A Critical Evaluation Of The Phenomenological Principles And Traces Of Abstraction In Preceding Art Movements Leading Towards Emergence Of Abstract Art

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Abstract

This research paper critically evaluates the foundational principles of abstraction in art movements preceding the emergence of abstract art around 1910, including Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, Neo-Impressionism, Cubism, Expressionism, Dadaism, and Surrealism. Drawing on historical analysis, the study examines how these movements progressively dismantled representational conventions through innovations in colours, form, perspective, and subject matter, culminating in the "object lessness" of abstract art. Each movement's contributions are assessed, alongside their limitations, socio-political contexts, and interdisciplinary influences, such as science, psychology, and non-Western art. The paper highlights the collective trajectory toward non-objective art, driven by cultural reactions to industrialization and modernity, and sets the stage for understanding the formal emergence of abstraction in the works of pioneers like Wassily Kandinsky and Kazimir Malevich.

Keywords: Abstraction, Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, Neo-Impressionism, Cubism, Expressionism, Dadaism, Surrealism, colour theory, form, perspective, subjectivity, objectlessness, non-objective art, modernism, industrialization, Primitivism, psychoanalysis.

Introduction

The emergence of abstract art around 1910, marked by the non-objective works of artists like Wassily Kandinsky, Kazimir Malevich, and Piet Mondrian, represents a pivotal moment in art history. Far from an abrupt break, abstraction evolved through a series of art movements that challenged representational traditions and redefined the purpose of art. This paper critically evaluates the grounding principles of abstraction as developed in Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, Neo-Impressionism, Cubism, Expressionism, Dadaism, and Surrealism, drawing on insights from a provided research document. These movements collectively reshaped colour, form, perspective, and subject matter, reflecting broader cultural shifts toward industrialization, psychological inquiry, and spiritual exploration. By analysing each movement's contributions, limitations, and contexts, this study traces the trajectory toward "objectlessness"—a state where art transcends recognizable forms to prioritize pure visual and conceptual expression. The paper also considers socio-political influences, lesser-known artists, and interdisciplinary connections to provide a comprehensive understanding of abstraction's foundations.

1.   Impressionism: The Primacy of Sensation

It's prudent quoting an oft-quoted saying of Paul Gauguin, "Do not paint too closely from nature…...Art is an abstraction. Remove it from nature, dream about it and think more of the resulting creation, the only way to attain God is to do so as the Divine Master, create."[1] Also it will be appropriate to quote Cezanne who said "I wished to copy nature, I could not. But I was satisfied when I had discovered that the sun, for instance, could not be reproduced but it must be presented by something else…by colour."[2] Before the onset of phenomenon of abstract art in 1910, the preceding art movements paved the way towards abstraction. Roots of abstraction can be traced as a reactionary tendency towards impressionism and in impressionism. In the 1880s, several aspects of impressionism served as reasons for reaction. For classicist painters, the weakness of impressionism lay in its unclarity, its destruction of definite linear forms, for others it was casual, unmethodical, too photographic and personal. If the impressionists reduced things to the artist's sensation, their successors reduced them further to projections or construction of his feelings and moods or to 'essences' grasped in an intense intuition. Works of Vincent van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, Georges Seurat, Henri Rousseau reflect the tendencies of abstraction. Works of Henri Matisse and his followers (1905-14) extended the colours and rhythms of Gauguin, Cezanne and van Gogh into intense and unrealistic portrayal. The works of Maurice Vlaminck, Andre Derain, Cornelius Van Dongen, Henri Matisse, Raoul Dufy and Albert Marquet developed a movement called Fauvism. Fauvism enriched and revolutionized the way of colour application and in doing so, they resorted to Paul Gauguin and van Gogh. The mode of colour application in fauvism gave more freedom to colour. To indicate shadows, they used purple and red along with cold colours. They employed unusual harmonies in application of complementary colours. Chiaroscuro and relief was abandoned. Line was not employed to precisely define the object, rather resultant in shattering of traditional forms. The neo-impressionists differed from impressionists in terms of furthering the cause of subjectivity and intense personal feelings. It is appropriate to quote Maurise Denis who posited that-

"Impressionism- and by that I mean much more the general movement, which has changed during the last twenty years the aspect of modern painting, than the special art of a Monet or a Renoir-Impressionism was synthetic in its tendencies, since its aim was to translate a sensation, to realize a mood; but its methods were analytic, since colour for it resulted from an infinity of contrasts. For it was by means of the decomposition of the prism that the impressionists reconstituted light, divided colour and multiplied reflected lights and gradations; in fact, they substituted for varying grays as many different positive colours. Therein lies the fundamental error of impressionism. The *'Fifre'* of Manet in four tones is necessarily more synthetic than the most delicious Renoir, where the play of sunlight and shadow creates the widest range of varied half tones."[3]

Monet pioneered the movement of impressionism under influence of Boudin and Jongkind having reflected on the works of Corot, the Barbizon painters and Courbet. Impressionism at the beginning was closely related to Realism. To this effect, the contributions of Delacroix is presented by Paul Signac who attributes the thought process behind the application of possibilities of colour to him in the following manner-

"For half a century Delacroix tried hard to achieve more brightness and luminosity, thereby displaying to the colourists who would succeed him the path to follow and the goal to attain. He still left them much to do, but thanks to his contribution and his teaching, their task was made easier. He proved to them all the advantages of a 'sound technique', of planning and logic, not hindering the passion for painting, but strengthening it. He gave them the secret of the laws governing colour, the harmony of similarities and the analogy of opposites. He showed them how a unified and dull colour scheme is inferior to the colour produced by the vibrations of different combinations of elements.

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[1] Muller Joseph Emile, *'Modern Painting from Manet to Mondrian'*, London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, p.50.

[2] Harrison Charles And Wood Paul (Eds), *Art In Theory 1900-45.An Anthology of Changing Ideas,* Oxford: Blackwell, (1999), p. 45.

[3] Harrison Charles and Wood Paul (Eds), *Art in Theory 1900-45. An anthology of Changing Ideas,* Oxford: Blackwell, (1999), p.45

He secured to them the resources of optical blending, which gives rise to new colours. He advised them to banish dark, dull and drab colours as much as possible. He taught them that it is possible to modify and reduce a colour without tarnishing it with mixtures on the palette. He showed them the moral influence of colour which could contribute to the effect of the painting, he initiated them into the aesthetic language of colours and tones. He incited them to dare everything, never to fear that their harmonies might be too colourful."[4]

To refer *'Women in the Garden'* as painted by Monet in 1866-67, we trace that Monet painted his picture entirely in the open, such rendering were hitherto done in only as nature study. Secondly, he replaced using of dark colours by cold colours, greens and blues in indicating the shadow-as a result shadows became colourful. Thirdly, he placed side by side warm and cold colours, thereby an array of colours independent of the objects and their shapes- wherein the external shape was giving way to colour. These were the three main distinct characteristics which distinguish impressionism. The impressionists comprised of many artists, but chiefly only eight of them came to be famous as impressionist. They are Monet, Pissarro, Renoir, Sisley, Berthe Morisot, Guillemin, Degas and Cezanne. Though each of them had a differing style, but the commonality was that they all rejected all modes and means of academic painting. They chose to not to paint any historical, mythological and sentimental subjects, over polished finish, dull tar like colours.

Subject-matter wise they chose to paint glimpses of everyday life- everyday reality of their time. They expressed their perceptions sincerely- even at the cost of drifting away from representation. Selection of subject was impromptu and not portrayal of pre- conceived subjects. Goal was capturing of fleeting light and movements. This resulted in prioritisation of the element of expression, chiefly colour, over the object. Emphasis in capturing the luminous phenomenon and reproducing their fugitive truth resulted in newer technique in the palette. The stress was laid primarily on the laws of complementary colours without limiting to the theories of spectrum. The fact that complementary colours when applied after mixing- destroy each other and when placed side by side, accord distinction in each other was distinctly established by them.

Towards application of colour, we note a remarkable shift wherein the priority was laid towards visual effects and not the details. To attain this, short, broken brush strokes of mixed and pure un-mixed colour were undertaken which were not blended smoothly or shaded in order to acquire intense colour vibration.

In view of the above analysis, it can be said that the impressionists, in order to attain to the freezing of an instant- in movement and immediacy, held supreme the element of colour which brought newer depiction of the form.

Henri Matisse said the following of the impressionist painters-
"The impressionist painters, especially Monet and Sisley, had delicate sensations, quite close to each other: as a result, their canvases all look alike. The word 'impressionism' perfectly characterizes their style, for they register fleeting impressions and consider it almost dishonest. A rapid rendering of a landscape represents only one moment of its existence. I prefer, by insisting upon its essential character, to risk losing charm in order to obtain greater stability."[5]

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[4]Ibid., p.20

[5]Ibid p.32

Examining Monet's work of 1890, we find that Monet experimented on fleeting lights on a series of canvases without perspectival shift or any shift of subject matter.

Object under influence of light and manifestation of light in amalgamation with appearances of object was the quest of Monet. This often called for a neglect for the prerequisite such as consideration of volumes, weight and other necessary physical realms of the objects. Faculty of colour started to be accorded priority over form- colour reigned supreme. In his *'Waterlily'* series, we find colour being utilized in blobs, trails and jumbles. His portrayal depicts a shift to imagination in order to reflect and transcend the reality of mundane.

Pissarro's quest was to express the marvellous and fugitive effect of nature – in order to do so he tried to portray nature truthfully and religiously. His individual approach towards depiction of nature served as inspiration for Cezanne, Gauguin, Seurat and van-Gogh.

August Renoir's work reflects his quest to estimate the effect of light on the human figure. Having undertaken the study of the works of the Italian old masters it can be said that he was influenced chiefly by Raphael. His exercise on the frescos of Pompei had altered his technique of portrayal. His portrayal of form had strengthened. His devotion was towards strength of drawing- that of line. In colour application, he preferred to create harmonies in blues and lilacs and had a later stage in life- his palette found higher shades and hues of pink, orange, green and pale blue.

Edger Degas utilized artificial colours and did not resort to out of door experimentation as opposed to other impressionists. As he was not concerned about making his colour hallowed so did he not choose any soothing subject matter as well. He depicted the mundane movements of rest and leisure of opera dancers. This is a notable shift in terms of the subject matter. Never before the commoners were given the centre stage of portrayal and such mundane activity of casualness was never depicted before. In his works, we find drawing more important than colour application. Through his perspectival preferences and portrayal of artificial lights he widens and deepens the space. On employing shadows, he narrows the space down. Together they create a depth and bewilderment. His complete denial to follow the representational mode had presented to contemporary art the spirit of individualistic creativity. In support of this, I seek to quote, "The air in the pictures of a master is not the same as that which one breathes out of doors"[6]and "I do not feel it is necessary to lose consciousness before nature."[7]

Having analysed the works of the artists of Impressionism, we find that they made deviations from portrayal of reality, such as bringing forth the impressions of effects of light, giving different distinction to form, choosing of mundaneness, spontaneity of subject matter and above all catching the impression of a passing moment in the scheme of events, still they remained faithful to nature, after all. We find reflections of this when Cezanne says-

"In this world, there is a moment of time, the object is to paint it, in its reality, and to forget everything for this"[8].

Even in him, we find that he does not want the artist to be merely an eye, to reflect on what he sees; his mind must elaborate it and act as a filter, in order to build up and condense. He says- "There are two things in the painter-the eye and the brain. The two must co-operate, one must work for the development of both, but as a painter, of the eye through the outlook on nature, of the brain through the logic of organized sensations which provide the means of expression."[9] This was a considerable shift of focus from percept to concept or intervention of the mind over matter.

Critical Evaluation: Impressionism laid a foundation for abstraction by prioritizing sensory experience and liberating colour from realism. Its representational anchors and lack of emotional or intellectual depth,

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[6] Ibid p.32
[7] Ibid p.32
[8] Ibid p.39
[9] Johnson Ellen H, *Modern Art and the Object*, Thames and Hudson, London,1976, p.11

however, prompted reactions from Post-Impressionists, who sought greater expressive and structural innovation.

2. Post-Impressionism: Expressive Colour and Structured Form

Impressionism was criticized by the neo-impressionist- in subtlety as well as vehemence. Some, in the way of protest felt that it shall change its course, others, preferred turning their back on representation. They didn't accept the modalities, means and ways of colour application and subject matter. The most prolific opposition was from Paul Gauguin who said- "Impressionism is a purely superficial and material art, in which thought has no place".[10]

If for Gauguin thoughtlessness was the point of detest, for van Gogh, the quest and point of despair was Impressionism's lack of "portrayal of the human emotions". He says- "Instead of trying to portray, what I see before me, I use colour more arbitrarily in order to express myself more intensely."[11]In other reactions, the supremacy of nature as sole source of depiction is questioned. Closer proximity to nature and external reality and lack of deliberate composition were again the chief reasons as to why Impressionism was attacked.

Art came to proceed towards this newer approach in Neo impressionists, the 'sudden' or 'instantaneous' gave way to measurements, preponderance and calculations. Executions of works of art had remained so for ages before- the difference was that of the impressionists alone.

As devised by Georges Seurat in his pointillism we find Neo-impressionists venturing about the scientific application of colour theory based on optical mixing of colour. Clarity was all encompassing in process of depiction by the neo-impressionists. They had a clear pre-assessment of the requisites and the outcome of a painting and often had placed them in writing beforehand.

Though the neo-impressionists portrayed the effects of light over object, but they differed in mode of portrayal. They differentiated systematically in portrayal of local colours of the objects, colour of the lighting and their reactions upon one another. The other revolutionary approach has adopted by neo-impressionists are that they invented the phenomenon of optical blending wherein they placed their colours side by side – which remain unmixed in application, but are perceived as mixed when seen by a viewer. This created an active participation by the viewer. By means of according a place of pride to the elements of colour wherein colour retain its purity, this was the start of a freedom that eventually granted to the element of colour.

In Paul Cezanne's work, we find a duality of conflict- at one hand he seeks to portray nature as truthfully as possible moved by the sensations of the nature in a truthful transcript in accordance with the freshness and intensity, whereas he seeks to make his portrayal transcend the incompleteness, incoherence, disorderliness and transitoriness of the depicted subject matter. Assimilating the portrayal in its completeness we find that he discards the perishable matter and lays stress on the indicative shape and colour, transposing them towards beauty of regularity and geometric shapes. He had undertaken the portrayal of light to the extent of elevating the intrinsic light inherent with the object.

He reflected this re-iteration vide a letter dated 15th Apr 1904, thus-

"May I repeat what I told you- treat nature by means of the cylinder, the sphere, the cone, everything brought into proper perspective so that each side of an object or a plane is directed towards a central point. Lines parallel to horizon give breadth, whether it is a section of nature, or if you prefer, of the show which the *Pater Omnipotens Aeterne Deus* spreads out before our eyes. Line perpendicular to this horizon gives depth. But nature for us men is more depth than surface, whence the need to introduce into out light vibrations represented by the reds and yellows, a sufficient amount of blueness to give the feel of air."[12]

He had undertaken the portrayal of light to the extent of elevating the intrinsic light inherent with the object.

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[10] Ibid p.39
[11] Ibid p.39
[12] Ibid, p.37

Colour research in different means of depiction made Cezanne portray the effect of light and colour both in oil as well as in water colours subsequently. It is appropriate to say that in his work 'La Montagne Saint- Victoire' we find the objects expressed in sensation of colours, masses and planes. He prioritized depiction in colour than in lines.

In order to fully exhaust the possibilities of plastic research we find Cezanne experimenting with colour as perceived on inanimate objects and still life. The problem of representation of the three-dimensional objects into two-dimensional picture plane is solved by his portrayal of questioning the concept of space. Abiding by the laws of linear perspective formulated during the Renaissance, the view point remains static and singular, but Cezanne pioneered the cause of multiple and moving viewpoints. Ellen H. Johnson, in his essay *'The Painted Object'* analyses this perspectival multiplicity in one of Cezanne's work entitled *'The Basket of Apples'* and says that the oval shape of the plate holding the articles are squared off, relating the shapes to other oval and rectangular forms. The basket and its handle, the apples and the colour planes which model them are pulled towards the shape of the picture itself in a complex oval-rectangular counterpoint. He says that the left side of the table remains completely flat which is not viewed from any single position. Though it gives pictorial support but does not provide any conceivable physical support to the swelling basket of fruits, within which the scale of the apples changes considerably. By the process of enlarging, simplifying and flattening forms towards the outer parts of the composition, Cezanne accentuates the fuller volumes and changing colours, shapes and lines in the central parts. He further notes that the left edges of the table do not correspond to the right edges and these discrepancies set up a pictorial 'tug of war' concealed by the different pictorial elements such as the cloth, the bottle and the basket. He interprets the impressions of these tensions on the viewer and says that the slanting bottle appears to strain away from the axes of the other elements. Through this 'empathy', the portrayal of 'life', as if in this still life is perceived, and one marvels at the 'miraculously quiet' but vibrant equilibrium created by Cezanne from the conflicting forces in the still life. The analyst feels 'Cezanne prepared the way for the Cubist fragmentation of the object and its eventual elimination in abstract painting.'[13]

Paul Gauguin's contribution towards symbolism effected a lasting and crucial impact on the contemporary and future art practices. Subject matter wise, he chose to reflect on abundance of life and savagery of a Tahitian land where he settled leaving all he possessed, his revolutionary approach towards choice of subject matter was equally important as was his mode of depiction. He was the pioneer of 'Primitivism', an art movement which is portrayed by exaggerated body proportions, animal totem, geometrical designs and stark contrast. The western art world's attention was drawn towards the art practices of the distant primitive cultures such as that of Africa, Micronesia and native America on initiation of Gauguin who was motivated by the grotesque like artifacts, raw power and simplicity of the primitive cultures. Technique wise, Gauguin opted for 'peinture a lessence'- a technique in which oil is drained from the paint, the remnant pigments are mixed with turpentine. Gauguin's bold, colourful and design-oriented paintings significantly had influenced the appreciation and colour application of Vincent van Gogh, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque and other artists of contemporary hue. Gauguin's uses of analogous colours in close proximity achieved a muted effect. He pioneered the uses of non-representation in colour application. He was influenced by the strength of folk art and strength of drawing and composition of Japanese prints. This resulted in graduating to the naivety of the figures and compositional austerity. In his quest of portrayal, he strengthened his form with vigorous synthetic outlines and reduced relief to ensue a two-dimensional portrayal. He dispensed away aerial perspective and minimized use of linear perspective and shadows.

Vincent van Gogh palette was lightened under influence of Pissaro, Gauguin and Signac. During his early years, he was influenced by Jean Francois Millette and sought to portray the life of peasants and rural life by means of earthly colours. He pioneered the impasto technique in which the application of thick colour results into enabling an expressionistic quality to the colour. In this process brush strokes remain visible on the thick, textured, undiluted and three-dimensional paint – revealing to the spectator the process of painting along with

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[13] Johnson Ellen H, *Modern Art and the Object*, Thames and Hudson, London,1976, p. 68.

the depicted object. Often pure primary colours are seen undiluted and mixing, if any, is undertaken on the canvas directly. Van Gogh utilized impasto technique for reflection of emotion and movement, as seen in his works such as in the clouds of the '*Wheat Field with Cypresses'* and *'Starry Nights'*.

Interdisciplinary influences included Symbolism's focus on inner experience, theosophical ideas, and emerging psychological theories, which shaped Expressionism and Surrealism. Cézanne's structural innovations resonated with mathematical interest in multi-dimensional geometry.

Critical Evaluation: Post-Impressionism advanced abstraction by prioritizing emotional and structural innovation. Its representational roots limited its leap to non-objectivity, necessitating further experimentation by Fauvists and Cubists.

3. Fauvism: Colour as Autonomous Expression

Fauvism, active from 1904 to 1908, took Post-Impressionism's expressive colour to extremes. Led by Henri Matisse, André Derain, and Maurice de Vlaminck, Fauvists used vibrant, non-naturalistic colours to convey sensation, as Matisse's statement that colour choices were driven by "observation, sensitivity, on felt expressions" indicates.

In '*Woman with a Hat*' (1905) and '*The Joy of Life*' (1905–06), Matisse employed electric blues and fiery reds for emotional impact, asserting that colour could express light through harmonies rather than contrasts. Derain's *'The Turning Road, L'Estaque'* (1906) simplified forms with bold outlines, echoing Cézanne but prioritizing colour. Fauvism's liberation of colour from descriptive roles was a direct precursor to abstract art's focus on visual elements.

Fauvism's short lifespan and figurative subjects—portraits, landscapes, and interiors—limited its abstraction. Its intuitive approach contrasted with Neo-Impressionism's scientific rigor or Cubism's structural analysis, risking emotional subjectivity. Socio-politically, Fauvism challenged bourgeois tastes at the 1905 Salon d'Automne, earning the label "Fauves" (wild beasts). Lesser-known Fauvists like Kees van Dongen, whose 'Woman with Large Hat' (1906) pushed colour boundaries, enriched the movement's expressive shift. Influences included Post-Impressionist experiments, African art, and Symbolist literature's sensory focus.

Critical Evaluation: Fauvism's radical colour usage and simplified forms accelerated abstraction by prioritizing emotional expression. Its intuitive approach and figurative anchors, however, required structural and conceptual deepening by later movements.

4. Neo-Impressionism: Scientific Colour and Universal Harmony

Neo-Impressionism, led by Georges Seurat and Paul Signac in the 1880s–1890s, systematized Impressionism's colour experiments through pointillism. Seurat's '*A Sunday Afternoon at La Grande Jatte*' (1884–86) used small dots of pure colour for optical blending, achieving luminosity and harmony, as Signac (1899) explained.

Neo-Impressionism's scientific approach, rooted in Chevreul's colour theory, detached colour from naturalistic depiction, treating it as a universal language. Georges Seurat believed in universality of meaning of colour and propagated the concept of possibility of founding of a universal language for depiction of each human emotion by means of preconceived and precalculated depiction of colour. By means of pointillism he placed tiny dots of pure colours together in succession and in independence to each other – for the eye to blend it optically. Analysing his major work '*A Sunday Afternoon at la Grande Jatte*,' we find that as if the picture is frozen in space and time. The character portrayed with vigour and vitality beam with exuberance, we find tranquillity, serenity and total blissful rest. His unflinching quest for propagation of establishment of element of colour resulted in attainment of lighter tone of colours, emerging towards delicacy, colour vibration and subtlety of

drawing. His experimentation of form wherein he aimed at simplified and purified forms, made his works a source of referral and influence for the cubists.

Seurat's use of lines and colours—horizontal lines for calm, warm colours for joy—anticipated abstraction's emotive visual elements. The movement's ordered compositions contrasted with Impressionism's spontaneity, emphasizing structure.

However, Neo-Impressionism's figurative subjects and labour-intensive technique limited its abstraction. Critics like Félix Fénéon praised its innovation but noted its rigidity. Socio-politically, Signac's anarchist sympathies reflected utopian ideals mirrored in ordered compositions. Lesser-known artists like Camille Pissarro, who adopted pointillism in '*Apple Harvest*' (1888), bridged Impressionism and Neo-Impressionism. Influences included scientific advances like Charles Henry's aesthetic harmony theories and Positivism's rationalism.

Critical Evaluation: Neo-Impressionism's scientific colour and structured compositions treated visual elements as autonomous, advancing abstraction. Its representational subjects and meticulous process constrained its leap to non-objectivity.

5**. Cubism**: Deconstruction and Synthesis of Form
Cubism, pioneered by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque from 1907, revolutionized form and perspective. Its analytical phase (1907–1911) fragmented objects into geometric planes, as in Picasso's '*Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*' (1907) and Braque's '*Violin and Palette*' (1909). The synthetic phase (1912–1914) introduced collage and vibrant colours, as in Picasso's '*Still Life with Chair Caning' (1912).*

Analytical Cubism's use of muted palettes and faceted forms, as Braque's "disappearance of anecdotes behind pictorial facts" suggests, challenged Renaissance perspective. Synthetic Cubism's collage techniques synthesized fragmented forms into new realities, moving toward abstraction. Donald Kuspit (1985) notes Cubism's position "midway between the organic and the robotic," reflecting industrialization's impact, as Heinz Kohut (1971) suggests.

Cubism's reliance on recognizable motifs—still lifes, figures, and instruments—prevented full abstraction, and its analytical rigor risked emotional detachment. Socio-politically, Cubism reflected pre-World War I technological fragmentation. Cubists like Juan Gris ('*Violin and Glass*', 1913) refined synthetic techniques. Influences included Cézanne's multi-perspectival approach, African masks, and Einstein's relativity.

Critical Evaluation: Cubism's fragmentation and synthesis dismantled traditional representation, paving the way for abstraction. Its representational anchors and analytical focus required emotional liberation by Expressionism and Surrealism.

 6. Expressionism: Inner Vision and Emotional Intensity
In Expressionism we find exteriorisation or revelation of the feelings that remains within the soul of the artist in most vehement manner. This does not comply with the academic necessity of colour application but reveal an atmosphere which relates to drama, yarning of the unrest, anguish and angst. It seeks its root in the reactionary derivatives of impressionism. We find it guided by the resultant post-impressionistic realisations, Negro, pacific art and German wood arts. Expressionism had its root in Germany and propagated in many other countries such as the United States, Mexico, Brazil and reflected a variation of tendency as per the cultural variation.
An example can be given of German expressionist group named '*Die Brucke'* (The Bridge), which comprised of artists such as- Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Erich Heckel, Karl Schmidt- Rottluff, who were later joined by Max

Pechstein, Otto Muller, and Emile Nolde. The movement of the group can be termed to be of equal artistic importance of that of the Fauves.

Expressionism prioritized emotional intensity. Artists like Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Emil Nolde, and Wassily Kandinsky used distorted forms and vivid colours, as in Kirchner's '*Street, Berlin'* (1913) and Kandinsky's *'Composition V'* (1911), to externalize inner turmoil.

Kandinsky's transition to non-objective forms, articulated in '*Concerning the Spiritual in Art'* (1911), used colour and form to evoke universal emotions, a cornerstone of abstraction. Expressionism's figurative subjects and subjective intensity limited its early abstraction. Socio-politically, it reflected pre-World War I anxieties and industrialization's alienation. Artists like Käthe Kollwitz ('*The Weavers', 1897*) added socio-political depth. Influences included Freud's psychoanalysis, Nietzsche's philosophy, and non-Western art.

Critical Evaluation: Expressionism's emotional and spiritual focus, particularly Kandinsky's non-objective works, was crucial for abstraction. Its figurative roots required synthesis with other movements' formal innovations.

7. Dadaism and Surrealism: Subconscious and Anti-Art

Dadaism (1916–1922) and Surrealism (1924–1966) dismantled representational norms. Dadaism's anti-art gestures, as in Marcel Duchamp's *'Fountain'* (1917) and Hans Arp's chance-based collages, rejected aesthetics. Surrealism, as Anna C. Chave (1989) notes, bridged realism and abstraction through subconscious imagery, as in Joan Miró's '*Harlequin's Carnival'* (1924–25) and Max Ernst's '*The Horde'* (1927). In Surrealism the pictorial possibilities were guided by psychoanalysis. It posited such possibilities in a constructive spirit when compared with Dadaism. Anna C Chave, in her book 'Mark Rothko, Subjects in Abstraction' analysed the work of surrealists in the following manner- "the art of the surrealists-especially that of Miro, Masson, Matta, Ernst and eventually Gorky, demonstrated a middle ground between those supposedly arid realms of realism and abstraction. The surrealists have shown too, that the subject of a work of art need not be a closed or circumscribed theme, plainly legible to artist and viewer alike, but the artists could reveal or realise their sense of turmoil by scrambling their subject."[14]

Dadaism's rejection of form and Surrealism's subconscious exploration liberated art from representation. Their figurative elements limited full abstraction. Socio-politically, Dadaism responded to World War I, while Surrealism reflected interwar unrest. Surrealists like Leonora Carrington ('*Self-Portrait*', 1937–38) enriched abstract potential. Influences included Freudian psychoanalysis and automatism.

Critical Evaluation: Dadaism and Surrealism advanced abstraction by prioritizing concept and subconscious. Their figurative residues required further synthesis for pure abstraction.

 8. Synthesis: The Cultural Shift Toward Objectlessness

The collective trajectory of these movements reflects a reaction against materiality, culminating in "objectlessness." Impressionism's sensory focus was criticized for lacking depth, prompting Post-Impressionism's emotional and structural innovations. Fauvism and Neo-Impressionism liberated colour, Cubism fragmented form, and Expressionism and Surrealism prioritized inner experience. Dadaism removed final barriers, enabling non-objective art. To summarise, on critical analysis and evaluation, we find that in the works of impressionists, essence, rather the detail of the subject matter is captured by means of short, thick strokes. Impasto technique is followed in application of paint. In works of Monet, we find placing of warmer and cold colour side by side-colour was applied independent of object and their shapes. The impressionists refused to portray any historical, mythological and sentimental subject. This freedom of choice of subject matter elevated the credence of the artist's capacity, firstly to perceive different subject matters and secondly,

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[14] Chave, Anna C, *Mark Rothko, Subjects in Abstraction,* Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1989, p.64

establishment of the commonplace, mundane as a replacement to the existing subjects. The depiction of colour in place of shade was reflective of the impact of the scientific development of colour theory. Jules Lafourge first applied the principles of prismatic colour to impressionistic painting. Priority of colour over line negated the outline of an object. Exaltation of colour created newer possibility of form and seeds of expression are found to be sown. We find detailing was replaced with visual effect. To attain this smaller brush strokes were applied. Monet experimented on the effect of shifting light without any shift of perspective. Pissarro's works of depiction of nature had influenced the later artists. Renoir's work signifies the quest for dexterity of the element of line. The quest of Degas elevated the place of mundane activities which remain 'off the record'. This has set an example about the freedom of the subject matter and that anything can be a subject of depiction. He experimented more with drawing than with colour. Also he drifted from the trend of depicting nature. In neo-impressionists, we find an advancement towards delving to the inner essence than its appearance. It was a phase of questioning and search for meaning. Expression on interpretation of nature on reflection over the artist's individual interpretation was attempted. Mixing of colour in the palette was abandoned. In works of Cezanne, we find the drive towards attempting the portrayal of the visual elements for the first time, evident in his call to treat nature by means of cylinder, sphere and cone. Also, the concept of symbolic meaning was attained by him such as that of meaning of different lines. Universality of meaning of colour application was a major attempt by Georges Seurat in his works of pointillism. Gauguin's works for the first time shows the application of colour in a non-representational way. Symbolism was attached to colour. In van Gogh we find the search for the soul-the expressions, sensations and sentiments finding their way through the strength of colour. Both van Gogh and Gauguin resorted to understand the art practices of non-western nature, such as the oriental art forms in Japanese prints. In cubism the form, so far under different speculation, fragmented to the point of non recognition and non-objectivity. Also we find here a shift of colour application such as chromes of brown and dull colours. They arrived at the linearity of the elements-study of objects under fragmented form. We find the start of loss of the object as a subject and portrayal of newer reality. Multi-perspectival view point revolutionised the approach to see. Expressionism, Dadaism and surrealism paved the way towards portrayal of the subconscious. We thus find a total shift in perception of the real and towards the quest of possibilities we find inclusion of concept. This shift was a reaction towards the materiality and the material world which questioned the object and these movements resulted into attempting of portrayal of 'objectlessness'.

This shift towards objectlessness was driven by industrialization's alienation, as Kohut (1971) suggests, and global influences like African and Oceanic art. Women artists like Sonia Delaunay ('*Electric Prisms'*, 1914) bridged Cubism and abstraction. Interdisciplinary connections included Schoenberg's atonal music, Joyce's stream-of-consciousness, and theosophical ideas.

<u>**Critical Evaluation**</u>: The move toward "objectlessness" was a cultural response to modernity, enabled by each movement's progressive detachment from representation.

<u>**Conclusion**</u>

The grounding principles of abstraction evolved through a dynamic interplay of Impressionism's sensory experiments, Post-Impressionism's expressive innovations, Fauvism's bold colours, Neo-Impressionism's scientific rigor, Cubism's formal deconstruction, Expressionism's emotional intensity, Dadaism's anti-art stance, and Surrealism's subconscious exploration. Key contributions include colour autonomy, fragmented form, subjective expression, and a cultural shift toward "objectlessness" driven by modernity's complexities. Limitations, such as representational anchors, highlight the necessity of each movement's synthesis in enabling abstract art's emergence. Future research could explore socio-political contexts, contributions of marginalized artists, and interdisciplinary influences in greater depth to illuminate abstraction's global and cultural dimensions.

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