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Homeless Sculpture

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HOMELESS SCULPTURE*

I. HOMELESSNESS

“Things”—“Dinge.” It is with this sober word, that Rainer Maria Rilke opened his famous speech on his master, about forty years ago—that gospel that made a whole generation see, understand and misunderstand Rodin. When Rilke pronounced this word, he expected and he really provoked a sort of holy silence of the noisy world of objects surrounding us. The generation of 1907 was profoundly impressed by this magic word, although it had not the slightest idea why. Today our distance from the century’s beginning is sufficient. Today we can see, what this sober word and its strangely magic effect really meant.

Mankind around 1900 was living in a world which had made everything: man, man’s time, man’s relation to man, an exchangeable element in a system of commodities. Exchangeability means: no thing is identical with itself any longer; but determined and defined by its universal commodity relation, by the market. It is, as sociology calls it, “alienated.”

It is obvious that for the average member of society a straight fight against this alienation was out of the question. Since alienation was the direct outcome of the subsisting system, the fight could only be fought in an indirect way. Only by “denial” or concealment.

Thus philosophy, art, music, poetry furiously tried to glorify life and to emphasize the difference which metaphysically exists between “Person” and “Thing,” and to accompany faithfully the ever growing “reification” of man by an ever growing Romanticism that never failed to keep pace. One of them was Rilke.

But he said “Things.” “Things” out of all words. Why not rather “Life” or “Soul” or “Redemption”?

Is not “Thing” exactly the word that designates the “reification” of the world which Rilke wishes to refute? What a contradiction! There is no contradiction.

It was not only man himself who was alienated from man; but all the things dear to man’s heart; all things with which man has to do; the things

* This speech was delivered at the Vigovino Galleries, Brentwood, California, on March 13, 1943. Illustration numbers refer to *Rodin*, Phaidon Edition, Oxford University Press, New York, 1939, and to Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Auguste Rodin*, Insel Verlag, 1920.

he is working with—the machines—are not the things he is using and living with in his own life; the things he is using, the commodities, he has not made himself. Thus making and using were alienated from each other and man's world was divided into two provinces.

Had Rilke been a philosopher, he would have said: there are no "things" any longer, but only machines and commodities. House and garden are forfeited. Rilke wants to rescue them; he wishes to reinstate them in their "due" place; to reinstate by cutting off their ties which connect them, as he puts it, with the "frightful spider web of the world" and which deprive them of their identity. As a matter of fact, these simple things appear again and again in Rilke's poetry with a strangely nostalgic, even conjuring appeal; with an appeal which reminds us of Gandhi's canonization of the spinning-wheel. For, in the harmless and noncommittal realm of poetry Rilke too was a machine-smasher.

But strangely enough, by taking things out of their "alienating context" he alienated them anew; and this time for good. True, he saw the jug no longer as commodity; but he did not see it either as pitcher for beer—but as a thing deprived of all relations. By cutting off its commodity character he gave the thing an insular identity. The jug in his hand was no jug any longer but a "piece" of an antique-shop, or even a sort of talisman.

His was not an individual whim. The whole movement of *Nature Morte*, foreshadowed by the great Chardin, renewed by Cézanne and Manet, later followed by cubism and surrealism, is a movement of thing-worship. They all "steal" things out of their context, Van Gogh the chair, Cézanne his famous bowl, to give them back their reality—even a sur-reality, which the things had lost while drowned in their pragmatic purpose and context.

When Rilke opened his speech with the magic word, he obviously meant to conjure the realm of beauty. What has this "taking a thing out of its context" to do with beauty?

Hang a carpet or a dagger on the wall—suddenly it will strike you as a work of art. By taking an object out of its pragmatic context, it is taken out of the system of our want. Now we look at it as men free from want. Since we do not desire it any longer, we find ourselves in the aesthetic attitude.

It is not difficult to see that the word "things" is particularly suited to describe the works of a sculptor. For two reasons: once the sculptor's product has been achieved, it is a massive three-dimensional object among other objects of the world and claims its place—while the painter's work, the two-dimensional illusion of three dimensions, does not occupy a real place in the three-dimensional real world. Furthermore, the sculptor is *the* isolating artist; while the painter is able to offer a whole world—a landscape, people among people, things among things—the sculptor cuts off one object, mostly the human body, out of the universe of objects.

This observation sounds true. But it is only a half truth. Up to the nineteenth century the sculptor *isolated only in order to integrate*. He was always *architect's second officer*. Architecture built real objects for society; and whatever sculpture we know up to the last century—every piece is meant for a definite place within the whole of an architecture; thus within the whole of a society. As “reliefs” they were still architectural elements, as full sculptures they were sheltered in niches.

Now let's jump to the nineteenth century, to the world after the bourgeois revolution in France. The two social groups—Church and Court—which had been outstanding in building the representative buildings and which had ordered glorification and immortalization from the sculptor, had forfeited much of their significance. Glorification and immortalization, the two motors of sculpture, apparently contradicted the principles of bourgeois society. The equality of men, even if only an ideology, does not allow for marble heroes. And the home of a bourgeois does not permit the erection of a monument.

In front of Duke University you can see the statue of Mr. Duke, the creator of the Chesterfield cigarette and the founder of the University, smoking a never-burning metal cigar of his own brand and proving that sculptural immortalization of the bourgeois amounts to a farce.

Even the nineteenth century painters (with the exception of Delacroix and Puvis) were excluded from contributing to public work; and most of them did not know any longer for what and for whom they painted. Their paintings went immediately to the exhibition (in order to become commodities and to disappear somewhere) or, in rare cases, they went to the museums, the staple houses of objects of the past that had become homeless. While works of art of former epochs found their way to the museums only after their first homes had served their time, the works of the last century were *born* homeless. They had as little a definite place in society as the artists had—the artists who now advanced from a definite though low social rank (now conquered by the photographer) to the rank of a divine outcast.

What applies to painting, applies in a much higher degree to sculpture. The sculptor of the last century (with the exception of a few academicians who do not count), made his sculptures for no definite place, for no definite function. He had to make isolated things. Now—at last—have we reached the world of Rodin; and now, at last, do we understand why Rilke opened his Rodin speech with the word “Dinge.”

II. SHELTERING

Look at the famous torso of Adele of the year 1882 (plate 42). The body is not “erected” like an ordinary sculpture, but it lies like a real body on a real velvet blanket. There is no pedestal, no bridge, no attempt to

connect the body architecturally with the world, with a place, where it should belong, because there is really no place where it belongs.

(Incidentally, the effect is already, though unintentionally, surrealist, since Surrealism consists in the promotion of a clash of two contradicting dimensions of reality. Imagine this marble body in a real bed, and you have a subject for Dali.)

Just try to imagine a socially possible place for this Adele body. A church? A government building? A bourgeois home? A public square? All equally impossible. A garden? Hardly. Nature? Perhaps.

As a matter of fact, that is Rodin's theory. Since there is no proper social place to put his sculptures, he pretended or he really believed to have meant them for nature. His famous *Citoyens de Calais* (plate 52), e.g., he wished erected on the grassy surface of a square in Calais, again without any pedestal on ground level; and he even wanted the boys of Calais to roam about among the figures, as though they were trees. The philistine municipality refused this startling plan, whereupon Rodin insisted on placing the group on an unhewn rock, just facing sky, and sea, and empty space, since no social place was appropriate to shelter it. New refusal. When at last the group was erected, in 1895, eleven years after it was ordered as a decent and normally patriotic monument, Rodin owed it to the secret financing by the Rothschild family.

This one example is characteristic for all. Always he had to place his pieces "outside the world," either in his garden or in a museum of his own. When the *Exposition Mondiale* took place in Paris, he did not and he could not find any place where his works fitted in. For the exhibition was already a sort of *Exhibition Industrielle*. Thus he opened, some hundred feet from the Exposition Ground, a special exhibition, an *Exposition Mondiale* of his own.

Rilke had already seen and expressed this homelessness, though with an accent which implies that the unplaceability is a divine quality rather than a social abnormality. Anyhow, this category "homelessness" is the key with which all the sculptures of Rodin can be opened for interpretation. Let us try (plates 109, 110).

Since there is no "social ground" or background, no architectural shelter for his sculptures, Rodin has to provide an *Ersatz* himself. Therefore, he endows most of his figures with a piece of world to which they belong from which they seem to originate—a piece of petrified chaos as it were. Look, e.g., at the "Mother with Child" or at the famous Mozart bust.

Sometimes he tries to shelter the sculpture within a niche that is a part of the sculpture itself (Rilke p. 43). Look at the Hugo monument. The three *Genies de la Poesie* protect the Hugo figure like a shell. However, such attempts to shelter the sculpture within the sculpture itself are hardly

satisfactory. True, the main figure may now enjoy something like a niche—but the niche itself remains unprotected, a niche in empty space. This frustration recalls the sad story in the "Arabian Nights," in which a man, lost in the desert, tries for hours and hours to lie down in his own shadow.

However (and what I am going to say now applies to the whole paper), do not misunderstand such remarks as criticisms of the artist Rodin. The shortcomings which we are going to discuss, are the shortcomings of an epoch which had no architecture and no place for a sculptor; but not Rodin's shortcomings. On the contrary it is just the desperate homelessness of his figures, just his never-tiring labor to overcome it, just his failure, that makes him so incomparably superior to all his contemporaries. He was the only one among the sculptors, who saw the "signs of the time," and who realized how childish it was to muddle along as though nothing had changed in the *function* of sculpture. Compared to Rodin's grandiose failure, the successes of some of his contemporary Classicists are just decorative anecdotes; just as Bizet is an anecdote compared to the gigantic failure Richard Wagner.

Back to his sculptures. We come now to Rodin's third attempt to overcome the homelessness of his pieces.

He created architectures of his own—as shelters for them. The most famous of these shelters—a place corresponding to the Tomb of Julius, in which Michelangelo wished to place his figures—is the so-called "Gate of Hell" (plates 19, 20), a door crowded with many of his famous pieces as the "Thinker" and the "Shadows," not to mention the anonymous crowd. Here they found their places, but like marooned people who are rescued by a boat that is lost in the ocean itself. True, they had become figures on a door; but where did the door find its place? Again, nowhere. While ordinarily a door is an opening in a building, Rodin's door is a—building in open space; it leads to nowhere, it is pure pretense.

When we said that Rodin assembled his sculptures in this "Gate of Hell," we did not imply that the result was a "composition." Never did Rodin plan the whole in advance; every figure came into the world as a desperately individual being. Only later, it became an inmate of the "Gate of Hell." As a matter of fact, the society which they entered there, was the precise mirror of liberal society; every figure stood for itself, their coordination was utterly casual; their harmony, if there was any, was expected to result automatically and from nowhere. Rodin himself confessed that he was never satisfied with the configuration of the figures of his greatest group-sculpture, the *Citoyens de Calais*.

The other attempt to rescue his marooned pieces in the so-called *Tour de Travail* (Rilke, p. 65). But again, Rodin did not mean this tower for a real social purpose, but just as a symbol, just as a giant trinket. Therefore, it always remained just this small architectural model.

Not even an architectural model. For Rodin was so much of a sculptor that he sketched this architecture as a sort of living being, as a spiral organism, which feigns rather to have grown up than to have been built. As a matter of fact, Sauvage pretended to have discovered a new architectural style by imitating the structure of leaves, branches and animals. He was Rodin's contemporary. The *Tour de Travail* is no architecture, but a sculpture to shelter sculptures.

You will immediately realize that this interpretation is not exaggerated.

You know that Rodin was, in his way, intensely interested in the "Gothic Style" about which he even wrote a book. How did he see and interpret it? (plate 101).

Look at these hands. He called them "Cathedral." This title is sufficient proof of his conviction that the architectural motive of the "Pointed Arch" can be translated into sculpture, can be expressed in terms of the human body. And it was exactly this pan-sculpturism that I meant when I called the *Tour de Travail* a "Sculpture to shelter sculptures."

You remember the European style between the eighties and about 1910, particularly the so-called *Jugendstil* which made every spittoon foot run out into lily shoots. You remember the Goetheanum in Dornach or the Einstein-Tower in Teltow which show breast-like balconies and mouth-like windows. Society, based on a purely materialistic foundation, considered it a disgrace to be in need of merely material goods and practical tools and disguised them with graceful plants and phantastic animals. Every object had to look as though it had no practical purpose, because practical purposes remind man of his wants. Ultimately society was ashamed of its own mechanical mode of production and concealed it with the fig-leaves of nature. In this generation belongs Rodin, as a genius sentenced to monstrosity.

"The research into natural forms," says Boccioni thirty years ago in his Catalogue to the First Futurist Exhibition, "removes sculpture from its original and ultimate goal: Architecture. The utter absence of architecture is the great fault of Impressionist sculpture." There can be no doubt, that these words were aimed at Rodin. And very soon the extreme reaction set in. Very soon you could see Rodin's pan-sculpturism supplanted by a movement that made even sculpture a sort of building and engineering.

Back to Rodin. The next way in which he tries to overcome the homelessness of his pieces is the invention of sacral "gesture." What do we mean?

Think of a sculpture by Verocchio or Praxiteles or Bernini or any other sculptor. The figures represented are either just standing, just showing themselves, offering their existence as it were, or they are obviously busy

doing something: dancing like as the famous Carpeaux sculpture on the Paris Opera; hammering, as the Meunier sculptures, and so on and so forth.

Rodin's sculptures belong neither to the one nor to the other category. Look at the so-called "Shadow" (plate 11). This Shadow is far from "showing himself"; but what is he doing? Hard to answer. The very word "doing" seems already inadequate. He is rather. . .speaking with his body. But this "speaking" is filled with that melancholia and intensity of the animal or the mute, which is the effect of frustration and despair, the effect of not being able to speak. He thus is not doing anything, but just. . .expressing himself.

He is expressing himself. But to no one. He is communicating, but with no partner. He is praying, but to no God.

With the inauguration of this very strange "partnerless" gesture Rodin has made history: The whole modern dance, particularly Mary Wigman's Art, lives from this "pure" and somewhat narcissistic sort of gesture. Between 1900 and 1943 you have seen it innumerable times: the dancers who seemed to "give". . .but without receiver; who seemed to "carry". . .but no weight; to ask. . .but of no one; to love. . .but not a beloved. It became the great fashion for a very strange reason. Since the communication, expressed in the gesture, is partnerless, it seems to hint at an invisible partner for whom the gesture is meant. And that is the reason why I called the "gesture" a means to break through the isolation. Hinting at an invisible partner, the gesture becomes "somehow" religious. The lack of social integration of the figure changes into a consoling, though vague, cosmic or religious integration.

It sounds paradoxical that Rodin, the eminent naturalistic artist should have been a disguised priest. But in the nineteenth century this blending was far from improbable. When Richard Wagner meant to produce a sacred and supranatural situation by naturalistically "imitating" emotions in the language of music, he apparently combined the two contradictory attitudes too. An analysis of this strange blending would require an interpretation of the whole paradoxical nineteenth century.

Back to the "gesture." Rodin's figures do not "make" any gestures; they are their gestures. Each figure is, despite its masterfully naturalistic execution, just the field or even the pretext for the gesture. Otherwise Rodin's sculptures as e.g., "The Walking Man" (plate 7), would not be understandable. Here Rodin shows "walking" without a walker. . .therefore, he can dispense with the figure's head.¹

¹ Since the headless man cannot face us, he is really a . . . *thing*. He is even isolated from *us*, the *spectators*, isolated like an animal who goes his way with utter unconcern, no matter how strongly we try to make him see *us*.

However, Rodin's most ingenious and most impressive method of overcoming the isolation and the homelessness of his figures is closely connected with the content of his sculptures. He transforms the isolation into something positive, into desire—desire to break the isolation. Thus "Desire" (in the form of sexual desire) becomes the almost exclusive *leitmotive* of his whole oeuvre (Rilke, pp. 24, 25). Look at those pieces. They are very much like those beings described by Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium* who have been cut clear through the middle of their bodies, and now are longing to rejoin each other. While most of the Rodin pieces remain in their Tantalus-situation, some are more fortunate. For once in a while (plate 87), Rodin plays God and gives one of his statues a partner, because "it is not good, that the man should be alone. I will make him a helpmate for him."

Or he supplemented the isolated figure (plates 11, 12) by multiplying it by three or four, thus giving it at least the consolation of its own company. As you see, the three figures are completely alike, just as alike as Tiller girls.²

III. DEHUMANIZATION

The religious glorification of sex as we find it in Baudelaire, Wagner, Rodin (even in the late Goethe, who tells us that it is not Christ, but the "eternally feminine," *das ewig Weibliche* that lifts us up)—this glorification of sex is quite understandable, as the last way out for the man of the nineteenth century. The increasing lack of religious "communion" on the one hand, and the lack of social integration of man, particularly of the artist on the other hand, leaves sex as the last device for the individual to lose himself into something that is more, and more general than himself. There is a word of Simmel, "Music. . .the religion of today." It could be supplemented by the other "Sex, the holy communion of today," or rather of yesterday.

Here the similarity between Wagner and Rodin becomes most striking,

² It is not a simple coincidence that those few figures whose movements do *not* point in a direction outside themselves, have become the most popular ones in classicist France. The one is the "Age of Brass," whose arm gesture flows back into the body. The other one is the "Penseur," who is bent over himself. The third one is Eve who, incarnation of shame, tries to creep back into herself. And the last one is the so-called "Eternal Idol" (plates 67, 68), that famous group, in which the lover has really found his beloved; I must confess that I regard this group the cheapest thing ever made by the great Rodin, just a naked happy ending which, after the ferocity of the preceding desire strikes us with its odd respectability. The discrepancy between the animal desire and the shy satisfaction is, however, far from possibly Rodinesque. The same odd mixture of desire and renunciation we find in Wagner. Both enjoy the longing rather than its fulfillment. And the game rules of society are at last preserved.

in spite of their different places in history. Take the case of Isolde. It would be totally impossible to depict her "problems," her "character," or her "development" . . . she is nothing but desire and love-death. In the same way Rodin's beings have no character, no dramatic meaning; they are not even themselves. They are just desire.³ Being purely physiological their natures are torsos; and when Rodin represents them as torsos, their intentionally fragmentary form agrees entirely with their torso-like nature.

The headlessness of some of his beings, which we had interpreted before, is not understandable without this dehumanization.

While in former epochs of art the only wilfully-made torso had consisted in the head, because the head is the man, Rodin offers us negative portraits: the glorious indecency of man's or woman's headless animal body (plate 74).

Man's animal body—yes, we are at the end of the century, in which Darwin had propagated the idea of man being just an animal among animals; and Rodin is his messenger in terms of sculpture.

The most enlightening example of dehumanization seems to be the grandiose *Penseur*; most likely because he pretends to be spiritual. Look at his biceps; it is amazing. Truly, this metaphysician looks like a sad boxer sitting down between two rounds; like a boxer who does not like the idea of being sentenced to such a powerful physique. If you saw him next to the famous "boxer" in the *Museo Nazionale*, this piece of Latinized Greek sculpture, you would think him his dangerous competitor. He is nothing but power. For besides desire, power is the only feature of this Rodin-created mankind. Even the melancholic "Shadow" can not help being provided with a club-like arm.

Yes, we are at the end of the century in which Nietzsche had formulated the biological idea of a superman, and the idea of a "Will to Power," and Rodin is his messenger in terms of sculpture.

V. NUDISM

However, the importance of sex in Rodin's work has still other motives. As we have seen in the beginning of our analysis, the bourgeois does not lend himself for sculptural glorification. Therefore, if represented at all, he has to be denuded of his social reality of high collar and top hat or rugs. He has to be shown nude. Therefore, Rodin undresses him and makes him a sort of mythical figure, of "first man"; and it is no coincidence that he called his first statue "The Age of Brass."

However, man of the bourgeois world is not only unfit for being immortalized in marble; a candid representation of man, as he is, of society as it

³ It is historically important to stress, that in his sculptures the woman has the same right to desire as man has; she is no longer just the beautiful body, prey of man's desire. Democracy of sex is clearly established.

is, would automatically amount to a sort of accusation. Now, Rodin was far from being a courageous accuser; his more than equivocal behavior during the Dreyfus affair is sufficiently known. Therefore, he has to avoid or to conceal the social reality of man. Since it is always more permissible to unveil the torments of the flesh than those that are caused by a social system, he avoids showing man's social reality by exposing his natural reality. He disguises man in his nakedness—while Zola, who made the sincere attempt to tell the “naked” truth, showed man in the gowns and rugs of his epoch. Now, in the classless society of his nudist colony all social problems disappear; all social curses, vices, miseries are gone; and the only thing left, is desire and power.

You may object that the naked body is the natural theme of sculpture. But that is erroneous. Pericles or Socrates or Plato had never seen in their lives the sculpture of a nude woman. Myron, Polycleitos, or Phidas did not think of showing them. If they showed naked men—well, nakedness and nakedness are different. In Greece, the naked body played a very definite, a solemn role in the reality of Greek life. It was the body of the prize-athlete in the Olympian Festival where he had really fought naked. This nakedness was not the monopoly of the sculpture, but a social reality outside the atelier.

Now take the nakedness in the nineteenth century, in the century of *corsage* and *cu*. If there existed nakedness outside the *atelier*, it was certainly not meant for Olympic games. Since its role in reality was unequivocal, its role in art was unequivocal too. Of course, in Rodin's work, it did not mean any longer *la vie galante tout simple*. However, Boucher is not entirely forgotten yet (plate 66). Although it is the *vie galante* of the Universe that Rodin means . . . a pantheist variant of Boucher.

One could furthermore object, that Rodin had other than naturalist intentions when he showed the man naked. That he wanted to lift him up to some sort of eternity, or the like. He certainly had. However, it is at least very strange, that now, in the fenced and unreal realm of his nudist colony, he became the master of naturalism who makes us forget the unreality of the realm itself. This naturalism went so far, that his first statue, “The Age of Brass” (plates 4, 5, 6) was immediately after its first exhibition suspected of being made after a clay cast. And when he modelled his Balzac, he did not make him as you see him here (plate 78) but as a naked man, very much like this Hugo (plate 77) who is not nude but obviously undressed. Then he arranged real cloth around the figure and starched the cloth.⁴

⁴ Incidentally, this process of producing his figure, is already surrealist; the real cloth on an unreal figure provokes the clash which we had described as the surrealist clash; although the result, the figure as such, is, of course, still pre-surrealist.

However naturalistic Rodin presents the ferocity of desire and sex, he always felt somewhat inhibited from calling the thing by its name. Here we see his cautiousness again. The titles he invents are mostly taken from Greek mythology; the brutal realities are again and again disguised as symbols; and many a breast feigns to be just a metaphor.

VI. BOGYMAN

Only once Rodin tried to glorify the man of bourgeois society: in his grandiose monument of Balzac of 1897 (plates 78, 80), which stands unique in his century. Here for the first time in the history of sculpture man is not represented as a god or as a hero or as a beauty or as an emperor-like idol, but as a sort of glorified bogymán. As a bogymán in whom physical and intellectual power assumes most pronouncedly vulgar traits. This man Balzac is a mixture of a giant and a peasant from the Auvergne. He is far from being a noble; he is rather the threatening power of the *troisième état*. I called him a "bogymán": this is true to the last detail. Look at his eyes, which are the eyes of a mask; and masks have never been made to delight, always to horrify. No wonder, the Writer's Committee who had ordered "just a Balzac statue" and expected some sort of poet-king, refused the acceptance of this piece almost unanimously.

True, ugliness as an aesthetic value had been discovered long before. Painters had relished the delicate representation of ugly faces as early as in the fifteenth century. Van Eyk had been master in ugliness—not to speak of Velasquez, Brower, Breughel, and so on. But when those painters showed ugliness, they either did it in order to show a characteristic personality, or in order to indict the corruption of man.

Rodin's Balzac does neither. He glorifies ugliness, he makes a monument out of it. In terms of history, he makes the vulgar man the hero of the century. And when this Balzac steps out of the dark, this gesture has an eminently social significance.

Just a short historical addition. As early as 1891 Rodin has made his first sketches for this grandiose piece. In July 1939, forty-eight years later, exactly three weeks before the outbreak of this war, the French Republic made up her "mind" to erect the statue—on the famous junction of Boulevard Montparnasse and Raspail. The most corrupt government of France was cynical enough to celebrate the greatest exposé of corruption.

VII. GOD-PLAYING

When I told you, that once in a while Rodin gave his lonely creatures a comrade, I said that he played God. This God-playing has, however, much broader implications.

An artist, who works to order, who makes figures for a church, or an equestrian monument for a public square, is socially just as normal an

individual as a craftsman, who makes a candlestick for a chapel or a bench for a park. He contributes. An artist however, who means his product not to become an integrated part of the existing social world, must feel either as an outcast or as a man, who, instead of contributing to the world, has to create a whole world of his own; in short, as a God. And that is the way Rodin felt. And that is the reason, why the nineteenth century was so crowded with so-called "geniuses." Not, as Emil Ludwig tries to make us believe, because a sudden shower of meteors went down; but because the artist, standing outside the social world, became outstanding. Anyhow, since the reason for this god-like feeling had to do with the general role of the nineteenth century artist, Rodin was far from being the only "God-player."

But to be sure, Rodin goes much farther than others. He even portrayed himself as God. I speak of that amazing piece which leaves open whether it is meant as God's hand or his own hand which creates man (plate 89). The most shocking document of the self-deification of man.

Whoever met Rodin and saw Rodin at work described him with God similes. Isidora Duncan, e.g., tells an anecdote which is hard to repeat but too characteristic to be suppressed. When she came to pose for him, he started kneading her body as though it was still clay, badly in need of being formed. If we can trust the Duncan, this kneading was just modelling and nothing else. And even if it was equivocal, the Pygmalion myth shows that the two meanings do not lie so very wide apart.

Anyhow, no Greek sculptor would have called his work "creating." He just made his works of art. And the Greek word for "art" is "techne," technique. Only in that moment in which the artist lost his definite social function, he socially distinguished his mode of production from the ordinary one. And only then his activity was called "self-expression" or "creation."

You understand what I mean when you think of the motion picture industry. Since their works are socially integrated, since they have a definite social function (no matter whether we like it or not), no producer or director would say: "Pardon me, I'm just expressing myself"; or "So sorry, I am just creating."

Incidentally, much of the wholesale vocabulary of "self-expression" and "creativity" of the artist (which still today rages in American aesthetics and educational theories unabated) is indirectly derived from Rodin. Today everyone is supposed to have the right for self-expression; and when he produces something which is not or not directly usable for society, he is proud of "creating." Quite understandably: production has been so entirely alienated and mechanized that hardly any everyday work has direct connection with the one who does it. To counterbalance this "alienation"

and this "indirectness" of work, man tries to find an entirely human activity: expressive creation; which thus proves to be only the extreme reversal of the phenomenon of alienation. For eight hours he is just a mechanical tool; in the evening, as a hobby, a creative genius—a dualism that already today proves a catastrophe for mankind.

VIII. CARTOON

Ever since the Egyptian technique of preserving mummies, sculpture has been a technique of immortalization, a technique designed to counteract the decay of life. From this angle, time, movement, becoming are just negative qualities of life which sculpture tried to paralyze. "Becoming" was to be transformed into "being."

Now look at the sculptures of Rodin. What he wants to immortalize is just the becoming as such, the time character of life as such. He wants even more. He tries to retranslate the stability of the body into terms of becoming. The heads you saw, are not substances, but processes; each face seems to be a sort of earthquake: Hills and valleys have not yet found their definite form, the rubbish of creation is not yet being cleared away; the seventh day of the creation has not dawned yet.

Again: Rodin is far from being the only one to retranslate "being" into "becoming."

To a certain degree the whole Impressionist movement dissolved the substantial universe into a process, the process of light waves. Van Gogh paints the whole world as though it were still of the same viscid consistency as the fresh oil paint coming out of the tube. What applies to painting, applies to the whole civilization of the epoch: it called itself "dynamist." Science, e.g., had, as the philosopher Cassirer elaborated it in his book *Substanz-und Funktionsbegriff* retranslated substance into function. The philosopher Bergson had, in the year 1889 (simultaneously with Rodin's dehumanizing figures) interpreted the organisms as mere flood dikes within the eternal stream of the germ plasma of the *élan vital*. In the doctrines of social life the same. The majority of mankind considered itself not as something that is, but as something that automatically becomes, progresses. Last but not least: the harder the life of the real man became, the more was life as such, movement as such, deified—an attitude which finally was adopted and exploited by the fascist movements of the various brands.

Now, if Rodin is just one among thousands of such "dynamists," why should we take him so seriously?

Because he is the crisis; because he is the only one who contributes to this movement with paradoxical means; with stone and bronze he tries to make the world fluid; he wants to swim in an ocean of stone. And judged from this angle his whole oeuvre is one gigantic document of frustration.

And is it just this frustration that is so enlightening and so immensely impressive.

The only thing he wanted to convey is movement. Since the massiveness and compactness of the figure excludes real movement, it is the spectator it is you, who are expected to provide it; you who are supposed to retranslate "substance" into "function"; you who are expected to go around the figure and to enjoy the constant change of light, shadow, and configuration which takes place by your movement. Thus, each of his figures is, so to speak, a bag of virtual time. We have to realize this time.

Since hardly one of these pieces is supposed to be erected and to be seen from this or that side, all sides become equally important, the sculpture loses its main view. Backsides do not exist any longer (plate 22, *The Crouching Woman*). It is simply impossible to find out from where the crouching woman "wants" to be seen, because it should be seen from everywhere. While Michelangelo's "David" or the famous "Laocoon," f.i., are always reproduced from one and the same angle, all Rodin publications differ in their angles from which the figures are photographed.

If he had been able to, Rodin would have hung his figures in empty space to have them seen from everywhere. This is no joke. Look at this "Flying Figure" (plate 65) in which he tries to dispense with the law of gravitation. The audacity of this experiment cannot be surpassed; although we can hardly say that he has really succeeded in conveying the impression of "flying." The famous "Nike of Samothrake" who still touches the ground, but is just about to lift herself into the clouds is far more flying than this heavy bronze.

It is easily understandable that it was a torture for Rodin to require weeks or months or even years for making one single snapshot in marble. The length of time contradicted the intended time effect. Thus he resorted to another form of art—to a form that required just seconds—to drawing. He did it in the evenings, as reward for the curse of sculpturing, so to speak. Surrounded by a whole colony of nude models he stood around, hunting for snapshots. . . "Instantanés" as he called them himself. What he drew, was never a human being, just his momentary gesture.

Look at those faces, if there are any faces, they are just pretexts for their movement. Look at the contours; they are double, they are triple; they are a sort of moving picture; two or three different contours compete to describe two or three different phases of movement. They try to lead us around the body. Look at the water color: never does it exactly cover the contours; if it did, it would state a stationary position in too definite a way.

They are tragic documents: documents of the desperate race between the movement of the drawing hand and the flying movement of the model.

Sketches? No they are no sketches. Sketches are being made as first

hasty preparation for an elaborated painting. There are no elaborated paintings by Rodin's hand. The hastiness is, on the contrary, meant as the true and the only way to catch the hastiness of the model. The sketch is the painting itself.

More adequate may it be to call them cartoons—except for the fact, that it always a whole set of drawings that Rodin threw on one and the same sheet.

I know it sounds like bad taste to pronounce the two names Auguste Rodin and Walt Disney in one and the same breath. Doesn't Rodin, despite all his revolutionary attempts and achievements, still belong to the genuine classical tradition? Do not these enchanting bodies recall Hellenistic figurines or Tanagra? True. They do. But they do it for a last time.

Look at them. They are not paintings, not sketches, and yet not cartoons. They are the unique testimonies of a unique moment in history. And here—and for once—we are surrounded by this unique moment. Catch it.

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NEW YORK CITY.

EXTRACTO

Las esculturas de Rodin no tienen ningún lugar social definido. No están destinadas ni a las iglesias, ni a los palacios, ni al hogar burgués. Son, socialmente, carentes de hogar, como lo era el artista mismo durante la segunda mitad del siglo diecinueve. Esta espectral carencia de hogar se refleja evidentemente en las esculturas de Rodin. Les falta muchas veces hasta el pedestal—el puente tradicional entre la escultura y el “mundo real.” No haciendo sus obras para nadie, para ninguna función social dentro del mundo hecho por el hombre, Rodin no interpreta su producción artística como un “hacer.” La llama o “expresión de sí mismo” o “creación.” También estos rasgos característicos se pueden encontrar en su obra.

A meeting of the Phenomenological Society will be held at 9:30 A. M. on February 22, 1945 at Hunter College, New York City. Papers will be presented by Aron Gurwitsch, Wolfgang Koehler, and V. J. McGill.