

Umgekehrt enthält auch der Text des Gedichts einige musikalische Anspielungen, und man geht vermutlich nicht fehl in der Annahme, dass manche Walzeranklänge im Prélude auf die »valse mélancolique« Baudelaires Bezug nehmen – allerdings in einer merkwürdig verschwommenen Weise: So ist das Hauptmotiv in einer Überlagerung von 3/4- und 5/4-Takt notiert, so dass sich das für den Walzer charakteristische Schema einer schweren und zweier leichter Zeiten im Hauptmotiv mehrfach findet, teils überlagert, teils unterbrochen (z. B. kann man das A im Bass des ersten Takts als schwere Zählzeit auffassen, aber ebenso das b); Entsprechendes gilt für den zweiten Takt).

20 Angemerkt sei, dass Debussys Préludes in ihrer formalen Anlage weitaus weniger einheitlich sind als diejenigen Chopins; die am Prélude I,4 illustrierte formale Strategie liegt sozusagen an einem Ende der Möglichkeiten, die Debussys kompositorischer Stil zuließ. Am nächsten kommt ihr innerhalb der Sammlung der 24 Préludes das erste des zweiten Hefts (»Brouillards«); dort fungiert ein Motiv in ähnlicher Weise als »Hauptmotiv«; die Reihung der Motive ist gleichermaßen offen und durch vielfältige Bezüge zwischen den Motiven zusammengehalten, so dass auch dort dem objektiven Verlauf mehrere Zeitebenen überlagert scheinen.

21 Cf. Riegl 1899/1929, (wie Anm. 11), S. 34.

22 Deshalb sind solche Stimmungen auch keineswegs gegenstandslos oder in ihrem Gegenstandsbezug unbestimmt.

23 Moritz Geiger, »Zum Problem der Stimmungseinführung«, in *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 6, 1911, S. 18–59, beschreibt diese Doppelung folgendermaßen: »Dieselbe eine Stimmung geht von zwei verschiedenen Enden aus. Sie gehört dem Gegenstand zu – und sie stammt aus der Spontaneität des Ich.« (S. 53). Diese Spontaneität beschreibt Geiger als Mit- oder Nacherleben von etwas, das im Gegenstand vorgefunden wird. Doch kann es dabei nicht nur darum gehen, selbst etwas zu erleben, was ein anderer erlebt – erstens würde dazu ein passiv empfangener Eindruck genügen, und zweitens empfinden die Gegenstände, die die Stimmung tragen (wie eine Landschaft) selbst nichts. Deshalb scheint es mir besser, von einer Einstimmung zwischen Gegenstand und Rezipient zu sprechen. Damit wäre der Gegenstand jedoch nicht das schlechthin Feste, unveränderliche, wie Geiger (*ibid.*, S. 54) schreibt; vielmehr ist seine Stimmungseigenschaft selbst fragil und vom Zustand des Rezipienten abhängig.

24 Cf. Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, Oxford 1997, S. 94; siehe dazu auch Becker 2007, (wie Anm. 16).

»Des horizons infinis dans le cercle restreint d'intérieur«: *Stimmung* in Édouard Vuillard's decorative paintings

Merel van Tilburg, Geneva

As has been stressed by many researchers, the German notion *Stimmung* cannot be accurately translated into French. An approximating compromise is found in the expression *état d'âme*, but here the dual signification of *Stimmung* as both a private mood and an overall atmosphere is lost, and so is the musical connotation. Should there have been an equivalent of *Stimmung* in French, it would surely have been welcomed by Symbolist artists and theorists at the turn of the nineteenth century – both for its dual and synthetic nature, embracing a meditative subject and its surroundings, and for its potential musicality. In the historiography of Symbolism, the term »Stimmungsmalerei« has even been mentioned as a local denomination for Symbolist painting.¹ As it was, French Symbolists were obliged to think of the correspondences they perceived between subject and object, between man and nature, in separate terms. That is: when they thought of these correspondences *in words*. Arguably, in painting there is no need for a preliminary verbal concept to address the issue of the »tuning« of the soul to the universe, to its surroundings.

It is the aim of this article to explore the possibilities of using the German notion *Stimmung* as a model of sense for the interior paintings of the French Symbolist painter Édouard Vuillard. Even if *Stimmung* as an art historical notion is most often associated with the landscape (the so-called *Stimmungslandschaft*), it can be perceived also in or as a ground of other forms of painting.² *Stimmung*, I will argue, is the exact notion that is sought after, evoked, and sometimes perceived by contemporary beholders, in the interior paintings of Vuillard. The focus will be on two decorative ensembles, executed in 1895 and 1896: the set of five panels known as *The Album*, and four panels painted for the library of the Parisian medical doctor Henri Vaquez. In these interior decorations, it is possible to trace the polyvalence of the word *Stimmung*. *Stimmung* will be discussed not only as the possible ground or content of these paintings. Furthermore, Vuillard's decorative ensembles can be seen as producers of *Stimmung* in the interiors for which they were destined.

The most important source for the association of *Stimmung* with the landscape in painting is found in an article by Alois Riegl from 1899, *Die Stimmung als Inhalt der modernen Kunst*.³ To describe the experience of *Stimmung*, Riegl makes his famous analogy with a meditative beholder looking at a landscape from a mountaintop. *Stimmung* for Riegl is not exclusively connected to this particular experience: the experience of the artwork is to fulfil man's »Stimmungsbedürfnis«. But the contemplation of nature remains very present throughout his text. However, it is possible to distil

from Riegl's mountaintop analogy the ingredients he identifies for *Stimmung*, and to transpose them to paintings not depicting a landscape. It then quickly becomes clear that Riegl's formulations are very close to preoccupations of Symbolist painters, and more particularly to those of the Nabis, the group of painters of which Vuillard was a member in the 1890s.⁴

On the mountaintop, thanks to the elements »Ruhe« and »Fernsicht«, an unusual way of looking at the world becomes possible. The eye takes over all of the other faculties and roams around in the landscape, observing familiar elements from a new angle. It is a purely visual experience, wherein objects and forms melt together into a harmonious whole. This type of visual experience was not unfamiliar to Vuillard, who analyzed it in his personal notes. Vuillard asks himself why a large space in the countryside is captivating. His answer is that the immensity of the view that the eye has to explore predisposes the viewer to see the overall relationships, as details are lost. This »simplicity« of large lines and masses, producing the effect of seeing simply and only forms before one's eyes, is not a privilege of the infinitely large view: »c'est pourtant le même phénomène qui se passe dans une chambre devant un objet dont on sent la forme et la couleur.«⁵ »Fernsicht«, therefore, is not a necessary condition for this kind of out-of-the-ordinary visual experience. However, in the closed space of a room, we don't have the habit of seeing »les grands rapports« before the smaller details, and so, according to Vuillard, »dans ce cas il faut une prédisposition«.⁶ That is: a mental predisposition in the viewer, who is, firstly, the artist.

Following the example of Gauguin, the pictorial technique used by the Nabis to achieve this »simplification« of lines, colours and masses in painting was *synthétisme*. The choice of word is interesting. As Filiz Eda Burhan has shown, the philosophical method of synthesis – to unite a thesis and an antithesis into a synthetic solution – was a cherished model of thinking in the education system of the French *lycées* in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁷ Vuillard was educated at the important Parisian Lycée Condorcet, as were most of his fellow Nabis. In addition to a thorough philosophical education, the members of the Nabi brotherhood regularly discussed philosophical, psychological and esoteric theories.

To synthesize two disparate elements means to create, or to perceive, a new unity, where before there was none. Like the German Romantics,⁸ the Symbolists had a predilection for words with the originally Greek prefix »syn-«, a prefix used in ancient Greek to express a co-existence or convergence, and that, in Homer, referred to the common origin of both man and things.⁹ The choice for the notion »symbol« itself is equally significant. The Greek verb *sym-ballein* has several nuances in its general meaning, »to bring together«, almost all of which refer to the accidental or even violent nature of bringing together two disparate elements (»to throw together«, »to make collide«, »to oppose«, »to compare«, »to accidentally meet«).¹⁰ There is something forced and unnatural in the action of *sym-ballein*, except perhaps when it refers to the mixing of two or more elements. The Greek origin of the word »symbol«, as a

forced unison of elements that are separated, fits well with the Symbolist programme as described by Jean Clair: the attempt to regain a lost unity.¹¹ Human beings, in the eyes of the Symbolists, had become divided from their surrounding world, as knowledge became further and further fragmented by the progress of science. Symbolism, in the words of Jean Clair, was »the last movement to provide a general explanation of man's position in the natural world«.¹²

In Symbolist theories, the unity between man and nature was often phrased in terms of a communication of the individual soul of man with the soul of things, or even with an all-pervading world soul. This opening up to the world soul is also the next important element in Riegl's description of *Stimmung*; it is even the goal and accomplishment of *Stimmung*. The beholder on the mountaintop forgets about daily pressures and becomes aware that »eine Weltseele alle Dingen durchzieht und sie zu vollkommenem Einklange vereinigt«. What Riegl calls *Stimmung* is the »Ahnung der Ordnung und Gesetzlichkeit über dem Chaos, der Harmonie über den Dissonanzen, der Ruhe über den Bewegungen«.¹³ The Rieglian experience of *Stimmung* is a privileged moment, outside the linear time of daily life, wherein a beholder is confronted with the higher truth governing his surroundings, with an underlying unity and order in the world; a moment of awareness (Ahnung) of harmony in nature. This privileged moment of higher awareness could be rephrased as a moment of communication with the infinite: a key theme for most of the Symbolist artists.

The »predisposition« that Vuillard deemed necessary for the painter to perceive objects in a room in a synthetic manner is elsewhere in his notes referred to as »état de grâce«.¹⁴ This state of grace is described as a necessary condition for the artist to create a harmonious artwork. Theologically – and Vuillard was a practising Catholic – the state of grace is the state of man before the fall of Adam and Eve and the expulsion from Paradise: the state wherein the human being still resembled God.¹⁵ It is only in a state of restored identity with God that the artist can comprehend the universal harmony of the world, and that he can express it properly in his artworks. The artist-creator in a state of grace is *like* the divine Creator, who created the world in his eternal wisdom, of course also in a state of grace. The only direct prayer that Vuillard wrote down in his *carnet* testifies of his longing for a restoration of this original state of man:

Dieu, formule de toute harmonie, de toute intelligence qui nous pénètre partout, détachez-moi, soutenez-moi dans mon détachement des idées basses et obscures, à chaque instant manifestez-vous à ma pauvre intelligence si faible! La prière peut seule me sauver. J'entrevois cette paix: plus d'orgueil humain, fierté seule légitime de participer à l'universelle harmonie, d'être fils de Dieu!!¹⁶

In Vuillard's words, it is impossible for an artist »in a state of sin« to express anything other than an image of chaos: »Qu'arrive-t-il dans l'état de péché. On ne voit pas. On veut par conséquent on ne sait quoi. On veut avoir conscience d'un état de non-

conscience. Le Travail est impossible et la production d'un pareil état ne pourra être idéaliste mais ne fera que représenter cet état de non-conscience.¹⁷ To be able to depict the harmony and unity of a transcendent truth – God, or, in a neo-Platonic way of thinking, the Idea – it is necessary to exit the chaotic vision that accompanies the state of sin: »L'idée est une, simple, entière. Elle s'exprime dans un état de grâce.«¹⁸ Interestingly, the state of grace, a full consciousness of the entire creation, is also a necessary condition to express the state of sin in art: »Verlaine écrivant *Sagesse*: en état de grâce, ayant la contemplation de l'Idée, il peint l'état de péché et parce que les idées sont conscientes, il les exprime et peut les exprimer.«¹⁹

Musical harmony in painting

»Universal harmony« is a term quoted by several of the Nabis, and sought after in art by all of them.²⁰ Paul Sérusier and Maurice Denis, the founders of the Nabi brotherhood and its most gifted theorists, each independently tried to formulate a »science« of harmony in painting, at various points in their careers. Where Sérusier developed a geometrical approach to harmony in painting, Denis expressed his belief in mathematics but not in numbers or geometry.²¹ Vuillard too mentions the »science of harmony« in his *carnets*, already from an early stage in his career, for example when he writes: »Le mot harmonie veut dire seulement science, connaissance des rapports des couleurs.«²² This »science« of harmony would sometimes be mentioned by both Nabi painters and critics as an eminently French characteristic in painting.²³

But even if harmony is a »science« of colours and tones, the vocabulary Vuillard develops to discuss this science is distinctly musical. He speaks of »accords de tons« and discusses the painting of Corot as a »symphony« in grey.²⁴ In January 1894, Vuillard paraphrased in his *carnets* a paragraph from Delacroix's *Journal*, on the musicality of painting:

L'impression qu'on reçoit, pour les beaux arts n'a pas le moindre rapport avec le plaisir que fait éprouver une imitation quelconque. Qui dit un art dit une poésie.

Il n'y a pas d'art sans un but poétique. Il y a un genre d'émotion qui est tout particulière à la peinture. Il y a une impression qui résulte de tel arrangement de couleurs, de lumières, d'ombres etc. C'est ce qu'on appellerait la musique de la peinture.²⁵

The analogy with music, essentially a non-objective art, permits painting to develop in the direction of abstraction. This abstraction does not yet lead to non-objectivity in painting; merely, the emphasis shifts from the representation of objects to the rendering of the relationships between them, in colour, tone, line and form. As Vuil-

lard notes: »Concevons bien un tableau comme un ensemble d'accords, s'éloignant définitivement d'idée naturaliste.«²⁶

If we were to speak of a specific »science of harmony« in Vuillard's painting, it would be a harmony patterned on music. Of all the Nabi painters, it is Vuillard's work that is most often described in musical terms.²⁷ Moreover, Vuillard seems to have been a great lover of music. In an engraving from 1897 by Félix Vallotton, entitled *The Symphony*, a group of men is depicted listening to music performed by a woman behind a piano. The pianist is Misia Natanson, student of Franz Liszt, wife of the editor of *La Revue blanche*, Thadée Natanson, and Vuillard's muse in the 1890s. The men listening to her playing are grouped in a pyramid, at the top of which Vuillard is standing upright, listening with his eyes closed. In this position, it is Vuillard who seems to be most ardently »tuned in« to the music. Vuillard was very serious about music, as becomes clear from the condemnation of his friend Kerr-Xavier Roussel's passion for music: »J'ai peur que le désir de Kerr vers la musique ne soit que la recherche d'un plaisir nouveau, d'une excitation nouvelle.«²⁸ For Vuillard, music rather had a healing effect, and it helped him to achieve a state of quiet meditation and contemplation, perhaps also of communication with world harmony. Art is a matter of »sanity«, not at all of fleeting sensual pleasure, which is to be rejected: »Alors Kerr pensant à la musique qui le fera vivre un moment s'emporte et parle de rêve de bonheur mot excessif et dangereux.«²⁹

Notwithstanding his love of music, during the first half of the 1890s Vuillard very rarely depicted scenes of listening to or performing music – even if this was a frequent theme for other Symbolist painters of interiors.³⁰ Unfortunately, when he did depict one scene of music making, he did not comment on it in his *carnets*. Among the panels Vuillard executed for the library of the Parisian cardiologist Dr. Henri Vaquez, there is one panel now entitled *Music* (fig. 2), showing an interior with a woman behind a grand piano and four other women, three listening in a leisurely manner and one occupied with sewing. The ensemble consists of four panels, all of the same height (212 cm), depicting women and one man in an interior space, engaged in leisure activities. The panels were not named by Vuillard, and received their current titles in 1914 from the writer Achille Segard, who wrote about Vuillard's decorative ensembles in his book *Peintres d'Aujourd'hui. Les Décorateurs*.³¹



1 Félix Vallotton, *Symphony*, engraving



2 Édouard Vuillard, *Figures in an Interior: Music*, 1896, distemper on canvas, 212 x 154 cm, Paris, Musée du Petit Palais



3 Édouard Vuillard, *Figures in an Interior: Work*, 1896, distemper on canvas, 212 x 77.3 cm, Paris, Musée du Petit Palais



4 Édouard Vuillard, *Figures in an Interior: Choosing a Book*, 1896, distemper on canvas, 212 x 77 cm, Paris, Musée du Petit Palais



5 Édouard Vuillard, *Figures in an Interior: Intimacy*, 1896, distemper on canvas, 212.5 x 154.5 cm, Paris, Musée du Petit Palais

Two of the four *Vaquez panels* are narrow. These two panels, entitled *Work* (fig. 3) and *Choosing a Book* (fig. 4) depict the painted room almost from the same viewpoint, and are connected by a continuation of horizontal lines in a Persian rug on the floor, in bookshelves in front of a wall hung with flowered wallpaper, and in wooden beams in the ceiling of the room. Two wider panels are the aforementioned *Music* and a panel entitled *Intimacy* (fig. 5). These panels form a continuation in the same way as the narrow panels: the lines and patterns from the depicted interior decoration continue throughout the two panels – which nevertheless present different scenes. Flowers abound: on the wallpaper, in fabrics of dresses, carpets, cushions and items to be mended, and in vases. The panels are painted with distemper, creating a matted effect. The richly decorated interior in the paintings provides a large variation of patterns, a richness that mimetically justifies the overall pattern covering the surface of the panels. This overall surface pattern is the main feature of the panels, and, as Segard comments, the subject of the paintings disappears.³² More important in these panels is the harmony of colours, as well as the rhythmic surface pattern based on an «accord de tons». The paintings are built up in different shades of pink, fuchsia, beige, green, brown, and grey, with a few blue notes. The subdued harmonious ensemble created by the accordance of palette and patterns mirrors the calm and meditative *état d'âme* that for Vuillard was attached to musical harmony. This contemplative predisposition, which opens up the possibility for the individual soul to temporarily »tune in« to the world soul, could be translated as *Stimmung*. And so, as the subject of the paintings disappears, it makes room for *Stimmung* to take its place.

Interior decoration

With Whistler, Vuillard would have been of the opinion »that the painter also makes of the wall upon which his work is hung, the room containing it, the whole house, a Harmony, a Symphony, an Arrangement, as perfect as the picture or print which became a part of it«.³³ Indeed, Vuillard always adapted his large decorative paintings to the rooms for which they were destined. Not only did he choose for the *Vaquez* library a palette in tone with *Vaquez's* interior decoration, but also the specifics of the library were taken into account in the execution of the panels. The distribution of colours on the paintings is adapted to the position of the windows in the library. A different ground colour was used for the panels: blue-green for the panels near the windows, ochre for the panels further away from the direct source of light. This made sure that in *Vaquez's* interior, the paintings would all appear of the same tonality.³⁴

For a painter with a strong predilection for interior scenes, it is perhaps only a logical step to interior decoration, especially in a time where the direction of modern art was thought to be decorative, and in a group of painters who wanted to do away with

easel painting.³⁵ In the case of Vuillard, even critics predicted his future to lie in large-scale decorative painting. As for example André Mellerio in 1896: »Dans des œuvres agrandies, M. Vuillard [...] donnera plus d'ampleur à ses belles qualités de fraîcheur, d'harmonie et de sentiment.«³⁶

From the beginning of their careers, the Nabis included in their activities the design of objects destined for interiors, such as folding screens, fans, and decorative panels. Furthermore, Vuillard was very actively involved in design for the theatre, creating programmes and stage sets for the Symbolist Théâtre d'Art (1890–91), and for the Symbolist Théâtre de l'Œuvre, which he even co-founded in 1893 with the actor-director Aurélien Lugné-Poe and the critic Camille Mauclair.³⁷ In 1893, Vuillard had his first and perhaps only opportunity to collaborate in the interior decoration of an entire apartment, when he assisted Misia Natanson with the choice of fabrics for the Natansons' Paris apartment.³⁸ Gloria Groom has described this apartment in her exhibition catalogue on the Nabis' decorative works as unconventional for the time, lacking a distinction between traditionally feminine and masculine spaces.³⁹ Misia Natanson claimed to have been inspired by the interior designs of Henry van de Velde, and indeed photographs show the accordance of fabrics and wallpaper throughout the apartment. Vuillard was not only the Natansons' »decorator«; he also represented their interior in several of his paintings. Thadée Natanson, chief editor of *La Revue blanche*, in addition to being a good friend, was an important buyer and sponsor of Vuillard's work.

In 1895, Vuillard was invited by the merchant Siegfried Bing to decorate an antechamber for the opening exhibition of La Maison de l'Art Nouveau in Paris.⁴⁰ The five panels that Vuillard painted for this exhibition are now known as *The Album* (fig. 6), but were referred to in Vuillard's carnets as »panneaux de Thadée«.⁴¹ The fact that the paintings were originally intended for the Bing exhibition, and were only later hung in the Natansons' apartment, has led Annette Leduc Beaulieu and Brooks Beaulieu to conclude that Thadée Natanson was Vuillard's sponsor for the exhibition.⁴² Leduc Beaulieu and Beaulieu have made a careful and convincing reconstruction of the way

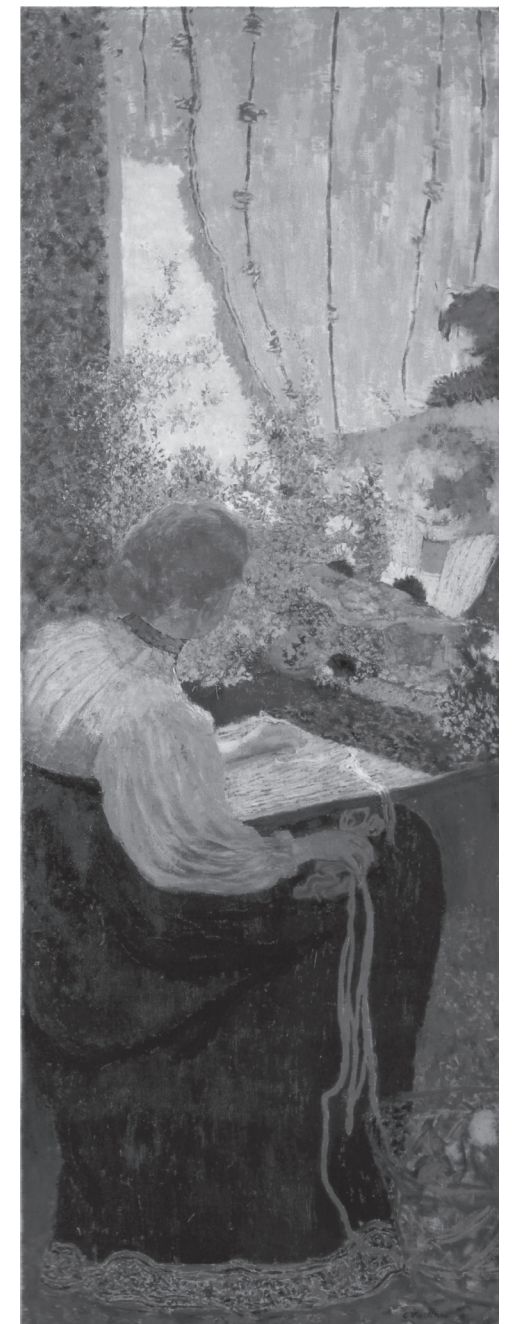


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6 Édouard Vuillard, *Album*, 1895, oil on canvas, 67.9 x 204.5 cm, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

the panels were hung in the exhibition.⁴³ As with the Vaquez ensemble, executed some eight months after the panels for the Bing exhibition, Vuillard adapted his paintings to the room they were destined for – even if he must have been fully aware that the paintings would only be hung there during the time of the exhibition. Leduc Beaulieu and Beaulieu have shown that the sizes and shapes of the five panels correspond exactly to the proportions of the walls of the small antechamber in Bing's store. This allows for a reconstruction of the order in which the paintings were hung. The »installation«, because of the small size of the room, must have worked as a total environment to the beholder. The windows of the antechamber were blacked out for the exhibition, and the only light in the room came from a chandelier. The outside world being shut out from the room, »nature« was reconstructed in the paintings, which had as their light source a *painted* window in the only panel with standing format, *The Embroidery* (fig. 7). This panel depicts three women in an interior, one sitting in the foreground with her back turned to the spectator, working on an embroidery; one behind a table, perhaps reading or mending something; and one to the back, opening a curtain and thereby »letting in the light« for the other panels. *The Embroidery*, figuratively the most directly recognizable painting of the ensemble, works as an »overture« to the installation, and not only thanks to the opening of the curtain. Also, a strain of red thread, meandering serpentine-like down the lap of the woman in the foreground of the painting, seems to announce the distinctive feature of the other panels: the arabesque.

The five oil paintings of *The Album*, depicting women in an interior, form a harmonious



7 Édouard Vuillard, *Album: Embroidery*, 1895, oil on canvas, 177.7 x 65.6 cm, New York, The Museum of Modern Art

whole in colours and shapes. As with the Vaquez panels, painterly means take precedence over the subject, and the »accord de tons« is here made up of stone-like and rosy hues of red, whites, greys, brown and black tones, and here and there a bright red or blue accent. The subject disappears even more than in the *Vaquez Panels*, as figures, objects and ground merge in the mixture of tones and shapes, and in the overall brushwork. The composition and colour distribution create a play of undulating lines on the picture surface: arabesques. The arabesque, a cherished line in Art Nouveau because of its expression of »vitality«, for the Nabis also expressed the harmony of music.⁴⁴

It is possible then to see the complexification of direct recognition of subject matter in the *Album* panels not as an expression of a chaotic world vision wherein no distinction can be made between objects and human beings, but rather as an expression of the *état d'âme* of a painter »in a state of grace«. In this state, the painter consciously renders his all-encompassing comprehension of the human being and his surroundings, perceived as united by something like a world soul, or world harmony. It is the privileged vision of the painter on the world – a vision that synthesizes objects and human beings and for which the painter needs to have a specific predisposition – that is at the basis of these panels. Or, as Segard phrases it: »M. Vuillard a exprimé le plaisir qu'il éprouvait en constatant de quoi était fait son plaisir visuel, et il s'est amusé à en reconstituer sur sa toile tous les éléments.«⁴⁵ This visual pleasure that Segard seems to quote after Vuillard is not to be understood as simple pleasure as such. In his *car-nets*, Vuillard struggles to decide what place should be attributed to visual pleasure in art, specifically in relationship to the spirit, soul, or Idea in a neo-Platonic sense. In the end however, truth for Vuillard, as for Maurice Denis, is not found only in the Idea. Sensations prevail in painting, as they are the agents of communication between the world and the soul. The soul and the senses are not separated, and pleasure in painting is a direct expression of the soul: »Ce plaisir décoratif, ces harmonies sont les signes qui s'imposent, on ne doit pas y trouver un plaisir uniquement quel que chose séparé de l'Idée c'est à dire une affection des sens. Seulement ce sont ces sens qui communiquent l'idée dans sa vérité et sa beauté.«⁴⁶

The process of painting the pleasure of painting itself and showing the beholder an unusual, painterly way of looking at the world (a way of looking that, as has been argued above, privileges relationships over objects and requires a specific predisposition), is not only constituted by the prominence of arabesques in the *Album* panels. Another effect in the panels confusing figure and ground, or blurring the demarcations between objects and figures, is that of *papillotage*, which for Vuillard has been translated as »flickering décor«.⁴⁷ *Papillotage* is a technique or effect in painting, where a fragmentation into dots or tiny patches of paint causes a flickering impression for the eyes, which are in turn forced to make small rapid movements between the fragments and the whole of a painting. The word *papillotage* was first applied in painting for French Rococo, a style that also made extensive use of the arabesque.⁴⁸ Vuillard

mentions this effect in his *car-nets*, in his preliminary notes for the decorative panels *Jardin Public* in 1894: »décor papillotant de feuilles très ornées.«⁴⁹ *Papillotage* in the *Album* panels takes place in the colour distribution across the surface of the paintings, and forces the eye of the beholder to rapid movements. The attention of the spectator is therefore fragmented, and the manipulation of perception leads to a cognitive process: the beholder moves to-and-fro between contemplation of what is painted, and awareness of the fact that he or she is looking at a painting. *Papillotage* disrupts illusion, and creates awareness both of the observing self and of perception. This alienating effect provoked by arabesques and *papillotage* opens up the eyes and mind of the contemplator to the out-of-the-ordinary vision of the world that the painter presents in these panels.

Daily life for the Nabis took place in Paris interiors. Communication with the infinite, according to French Symbolists, could as well take place in everyday surroundings.⁵⁰ The Swiss philosopher Henri-Frédéric Amiel had stated that »un paysage quelconque est un état de l'âme«, and so emphasized the Romantic idea of a connection between man and nature.⁵¹ Maurice Denis's dictum that in Symbolist painting »les phénomènes signifient des états d'âme«⁵² not only extended this connection beyond the landscape to all phenomena in nature; but also, in Denis' formulation, tangible phenomena are not equal to, but *signify* states of soul. This is in line with Denis' attachment to the perceptible world. Vuillard shared Denis' conviction that real forms make manifest the existence of the invisible.⁵³ This is a reversal of neo-Platonic thought, which holds that it is the metaphysical Idea that gives form to nature.

An accordance of the animate and the inanimate was perceived by Vuillard in the interior of a room as well as, or even more than, in nature. His interior paintings, expressing this worldview, in the words of André Mellerio opened up for the soul, and not for the eye, »des horizons infinis dans le cercle restreint d'intérieur«.⁵⁴

Stimmung would be a very accurate word to describe both the mood that Vuillard deemed necessary to create a true work of art, and the subject of his decorative paintings. In addition, Vuillard's paintings, and especially his ensembles destined for interior decoration, are producers, or rather agents of *Stimmung*. Even if there was no French equivalent for *Stimmung*, it is clear that this notion covers a problem that occupied French Symbolist painters at the turn of the nineteenth century, and Vuillard was no exception. It was also a problem that kept bothering critics, who went out of their way to describe the effect of the paintings of Vuillard and other Symbolist painters in terms circumscribing all of the meanings of the word *Stimmung*.⁵⁵ Two of these descriptions in particular are well worth mentioning here. The first comes from the art critic G.-Albert Aurier, an early and ardent defender of the »new« art of Symbolism in painting. For Aurier, the artwork was not only thought to convey an *état d'âme*; in line with the Symbolist idea that objects have a soul, it was also thought to have a soul: »[...] l'œuvre d'art complète est donc un être nouveau, on peut dire absolument vivant, puisqu'il a pour l'animer une âme, qui est même la synthèse de deux

âmes, l'âme de l'artiste et l'âme de la nature». ⁵⁶ Aurier further describes how he thinks the artwork communicates emotions and ideas to the beholder in terms of a sympathetic, even loving communication between two souls. In this process, according to Aurier, the human soul is passive and receives from the active soul of the artwork a sympathetic »influx« and »radiation«. ⁵⁷

An approximation of *Stimmung* as a state of soul embracing subject and object, which corresponds more to Vuillard's own concept, is found in Achille Segard's discussion of the effect emanating from Vuillard's decorative paintings, written in 1914. Segard here pulls *Stimmung* into the twentieth century, describing it in terms connected to recent scientific discoveries: »Il émane de ces peintures des ondes qui ne peuvent ébranler que des organismes nerveux très sensibles mais qui s'inscrivent cependant sur certaines sensibilités comme s'inscrivent à travers l'espace sur des enregistreurs ultra-sensibles les ondes immatérielles qui se propagent à travers l'espace.« ⁵⁸ Be it transferred through radiation or immaterial waves, it seems clear that *Stimmung* is an appropriate notion to describe the content of Vuillard's decorative paintings from the turn of the nineteenth century.

1 Cf. Reinhold Heller, »Concerning Symbolism and the Structure of Surface«, *Art Journal* 45, 1985, no. 2, pp. 146–153.

2 I agree with Kerstin Thomas, who states that »[...] der Stimmungsbegriff das Potential birgt, emotionale Bildstrategien auch jenseits der Landschaftsmalerei verständlich zu machen [...]«. Kerstin Thomas, »Stimmung in der Malerei. Zu einigen Bildern Georges Seurats«, in *Pathos, Affekt, Gefühl. Die Emotionen in den Künsten*, ed. by Klaus Herding and Bernhard Stumpfhaus, Berlin and New York 2004, pp. 448–466, here p. 449.

3 Alois Riegl, »Die Stimmung als Inhalt der modernen Kunst« [1899], in *id.*, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, ed. by Karl M. Swoboda, Augsburg and Vienna 1929, pp. 28–39.

4 Riegl's text of course was published at a moment when Symbolism was a key force in art. Symbolism, by 1899, had spread all over Europe. In France, it had perhaps already passed its peak. Naturalism, which in the German-speaking countries did not boast of a long literary tradition as in France, continued to co-exist with Symbolism much longer in Germany and Austria than in France – despite attacks by critics such as Julius Meier-Graefe or Hermann Bahr (who had published his influential text »Die Überwindung des Naturalismus« already in 1891). This co-existence of Symbolism and Naturalism in the German-speaking countries could be an explanation of the somewhat strange mixture of Symbolist and Naturalist ideas in Riegl's text.

5 Édouard Vuillard, notebook entry 31 August 1890. Vuillard's notes from the first half of the 1890s are transcribed in Françoise Alexandre, *Édouard Vuillard. Carnets intimes. Édition critique*, typescript, Diss. Université de Paris VIII, 1998, here p. 201.

6 Édouard Vuillard, notebook entry 31 August 1890, in Alexandre 1998 (see note 5), p. 201.

7 Filiz Eda Burhan, *Vision and Visionaries: Nineteenth Century Psychological Theory. The Occult Sciences and the Formation of the Symbolist Aesthetic in France*, typescript, Diss. Princeton University, 1979, p. 45.

8 Leo Spitzer quotes at least nine different terms based on »das romantische Syn«, referring to a study by Paul Kluckhohn. Leo Spitzer, *Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony. Prolegomena to an Interpretation of the Word »Stimmung«* [1944–1945], ed. by Anna Granville Hatcher, Baltimore 1963, p. 152, note 20.

9 Art. »syn«, in *Wolters Woordenboek Grieks Nederlands*, Groningen 1969, pp. 687–688.

10 Art. »sym-ballein«, *ibid.*, pp. 681–682.

11 Cf. Jean Clair, »Lost Paradise«, in *Lost Paradise: Symbolist Europe*, exh. cat. Montreal, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1995, ed. by Pierre Théberge and Jean Clair, Montreal 1995, pp. 17–22.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

13 Riegl 1899/1929 (see note 3), p. 29.

14 The paragraph in Vuillard's *carnets* that describes this state dates from September 1891. Alexandre 1998 (see note 5), p. 320.

15 Genesis I, 26: »And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.« What I have called »resemblance« is here »likeness«. In the theories of Thomas Aquinas and St Augustine, very likely known to Vuillard, man's essential interior structure is made in the image of God. Therefore, the universal humanity has its foundation in God and links the human being to his or her creator. The »resemblance« to God however is historically lost with the expulsion from paradise. But the state of grace is restored in Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God, and this filial likeness restores man to his original identity with God. In a state of sin, the image of God in the human being is not clearly perceived, it is confused, and the world appears as chaotic. For a longer discussion of the relationship of the image and the state of grace, see the chapter »A l'image et à la ressemblance de Dieu«, in: Laurent Lavaud, *L'image*, Paris 1999, pp. 36–38.

16 Édouard Vuillard, notebook entry 24 October 1890, in Alexandre 1998 (see note 5), p. 286.

17 Édouard Vuillard, notebook entry September 1891, in Alexandre 1998 (see note 5), p. 321.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 322.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 320. The reference to *Sagesse* by Paul Verlaine could be a hint that Vuillard's ideas on the state of grace were influenced by Maurice Denis, who in 1889 had illustrated Verlaine's *Sagesse*. The Nabis considered their book illustrations as »accompagnements de lignes expressives«, »sans exacte correspondance du sujet avec l'écriture«. Cf. Maurice Denis, »Définition du néo-traditionnisme«, *Art et critique* 65 and 66, 1890; reprinted in Maurice Denis, *Le Ciel et l'Arcadie*, ed. by Jean-Paul Bouillon, Paris 1993, pp. 5–21, here p. 18.

20 I leave aside here a comparison of the Nabi ideas of world harmony with the Pythagorean harmony of spheres. For an exploration of the sources of the notion *Stimmung* in this particular idea of world harmony, cf. Spitzer 1944–45/1963 (see note 8).

21 Cf. Paul Sérusier, *ABC de la peinture, suivi de fragments de lettres et propos sur l'histoire, la théorie et la technique artistiques* [1921], La Rochelle 1995; Maurice Denis, letter to Paul Sérusier [1896], in Maurice Denis, *Théories, 1890–1910, Du symbolisme et de Gauguin vers un nouvel ordre classique*, Paris 1920, p. 86.

22 Édouard Vuillard, notebook entry 30 October 1890, in Alexandre 1998 (see note 5), p. 288.

23 As for example in a letter from the Danish Nabi painter Mogens Ballin to Édouard Vuillard, sent from Denmark, dated 16 November 1904 and conserved in the Salomon Archives in Paris.

24 Édouard Vuillard, notebook entry 31 August 1890, in Alexandre 1998 (see note 5), pp. 201–202.

25 *Ibid.*, January 1894 (exact date not specified). Quoted after: *Édouard Vuillard*, exh. cat. Washington, National Gallery of Art, 2003, ed. by Guy Cogeval, New Haven/Conn. 2003, book cover. The journal of Eugène Delacroix had been published in France for the first time in 1893. A corresponding paragraph was formulated by Delacroix in reaction to an article by a certain Peisse, on 20 May 1853: «[...] si, à une composition déjà intéressante par le choix du sujet, vous ajoutez une disposition de lignes qui augmente l'impression, un clair-obscur saisissant pour l'imagination, une couleur adaptée aux caractères, vous avez résolu un problème plus difficile, et, encore une fois, vous êtes supérieur: c'est l'harmonie et ses combinaisons adaptées à un chant unique. Il [Peisse] appelle *musicale* cette tendance dont il parle; il la prend en mauvaise part, et moi, je la trouve aussi louable que tout autre.» Eugène Delacroix, *Journal d'Eugène Delacroix*, ed. by André Joubin, 3 vols, Paris 1932, vol. 2, 1853–56, pp. 55–56.

26 Édouard Vuillard, notebook entry 31 August 1890, in Alexandre 1998 (see note 5), p. 201.

27 Vuillard's painting has been compared with the music of Debussy. Vuillard's arabesques were still thought to express emotions. As Achille Segard writes, for example: «[...] la peinture de M. Vuillard est plus humaine que ne l'est la musique de M. Debussy. [...] sa peinture garde avec la réalité des liens beaucoup plus étroits que n'en garde la musique de M. Debussy.» Achille Segard, *Peintres d'aujourd'hui. Les décorateurs*, 2 vols [n. d.], Paris 1914, vol. 2: *Henri Martin, Aman-Jean, Maurice Denis, Édouard Vuillard*, p. 288.

28 Édouard Vuillard, notebook entry September 1891, in Alexandre 1998 (see note 5) p. 319.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 320. In *The Republic*, the only philosophical text that is mentioned several times in Vuillard's *carnets*, Plato states that the body, the individual soul and the *polis* are all three based on order and temperance. The body is attuned to the harmony in man's soul, «if he has true music in him». Cf. Spitzer 1944–45/1963 (see note 8), p. 17.

30 Cf. Anne Leonard, «Picturing Listening in the Late Nineteenth Century», in *Art Bulletin* 89, 2007, no. 2, pp. 266–286.

31 Segard 1914 (see note 27). Vuillard never gave titles for his paintings. Subsequently, they acquired most often narrative titles in the course of history.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 272.

33 Quoted from Whistler's journal in Joseph Masheck, «The Carpet Paradigm: Critical Prolegomena to a Theory of Flatness», in *Arts Magazine* 51, 1976, no. 1, pp. 82–109, here p. 82.

34 Cf. Kimberley Jones's description of the panels, in exh. cat. Washington 2003 (see note 25), pp. 195–197, cat. no. 137–140 («*The Vaquez Panels: Figures in an Interior*»).

35 As expressed in the often quoted paragraph from the memoirs of the Nabi painter Jan Verkade: «Vers le début de 1890, un cri de guerre fut lancé d'un atelier à l'autre: Plus de

tableau de cheval! À bas les meubles inutiles! La peinture ne doit pas usurper une liberté qui l'isole des autres arts. Le travail du peintre commence où l'architecture considère le sien comme terminé. Le mur doit rester surface, ne doit pas être percé pour la représentation d'horizons infinis. Il n'y a pas de tableaux, il n'y a que des décorations [...]». Dom Wilibrord [Jan] Verkade, *Le tourment de Dieu, étapes d'un moine peintre*, Paris 1926, p. 94.

36 André Mellerio, *Le mouvement idéaliste en peinture*, Paris 1896, p. 49.

37 For a more elaborate discussion of Vuillard's work for the theatre, see, among others: *Le Théâtre de l'Œuvre 1893–1900. Naissance du théâtre moderne*, exh. cat. Paris, Musée d'Orsay, 2005, Paris 2005; *Artists and the Avant-Garde Theater in Paris, 1887–1900*, exh. cat. Washington, National Gallery of Art, 1998, ed. by Patricia Eckert-Boyer, Washington 1998. The standard work on the Théâtre de l'Œuvre is Jacques Robichez, *Le Symbolisme au théâtre. Lugné-Poe et les débuts de l'Œuvre*, Paris 1957.

38 A short letter of Misia Nantanson to Vuillard announces Vuillard's involvement. The letter is dated 22 November 1893 and is conserved in the Salomon Archives: «Voulez-vous être assez gentil pour venir demain matin le plus tôt possible c-a-d 9 h ½ pour aller nous promener au Bon Marché où je viens de voir un tas de jolies étoffes pour la chambre à coucher et sur lesquelles je serais bien contente d'avoir votre avis.» Also in the Salomon Archives are two letters from Thadée Natanson to Vuillard, written around the time of after Misia Natanson's letter. In the first, Thadée Natanson addresses Vuillard as «mon cher décorateur»; in the second, Vuillard is asked to negotiate with a merchant of fabrics.

39 Cf. *Beyond the Easel: Decorative Painting by Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis and Roussel, 1890–1930*, exh. cat. Chicago, The Art Institute, 2001, ed. by Gloria Groom, Chicago 2001, pp. 128–131.

40 Annette Leduc Beaulieu and Brooks Beaulieu, «The Thadée Natanson Panels: A Vuillard Decoration for S. Bing's Maison de l'Art Nouveau», in *Nineteenth Century Art Worldwide*, Fall 2002, URL: www.19thc-artworldwide.org/autumn_02/articles/beau_print.html [last access 17 June 2009].

41 Vuillard has added a short chronology of the 1890s to his *carnets*. The date of the entry itself is not mentioned. However, as the chronology ends in 1901, it must have been added in or after 1901. For 1895, the chronology reads «panneaux de Thadée»: Édouard Vuillard, notebook entry, in Alexandre 1998 (see note 5), p. 421.

42 Leduc Beaulieu/Beaulieu 2002 (see note 40), p. 2 and p. 7.

43 *Ibid.*, pp. 6–8. The following paragraph is based on these pages.

44 According to Jean-Paul Bouillon, this was Maurice Denis' interpretation of the arabesque. Cf. Jean-Paul Bouil-

lon, *Arabesques*, in exh. cat. Montreal 1995 (see note 11), pp. 376–384. The arabesque for the Nabis was what G.-Albert Aurier had named a «directly signifying means» in art. Cf. G.-Albert Aurier, «Le Symbolisme en peinture: Paul Gauguin», in *Mercury de France* 2, 1891, no. 15, pp. 155–165, here p. 162.

45 Segard 1914 (see note 27), p. 270.

46 Édouard Vuillard, notebook entry September 1891, in Alexandre 1998 (see note 5), p. 320.

47 Cf. Dario Gamboni, *Vuillard and Ambiguity*, in exh. cat. Washington 2003 (see note 25), pp. 405–422, here p. 411. Gamboni discusses in this article how visual ambiguity in Vuillard's late nineteenth-century paintings is part of a larger turn-of-the-century cultural trend.

48 Cf. Marian Hobson, «Illusion and the Rococo: The Idea of Papillotage», in *id.*, *The Object of Art. The Theory of Illusion in Eighteenth-Century France*, Cambridge 1982, pp. 47–61.

49 Édouard Vuillard, notebook entry 10 September 1894, in Alexandre 1998 (see note 5), p. 372.

50 Maurice Maeterlinck for example, whose writings for the theatre Vuillard knew intimately through his work for the Théâtre d'Art and the Théâtre de l'Œuvre, thought that this communication took place in the interior, «in silence and immobility». Cf. Maurice Maeterlinck, «Le Tragique quotidien» [1894], in *id.*, *Introduction à une psychologie des songes et autres écrits, 1886–1896*, Brussels 1985, pp. 96–102.

51 Henri-Frédéric Amiel, journal entry, 31 October 1852, in *id.*, *Journal intime* [1883], ed. by Bernard Gagnebin and Philippe M. Monnier, 12 vols, Lausanne 1976–94, vol. 2: janvier 1852–mars 1865, Lausanne 1978, pp. 295–296.

52 Maurice Denis, «Notes sur la peinture religieuse», in *L'Art et la vie* 54, 1896, pp. 644–654. Reprinted in *Maurice Denis, Le Ciel et l'Arcadie*, ed. by Jean-Paul Bouillon, Paris 1993, pp. 32–48, here p. 37: «Il y avait donc étroite correspondance entre des formes et des émotions! Les phénomènes signifient des états d'âme, et c'est le Symbolisme.»

53 See Jean-Paul Bouillon, «Le rêve deviendra le réel», in *id.*, *Maurice Denis*, Geneva 1993, pp. 38–45.

54 Mellerio 1896 (see note 36), p. 48.

55 As late as in 2003, Guy Cogeval seems to have been faced with this problem in his description of the *Vaquez Panels*: «Disons plutôt que Vuillard introduit une atmosphère, un climat, ce que les Anglais appelleraient *a mood* [...]» In Antoine Salomon and Guy Cogeval, *Vuillard. Le Regard in-nombrable. Catalogue critique des peintures et pastels*, 3 vols, Paris and Milan 2003, vol. 1, p. 438, cat. no. V–97.4: «La Musique».

56 G.-Albert Aurier, «Les Symbolistes», in *Revue Encyclopédique* 2, 1892, no. 32, pp. 474–486, here p. 481.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 481.

58 Segard 1914 (see note 27), p. 278.