signify both a resistance to conceptualization or explanation – exacerbated by the 'game-playing' associations of *Jeu de massacre* – and a potentially nihilistic world-view in which representation yields only to further representation in a '*mise-en-abyme*' that alienates and disturbs the viewer.[113] The puppet-world of the painting presents a nightmarish determinism; a literally dark, theatrical re-enactment of a world in which existence is rendered absurd – the world in which we dwell is revealed as innately hostile, despite its domestic appearances.[114] It is also, as indicated in chapter one, an ironic reflection upon the ideology of demystification. In the (ultimately futile) process of deciphering the various layers of the painting, the illusion of drawing near to a moment of revelation is fostered, but in the end, in aphoristic fashion, what is revealed is that there is no revelation. In this respect, *Jeu de massacre* exemplifies the idea that Rouault's painting sits on a knife-edge of 'what if', facing the possibilities of either something or nothing.[115] The argument for 'something more' in this painting, then, is located in the resignation discussed in the first part of this chapter: resignation to the terms of the painting, resignation to the resistance to unravelling re-orients mystification towards an opening-up or grasping akin, more positively, to the Mallarméan sense of a grasping epistemology.

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[113] Incidentally, the term *mise-en-abyme* as used in critical theory was introduced (from its former use in heraldry) by André Gide. On Gide's influence on French modernism, see *The Cambridge Companion to European Modernism*, ed. Pericles Lewis (Cambridge, 2011).

[114] See Ian Hacking, 'Nineteenth-Century Cracks in the Concept of Determinism', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 44 (1983), 455-475.

[115] As indicated in previous chapters, contemporary models for this existentialist line of thought include Vaihinger, and also demonstrate the influence of Pascal.

This hostility is also potent in Rouault's later landscapes, such as *Crépuscule* (1920-1929) [fig.105] and *Paysage de Sierre* (1930) [fig.106]. Where the undulations of the paint in *Paysage* of 1907 represent the undulations of a landscape *empathetically* understood, felt rather than seen, an embodied and 'habitable' landscape, the marks that make up the later landscapes are more brutally applied, slab-like constructions, imposed as separate material units. *Paysage de Sierre* is a darker, madder Mont Sainte-Victoire [fig.107], built from the crudest elements of painting, the primary colours, plus black and white, unevenly applied, background and foreground indivisible in the strident layers of marks that denote landscape, arranged around a triangular mountain about which the thick blue sky is shaped. A figure of sorts emerges in the scumbled surface at the bottom of the canvas, but in belonging to the distanced world of this mountain-in-paint it does nothing to bring the viewer into the picture. At the same time, the painting rests in this non-identity with reasonable content: it reaches us from a distance that it makes no attempt to overcome. It does *not* contain proposals about the world and our knowledge of it as, for example, are contained in Rouault's early landscapes such as *Paysage de nuit* (1897) [fig.108], or *Paysage* (1907), or *Peniche* (1909) [fig.109]. Instead, it can be read as a representation of an effort to enforce a 'will' upon the world. We sense that this is Rouault making the world over as he wishes, not attempting to capture it as it might be (painting, of course, can never do that, but many landscapes give the impression that they have at least tried to do so). We sense, in other words, that these are less records of the world than a 'performance' of a 'will-to-knowledge' that, if successful, must inevitably end up offering a glimpse of a world-making that is ultimately hostile and inhumane.

To invoke 'will' is to bring in the Nietzsche of *Beyond Good and Evil* again, where, insisting that knowledge is endlessly subjective, the drive to truth comes to be understood as a manifestation of the 'will-to power', a desire for domination or instinct for the expansion of

power – 'life simply is will to power'.[116] The implication, then, is that the inaccessibility of the landscape posited by the repetitive, procedural facticity of Rouault's marks in these paintings represents a denial of 'intuition', of the 'diving beneath the surface' of chapter two, and replaces it with a version of the 'will to power'. Pursuing these terms in relation to these paintings might suggest that they are on a comparable trajectory as Nietzsche's thought at this point, which is towards a dismissal of the existence of a higher or transcendental sphere.[117] 'Truths', mysteries, or what were formerly 'strained towards' in Rouault's work, threaten to become wrapped up in wilfully inscribed subjectivities. Rouault's work never quite, or never fully, succumbs to such subjectivity (an argument that might be said to correspond with Impressionism). The materiality of the works gets in the way, preventing the domination of subjectivity as it prevents the fall into materialism or the dissolution into idealism.

Crépuscule is, at first sight, an even more forceful example of landscape painting as an imposition of 'will'. It has a greater sense of order than *Paysage de Sierre*: again it is made up of heavy brushmarks, here applied predominantly horizontally with a constructive logic of *addition*, of layer upon layer that yet again forcibly opposes the 'unveiling' or revealing of the scene. The thick paint matter of *Crépuscule* and *Paysage de Sierre* also presents the will to power or truth as a de-animating force that threatens to give way to

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[116] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §259. In a similar chain of thought, T.J. Clark asks of Cezanne's marks: 'Why should the will not be in unflinching charge – a will that is ultimately happy to settle for a world made up of separate and incommensurable realms, each one of sheer procedure? Are not [these] marks... procedural with a vengeance? Are they not more like a Nietzsche aphorism than a paragraph of Proust? Fierce, declarative, and self-cancelling, not edging toward the truth of consciousness step by qualified step? Clark.'Phenomenality and Materiality in Cezanne', p.106. However, Clark does not think that Cezanne's painting need lead us in Nietzsche's direction, ('Part of Cezanne's importance to me is that in him it does not.') and he refuses to go along 'with the notion that an aesthetic of performance and will is, by its nature, less humane and empathetic than one of totality and phenomenon.' Clark.'Phenomenality and Materiality in Cezanne', p.110: 'I realise', Clarks adds, 'that in putting "accident, performance, and will" in place of "necessity, imagination, and openness" I look to be preaching a heartless creed. But what if I settled for the words "practice, exercise, and object" rather than "spontaneity, experience, and subject"? At least then the ethical balance becomes less clear. We know what kind of violence has been done in the name of the latter triad's brand of organicism.' Ibid.

[117] Nietzsche, 'How the Real World became a Myth', in *The Twilight of the Idols or, How to Philosophize with a Hammer, and The Antichrist*, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1968; repr. rev. edn, 2003), p. 50.

materialism. In their heavy materiality, the purposeless vision or 'stony gaze' seems to risk de-animating the world to the point of reducing it to matter.

But at the same time, the materiality that poses this hostility also poses an uncertainty, particularly in *Crépuscule*, that also works against the reading of the surface as a manifestation of the will to power. The materiality of the surface, in asserting itself as more than raw material, is both a gap that gapes and a rupture that allows for the seeping in of meanings. In *Crépuscule*, the major interruption of the procedural facture is introduced by the colours, which support the title, *Crépuscule*, or twilight – the light before dawn or just after dusk. The moment before dawn has biblical significance, it is in the half-light before the cock crows that Peter denies Christ three times, and it is for the dawn and for his betrayal and arrest that Christ waits in the Garden of Gethsemane.[118] That these allusions are relevant to this painting by Rouault is suggested by the similarities between *Crépuscule* and many of his biblical landscapes, many of which are entitled *Paysage biblical*, painted in the 1930s and 1940s. In Greek mythology 'dawn' is personified as Eos, a Titaness – which recalls Rouault's writings on Rodin – who rises each morning and 'with rosy fingers' opens the gates of heaven for the sun to appear. Dawn is sometimes synonymous with creation, as a 'pre-light' or primordial moment, which stands for 'becoming', for the emergence of man, of time and space. As described in *Noli me tangere*, then, these paintings are wrapped up in the processes of 'becoming' undertaken by painting: processes that are at once opposed to truth as power and that figure a longing for a 'twilight' moment before the light of reason and of the imposition of will.

The obdurate surfaces of Rouault's landscapes impose questions about the blindness or blinding potential of painting onto a landscape genre often associated with 'surveying',

[118] For more on this see Paul L. Mariani, *God and the Imagination: On Poets, Poetry, and the Ineffable* (Georgia, 2002).

with looking-out or looking-upon. Finally, bringing together questions of recognition, disguise, concealment and darkness, I want to turn to the interrelation of revelation and blindness in Rouault's work through the 'blind' subjects of his paintings.

Until the 1930s, dark glasses were generally worn only by the blind, and not to protect their eyes but to conceal them from the sight of others. This aligns the eyes of the blind with the sightless eyes of the dead, which are also closed to conceal the appearance of death; these eyes see nothing, but equally, in those eyes the sighted see nothing – instead of the conventionally understood 'windows of the soul', there is 'nothing', a fearful possibility of absence in the 'blind' that obstructs the sight of 'depth'.

Almost all of Rouault's subjects, after 1903, lack eyes that give the illusion of seeing. In *Clown au tambour*, for example, the eye of the clown is indicated by two or three black and dark blue brush strokes – to say these create the sense of a space where the eye is or should be, is misleading, because once again, the thickness of the paint fills the 'space', making it a 'presence' of a place for the eye. We read an 'eye' because of its place within the face, but it does not 'see' and it is not eye-like, which contributes to the emphasis upon the surface, to the mask-like and automata-like appearance of the clown. The same is true of *Clown au singe*, despite the brush of white that suggests the curvature of the lens. In this painting, as discussed previously, the clown is face to face with a monkey, but this appears more akin to a reflection (especially given the similarities between the faces) than as a gaze between two subjects. In *Lutteur*, *Parade*, *Filles*, *L'Ivrognesse*, and numerous others, the eyes are mere slithers of black paint or thick black slabs, impenetrably opaque.

Polichinelle and *Tête de clown tragique* vary in that the pupils and the shape of the eye are relatively distinct. In these cases both clowns appear to gaze out of the paintings, but not directly at the viewer, it is impossible to 'catch their eye' (this is a feature that Derrida

associates with the self-portrait[119]). This association might be read in terms of Rouault's 'recognition' of the clown as himself, as 'practically all of us',[120] or, as related to emphasis upon the concealment-as-human of the kenotic motif. This is supported by the absence of a sense of internality 'behind' the face-as-mask, or the obliteration by opaque paint of any sense of interiority in gaze of *Polichinelle* and *Tête de clown tragique*. The eye itself oscillates between painterly mark and eye, making the gaze a depiction of a gaze in paint. Even Rouault's later paintings of icon-like faces, such as *Madame X* (1947) [fig.110], *Pierrot melancholique*, (1949-1956) [fig.111], and *Sarah* (1956) [fig.112], all of which are large works in extremely thick paint, have only black lumps of matter as eyes.

At times, their eyes resemble those of the women painted by Rouault's contemporary, Kees Van Dongen, who borrowed and stylized 'primitive' eye-shapes from the Javanese temple statues he bought when the 1900 World's Fair in Paris closed.[121] Van Dongen sometimes outlined these eye-shapes in a manner familiar, as Anita Hopmans observes, from the Iberian and Egyptian sculptures in the Louvre (with which Rouault was also acquainted) as well as in the expressive manner of the Javanese dancers' masks. In 1921, Van Dongen reportedly (and provocatively) said that he strove to glorify women, that he gave them 'big eyes – but I don't know why – long eyelashes, satin-smooth or matt skin... pearls and brilliants'.[122] This so-called glorification, in its emphasis upon ornament and in the eyes that are wide but as empty of vision as those of Rouault's subjects, seems to be as much a process of objectification as we find in Rouault's sightless subjects. However, where in Van Dongen

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[119] In *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago, 1993), Derrida draws a parallel between drawings of blind people and self-portraits, beginning with the eyes: the eyes of the blind are focused somewhere out of the picture or are blank, while the eyes of the self-portrait look out – or back at us – from the picture, but fail, somehow, to meet the viewer's eyes as might be expected of a regular portrait's eyes.
[120] Rouault, letter to Edouard Schuré, circa 1905, see opening to Chapter 2.
[121] Anita Hopmans, *All Eyes on Kees Van Dongen*, exh.cat. trans. Lynne Richards and Beverly Jackson (Rotterdamn: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 2010), p.34.
[122] Hopmans, *All Eyes on Kees Van Dongen*, p.7.

this is part of a way of 'laying-hold' of a superficial and materialist society, Rouault's concern was with the deliberate impoverishment of the image, in order to draw veneration not for the image but for the unknown, mysterious authority to which it gestures.

In concealing interiority, in secreting individual subjectivity behind an impenetrable surface, the face becomes, in the manner of a death-mask, an emphatically material thing. Like the mask that refuses unmasking and thus suggests the possibility that there is nothing behind it, the unreturned gaze of sightless eyes that cannot see us – and therefore, in which we cannot see ourselves being seen – presents us with an image of our own mortality. The heavy, statue-like, forms of Rouault's women support the lack of animation suggested by these sightless eyes, and in *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, in a passage that recalls Kierkegaard, Derrida describes the eyes of statues as closed like the eyes of the dead, '"walled up' in any case... or turned inward, more dead than alive, more dead than the eyes of masks.'[123] As a critique upon modernist painting, Rouault's blind, statuesque faces are also a metaphorical image of the mortality of painting – the thick materiality, however insistently painterly, refusing an 'unmasking', and posing the possibility that there is 'nothing' behind the sightless eyes.

At the same time, the 'blindness' of Rouault's low-life figures can be read as an articulation of their 'innocence' and affinity to the notion of the 'Holy fool'. As in *The Idiot*, the innocent vision of the 'fool' makes him or her vulnerable to the deceits and complexities of society and undermines the individual's agency – not knowing or understanding puts the 'fool' at the mercy of those members of society, or a society in itself, without good

[123] Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, 44

intentions.[124] The link between blindness and innocence can be found in *Genesis (3: 6-8)*, in which, upon Eve's eating of the fruit, 'the eyes of both were opened', and with vision comes the end of innocence.[125] Myshkin's loss of innocence through his opened vision to reality also signifies his fall; he returns to the clinic in Switzerland struck down by madness and epilepsy. In this case, 'bringing to light', raising the obscure to knowledge, is a bad thing – the world overwhelms the seer unprepared for knowledge of it. These ideas were present in Rouault's extended circle, notably in the writing of André Gide who was closely connected with Maritain – both sympathetically and antagonistically. [126] This innocence, as well as the blindness of seeing and the revelation of blindness, are explored in Gide's short story *The Pastoral Symphony* (1919). The heroine of the story is a blind girl, later named Gertrude, who is discovered by a pastor in the shadows of a dark cottage by the deathbed of her grandmother. Initially she is also mute, not because she cannot speak but because she does not know how to – her deaf grandmother having never spoken to her. She is described as 'opaque', as an 'uncertain being', and the pastor makes it his mission – in the beginning from pure charity – to induce expression from her 'statue-like face'.[127] As the story progresses, Gertrude's literal blindness reveals the metaphorical blindness of the pastor, who fails to understand in this Pygmalion relationship that his motives are driven by desire for the girl.

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[124] See Georgina Kleege, 'Dialogues with the Blind: Literary depictions of blindness and visual art', *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1, (2010), pp.1-15.

[125] See Irvin Goh, 'The Passion According to Cixous: From Human Blindness to Animots', *MLN*, Vol. 125, No. 5, (December 2010), pp.1050-1074.

[126] Around the time of its writing, Gide was closely connected with Maritain, hence the several quotations from Gide that are found in *Art and Scholasticism*. My point here is to establish the historical connection between Rouault and Gide – since Maritain's treatment of the latter was prejudiced and distorts his opinion (which I am not drawing upon here). Maritain's friendship with Gide was deeply problematic – like his association with Cocteau Maritain admired their art but struggled with their homosexuality (Gide at this point was in a relationship with the 15 year old Marc Allégret). Maritain, still associated with the at times bigoted opinions of the Catholic Right, distanced himself from Gide after Gide's public defense of homosexuality in 1924. They also fell out over Gide's brief period of Communism in the 1930s but were reunited over the 'Jewish Question'. See Alan Sheridan, *André Gide: A Life in the Present* (Harvard, 1993); Bernard Doering, *Jacques Maritain and the French Catholic Intellectuals* (details); Michael Einfalt, 'Gide Versus Maritain' in *The Maritain Factor: Taking Religion into Interwar Modernism* eds. Rajesh Heynickx and Jan de Faeyer (details), 153.

[127] Gide, *La symphonie pastorale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1919), my translations – see also Maud Ellman, whose book *Nets of Modernism* also includes a discussion of blindness in relation to the short story, including Gide. Nets,100. See also, Gemaine Bree, *Gide* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1963)

The title of Gide's story refers to Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony,[128] which symbolizes the universal harmony of God's world; whilst blind, Gertrude is given such a world through stories told her by the pastor, but once cured of her blindness (by an operation which the pastor initially resists) this harmony is shattered by her vision of the world around her. As in *The Idiot*, sight is as blinding as it is revelatory. Gertrude attempts to drown herself and dies from the subsequent fever, thus returning to the statuesque state in which she was originally bound. As the pastor's blindness and Gertrude vision head towards a collision, the narrative becomes increasingly claustrophobic, with events crowding in, written in a breathless fashion as if out of control and wrecking the pious orderliness of the first part of the narrative. As Gide's narrative collapses in upon itself, obscuring its initial clarity, this obscurity reveals what the previous narrative structure could hide, the blindness of the pastor and his desperation to keep himself in the dark from what, in the end, even he cannot help but suspect, albeit not quite consciously. Simultaneously, Gertrude's restored vision, which reveals to her the double blindness of her former state, is presented in the obscurity of the text as a second revelation, a doubled vision to counter the double blindness. But this revelation is also blinding, it renders the world utterly obscure to Gertrude and she chooses to return to a state of darkness.

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[128] It is interesting that Gide chooses a work by a deaf composer, and also that is it Beethoven's work (specifically the ode to joy from the 9th Symphony) that Nietzsche describes as, if turned into a painting, the work that would come closest to the Dionysian. Gide was possibly Nietzsche's greatest supporter in France in the early twentieth century, and it might be suggested that his choice of 'Pastoral Symphony' is not merely a facile irony, but also a nod to the underlying unity of the Dionysian to which the pastor's 'higher unity' succumbs, and to the Pygmalion imagery of Nietzsche's passage: If someone were to transform Beethoven's Ode to Joy into a painting and not restrain his imagination when millions of people sink dramatically into the dust, then we could come close to the Dionysian. Now is the slave a free man, now all the stiff, hostile barriers break apart, those things which necessity and arbitrary power or "saucy fashion" have established between men. Now, with the gospel of world harmony, every man feels himself not only united with his neighbour, reconciled and fused together, but also as if the veil of Maja has been ripped apart, with only scraps fluttering around before the mysterious original unity. Singing and dancing, man expresses himself as a member of a higher unity. He has forgotten how to walk and talk and is on the verge of flying up into the air as he dances. The enchantment speaks out in his gestures. Just as the animals speak and the earth gives milk and honey, so now something supernatural echoes out of him. He feels himself a god. He now moves in a lofty ecstasy, as he saw the gods move in his dream. The man is no longer an artist. He has become a work of art. The artistic power of all of nature, the rhapsodic satisfaction of the primordial unity, reveals itself here in the intoxicated performance. The finest clay, the most expensive marble—man—is here worked and chiseled, and the cry of the Eleusianian mysteries rings out to the chisel blows of the Dionysian world artist: "Do you fall down, you millions? World, do you have a sense of your creator?" Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p.4.

This intertwining of vision and blindness in the question of 'knowing' has been shown to be at work across a number of Rouault's surfaces, including the skein-like materiality of the surface of *Parade*. *Parade* presents an immediate impression of incoherence, which resists immediate comprehension; what it 'reveals' is a similarly doubly blinding, an obscurity that cannot be unravelled or disentangled. It is also a revelation of a state of blindness, but a blindness that, paradoxically, promises – or threatens – to be 'more' revelatory (even if it's revelation is that there is nothing more to reveal) in its obscure darkness than a conventional 'bringing-to-light' of coherence or comprehension. This raises the question, however, of *who* is doing the concealing in the case of *Parade* – a question that, as Gide's story makes clear, shapes the ethical tone of the work of art. In *Parade,* it is complex: the clowns themselves are concealing their identities in their roles as clowns; the activity of the clowns hides and is hidden by the activity of painting left in the traces of paint; and the painter, Rouault, is complicit both in concealing the meaning of the work in obscurity *and* in revealing, through a representation that does not falsify a world of harmony, a view that itself reveals both the obscurity of the world and the falsity of representations that seek to transform this obscurity into clarity.

Conclusion: Precariousness

The hostility of the world and the problem of revelation and concealment are brought together in the topsy-turvy world of the last acts of Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of King Lear*, in which a King takes the place of his jester and in his madness praises the vision of blind man. 'See better', Kent prophetically wishes of Lear in the opening scene of the play; and later, Gloucester's gouged-out eyes are a hideous foil to the metaphorical blindness of the King – a king whose 'sight' equals power ('out of my sight' is an oft-repeated command),

but whose vision of the world is deeply flawed.[129] Coming upon the blinded man, Lear asks: 'No eyes in your head, nor no money in your purse? Your eyes are in a heavy case, your purse in a light; yet you see how this world goes.' (IV, 5, 141-144) 'I see it feelingly' answers Gloucester, exploding the relationship between sight and knowledge, and opening knowledge as a more ambiguous experience, informed by the senses, the emotions, and suffering.

The rupture of truth and sight offers Shakespeare an opportunity for political satire, and he has Lear add, in his reply to Gloucester: 'Get thee glass eyes, / And, like a scurvy politician, seem / to see the things thou dost not.' Lear's 'madness' ('matter and impertinency mixed – Reason in madness!' the witness, Edgar, whispers aside) signifies that when the truth that he has refused to 'see' turns upon him, his world is turned upside down and everything he thought he 'knew' becomes precarious. His 'madness' is more truthful, if also sadder, harsher, and darker, than his former blind madness. In a moment that resonates with Rouault's description of the old clown patching his glittering motley-coloured costume, Lear removes his crown of weeds – a crown that mocks his former objects of status – and says: 'When we are born, we cry that we are come / To this great stage of fools.' Lear is, here, without his spangled costume, and as in Rouault's scene, he is both reduced to a man like any other, and in a way, raised up beyond the glittering costume to this everyman status. Despite his protestations that 'I am a very foolish, fond, old man' and 'I am old and foolish' (V, 1, 53 and 77), Lear's 'foolishness' is not that of the innocent fool or indeed of his own fool, whom he appears to have replaced.

Lear's original vision of the world was never naive or optimistic, it was caught up in the trappings of an artificial world run through with lies and deviousness – Lear himself, in the first scene, declared 'a darker purpose', indicating his own complicity in the world that

[129] *Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford, 1988), pp.945-974.

then fractures around him. The ensuing tragedy plays out that fracturing: as an account that binds blindness and madness it has nothing to do with longing for a lost world but *is* to do with the revelation of the world as '*always already*'[130] *there* and *as already* dark, a world in which light and clarity yield to darkness and madness. Lear's madness, then, can be understood as analogous to the Schopenhauerean horror, described in Chapter two, in Nietzsche's words, as the 'monstrous horror which seizes a man when he suddenly doubts his ways of comprehending illusion, when the *sense of a foundation*, in any one of its forms, appears to suffer a breakdown.'[131] In this light (or darkness), the threat to signification presented by the destabilizing fracture of the oscillation between clown and paint in Rouault's *Tête de clown tragique*, which led the critics to accuse him of a kind of madness, also pictures a glimpse of the world as it might appear without the conventional sense of a foundation. The same point applies to the interminable deferral of a foundational signifier in *Jeu de massacre*. This is the world as it might be thought to appear to the Lear who has undergone tragic suffering. In Rouault's work, as in *King Lear*, the implication is there that there might be a deeper – perhaps greater or more 'real' – knowledge beyond the surrender of conventional and established 'knowledge'. But at the same time, seeing 'better' does not save Lear or Cordelia: their deaths also stage the possibility that there is no higher power or morality to restore order.

This is the paradox and struggle that Rouault's painting strives to represent. Emphatically material, Rouault's painting is analogously kenotic. It is thereby wrapped up with the tensions of a physicality which both questions what is meant by God or meaning and intensifies the sense of a physical, human value that might only be grounded in an other or deeper or higher meaning – if it exists, for Rouault this is God. The ambivalent darkness of

[130] This is Heidegger's phrase.
[131] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p.5. – my emphasis.

Rouault's works pursues and interrogates the comfortable and uncomfortable margins of those values and meanings. It leads to an indeterminacy that presents a series of possibilities: possibilities that the world is finally like this or like that, either marked above all by excess, by new possibility, by grace, or that it is the product of chance (staged in Rouault's work by the tarot and the game), in which there is, as George Pattison writes, 'no more in the way of ultimate resource than can be provided by an unconstrained capacity for self-assertion'.[132] Rouault interrogates painting as a model of making which is directed toward openness and mystery rather than control.[133] The stakes are high, as they are in *King Lear*, both for the protagonists or subjects and for the painting or dialogue that seeks to pose their questions. Without doubt, fear, or the precariousness of a dark un-knowing, the revelation or truth for which these projects strive (even if that striving is ultimately futile) cannot be contemplated. As Gide wrote:

> Art is always the result of some constraint. To think that it rises higher in proportion as it is free, is to think that what keeps the kite from climbing is the string to which is attached. Kant's dove, which thought it would be able to fly better without that wind keeping its wings back, fails to realise that for it to be able to fly at all, it needs the resistance of the air on which to lean its wings.'[134]

[132] George Pattison, 'Freedom's Dangerous Dialogue: Reading Kierkegaard and Dostoyevsky together' in *Dostoyevsky and the Christian Tradition*, eds. George Pattison and Diane Oenning Thompson (Cambridge, 2001), pp.237-256; and Williams, *Dostoyevsky*, pp.228-236. See also Pattison's *Kierkegaard and the Quest for Unambiguous Life: Between Romanticism and Modernism* (Oxford, 2013) and *Kierkegaard, Religion and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Culture* (Camrbridge, 2002).
[133] Williams, *Dostoyevsky*, p.234.
[134] AS, p.100.

Conclusion: Woundedness

Le clown blessé (The wounded clown) [fig.113] (1932) is a monumental work. 199cm x 119.5cm, in oil on paper mounted on canvas, for the last few years it has dominated *Salle 18* of the Musée national d'art moderne at the Centre Georges Pompidou. Hung opposite the entrance to the small room dedicated to 12 works by Georges Rouault, even from a distance the overwhelming impression created by *Le clown blessé* is of paint: of a surface intensely worked, and literally laden with stroke after stroke of thick paint. The blue of the early works is gone, to be replaced by a blue-black broken by slab-like marks and thickly painted shapes of burnt red and yellow that fades to green where it merges with the blue-black. The effect is apocalyptic, and yet there is a sense that if the thick black lines were less static and more caricatural, or the marks more jaunty and less intense, the work might be a comic re-enactment of monumental painting.

Le clown blessé is a painting that draws upon a variety of the rhetorics of materiality described throughout the previous chapters. In concluding this thesis, I want to suggest that this monumental painting can, in good modernist fashion, be read ultimately as about painting, but painting which is *always and already* bound up with the philosophical and theological. I also want briefly to deploy the theme of woundedness as a way of reiterating and rearticulating the notion of limitation as central to Rouault's project.

Three clowns are shown arm-in-arm, the central clown with a bowed Christ-like head, and the others bearing the weight of their wounded companion. They are set against the outline of a hill, possibly Calvary, suggesting the allegorical nature of the work – and it has been read as a parable of Christian solidarity and trust, of Christ aligning himself with the people to bear their suffering. But whilst this is one of the resonances mobilized by this painting, as ever in Rouault's painting, such a unified reading is complicated by the other

threads of meaning that inhere in the surface. For example, the painting is dominated by the architectures of other paintings: the composition of the figures recalls Christ descended from the cross, and the picture is encased in a thickly painted Rococo frame (with a whiff of parody), complete with leering gargoyle. There is a partially indicated structure on the left hand side that resembles the gallows of Rouault's later work and might refer to the Cross, but which also might be the edge of a curtain in keeping with the theatricality of the painting.

The totality of the surface is also threatened by the visibility of the many parts that make up the whole, from the knee-caps of the clowns to the encrusted blobs and ossified dabs of the frame that Rouault has painted onto the paper/canvas, and which, since the painting is framed conventionally, produces a frame-within-a-frame. [1] The limbs of the clowns are solid, marionette-like parts, with the feet lined up in the manner of ancient Egyptian figures or as if in a frieze along the bottom of the picture plane. Once again, then, in this painting we are faced by heavily painted masked faces that are *not* faces, by a bodily language that is fractured and mutilated, and thus by a painting that 'stages' what Rancière has described as the abandonment of the old logic of will, feelings, actions and ends. The 'problem' of painting is represented: the problem of the incompatibility between the sensible texture of the imperceptible and the onstage presence of bodies meant to incarnate it.[2]

Throughout this thesis we have seen how these aspects – mistakenly seen by many writers on Rouault as separate – are inextricably bound together. The wounded clown may stand for Christ and for the outcasts of society, but it is also an allegory for the 'wounded'

[1] Gael Mooney suggests that this opposition of parts and whole resembles Gothic architecture, and signifies an organic structuring within which every idea, principle, and mental process finds it proper and integrated place. This 'wholeness', she argues, is the 'outward manifestation of the "mysterious interlinking of the blessed and the damned"' in Rouault's work. . Following Balthasar's discussion of the medieval concept of *ordo*, which expresses the mutuality and the transcendentals of goodness, beauty, and truth as not delimited from each other but interpenetrative, Mooney reads the 'blessed trinity' of 'form, colour, harmony' in Rouault's works, including particularly this work, as a reflection of the communion of the Trinitarian doctrine . Gael Mooney, 'Georges Rouault: Encountering God's Beauty' in *Violence, Transformation and the Sacred: "They shall be called Children of God"*, p.108. Whilst I do not want to suggest that this reading is wrong, it is, as the previous chapters have shown, incomplete. To see his work merely as a turn to medieval aesthetics denies the modernity of Rouault's surfaces and overlooks the materiality of the painting.

[2] Ranciere, *Aisthesis*, p.130,

condition of painting. Maritain also pursued this 'woundedness', describing art as '"limping", like the biblical Jacob, from the encounter with what cannot be named.'[3] For Maritain – as discussed in Chapter three – and Rouault this imperfection is crucial, because it indicates an art striving to represent something that it *cannot*. Towards the end of his career, Maritain wrote 'of finite beauty or finishedness in the work being always incomplete at some level ...achieved art always has "*that kind* of imperfection through which infinity wounds the finite".'[4]

This 'woundedness' brings together the notions of the physical materiality of the work of art as a site of constraint, as an imperfect imitation of creation, and, through the fidelity to itself as a 'made-thing', as an imperfect analogy to the kenosis of Christ. The wound and 'wounding' resonates throughout the kenotic model, since it is through the taking-on of human flesh and the self-emptying of the divine that Christ is able to suffer the physical wounds of the Crucifixion. The thickly painted surface at once interrupts or wounds older orders of representation, and expresses its own wounded condition through its explicit acknowledgement of its limitations.

Nicholas Royle has suggested that Derrida is the first thinker of 'philosophy as traumaturgy, that is to say, as a work and theory of wounds.'[5] What Derrida dreams of is the 'experience of the impossible' (which, as Royle notes, recalls what Derrida considers the

[3] Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, pp.166-7, cited in Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, p.21.
[4] Ibid. Realism, as a 'deceitful' art, is a 'perfect' presentation of the ordinary vision of the world – an achievable but misguided art. Maritain: AS, n.127: 'The reproduction or exact copy of nature thus appears as the object of an impossible pursuit – a concept which vanishes when an attempt is made to define it. In practice it resolves itself into the idea of a representation of things such as photography or casting would give, or rather – for these mechanical processes themselves produce results that are "false" as far as our perception is concerned – into the idea of a representation of things *capable of inducing an illusion and deceiving our senses*...; in short, into the idea of that naturalist *trompe-l'oeil*, which interests only the art of the Musée Grevin or Madame Tussaud's.' The opposite, of course, is also true: In overemphasizing spirituality at the expense of materiality, the after-life at the expense of this life, mysticism leads to the worship of an abstract perfection 'unresponsive to this world or to the body of humanity'. In art, it is merely another way of (falsely) worshipping (false) perfection. For Maritain, Mallarmé's efforts to, as Tamara Levitz writes, 'achieve spiritual fulfilment through poetry alone, in the form of *poésie pure* and an *esprit poétique pur*' were alarming for the same reasons. See Tamara Levitz, *Modernist Mysteries: Persephone* (Oxford, 2012), p.150.
[5] Nicholas Royle, 'Poetry, Animality, Derrida', *Companion to Derrida*, eds. Zeynap Direk and Leonard Lawlor (Oxford, 2014), p.533.

least bad definition of deconstruction): 'acceding to a thinking, however fabulous and chimerical it might be, that thinks the absence of the name and of the word [otherwise, and as something other than a privation.'[6] This, it seems, is the place of the dream, the possibility of the impossible can only be dreamed. 'I was dreaming' Derrida writes, 'of inventing an unheard of grammar and music in order to create a scene that was neither human, nor divine, nor animal...'[7] This recalls Rouault's vision, after the death of Moreau, of a new, previously unknown language: 'I experienced things that cannot be explained in words' he wrote. 'And I began to paint in a manner of outrageous lyricism, which baffled everyone.'[8]

But the mark is also cut, a hiatus, an interruption in which the sensible corrupts the dream and the point at which the possibility of the impossible fails. Painting is fundamentally wounded, it is never utterly new or free. Old orders are folded into it, or enclosed by it. The wound, like the mark, contains its own history and that is a history of knowledge – a history that allows Rouault's marks to reject the illusion of depth in painting, but simultaneously ties his marks up with that illusion.

However, it is in being engaged with the possible failure of making meaning, or of visualising the invisible, the excess of Maritain's creative intuition, that Rouault's works paradoxically open themselves towards that very 'excess', towards, at its most ambitious, a confrontation with the infinite. This is because, if knowledge is the ordering of experience, we have no exterior object order against which all others are measured. Therefore, we must, as Marko Zlomislić puts it, weigh the possible orders available to us. But in acknowledging the limitation of our ordering, acknowledging, as the previous chapters have discussed, the constraint of our condition upon our knowledge, then a higher or greater or other or unknown

[6] Royle, *Companion to Derrida*, p.532. NB: Recall the void of Chapter 3 as a celebration of lack.
[7] Derrida 'The Animal that Therefore I Am (more to follow)', p.64.
[8] Quoted in Kang, *Rouault in Perspective*, p.40.

order is intrinsically suggested. For Rouault, this is the knowledge of reality-as-mystery, or, more accurately, the unknown-knowledge of mystery under the material condition of paint.

To describe Rouault's modernism as wounded is not to negate its modernist tendencies. It is, as we have seem, this interrogation of the condition of painting in Rouault's work that takes to task the questions and assumptions about the presence and absence of meaning associated with abstraction, expression, and representation from within the practice of painterly modernism. It is also in drawing attention to its own physicality not as a move towards emptying itself of meaning but in a manoeuvre in which that very physicality re-opens the space for meaning, that Rouault's painting becomes theologically significant – without thereby losing its interrogative or critical relevance for narratives of modernist painting.

That the tensions and uncertainties of Rouault's project remain unresolved is suggested even in the decision to devote a small room solely to Rouault's painting at Musée national d'art moderne. This space is situated just outside the main gallery, which houses examples of early twentieth-century painting from Matisse and Fauvism to Surrealism. Salle 18 is itself an interruption in the museum's narrative. To return, finally, to where we began, it is Vauxcelles' series of questions that, after all, come closest to articulating what is still at stake in Rouault's paintings. The irresolute tension between the 'nothing' and the excessive materiality that Vauxcelles sees in Rouault's canvases is the 'truth' of his project.