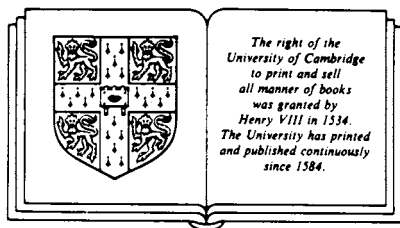


BENEDETTO CROCE

The Aesthetic as the Science of  
Expression and of the Linguistic  
in General

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Cambridge University Press

Cambridge

New York Port Chester Melbourne Sydney

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP  
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011, USA  
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Adelphi Edizioni 1990

© Cambridge University Press 1992

First published 1992

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Croce, Benedetto, 1866–1952.

[Estetica come scienza dell'espressione e linguistica generale.

Parte 1. English]

The aesthetic as the science of expression and of the linguistic  
in general = Estetica / Benedetto Croce; translated by Colin Lyas.

p. cm.

Translation of pt. 1 of: Estetica come scienza dell'espressione e  
linguistica generale.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-521-35216-9. — ISBN 0-521-35996-1 (pbk.)

1. Aesthetics. 2. Languages — Philosophy. 3. Philosophy.

I. Lyas, Colin. II. Title. III. Title: Estetica.

B3614.C73E713 1991

111'.85 — dc20

91-24931

CIP

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 0-521 35216-9 hardback

ISBN 0-521 35996-1 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2002

# Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	page xv
<i>Translator's Foreword</i>	xvii
<i>Preface</i>	xxvii
<b>I Intuition and Expression</b>	1
Intuitive knowledge	1
That intuitive knowledge exists independently of intellectual knowledge	2
Intuition and perception	3
Intuition and the concepts of space and time	4
Intuition and sensation	6
Intuition and association	7
Intuition and representation	8
Intuition and expression	8
Mistaken beliefs about the distinction between intuition and expression	9
The identity of intuition and expression	11
<b>II Intuition and Art</b>	12
Corollaries and clarifications	12
That art and intuitive knowledge are identical	12
No distinct species of intuitions	12
The difference is not one of intensity	13
The difference is a purely contingent one of extension	14
Artistic genius	15
Content and form in the Aesthetic	16
Critique of the notions of the imitations of nature and of artistic illusion	17
Of art conceived as feeling and not as something theoretical – Aesthetic appearance and feeling	18
Critique of the theory of the aesthetic senses	19
The unity and indivisibility of the work of art	21
Art as a liberator	22

<b>III Art and Philosophy</b>	24
The inseparability of intellectual and intuitive knowledge	24
A critique of denials of the foregoing	25
Art and Science	27
Another meaning of the terms "content" and "form". Prose and poetry	28
The connection between a first and a second level	28
That no other forms of knowledge exist	29
The historical. Its identity and difference with respect to art	29
Critical history	32
Historical scepticism	32
That philosophy is the perfect science. The so-called natural sciences, and their limits	33
<b>IV Historicism and Intellectualism in the Aesthetic</b>	36
Critique of probability and naturalism	36
Critique of ideas in art, of thesis art, and of the typical	37
Critique of the symbolic and the allegorical	38
Critique of the theory of literary and artistic genres	39
The errors that result from this theory in the judgment of art	41
The factual basis of the division of works into genres	42
<b>V Critique of Analogous Errors in History and Logic</b>	44
Critique of history treated as a form of philosophy	44
Aesthetic intrusions into logic	46
Logic properly so called	47
The distinction between logical and nonlogical judgments	48
Syllogistic	49
Logical falsity and aesthetic truth	50
Logic re-formed	51
<b>VI Theoretical Activity and Practical Activity</b>	53
The will	53
That the will exists at a level subordinate to knowledge	53
Objections and clarifications	54
Critique of practical or value judgments	55

The exclusion of practical considerations from the aesthetic	56
Critique of the theory of the goal of art and the theory that it is possible to choose an appropriate content for art	57
That art is innocent of the practical consequences it might produce	58
The independence of art	59
Critique of the expression: the style is the man	59
Critique of the concept of sincerity in art	60
<b>VII The Analogy Between the Theoretical and the Practical</b>	61
The two forms of practical activity	61
The economically useful	61
The distinction between the useful and the technical	61
The distinction between the useful and the egoistical	62
The economic will and the moral will	63
The purely economic	63
The economic side of morality	64
The merely economic and the erroneous belief in the morally indifferent	65
The critique of utilitarianism and the reform of Ethics and Economics	66
<b>VIII The Exclusion of Other Forms of the Spirit</b>	68
The systematic structure of the spirit	68
The forms of genius	68
There is no fifth form of activity. Law; the Social	69
The religious	70
Metaphysics	71
Mental representation and the intuitive intellect	72
Mystical Aesthetics	73
The mortality and immortality of art	73
<b>IX That Expression Cannot Be Divided into Modes or Levels. The Critique of Rhetoric</b>	75
The characteristics of art	75
That there are no modes of expression	75
The impossibility of translations	76
A critique of rhetorical classifications	76
The factual basis of the rhetorical categories	77

The use of the terms as synonyms for talk about the aesthetic	78
The use of rhetorical terms to indicate various aesthetic imperfections	79
A use of the rhetorical terms that goes beyond the aesthetic and which serves science	79
Rhetoric in the schools	80
Resemblances between impressions	81
The relative possibility of translations	81
<b>X Aesthetic Feelings and the Distinction Between the Beautiful and the Ugly</b>	82
Different meanings of the word "feeling"	82
Feeling as activity	82
Identification of feeling with economic activity	83
Critique of hedonism	83
Feeling as a concomitant of every form of activity	84
The significance of some ordinary distinctions between feelings	85
Value and disvalue: the contraries and their union	86
Beauty as the value of expression, or expression <i>simpliciter</i>	87
The ugly and the elements of beauty which constitute it	87
The error of believing that there are expressions that are neither beautiful nor ugly	88
Aesthetic feelings properly so called, and those that are concomitant to and contingently connected with the Aesthetic	89
Critique of apparent feelings	89
<b>XI Critique of Aesthetic Hedonism</b>	91
Critique of the notion that beauty is the pleasure of the higher senses	91
Critique of the theory of play	92
Critique of theories of sexuality and triumph	92
Critique of an aesthetic based on "what is likeable". The meaning of "content" and "form" in such a theory	93
Aesthetic and moral hedonism	94
The rigoristic denial and the pedagogical justification of art	95
Critique of pure Beauty	96

<b>XII</b>	<b>The Aesthetic of “That which attracts liking” and the Pseudo-Aesthetic Concepts</b>	97
	The pseudo-aesthetic concepts and the Aesthetic of “that which attracts our liking”	97
	Critique of the theory of the ugly in art and its transcendence	98
	Pseudo-aesthetic concepts as belonging to psychology	99
	Impossibility of defining them rigorously	100
	Examples: definitions of the sublime, the comic, and the humorous	101
	The possibility of linking the pseudo-aesthetic to the Aesthetic	103
<b>XIII</b>	<b>Physical Beauty and the Nature of Art</b>	105
	Aesthetic activity and physical concepts	105
	Expression in the aesthetic and expression in the naturalistic sense	106
	Representation and memory	107
	The formation of aids to memory	108
	Physical beauty	108
	Another meaning of the terms “content” and “form”	109
	Natural and artificial beauty	109
	Mixed beauty	111
	Writings	111
	Free and non-free beauty	112
	Critique of non-free beauty	113
	That which stimulates production	114
<b>XIV</b>	<b>Errors Arising from the Confusion between the Physical and the Aesthetic</b>	116
	Critique of associationism in aesthetics	116
	Critique of the Aesthetic of the physical	117
	Critique of the theory of the beauty of the human body	118
	Of the beauty of geometrical figures	119
	Critique of another aspect of the notion of the imitation of nature	120
	Critique of the theory of the elementary forms of beauty	121
	Critique of the quest for the objective conditions for the presence of beauty	121
	The astrology of the Aesthetic	123

<b>XV</b>	<b>The Activity of Externalisation. The Technique and the Theory of the Arts</b>	124
	The practical activity of external expression	124
	The technique of external expression	124
	Technical theories of the individual arts	125
	Critique of aesthetic theories of the individual arts	127
	Critique of classifications of the arts	127
	Critique of the theory of the fusion of the arts	129
	The connection between the activity of externally expressing something and utility and morality	129
<b>XVI</b>	<b>Taste and the Reproduction of Art</b>	132
	Aesthetic judgment. Its identity with aesthetic reproduction	132
	The impossibility of divergent views	133
	The identity between taste and genius	134
	An analogy with the other activities	135
	Critique of absolutism (intellectualism) and relativism in aesthetics	135
	Critique of relative relativism	136
	An objection based on variations in stimulus and in the psychological state	137
	Critique of the distinction of signs into natural and conventional	138
	The conquest of variation	139
	Restorations by historical interpretation	139
<b>XVII</b>	<b>The History of Art and Literature</b>	142
	Concerning historical criticism in literature and art. Its importance	142
	The history of art and literature. The distinction between it and critical history and aesthetic judgment	144
	The methodology of the history of art and literature	145
	Critique of the problem of the origin of art	146
	History and the criterion of progress	147
	That no single line of progress exists in the history of art and literature	149
	Transgressions against this law	151
	Other meanings of the term "progress" in the arts	152
<b>XVIII</b>	<b>Conclusion. Identity of Linguistics and the Aesthetic</b>	154
	Summary of the enquiry	154
	Identity of the Linguistic and the Aesthetic	156



*Contents*

xiii

The aesthetic formulation of linguistic problems.	
The nature of language	156
The origin of language and its development	157
The relationship between Grammar and Logic	158
The grammatical genres or parts of speech	158
The individuality of speech and the classification of languages	160
The impossibility of a normative grammar	161
Works of a didactic nature	161
Elementary linguistic items or roots	162
Aesthetic judgment and the model language	163
Conclusion	164
<i>Index</i>	167

# Intuition and Expression

## INTUITIVE KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge takes two forms: it is either intuitive knowledge or logical knowledge; knowledge obtained by means of our power to create mental representations, or knowledge obtained by means of the intellect; knowledge of individuals, or knowledge of universals; of particular things, or of the relationships between them; it is, in short, either that which produces representations or that which produces concepts.

Appeal is constantly made in everyday life to intuitive knowledge. It is said that there are certain truths of which definitions cannot be given; that cannot be demonstrated by syllogistic reasoning; that must be grasped intuitively. The practicing politician censures the abstract theorist who lacks a lively intuition of how things actually are. The educational theorist stresses, first and foremost, the need to assist development by educating the faculty of intuition. The critic holds himself honour bound to set aside, when confronted by a work of art, all theories and abstractions and to judge it by intuiting it directly. The practical man, finally, professes to live more by intuitions than by reasoning.

But to this ample recognition that intuitive knowledge receives in ordinary life there does not correspond an equally adequate recognition in the fields of theory and of philosophy. Of intellectual knowledge there is an ancient science – Logic – the existence of which everyone admits without bothering to debate the matter; but a science of intuitive knowledge is barely and timidly admitted by only a few. Logical knowledge has taken the lion's share, and even when it does not actually kill and devour its companion outright, it concedes to it only the humble and lowly position of handmaiden or doorkeeper. – For what on earth *could* intuitive knowledge be without the light of the intellect? It would be a servant without a master; and if the master needs the servant, the former is even more necessary to the latter, if

he is to get by in life. Intuition is blind: the intellect lends its eyes to it.

THAT INTUITIVE KNOWLEDGE EXISTS  
INDEPENDENTLY OF INTELLECTUAL KNOWLEDGE

Now the first point to fix firmly in one's mind is that intuitive knowledge has no need of masters; it has no need to lean on anyone; it does not have to ask for the loan of anyone else's eyes since it has perfectly adequate eyes in its own head. And although it is incontestable that in many intuitions one can find an admixture of concepts, in others there is no trace of any such admixture: which proves that such a thing is not essential. The impression of moonlight, depicted by a painter; the contours of a country, drawn by a cartographer; a tender or dynamic musical motif; the words of a plaintive lyric, or those with which we ask for things, give orders or make complaints in everyday life, can all perfectly well be intuitions, without any trace of reference to the intellectual. But, whatever one thinks of such examples, and even granted that one wishes to, and must, maintain the greater part of the intuitions of civilised man to be pervaded by concepts, there is, as well, something else more important and conclusive to be pointed out. The concepts that are to be found mixed and fused with intuitions, insofar as they really are thus mixed and fused, are no longer concepts, having lost any independence and autonomy. They *were*, indeed, once concepts, but have now become simply components of intuitions. Philosophical maxims, put into the mouth of a tragic or comic character, there hold the office not of concepts, but of characteristics of such persons; in the same way that the red in a painted figure does not function like the concept of the colour red as it is used by physicists, but as a characterising element in that figure.<sup>1</sup> The whole determines the nature of the parts. A work of art can be full of philosophical concepts, it can have them in greater abundance, and they can be more profound than those found in a philosophical treatise, which, in its turn, may be rich to overflowing with descriptions and intuitions. But, notwithstanding all those concepts, the net result in the case of a work of art is an intuition; and, notwithstanding all those intuitions, the net result in the case of a

<sup>1</sup> Consider the way in which a character, such as Hamlet, is defined by his tendency to philosophical maxim, and by the kinds of maxims he utters. In forming an impression of him as a character given to such utterances, we do not have to ask if what he says is true, whereas we would have to ask this if *Hamlet* were a work of philosophy rather than a work of art.

philosophical treatise is conceptual. *I promessi sposi* contains an abundance of ethical observations and distinctions; but it does not for this reason, taken as a whole, lose the character of being simply a story, or an intuition. By the same token, the anecdotes and satirical outbursts that can be found in the books of a philosopher like Schopenhauer do not take from those works the character of intellectual treatises. It is in the overall result, in the distinctive effect which everyone admires and which determines and bends to its service all the individual parts, and *not* in these individual parts, detached, and abstractly considered in themselves, that the difference between a scientific work and a work of art, between an intellectual act and an intuitive act, resides.

#### INTUITION AND PERCEPTION

However, in order to have a correct and precise notion about intuition it is not enough to recognise that it is independent of the conceptual. Among those who recognise this, or who, at any rate, don't explicitly make intuition dependent on the operations of the intellect, another error appears which obscures and confuses its true nature. Intuition is frequently understood as perception, that is to say, as the knowledge of what has actually happened, the apprehension of something *as* a real thing.

To be sure, perception is intuition: my perceptions of the room in which I am writing, of the ink bottle and the paper in front of me, of the pen that I use, of the objects that I touch and employ as my instruments, the instruments of a person who, if he writes, therefore exists; – these are all intuitions. But, as much an intuition is the picture that is now passing through my mind of a me that writes in a different room, in another city, with a different paper, pen and bottle of ink. Which means that a distinction between what is real and what is not is to be made only after intuition has occurred and is extrinsic to the true nature of intuition. If we suppose there to be a human spirit that is intuiting for the first time, it may seem that it could only intuit what is actually the case, and therefore only have intuitions of what is real. But, since an awareness that something is real is based on a distinction between representations of things that are real, and representations of things that are not, and since this distinction is not there to begin with, these primary intuitions will, in truth, be neither intuitions of what is real nor intuitions of what is not real. They will not be perceptions but pure intuitions. Where everything is real, nothing is real. A certain notion, a somewhat vague and distant approximation to this state of innocence, may be given to us by the young child, with its

difficulty in distinguishing between truth and make-believe, between history and legend, which are all one to it. Intuition embraces, without distinction, both the perception of what is real, and the representation of what is simply possible. In intuition we do not situate ourselves, as empirically existing beings, before an already existing external world, rather, we just make mental objects out of our impressions, whatever these may be.<sup>2</sup>

#### INTUITION AND THE CONCEPTS OF SPACE AND TIME<sup>3</sup>

Those who think of intuition as sensation given form and order simply according to the categories of space and time, might, however, seem to come closer to the truth. Space and time (they say) are the forms of intuition: to intuit something is to give it location in space and in time. The activity of intuition would, thus, consist of this dual, simultaneous activity of spatialising and temporalising something. However, we must repeat, with respect to these two categories, what has

<sup>2</sup> The point made here is that when we give a form, a representation, to the sensory impressions we receive, we need no more ask if those impressions have a real source in the “outside” world, than we need to ask, when appraising the expression on the face in a representational work of art, such as the *Mona Lisa*, whether there was some actual person of which this is a portrait. Of course, this leaves Croce with the nice problem of what we are saying when we say, and how we can know, that a representation has a real correlate in the world, a matter he struggles with (see Chapter III, especially note 9). This is a problem for any idealist, such as Croce, who believes that we construct the world from our impressions. See on this matter the discussion by Nelson Goodman, who also believes that we make our world and who therefore has the same problem, in *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976), chap. 1, sec. 8, and see also his *Ways of World Making* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981) and *Of Mind and Other Matters* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984).

<sup>3</sup> This is one of those places where the discussion assumes a knowledge of the history of philosophy, at least from the time of Kant. Kant’s self-styled “Copernican revolution” consisted in replacing the view that we come to knowledge through the printing of sensory information about an already formed world on the blank paper of the passive and usually infant mind, with the view that the mind organises its sensory input, giving it, among other things, and via intuition, a spatial and temporal order. Croce wishes to distinguish his use of intuition from this Kantian notion. He argues, first, that his species of intuition cannot be the same as the Kantian intuition that gives a temporal and spatial order to the world, since some of its products are not ordered in space and time. Second, he claims that his kind of intuition fuses even those entities already ordered in space and time into new wholes, giving them a new individual character or “physiognomy”. He finally claims that “recent analyses” of the formative intuitions of space and time tend to conform to his view rather than earlier, Kantian ones. It follows that what he is talking about when he talks about “intuition” is not what Kant is talking about when he uses that term.

been said about such intellectual distinctions as may be found to be fused into intuitions. We have intuitions that lack a location in space and time: a tinge of colour in the sky, and a nuance of feeling, a cry of pain, and a conscious effort of will, are intuitions that we have where nothing is given form in space and in time. And in some intuitions we can find the spatial and not the temporal, and vice versa; but even where one finds both, an awareness of them results from later reflection: they can be fused within intuition in the same way as all its other components: they will exist, that is to say, as the *material* and not as what *gives form to that material*, as ingredients and not as their organisation. Who, save by an act of reflection that would momentarily interrupt contemplation, notices space when standing before a portrait or a landscape? Who, save by a similarly distracting act of reflection, notices the temporal series when listening to a story or a piece of music? What one intuits in a work of art is not space and time, but its character or individual physiognomy. Moreover, some of the analyses that one sees offered in recent philosophy tend to conform to the view expounded here. Space and time, rather than being the simplest and most basic of forms, are revealing themselves as highly complicated intellectual constructions. And, on the other hand, even in some of those who do not entirely deny that space and time possess a formative power, or are categories or activities, one sees the attempt to unite them and to understand them in a different way from the ordinary concept of these categories. There are those who reduce intuition to the single category of that which locates something in space,<sup>4</sup> maintaining that even time can only be intuited spatially. Others abandon, as philosophically unnecessary, the three dimensions of space, and think of the activity of locating something in space as itself empty of any spatial attributes. And what on earth could this activity be, the simple activity of ordering that would even give an order to time? Isn't it, perhaps, the residue of various criticisms and denials, from which is extracted only the need to posit an activity that is generically intuitive? And isn't this latter correctly pinned down when one thinks of it as a single category or function – not the function of locating something in space, nor that of locating something in time, but that of giving a particular individual character to something: –

<sup>4</sup> A note is appropriate on the translation here. The Italian reads: “Vi é chi riduce l'intuizione all'unica categoria della spazialità”. But the sense here is governed by a locution used three lines later in which Croce refers to “la funzione della spazialità”, which makes it clear that we are dealing not with spatiality but with an *activity of locating something in space*. Hence my (even so, somewhat awkward) “category of that which locates something in space”.

or, better, when one thinks of it as just that category or function that gives us knowledge of things in their individual physiognomy.

#### INTUITION AND SENSATION

Having thus freed intuitive knowledge from any intellectual taint and from anything extrinsic to it or added by later reflection, we must now clarify it and determine its boundaries from another side and against a different kind of invasion and unclarity. On the other side, below a lower limit, there is sensation, there is unformed material, which the spirit can never grasp in itself, insofar as it is merely material, and which it can possess only by giving form to it, and as formed, but which it postulates by using the concept of *just that* – a limit. This material, abstractly conceived, is mechanism, it is passivity, it is that which the spirit of man endures but does not produce. Without it no human knowledge or activity is possible; but the merely material gives us our animal nature, what in man is brute-like and impulsive, and not the spiritual realm in which being *human* consists. How often we struggle in the effort to intuit clearly what is at work in us! We glimpse something, but we do not have it before the spirit, objectified and given form. In these moments we best perceive the profound difference between matter and form: these are *not* two things that we do, one of which stands opposed to the other; rather, the former is something that comes from outside us, which assails us and carries us away, the latter is something that comes from inside us, which seeks to encompass that which comes from without and to possess it. Material, besieged and conquered by form, gives way to concrete form. It is the material, the content, that distinguishes our intuitions from each other: the form is constant, it is spiritual activity; the material is mutable, and without it spiritual activity would never issue forth from its abstractness in order to become actual and concrete activity, this or that spiritually ordered content, this or that determinate intuition.<sup>5</sup>

It is curious and characteristic of our present state that precisely this form, precisely this activity of the spirit, precisely that which is what we *really* are, should be so easily ignored and denied. And there are those who confuse the activity of the human spirit with that mythical activity which is metaphorically referred to as the activity of so-called nature, which is mere mechanism, and which is not like human activity, save when, as in Aesop's fables, one imagines that *arbores*

<sup>5</sup> An echo of the Kantian thought that categories without experience are empty and experience without categories is blind.

*loquantur non tantum ferae*.<sup>6</sup> and there are those who claim never to have observed in themselves this “miraculous” activity; as if between sweating and thinking, feeling cold and an effort of will there were no difference, or that it was only a matter of a difference in degree. Others, to be sure less unreasonably, would prefer activity and mechanism, distinct species, both to be subsumed under some higher concept; but leaving for now any examination of the question whether such a higher unification is possible, and in what sense, and admitting that there is research that needs to be done on this, it is clear, above all, that to subsume two concepts under a third is above all to posit a difference between the two; and here the difference matters, and we stress it.

#### INTUITION AND ASSOCIATION<sup>7</sup>

Intuition has often been mistaken for brute sensation. But, since this mistake is too much, even for sound common sense, more frequently attempts are made to water it down and disguise it under a phraseology that seems at one and the same time to make distinctions and to conflate them. Thus it has been said that intuition is sensation, although *not* simply sensation but, rather, the association of sensations; where misunderstanding arises precisely from the word “association”. This is either to be understood as memory, mnemonic association, or conscious memory; and in that case it seems inconceivable to pretend to join together in the memory elements that have not been intuited, distinguished and possessed in some way by the spirit and which are products of self-awareness: or it is to be understood as an association

<sup>6</sup> “Not only the wild beasts but the trees speak.”

<sup>7</sup> Here the discussion is, I suspect, dictated by issues that were to the forefront of psychology in Croce’s day. He is discussing the theory that all our knowledge can come from the association of sensations. But, then, Croce poses a dilemma: have the elements associated been given a form or not? If the latter answer is given, then we never get away from the fruitless attempt to build all our knowledge on brute uninterpreted and formless sensation. If the former answer is given, then intuition has already been operative in giving something this form and so an associationist psychology has not eliminated the need to refer to intuition. If the association is an association of memories, then form must already have been given to something: for memories are representative mental objects. If the association is mere mechanical association of brute impressions, then we are back with the attempt to explain everything in terms of brute sensation. Croce concludes the section by pointing out that even associationists tend to talk of association as active, that is, productive or creative. But then they in fact agree with him, whatever their way of putting the matter may be. For so to talk is to admit the existence of that productive activity of the spirit that he calls “intuition”.



of unconscious elements; and in this latter case one never gets away from sensation and the merely natural. If, however, as some associationists do, one speaks of an association that is neither memory, nor flux of sensations, but a productive (formative, constructive, distinguishing) association, then in this case one can concede the thing and deny only the terminology. In fact productive association is no longer association in the sense used by those who would reduce everything to sensation, but synthesis, that is, spiritual activity. One may, by all means, call the synthesis "association", but, with the introduction of the notion of productivity, one has already posited a distinction between passivity and activity, between sensation and intuition.

#### INTUITION AND REPRESENTATION

Other psychologists are inclined to distinguish from sensation something which, although no longer sensation, is still not a concept produced by the intellect, namely, a representation or mental image. What difference is there between their representation or mental image and our intuitive knowledge? Both the greatest possible, and none at all: "representation", too, is a highly ambiguous word. If it is understood as something detached and rising forth from a psychical basis of sensations, representation is intuition. If, on the other hand, it is thought of as complex sensation, we are back with brute sensation, which does not change in character according to whether it be rich or poor, now taking place in a rudimentary organism, now in one that is developed and replete with residual traces of past sensations. Nor is the ambiguity remedied by defining representation as a second-order psychic product with respect to sensation, which would then be a first-order one. What does "second order" mean here? Qualitative or formal difference? And in that case, representation is the elaboration of sensation, and therefore intuition. Or greater complexity and complication? a quantitative or material difference? In that case, instead, intuition would again be confused with brute sensation.

#### INTUITION AND EXPRESSION

There is, however, a sure way of distinguishing true intuition, true representation from what exists at a lower level with respect to it: that spiritual act from something that is mechanical, passive and natural. Everything that is truly intuition or representation is also expression. That which is not brought before the mind as an object by expression is not intuition or representation, but sensation or something merely natural. The spirit only intuits by making, forming,

expressing. Anyone who separates intuition from expression will never be able to put them together again.

Intuitive activity intuits only insofar as it expresses. If this proposition sounds paradoxical, one reason for that lies without doubt in the tendency to give too restricted a meaning to the term "expression", using it only of those expressions that are called "verbal expressions"; whereas there exist also nonverbal expressions, like those constituted by lines, colours and tones: all of which are to be included in the notion of expression, which therefore encompasses every kind of product of man, — orator, musician, painter or whatever. And whether it be pictorial or verbal or musical, or however else one describes or labels it in any of these guises, expression cannot lack intuition, from which it is strictly speaking indivisible. How can we truly intuit a geometrical figure if we do not have so clear an idea of it as to be able to draw it right away on paper or on a blackboard? How can we truly intuit the contours of a country, for example the island of Sicily, if we are unable to draw it as we see it in all its windings? To each is given the capacity to experience the illumination that dawns within him when he succeeds, and only at the moment in which he succeeds in formulating to himself his impressions and feelings. Feelings and impressions then pass, by means of words, from the dark region of the soul into the clear light of the contemplative spirit. It is impossible in this process of coming to know, to distinguish intuition from expression. The one issues forth in the same instant as the other, because they are not two but one.

#### MISTAKEN BELIEFS ABOUT THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN INTUITION AND EXPRESSION

The main thing, however, that makes the thesis we have asserted seem paradoxical is the mistaken belief or prejudice that we intuit more of reality than we actually do. One often hears people claim to have in their heads many important thoughts but not to be able to express them. But the truth is that if they *truly* had them, they would have coined them in so many ringing words, and thereby expressed them. If, in the act of expressing them, these thoughts seem to melt away, or to become meagre and poor, this is either because they never existed at all, or were only ever meagre and poor. Equally, it is believed that all of us ordinary mortals intuit and form mental pictures of landscapes, figures, scenes as painters do, and bodies as do sculptors, except that painters and sculptors know how to paint and sculpt those mental pictures, whereas we carry them in our souls unexpressed. A Raphael Madonna, it is believed, could have been visualised by any-

one; but Raphael was Raphael because of his technical ability to put it on the canvas. Nothing could be further from the truth. The world that we normally intuit is a petty thing and translates itself into petty expressions that are gradually enlarged and made more adequate only by an increasing spiritual concentration at certain given moments. They are the internal words that we say to ourselves, the judgments that we express tacitly: "there's a man, there's a horse, this is heavy, this is bitter, I like this, etc., etc.": it is a dazzle of light and colour that, pictorially, could only find a true and proper expression in a hotchpotch of colour, and from which one could hardly extract a few distinct details. These, and nothing else, are what we possess in our everyday lives and are what serve as the basis of our everyday actions. They are the index of a book; they are, as has been said, the labels that we have attached to things and which take the place of them: index and labels (themselves expressions) sufficient for petty needs and petty actions. But, from time to time, from the index we pass to the book, from the label to the thing, from petty intuitions to the greater, and so to the sublimest and greatest. And the passage is sometimes far from easy. It has been pointed out, by those who have best investigated the psychology of artists, that when, after having glanced quickly at a person, they get ready to intuit that person properly in order to make, for example, a portrait of him, that ordinary apprehension, which seemed so vivid and exact, turns out to be little better than nothing: it is seen at most to possess a few superficial traits, inadequate even for a caricature: the person who is to be portrayed is placed before the artist as a world to be discovered. And Michelangelo used to say that "one paints with the brain not the hands", and Leonardo scandalized the prior of the Convent of the Graces by standing for whole days at a time in front of *The Last Supper* without putting a brush to it, saying that "great geniuses do not so much work as use the mind to seek invention". The painter is a painter because he sees what others only feel or glimpse but do not actually see. We think we see a smile, but in reality we have only a vague impression of it, we do not perceive all the characteristic traits from which it arises as, having worked on it, the painter perceives them, who can, therefore, capture them fully on canvas. Even of our closest friend, the person to whom we are close every hour of every day, we possess intuitively only a very few physiognomic traits that allow us to distinguish him from others. The mistake is less easy in the case of musical expression; since anyone would judge it strange to say that a motif, which is already there in the soul of someone who is not a composer, the composer only adds or attaches the notes; as if the intuition of Beethoven were not, for example, his Ninth Symphony nor his Ninth