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Matisse the *Phytophile*

Fitofil Matisse

ABSTRACT

This article aims to unveil the vegetal and vegetative forces underlying the creative process of Henri Matisse, arguing that *phytophilia* influenced every aspect of his painterly method. Drawing from the artist's statements and broader philosophical studies of plant life, the article posits four key and closely related assertions: firstly, Matisse's approach to his subjects required him to sink into an unconscious, vegetative state of mind, whereby the perceived entities appear to him as flows of vegetal energies rather than fixed entities. This state of mind is achieved through the cumulative act of painting and drawing, through which Matisse's works become budding pictorial assemblages. Secondly, Matissean composition implies a vegetal organization characterized by multifocality, chromatic intensity, and spatial expansibility. Furthermore, owing to their plant-like swelling and dilation, his works have a soothing effect on the beholder and elicit his vegetative soul. Ultimately, in this article, Matisse emerges not just as a painter whose works are inhabited with vegetal shapes, but as a *phytosopher* whose profound knowledge of plant life permeates and informs all the constructive elements of his compositions.

Keywords: Henri Matisse, *phytophilia*, multifocality/expansibility, vegetative soul, arabesque, color

SAŽETAK

Ovaj ogleđ nastoji otkriti vegetalne i vegetativne sile na kojima počiva stvaralački postupak Henrija Matissea, obrazlažući da se *fitofilija* odrazila na svaki aspekt njegova slikarskog postupka. Oslanjajući se na umjetnikove iskaze i šira filozofska promišljanja biljnog života, autor postavlja četiri ključne i tijesno povezane tvrdnje. Kao prvo, Matisseov pristup motivu podrazumijeva poniranje u nesvjesno, vegetativno umno stanje, u kojem se opaženi entiteti pojavljuju kao strujenja vegetalnih energija, a ne kao čvrste stvari. Ovo umno stanje ostvaruje se kroz kumulativni čin slikanja i crtanja, zbog kojeg Matisseova djela postaju pupajući piktoralni sklopovi. Kao drugo, matiseovska kompozicija podrazumijeva vegetalnu organizaciju koju karakteriziraju multifokalnost, kromatski intenzitet i prostorno širenje. Uz to, zahvaljujući svojem biljolikom nadimanju i dilataciji, njegova djela umirujuće djeluju na promatrača i bude njegovu vegetativnu dušu. Konačno, u ovom ogleđu Matisse se ne prikazuje samo kao slikar čija djela nastanjuju vegetalni oblici, već kao *fitozof* čije duboko poznavanje biljnog života prožima i oblikuje sve konstruktivne elemente njegovih kompozicija.

Ključne riječi: Henri Matisse, *fitofilija*, multifokalnost/širenje, vegetativna duša, arabeska, boja

“I explain the mute happiness of green plants.”
Louis Aragon, *Matisse speaks*¹

Magnolia, begonia, philodendron, acanthus, hyacinth, mimosa, cyclamen, iris: vast and diverse was the inventory of plants with which Henri Matisse gained an intimate acquaintance, drawing or painting them, cultivating and observing. Yet this botanical nomenclature is just one external sign of the much more profound and pervasive influence that vegetal beings exerted on the artist. The fundamental qualities of phytogenesis and vegetative life radically informed the creative procedures, compositional innovations, and pictorial power of much of Matisse’s oeuvre.² Imbued into his synthetic chromatic expressionism, this vegetal principle operated as a living sap undertowing all the figurative and representative layers of the picture, molding and conforming them to its own organic flow. Matisse’s ardent love of plants, his attraction to their attributes and structures, is perhaps most literally and conspicuously evident in those compositions where plant forms and vegetal shapes are morphologically recognizable, and yet an inner vegetative principle is discernible throughout his work. Indeed, it seems as if Matisse’s deep affinity with vegetation, along with his almost blind attachment to flowers as faithful “companions who followed him through life,”³ affected him subconsciously so that the very act of painting came to resemble the process of vegetal development. Plant-inspired metaphors of growing, expanding, and blossoming served the painter to describe at once his painting process, his identification with the subject, and the peculiar expansibility of his works, revealing that Matisse’s *phytophilia* was not limited to a visual fascination with the phenomenal opulence of plant forms nor could it be reduced to a veristic transcription of their external traits.

That Matisse felt a constant desire to surround himself with the silent inhabitants of the multifarious plant world, and that for this “great gardener,”⁴ leaves, flowers, stems, and branches were an inexhaustible source of admiration, is not only corroborated by his works depicting floral and vegetal forms, or images of his working and living spaces (figs. 1–2). He also left many remarkable and revealing confessions about the great sympathy he felt for vegetal rhythms, about his close attention to the burgeoning nature of vegetation: “In the spring, when all these shoots sprout from the earth and creep down the garden pathways like a lavishly decorated train, I’m going to watch how the seeds, spindly and pale, suck strength and color from the sun day by day.”⁵ What is of the utmost importance, he stated on another occasion, “is the attention one gives to it, examining the way a leaf is formed, how the leaflets attach to the petiole, the rhythm with which they occur,” for “each plant is its own universe, holding the secret of its formation, a secret that can be understood only through study.”⁶ This deeply intuitive rather than strictly analytical observation is nothing if not a way to transplant the process of vegetal growth, with all its fluidity and spontaneity, into the action of painting and drawing: “But as I take care of them, I learn their types, their weight, their flexibility, and that helps me in my drawings.”⁷ Instead of making a cold inspection of the fixed and exact shapes of plants, Matisse was eager to experience for himself their growth and change, to feel in his spirit their operations of spreading and unfolding. “I now go every morning to say my prayers,” he revealed in a letter, “pencil in hand in front of a pomegranate covered with flowers at different heights and I watch for their transformation, in fact I do this not with a scientific spirit but imbued with admiration for the work of God.”⁸ This sympathy with plants, this identification with their organic and serene existence, thoroughly suffused Matisse’s entire creative process, wherein the becoming-vegetal of shape, line, and color gave rise to the *phytous* power of his works, and the artist’s rational consciousness was dissolved into the instinctive quivering of his pure vegetative soul.



1.
Hélène Adant, Philodendron,
Hôtel Régina, Nizza-Cimiez,
1950 (© Bibliothèque Kandinsky,
MNAM/CCI, Centre Pompidou
– fonds Hélène Adant)

Hélène Adant, Filodendron, Hotel
Régina, Nica – Cimiez, 1950.

2.
Hélène Adant, Hôtel Régina,
Nizza-Cimiez, 1950 (©
Bibliothèque Kandinsky,
MNAM/CCI, Centre Pompidou
– fonds Hélène Adant)

Hélène Adant, Hôtel Régina, Nica
– Cimiez, 1950.

Matisse provided a very significant insight into the sincere reverence he felt for the passive energy of plant life, no doubt intuited through his journeying into the preconscious vegetative depths of his own mind [*esprit*]: “I don’t like the word vegetative, it is pejorative and leads to confusion.”⁹ Does not this statement, uttered before a wild fig tree, evince his acute sensitivity to the peculiar slow-flowing and almost imperceptible energy of vegetal life, as well as his repudiation of the demeaned position to which these unique organic entities have been condemned throughout the history of Western thought? Since the time of ancient Greece, philosophers have assigned lower, unconscious, and appetitive levels of vitality to vegetation, because plants have “no part in opinion or reason or mind, but only in feelings of pleasure and pain and the desires which accompany them.”¹⁰ Plant-being, according to Aristotle, is defined by mere nourishment, mindless growth, and purposeless propagation. Thus, the fate of the plant kingdom was irreparably sealed. Plant life was dismissed as the weakest link in the great chain of being, the literal embodiment of *physis*, merely existing and never outgrowing the rudimentary processes of germinating, flourishing, and vegetating. From Plato and Aristotle, through scholasticism to the present day, the *anima vegetativa* – the living phloem concealed in the human body – is almost invariably construed as a germ, a somatic rudiment that mature rational beings should aspire to surpass through the transcendence of their lowest impulses and most elementary instincts.

Yet it seems that Matisse’s art is precisely the fruition of the alert passivity of his vegetative soul and that all the accumulated fullness of his works derives from a creative process rooted in the “instinctual ferment,” always stimulated by the mysterious instinct: “the purest, most invulnerable thing” that alone promises the deeply felt experience of objects and events.¹¹ Entering into a selfless, instinctive interaction with his environment, the artist sank into a state of “disinterested openness” [*disponibilité désintéressée*]¹², tropistically capturing surrounding objects and atmosphere like “plants whose growth in the thickets of the jungle depends on the air they breathe, and the mud or stones among which they grow by chance and without choice.”¹³ Yet to channel this almost reflexive reception of the surrounding world

into the inner impulse which initiated the creative act, it was necessary to prune the instinct “like a tree whose branches are cut off so as to grow out more beautiful,”¹⁴ so the initial sensual irritation can give rise to an intuitive interpenetration, or even identification, of the artist and his motif. It was this pulsing interaction of objects in sympathy with each other, this “unifying affection” [*ensemble amoureux*],¹⁵ that made it possible for Matisse to discover in all things a “living rhythm” or a “living spirit,” and to sense even in inanimate and inorganic objects what he once called *frémissement*: to see everything – from a still-life arrangement to the human face – as living and tender, slow-shivering unfoldment.¹⁶ Thus, it is not implausible to claim that through his close contact with vegetal structures, as well as his appreciation of their sinuous tendencies, their spiral and radial stretchings, swirly openings and ramifications, Matisse recognized that the external world consists of inner vibrations we can only fathom through the work of the spiritual imagination. An intuitive possession of things implies, therefore, a feeling of their *explication*, an understanding of their latent vegetability through an unconscious mirroring of the flow of their contours and shapes. This is the prime reason that Matisse took this Chinese proverb as the gospel truth: “When you draw a tree, you must feel yourself gradually growing with it.”¹⁷

Hence, it seems appropriate to say that by celebrating vegetation as the “supreme form of life” and trying to awaken “the tree slumbering in every living thing,”¹⁸ Matisse inverted the inherited ontological hierarchy. For him, the vegetal being was by no means an organism condemned to torpor and sessility but the ultimate actualization of the processes of growing, explicating, flourishing, and swelling, which he accessed for himself through an intuitive communion with external reality.¹⁹ If we stay focused on them, the seemingly motionless perianths, whorls, buds, stems, and branches bring us into a spiritual swaying where we can feel the surge of their swollen vitality and suddenly start to “move with them,” to “feel the sound of their radiance.”²⁰ Matisse similarly concluded that “the static is not an obstacle to the feeling of movement,” but “a movement set at a level which does not carry along the bodies of the spectators, but simply their minds.”²¹ Therefore, his attentive observation often produced startling transformations: a bouquet of flowers became a “dance of young girls,” a stem became “a person breathing and growing tall,” and a hand became a “flower at the end of its stalk.”²² However, these analogies should not be conceived as morphological in nature but as rhythmic and genetic, for they imply that in all things, once we get emotionally *en rapport* with them, we can intuit the vegetal process as the underlying animating principle. Perhaps Matisse’s statement that “there are flowers everywhere for those who want to see them”²³ should be read in the light of this inner vegetability immanent in all things, that our intuitive apprehension of entities is attuning to the pulse of their opening out and emblooming in space and time.

This affective penetration, whereby perceived entities are transmuted into ripples of vegetal energy, implies the temporary subduing and loosening of the artist’s rational will and intellect, and the almost complete surrendering on his part to a plant-like subconsciousness. It is for this reason that Matisse often described his interactions with the world as blind operations peculiar to vegetative soul, as processes through which plants become one with their environment, that is, “nourishing,” “imbibing,” “incorporating,” “penetrating.” To adopt this unconscious and reflexive absorptivity required the painter to be “annihilated” [*anéanti*], for his volition to be suppressed and for his brain to be emptied, so he could perceive the present moment in all its vividness and open his mind wide to a complete engagement with the subject.²⁴ Rejecting rational thought in favor of subconscious feeling, the artist strove at once to root himself in the surrounding world as well as to assimilate it, in the manner of a succulent plant that si-

multaneously takes and gives: “I have to immerse myself in things. You have to receive first before you can give.”²⁵ Into this state of impersonal yet alert, unconscious yet tense vegetating, one could only enter through an immersive creative action, by the concentrated and perpetual drawing or painting activity. Matisse believed that by focused and intense work – by “preparing the soil” through successive sketches and “nourishing one’s feelings” through profound studies – the liberation of the unconscious mind could be activated, and at the same time, the intuitive comprehension of the external scene enabled.²⁶ The passage from the conscious to the unconscious gradually took place through the complete losing of the artist in his work, which eventually leads to a so-called “revelation,” in which the membrane that had previously separated him from his subject became so porous as to effectively collapse the distinction between the two: “From a certain moment on,” Matisse explained, “what takes place is a kind of revelation – it is no longer me. I no longer know what I’m doing, I identify with the model.”²⁷ Thus, for him, the precondition for a creative act was a specific state of passive trance, a kind of deliriousness produced by continuous and cumulative drawing or painting activity, a state of temporarily suppressed consciousness in which the artist’s self opened to the circumambient world like a hypersensitive corolla. Matisse described this condition as an “active contemplation” or “contemplative action,”²⁸ in which intensified activity and heightened receptivity were equated and individual consciousness yielded to selfless vegetating.²⁹ “When I’m not aware of what I’m doing,” he said, “it’s a complete success.”³⁰

If the intuition of vegetal rhythms in the perceived objects and the artist’s adoption of plant-like receptivity involved protracted periods of painting and drawing, it also follows that Matisse’s works must, ipso facto, become changeable, fluxional, budding assemblages, sites of frequent and often radical rearrangements and transpositions, which are subject to a curious switching and replacing of surfaces, shapes, colors, lines, and unpainted areas. Indeed, he emphasized that painting should be conceived as an unconscious and unpredictable adventure, in which each novel stroke sprouts almost spontaneously from the previously applied marks and in accordance with the overall physiognomy of the picture. “I always work without fixed ideas,” he once revealed, “referring to the impulses of the spiritual journey I made with my picture ...”³¹ As a consequence, Matisse’s compositions possess a remarkably phytogenetic quality, wherein pictorial events evolve and pullulate while still keeping pace with the overall unfolding of the pictorial structure, creating the impression that the image “grow[s] out from the canvas like a plant out of the soil.”³² Certainly, it could not be otherwise according to the painter’s principle of “synthetic equivalence,” whereby the intense sensation produced by a subject is converted into an equally powerful and harmonic interrelation of chromatic and linear forces. If by virtue of the creative process, seemingly static natural reality was experienced as a feeling of expansion and opening, it follows that the fruits of that process should embody the “same inner vibration” and the “same resplendent beauty, that we find in the products of nature.”³³ Moreover, given that Matisse conceived of “Nature” in its original sense as *physis*, that is, since he intuitively felt it as a process of flourishing, sprouting, growing, and emerging, it is natural that his compositions should display the same organic tendency toward unfoldment and expansion, transcending material elements in favor of a slow blooming of the image.

However, the characterization of pictorial development as a process of unconscious and unpredictable vegetal growth is not only applicable to the works of Matisse; to describe the act of painting and drawing as a spontaneous accretion of material traces is to describe the process of many painters. However, what makes Matisse’s works peculiarly *phytous* is their predisposition toward vegetal structures defined by openness, aggregation, self-multiplication, chromatic amplification, de-

centralization, and multifocality. Furthermore, through their slow-unfolding and mind-suffusing effects, such structures incite the beholder to fall into the same vegetative condition experienced by the painter as he explored his subject in paint. This becoming-vegetal of Matisse's pictures involves the inextricable coaction of two fundamental components in his decorative-type composition: *colored patch* and *arabesque*.³⁴ That both – the former in its chromatic intensity and breadth, the latter in its expansive and elastic capacity – bear a very strong relationship to the plant world is surely not a coincidence.

Matisse's rejection of a preplanned compositional design in favor of the direct organization of the picture plane by chromatic and linear rapports, a method whereby his drawings likewise became coloristic ensembles by virtue of the rhythmic distribution of white areas, marked a significant break with the old hierarchy, in which color was invariably subordinated to line.³⁵ Traditionally characterized as accidental and unstable, too sensual and irrational, color operated as the vegetative soul of painting that the form-defining, intellectual function of the contour was supposed to restrain. It is not necessary to delve too far into history to find an illustration of this hierarchy, for just a few generations before Matisse, the head of the École des Beaux-Arts, Charles Blanc, asserted that "drawing must maintain its supremacy over color," since color is "the peculiar characteristic of the lower forms of nature," while "drawing becomes the medium of expression, more and more dominant, the higher we rise in the scale of beings." Blanc, as a matter of fact, was merely reciting an inherited opinion, as old as Plato, that color is the "mobile, vague, intangible element" that "agitates the heart," whereas "precise, limited, palpable and constant" contour, the prime element of design, "shows us what passes in the mind."³⁶

The painting method of Matisse was not only an explicit reaction to and rejection of this difference-in-value between the supposedly mindless fluency of color and the line that locked it in well-demarcated forms but a positive adoption of the sensual and emotional power of color as the principal means of expression: "I feel through color, it is thus through color that my picture will always be organized."³⁷ Recognizing that each color gains its quality and strength from the relationships it establishes with other colors, thus contributing its valence to its neighbors, Matisse learned that the living coordination of chromatic elements generates a pictorial intensity equivalent to the sensory vividness and luminous effect of nature. Colors, with their "tonic effect," with their capacity to act on the "blood pressure" and "stir the sensual depths in man,"³⁸ were also the most efficient means to lure out the affective, vegetative soul of the viewer. This was the reason the painter claimed that "color can translate the essence of each thing and at the same time respond to the intensity of emotional shock."³⁹

If the intensity of color rapports on the canvas should be equivalent in strength to the emotions evoked by a particular subject – which indirectly makes the subject a kind of chromatic, phaneranthous phenomenon – then it is natural enough that Matisse found the paradigmatic model for this type of composition in the floral kingdom. It was not that Matisse's passion for flowers made him a flower painter in a documentary sense but that the very compositional structure of his pictures became floral, a fact the painter himself affirmed by saying that flowers provided him "the best lessons in color composition."⁴⁰ The purity, intensity, texture, and glowing color interrelationships perceivable in a flower, a bouquet, or a garden seemed to teach him how, within a flexible yet unified compositional whole, to invest all chromatic forces with similar dynamic and living qualities. Such flower-like polyphony exemplifies the heterogeneous type of harmony Matisse accepted as the primary manner of pictorial organization, a harmony based on the mutual relation of relatively autonomous color elements.⁴¹ "Look at the colors," he once described his flower garden, "how different each is from the next, yet how they blend together."⁴²

Through his instinctive appreciation of floral resplendence and his intimate contact with the plant world in general, Matisse comprehended the sensual, affective power of colors, as well as their capacity to “sing” without adhering to any law or theoretical prescription.⁴³ Moreover, the propulsiveness of colors in his paintings often unconsciously emulates the unattainable richness of floral accords and contrasts. As he once declared: “The flowers often give me impressions of color that are indelibly burnt onto my retina. Later, when I stand palette in hand before a composition and know only approximately which color I should apply, a memory like that may appear in my mind’s eye, and come to my aid, give me a clue.”⁴⁴ It is tempting to infer that the law by which certain contrasting tones produce in the eye hues that are physically nonexistent, as well as the law that the appearance of one color is modified by the proximity of its neighboring tones – so important in Matisse’s work – became evident to him through his intimate encounters with nature and flowers.⁴⁵ On the whole, the painter’s penetrating observation of petals and inflorescences, as well as his attunement to the rhythms of stems, bracts, whorls, branches, and trunks, was not directed toward a faithful description or a mimetic transfer of their forms but toward a grasping of the dynamism of their chromatic relationships and their linear explication and impetus, which regardless of the final look of the picture, was transplanted into its overall expressive construction. It was in the plant kingdom that Matisse observed the most striking and tangible bodying forth of this vibration, this intuitive feeling of growing and expanding, which, for him, was the rhythmic force immanent to the whole of reality.

However, the invention of a different type of linear composition was requisite for all incorporated elements to acquire equal importance in the final pictorial whole. If color relationships served to create a pictorial equivalent to vivid sensations produced by a subject, line was responsible for the interconnection in the image of intuitively apprehended external objects. In an instructive note, Matisse wrote that drawing should serve “to indicate the expression of objects in relationship to one another,” whereas color should be used “for its luminous intensity, in its various combinations, accords, and not for defining objects.”⁴⁶ He conceived of objects not as forms fixed in a measurable space but through the mode of temporal explication and spatial transpiration, intuitively encompassing their volumes and feeling the impulse of their contours,⁴⁷ as well as interrelating them through the intensity of his affection without diminishing their individuality. Consequently, Matisse’s linear plastic [*plastique linéaire*], his *écriture*, arranged all the pictorial forces, all the segments of the picture, all the areas and patches, in an equally living and active unity, where each part was distinct and yet inextricable from the whole. The connecting principle, the line that “makes all the phrases into a single phrase,” planting rhythm into and animating the whole space of the support, he defined as *arabesque*.⁴⁸

The term “arabesque” originally described stylized tendril-like ornaments inspired by plant shapes, but in the nineteenth-century French art discourse, it had lost its vegetal connotations and was used instead to denote convoluted or serpentine outlines that set in motion or “breathe life” into a figure or composition. Henceforth, arabesque became the common name for what a century earlier Diderot had called *ligne de liaison*, that is, the linear armature that connects masses, different planes, depth and foreground in a composition, and whose direction the beholder retraces when scanning the depicted scene.⁴⁹ Pursuing the notion of arabesque as connecting line, Matisse nevertheless radically changed its function and scope by restoring it to its primordial vegetal nature. As his paintings gradually evolved without a preconceived design and through direct contact with the surface of the support, it could be said that the Matissean arabesque is nothing but a *phytographic* trace, an index of growth, a line produced by the alternation of pictorial proliferation and abscis-

sion, the final product of the process of plastic distribution and transposition – in short, a perfusing constructive line endowed with a robust vegetal vigor. Grafting its voluble fluidity onto the canvas or paper, the arabesque *vegetalizes* its whole surface: it “furrows and festoons” this white field “with its robust vegetation.”⁵⁰ At the same time, arranging pictorial forces and thereby activating the surface of the support *in toto*, this immanent line operates as “an expansive force which gives life to the things around it,” causing Matisse to describe it as the “bearer of life.”⁵¹ Invading the entire picture plane, giving breadth and fluidity to all outbudding elements, pulling in its sway even the edges of the support, this vital line invests Matisse’s works with a peculiar *virens*, with a power of dilation and growing, an “impassioned impulse”⁵² that swells and inflates them (fig. 3). This is why the arabesque – the “drawing which is common to all things,”⁵³ a line that unites all things – is the linear embodiment of Nature, or the wholeness of a motif, manifesting its *vis vegetabilis*.

In Matisse’s pictorial procedure, however, it is impossible to distinguish the function of color patches and the function of arabesque, to separate the act of painting and the act of drawing, for the creation of an image requires what he called the “emotional relationship of color with drawing.”⁵⁴ The compresence of these two fundamental devices of composition was frequently highlighted by the painter, who explained that “color does not command the drawing, it harmonizes with it,” and that “to paint and to draw are one.”⁵⁵ His conviction that linear and chromatic expression are inseparable proceeded directly from his realization that only the immediate action of painting, consecutive and cumulative, can simultaneously make possible the intimate communion with a subject and the immersive work of painting. Moreover, knowing that the emotional intensity evoked by a spectacle could be transmitted to the observer only through an equally intense pictorial harmony, Matisse believed that, from the very beginning, a picture had to be envisaged and constructed as a dynamic whole, coordinating and incorporating individual forces into an efficient arrangement. He loved to make remarks about his unpredictable and often extended search for the final plastic equilibrium, during which each applied mark or area evoked and guided every subsequent stroke until all elements found their specific place in the dynamically organized field of support. Moreover, the painter often emphasized that, with each brushstroke, a completely new configuration of arabesques and colors was achieved: “As soon as I put a color on my canvas, the look of the whole thing changes for me, and my mind keeps working so that the picture is born with each new color.”⁵⁶ Yet this pictorial tillering, the proliferation of the picture from within, was important because it ultimately led to a specific expressive synthesis or assemblage in which all forces – all colors and lines – do their singular and different dynamic share. Therefore, expression through color and arabesque does not only imply that the act of painting became a kind of phytogenetic process, a coalescence of linear sprouting and chromatic blossoming; on the contrary, the product of such a process is itself a plastic, decorative *ensemble*, which carries all the distinctive attributes of a vegetal organism.

The supreme generative capability of the plant has been known since antiquity, and one of the very first European botanists wrote that the vegetal body “possesses the power of growth in all its parts, insofar as it possesses life in all its parts.”⁵⁷ Sprouting from the seed, the plant gives itself up to a wild proliferation, feeling and following only its blind desire for growing and spreading. Its whole meristem is a potential source of endless unforeseen and novel shoots that can burst forth anywhere, and so it develops and multiplies without any predetermined system or plan, creating an organic society of relatively autonomous members, a sprawling aggregate of single units. Since the body of a plant divides into numerous distinct parts that resist being subordinated to a self-enclosed system, Hegel inferred that the vegetal or-

3.

Henri Matisse, *Fauteuil rocaille*,
Vence, 1946, oil on canvas,
92 x 73 cm, bequest of Madame
Henri Matisse, 1960, Musée
Matisse Nice (© Musée Matisse
Nice / Photo: François Fernandez /
Succession H. Matisse)

Henri Matisse, *Rokoko stolica*, Vence,
1946., ulje na platnu, 92 x 73 cm,
ostavština gđe Matisse, 1960.,
Musée Matisse, Nica.



ganism instantiates the “superficial unity of the many,” a “separated plurality” devoid of necessary and meaningful internal unification.⁵⁸ However, it is more appropriate to say that at each stage of its development the plant attains a kind of provisional formal unity and that with each shoot it shapes a new whole in which all its involved members are integrated. Despite its myriad novel shoots or members, despite its grafts, prunings, and transformations, its overall body always remains a manifold whole, with no particularly isolated member. The anatomical, functional, and morphological specificity of a plant consists mostly in the fact that its constitution does not have a central, privileged organ or part that dominates over the rest of the organism, for all its members participate in a plural, dividual assemblage, wherein “the parts remain highly self-sufficient in relation to each other.”⁵⁹

Matisse’s paintings are structured according to this principle of equipotential phytous development: the first applied color patch acts as a germ from which other strokes and areas – concatenating on it and disseminating across the picture plane

4.
Henri Matisse, *Interior with Aubergines*, 1911, Distemper on canvas, 212 x 246 cm, Ville de Grenoble: Gift of the artist and his family in 1922 (© Musée de Grenoble / Photo: J. L. Lacroix / Succession H. Matisse)

Henri Matisse, *Interijer s patlidžanima*, 1911., distemper na platnu, 212 x 246 cm, Grenoble: poklon umjetnika i njegove obitelji 1922.



– grow forth, constituting a provisional state of pictorial wholeness. The application and placement of chromatic forces were conducted in the most various of ways and implied frequent rearrangements and unexpected mutations and transpositions. The contraction of one patch leads to the widening of other, the quality of one color enhances or reduces the quality and extent of its neighbors, removal of an existing or emergence of a new element changes the whole configuration so that the painting process may be thought of as an almost spontaneous unfoldment of the picture from the first “definitive stroke” that germinates it.⁶⁰ Each modification in the course of this process modulates the melody of the arabesque, redirects its flow and vector, modifies its pace and tension, while at the same time balancing areas and color patches and positioning them in the field of the canvas. The painting can multiply itself from within, can re-adjust or orchestrate linear and color forces, and thus radically change its appearance without doing violence to its overall expression and dynamism. It is this inner *phytousness* that empowers Matisse’s paintings to bud out and bloom, to transform and regrow their formal bodies, while still remaining societies of individual forces, of singular bearers of intensity, in a dynamic relatedness. The Matissean notion of expressive harmony implies a composition peculiar to a vegetal organism, wherein each separate part “presents an energy equal to that of the other parts, but which belongs nevertheless to a totality,” and whose totality “remains fluctuant, accessible, open.”⁶¹ A painting by Matisse is not an amalgamated and tightly closed structure that subjugates all its constituents but, as one of his contemporaries insightfully noted, “a circle of harmonies and not one harmony.”⁶² His works do not contain centers of meaning or optically prevailing elements, since each part is itself an individual center, while the entire painted surface is a multifocal field, which is transmuted by dynamic rapports into what the painter called *assem-*

blage expressif (fig. 4). That equally pronounced chromatic and linear forces have to build, through their reciprocal action, a plural planar unity, without a center or a periphery, a background or a foreground, the painter himself pointed out: “For me, the subject of a picture and its background have the same value, or, to put it more clearly, there is no principal feature, only the pattern is important.”⁶³ In short, his “co-ordination of controlled rhythms”⁶⁴ implies that each force, each stroke or element, expresses its power by playing a distinct role in the assembled pictorial diversity. It can be said with certainty that, in their pictorial configuration, Matisse’s works instantiate a centerless, superior vegetal democracy.⁶⁵

Such phytous structures were indispensable for Matisse as the only means to induce the beholder – by transplanting the intensity of his feeling before a motif into the equally intense pictorial totality – to taste the same inner sensual fermentation the painter experienced in the course of his creative act. If the artist was drawn into the serenity of vegetative life through the immersive nature of his task, then by its powerfully irradiative effect, the picture should likewise engulf the viewer and lure him into the calm elation that is pure vegetating. As the complementary actions of color and arabesque combine to form a democratic community of mutually enhancing forces, having neither foci nor centers of gravity, the Matissean composition acquires the power to captivate and suffuse the mind [*esprit*] and senses of the viewer. At the same time, in their centrifugal motion and amplexity, his drawings and paintings become the pictorial equivalents of the vegetal rhythm implicit in all intuitively apprehended things. With their tendency “to develop externally and expansively in a way that is directly turned toward its surroundings,” and to instantiate a “kind of development that it does not have the need to form centers of any kind,” Matisse’s works certainly achieve the “open form” intrinsic to plant organisms.⁶⁶ Due to their “tropism toward outward extension,” one can feel that his works grow “bigger as if, in a topological paradox, depth were being translated into a flat analog.”⁶⁷ (fig. 5) Certainly, owing to its anthoid craving for space, which causes its surface to irradiate and unfold outwards, Matisse also thought of the picture as a tender floral event: “A painting in an interior spreads joy around it with colors, which calm us ... a painting on a wall should be like a bouquet of flowers in an interior”⁶⁸ (fig. 6). Perhaps for the same reason, Cocteau, intoxicated by the florality of Matisse’s paintings, ascribed them a scent, another expression of anthoid being: “It may be that in the collection of Matisse’s works the exhibition hall exudes a fragrance [*embaumassent*].”⁶⁹ Even the painter felt that the decorated walls of his Rosary Chapel in Vence, like petals constructed out of line and color, turned its interior into an open spatial rose: “Well! ... what is the chapel? ... it is a flower. It is nothing but a flower, but it is a flower.”⁷⁰

As expandable, flat phytous surfaces, Matisse’s paintings have the power to transcend their physical dimensions, impelling the viewer to dismiss their limits and experience what the painter once called the “blossoming [*éclosion*] of sensitivity.”⁷¹ Matisse believed that colors should flirt with us, pollinate us with their florality, in a kind of *flowertation* [*fleurt*],⁷² while the vegetal impetus and dance of the arabesque should tenderly sway us into a deep elation where “the nature of space is transmuted into the nature of time.”⁷³ It is the captivating effect of such chromatic-linear budding-out, through which the artist’s very soul opened out “like a mystical flower,”⁷⁴ that should transport the spectator to the boundless realm of tranquility, to the blissful wavering of his vegetative soul. If the spectacle had to slowly take root in the artist’s mind, if it had to grow in him like a plant,⁷⁵ then in the same manner, the slow invasion of the picture’s unfolding vegetality should gradually work to overwhelm the mind [*esprit*] of the observer. To transmit to viewers his sense of reality as a boundless space and make them feel the process of explication and unfolding in all visible things, Matisse exposed them to the virtual swelling and dila-

5.
Henri Matisse, *Woman in Blue*,
1937, oil on canvas, 92.7 × 73.7
cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art:
Gift of Mrs. John Wintersteen,
1956 (© Philadelphia Museum
of Art / Photo: Joseph Hu /
Succession H. Matisse)

Henri Matisse, *Žena u plavom*,
1937., ulje na platnu, 92,7 × 73,7
cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art:
poklon gđe Wintersteen, 1956.

tion of his phytous plastic assemblages. Due to the expansive and calmative impact of such pictorial wholes, the beholder's experience of Matisse's works resembles an encounter with a plant: it "soothes his struggling spirit."⁷⁶ One could say that the painter aspired, through absorptive work that brought him into an intimate rapport with all living things, to feel the calm of his innermost being. At the same time, he wanted to throw the viewer into the same state of impersonal pure existence through the unconscious apprehension of the picture's vegetal rhythm. Hence, the function of art, according to his misconstrued armchair metaphor,⁷⁷ is to unburden, to relax into the mute elation of pure living. It is hard to escape the impression that Matisse wholeheartedly embraced the Romantic notion that "the highest, most perfect mode of life would actually be nothing more than *pure vegetating*."⁷⁸

It is in this craving for plant-like serenity, this "visceral will for joy" and "orientation towards joy,"⁷⁹ that the roots of Matissean *phytosophy* are found. Discharging both himself and the beholder of conscious will and reason, Matisse sought to elicit



6.
Hélène Adant, Gladioli, Hôtel
Régina, Nizza-Cimiez, 1950
(© Bibliothèque Kandinsky,
MNAM/CCI, Centre Pompidou
– fonds Hélène Adant)

Hélène Adant, Gladiole, Hotel
Régina, Nica – Cimiez, 1950.



the mute humming of the vegetative soul. Ancient Greek philosophy teaches that this third soul rests “between the midriff and the navel” and is not endowed with “the power of observing or reflecting on its own concerns.”⁸⁰ Yet this is the soul from whose unconscious and instinctive stirrings the art of Matisse burst forth in all its effulgence. Realizing that Matisse’s creative power had its roots in the feeling of visceral serenity, in the ventral regions of his vegetative soul, Picasso said admiringly that Matisse “carries the sun in his belly.”⁸¹

Matisse’s adoption of the heliotropic nature of the plant and its intrinsic desire for light is what finally reveals that his *phytophilia* cannot be distinguished from his *phototropism*. For Nature, or the felt unity of the visible world, always came to him in the form of luminous energy, which he soaked up like a plant: reflexively, instinctually, cravingly.⁸² Accordingly, pictorial light generated by the relationships and rhythms of line and color should slowly pervade the viewer and nourish his vegetative soul. Without this luminous suffusion, without this fulfillment of the vegetative soul, there would be no serenity, no deep satisfaction, no calm respiration. The painter could not have achieved the feeling of internal fulfillment and saturation he wished to incite by the radiant power of his phytous pictorial assemblages without reaching into the deepest regions of his own soul, without becoming-plant: vegetating. The art of Matisse is the flower of his *phytophilia* and *phytosophy*, the fruit of his genuine *plant-likeness*, for “only those who can admit the light into their gizzards can translate what is there in the heart.”⁸³

NOTES

- ¹ LOUIS ARAGON, *Matisse: A Novel Vol. II*, New York, 1972, 83.
- ² The words with the prefix “phyto” (from Ancient Greek φυτόν, *phutón*, meaning “plant”) are deliberately employed. Apart from our coinage “phytousness” (meaning plant-likeness, *Pflanzenheit*), all other terms are traceable in botanical literature. However, they have different meanings in this essay: e.g., “phytographic” refers to the marks left by pictorial growing and cutting, not a description of plant species; “phytosophy” is not a science of plants, a branch of biology – as in Herbert Spencer, Lorenz Oken, or Johann Eduard Erdmann – but intuitive knowledge of vegetal beings or the perception of reality as a vegetal flow.
- ³ ALBERT FLAMENT, *Le Sourire d’Henri Matisse*, in: *Revue des deux Mondes*, 81, 3, 1944, 294. “It pains my heart to know that plant must go,” Matisse lamented, parting with his beloved philodendron (see fig. 1). HILARY SPURLING, *Matisse the Master: A Life of Henri Matisse—The Conquest of Colour, 1909–1954*, New York, 2005, 453.
- ⁴ “About gardens, Fernand Léger quoted Delaunay: ‘The Matissees are in flower. A great gardener, that man.’” RAYMOND ESCHOLIER, *Matisse from Life*, London, 1960, 172. Alluding to his enthusiasm for vegetation, Marguerite Bouvier also noted that “a walk with Matisse is a real botany lesson” and that “he knows all sorts of things about the growth of fruit, the nature of the soil, which have nothing to do with painting.” See JACK FLAM, ed., *Matisse on Art*, Berkeley, 1995, 154.
- ⁵ JACK FLAM (n. 4), 63.
- ⁶ BRASSAÏ, *Artists of my Life*, trans. Richard Miller, New York, 1982, 128.
- ⁷ JACK FLAM (n. 4), 136.
- ⁸ SOEUR JACQUES-MARIE, *Henri Matisse*, in: *Grand Street* 50, 1994, 89.
- ⁹ ANDRÉ MASSON, *Conversations avec Henri Matisse*, in: *Critique* 324, 1974, 397.
- ¹⁰ PLATO, *Timaeus*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, New York, 1949, 60.
- ¹¹ JACK FLAM (n. 4), 59.
- ¹² GEORGES DUTHUIT, *Écrits sur Matisse*, Paris, 1992, 144, 114.
- ¹³ HILARY SPURLING (n. 3), 449.
- ¹⁴ Matisse as quoted in GINO SEVERINI, *La peinture d’avantgarde*, in: *Mercur de France* 455, 1917, 458.
- ¹⁵ LOUIS ARAGON, *Matisse: A Novel Vol. I*, New York, 1972, 142.
- ¹⁶ DOMINIQUE FOURCADE, ed., *Henri Matisse: Écrits et propos sur l’art*, Paris, 2014, 132 n. 101, 81 n. 8.
- ¹⁷ JACK FLAM (n. 4), 156.
- ¹⁸ PIERRE SCHNEIDER, *Matisse*, London, 1984, 595, 598. While these insights are principally correct, Schneider’s later account of the plant–human merger, which he calls “daphnification,” is substantially metamorphic. Becoming-vegetal, on the other hand, must not be understood as the assumption of recognizable vegetal forms but as the absorption of vegetal energies and their subsequent transfusion into the overall rhythm of the work. Even Matisse’s bust *Tiara* (1930) and his painting *Madame Yvonne Landsberg* (1914) – perhaps the most explicit examples of becoming-vegetal of human forms in his oeuvre – are no mere *femme-fleur* figurations: instead, both works are plastic wholes endowed with their own plant-like functions of budding, shooting, blooming, tumescing, and expanding.
- ¹⁹ Due to this feeling of outspreading or dilation within perceived things, Matisse “would speak of the plane trees of Villeneuve-Loubet almost as if they were human beings, saying that he watched them *swelling with their own strength*; and conversely, he would say of a tall and very handsome woman: ‘She’s demigod size, she’s a plane tree.’” LOUIS ARAGON (n. 1), 118. One could also construe that Matisse’s preference for the swollen throat in females – a consistent theme in Aragon’s novel – was due to its almost vegetal bulging out: as if flowers were growing and blooming within women’s gullets. The expansibility of Matisse’s forms and his paintings or drawings as wholes can be attributed to his sense of vegetal rhythms in all beings and objects.
- ²⁰ D. H. LAWRENCE, *Sketches of Etruscan Places and Other Italian Essays*, Cambridge, 1992, 230.
- ²¹ JACK FLAM (n. 4), 190.
- ²² ANDRÉ MASSON, (n. 9), 397; RIICHIRO KAWASHIMA, *Henri Matisse*, in: *Matisse: A Retrospective* (ed. Jack Flam), New York, 1990, 292; LOUIS ARAGON (n. 15), 112. Expressed through metaphors, similar intuitions of vegetal traits in other objects or beings are copious in Matisse. For instance, he compared *Snail* (1953) with “*volute acanthus*” (JACK FLAM /n. 4/, 214) and his model Yvonne Landsberg with “*buds*” (ALFRED H. BARR, *Matisse: His Art and His Public*, London, 1975, 185). However, the immanent vegetality underpinning such metaphors – i.e., the power of phytoid unfoldment present in all things facilitating their comparison – is more evident in such statements as this one: “An acacia on Vésubie, its movement, its svelte grace, led me perhaps to conceive the body of a dancing woman.” (JACK FLAM /n. 4/, 107). It is almost always in Matisse that vegetal rhythms are felt in other things, not the otherwise. He even asserted that: “When I observe, when I study a woman, I often think of flowers, but I never think of women when I see a flower.” See PIERRE SCHNEIDER (n. 18), 598. I am indebted to Jean-Claude Lebensztejn for reminding me of the acacia quote.
- ²³ JACK FLAM (n. 4), 174.
- ²⁴ DOMINIQUE FOURCADE (n. 16), 126 n. 89, 178.
- ²⁵ PIERRE SCHNEIDER (n. 18), 580.
- ²⁶ JACK FLAM (n. 4), 107, 182.
- ²⁷ PIERRE SCHNEIDER (n. 18), 582.
- ²⁸ LOUIS ARAGON (n. 15), 105.
- ²⁹ Matisse, at once, reached both extremes, which according to Félix Ravaisson, is when a suspension of cognitive consciousness sets in: “At the higher pole of absolute activity, just as at the lower pole of absolute passivity, consciousness, or at least distinct consciousness, is no longer possible. Any distinction, and therefore any knowing, would here be absorbed in impersonality.” See FÉLIX RAVAISSON, *Of Habit*, trans. Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair, London, 2008, 47.
- ³⁰ GEORGES DUTHUIT (n. 12), 289.

- ³¹ As cited in RÉMI LABRUSSE, *Matisse: La condition de l'image*, Paris, 1999, 171.
- ³² JEAN COCTEAU, Matisse et Picasso, in: *Le Matin*, 16 May 1963, 6.
- ³³ JACK FLAM (n. 4), 219.
- ³⁴ In an autobiographical note from 1930, Matisse briefly wrote that his works were “set up through combinations of spots [*taches*] and arabesques [*arabesque*].” Elsewhere, he stated that “color harmonies” and “stirring or communicating arabesques” were his usual means of pictorial organization. More often, however, these two elements were generically named “color” and “line,” thus alluding to the old *disegno-colore* dispute that this painter, by his own admission, strove to resolve all his life. JACK FLAM (n. 4), 282 n. 2, 95–6.
- ³⁵ “In my case, the composition – the main element – is made with colors.” SERGE GUILBAUT, ed., *Chatting with Henri Matisse: The Lost 1941 Interview*, Los Angeles, 2013, 143. “It is always the color that comes into play, even when the drawing is represented only by one continuous line. Then the surfaces are proportioned by the line which surrounds them and which gives them their quality.” ISABELLE MONOD-FONTAINE, *Matisse: oeuvres de Henri Matisse*, Paris, 1979, 136.
- ³⁶ CHARLES BLANC, *The Grammar of Painting and Engraving*, trans. Kate Newell Doggett, New York, 1874, 4–5, 146.
- ³⁷ PIERRE SCHNEIDER (n. 18), 363.
- ³⁸ JACK FLAM (n. 4), 123, 211.
- ³⁹ JACK FLAM (n. 4), 156.
- ⁴⁰ JACK FLAM (n. 4), 77.
- ⁴¹ DOMINIQUE FOURCADE (n. 16), 71 n. 47.
- ⁴² JACK FLAM (n. 4), 63.
- ⁴³ DOMINIQUE FOURCADE (n. 16), 93 n. 40.
- ⁴⁴ JACK FLAM (n. 4), 77.
- ⁴⁵ DOMINIQUE FOURCADE (n. 16), 207. It is now a commonplace in both the visual arts and sciences that a color value never functions independently of its adjacent values, but Matisse was right enough when he said that “people have taken years to realize just that.” He was one of the first painters to utilize the interactive nature of color in such a resolute and unconditional manner. See JACK FLAM (n. 4), 140.
- ⁴⁶ DOMINIQUE FOURCADE (n. 16), 182 n. 34.
- ⁴⁷ Matisse was not concerned with rendering or fixing the definite forms of things but with intuiting with the whole body, so to speak, the unfolding rhythm of their contours. His lines are the graphic equivalent of this rhythm and not a reproduction of a static shape. John Dewey noticed that “Matisse’s hands move in the rhythm of his forms when he shows the sketches.” THOMAS DALTON, *Becoming John Dewey: Dilemmas of a Philosopher and Naturalist*, Bloomington, 2002, 158. An anecdote reported by Rosamond Bernier also confirms, albeit indirectly, that Matisse used to see his models in terms of dynamic linear unfoldment: “More than once, he would scrutinize the subject, raise his hand, point his index finger at the canvas, and trace in the air the outline of what he wanted to do. Then he would let his arm drop and say, ‘Damn it! If only I’d had a brush in my hand, the thing would be done by now!’” ROSAMOND BERNIER, *Matisse, Picasso, Miró as I Knew Them*, New York, 1991, 92. Matisse himself referred once to contours as gestural and prehensive rather than static and fixed: “In speaking of a melon one uses both hands to express it by a gesture, and so both lines defining a form must determine it.” JACK FLAM, (n. 4), 48. Etienne Gilson indicated too that Matisse used to value his drawings in a tactile way, seeing the rhythmic quality of lines through manual feeling: “As he was visiting Matisse, a painter friend found him in his studio surrounded with a litter of drawings. Wondering how Matisse could make a choice among them, he asked him: ‘How do you know the really good ones?’ To this question, a philosopher, or a theologian, would have answered with considerations about beauty, order, splendor of the true, and suchlike, applied to the drawings under discussion. But Matisse’s answer was a different one. ‘How one knows the really good ones?’ Matisse answered. ‘Well, one feels that in the hand.’” See ETIENNE GILSON, *Painting and Reality*, New York, 1957, 55.
- ⁴⁸ JACK FLAM (n. 4), 211.
- ⁴⁹ DENIS DIDEROT, *Selected Writings on Art and Literature*, trans. Geoffrey Bremner, London, 1994, 215.
- ⁵⁰ GEORGES DUTHUIT, *The Fauvist Painters*, trans. Ralph Manheim, New York, 1950, 93.
- ⁵¹ ANDRÉ VERDET, Interview with Henri Matisse, in: *Matisse: A Retrospective* (ed. Jack Flam), New York, 1990, 152.
- ⁵² JACK FLAM (n. 4), 210.
- ⁵³ DOMINIQUE FOURCADE (n. 16), 313 n. 35. Alexander Liberman also recognized the conjunctive capability of Matissean arabesque when he wrote: “The line that delineates his nudes, the line that describes objects and their interrelationships, is the line that ties all together, to allow the spectator to comprehend in one swoop the undulating unity of the universe.” ALEXANDER LIBERMAN, *The Artist in His Studio*, New York, 1960, 60.
- ⁵⁴ JACK FLAM (n. 4), 211.
- ⁵⁵ JACK FLAM (n. 4), 208.
- ⁵⁶ MARG MOLL, *Erinnerungen an Henri Matisse*, in: *Matisse und seine deutschen Schüler*, exh. cat. (ed. Gisela Fiedler-Bender), Kaiserslautern/Regensburg, 1988, 44.
- ⁵⁷ THEOPHRASTUS, *Enquiry into Plants, Vol. I: Books 1–5*, trans. Arthur F. Hort, Cambridge, 1999, 7.
- ⁵⁸ M. J. PETRY, ed. and trans., *Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature: Vol. III*, London, 1970, 47.
- ⁵⁹ HELMUTH PLESSNER, *Levels of Organic Life and the Human: An Introduction to Philosophical Anthropology*, trans. Millay Hyatt, New York, 2019, 204.
- ⁶⁰ For *la touche définitive* and the concatenative or developmental method of paint application, see SERGE GUILBAUT (n. 35), 140–141.
- ⁶¹ GEORGES DUTHUIT (n. 50), 11.
- ⁶² Othon Friesz as cited in RENÉ HUYGHE, Matisse, in: *Le Point* 4, 21, 1939, 100.
- ⁶³ JACK FLAM (n. 4), 120.
- ⁶⁴ JACK FLAM (n. 4), 121.
- ⁶⁵ Scientists and scholars generally agreed that the decentralized plurality of the vegetal organism exemplifies the republican order, in contrast to the centralist, monarchist order of the animal

- organism. See GUSTAV THEODOR FECHNER, *Nanna oder über das Seelenleben der Pflanzen*, Hamburg/Leipzig, 1908, 221. As Whitehead wrote, suggestively: “A vegetable is a democracy.” ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD, *Modes of Thought*, New York, 1966, 24.
- ⁶⁶ HELMUTH PLESSNER (n. 59), 203.
- ⁶⁷ BRIAN O'DOHERTY, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, San Francisco, 1986, 23.
- ⁶⁸ JACK FLAM (n. 4), 165.
- ⁶⁹ JEAN COCTEAU (n. 32), 6. As they fuse the floral spatial expansion and olfactory emission, one might say, along with Schlegel, that Matisse's works instantiate “a beautiful kind of openness that unfolds like a flower to breathe forth its fragrance.” FRIEDRICH SCHLEGEL, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow, Minneapolis, 1971, 249.
- ⁷⁰ DOMINIQUE FOURCADE (n. 16), 272.
- ⁷¹ DOMINIQUE FOURCADE (n. 16), 192–3 n. 55.
- ⁷² This remarkable portmanteau, which melds “flirting” with “flowering” and was forged by Matisse to describe a particular *rendezvous* with a former model, perfectly describes his sensual communion with any subject, whether a human model or an inanimate object. Accordingly, the tender yet intense exchange between the viewer and a picture can also be conceived as a flowertation: “tossing flowers on each other”. *Fleurt* is translated as “flowertation” in PIERRE SCHNEIDER (n. 18), 670.
- ⁷³ ALBERT GLEIZES, Arabesque, in: *Cahiers du Sud* 175, 1935, 104.
- ⁷⁴ Y. A. RUSAKOV, Matisse in Russia in the Autumn of 1911, in: *The Burlington Magazine* 117, 866, 1975, 287.
- ⁷⁵ DOMINIQUE FOURCADE (n. 16), 270.
- ⁷⁶ FRIEDRICH HÖLDERLIN, *Hyperion and selected poems*, New York, 1990, 8.
- ⁷⁷ For Matisse, famously, art must have “a soothing, calming influence on the mind, something like a good armchair that provides relaxation from fatigue.” JACK FLAM (n. 4), 42.
- ⁷⁸ FRIEDRICH SCHLEGEL (n. 69), 66. Matisse would certainly have concurred with the aphorism of another Romantic thinker – Novalis: “Only a serene exuberant spirit can understand the plant world.” NOVALIS, *The Disciples at Saïs and Other Fragments*, trans. F. V. M. T. and U. C. B., London, 1903, 129.
- ⁷⁹ DOMINIQUE FOURCADE (n. 16), 30.
- ⁸⁰ PLATO (n. 10), 60.
- ⁸¹ DORE ASHTON, ed., *Picasso on Art: A Selection of Views*, New York, 1972, 45. On another occasion, intending to devalue the older painter and his flamboyant colors, Picasso resorted to a vegetal comparison, obliquely indicating the equivalence in nature and intensity between flora and Matisse's works: “Matisse! What is a Matisse? A balcony with a big red flowerpot falling all over it.” See ROBERT CRAFT, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky*, Berkeley, 1980, 106–7.
- ⁸² When he defined the aim of his art as “a quest for light,” (BRASSAÏ 1982, /n. 6/, 139) Matisse was speaking not only of his heliotropic search for light in various natural and geographic regions and its influence on the objects and the settings of his paintings. Rather, his obsession with light had a wide-ranging impact, for he also thought of his drawings and paintings as “generators of light.” See DOMINIQUE FOURCADE (n. 16), 105 n. 60, 159. Furthermore, he indirectly stated that every motif or model primarily acts as an outpouring of luminous energy: “[my painting] is made for a light that I create by my own means, a light equivalent to the model that inspired it.” SERGE GUILBAUT (n. 35), 51.
- ⁸³ In his inspired praise of the painter, Miller was sensitive enough to see Matisse's joy as the satiation of the light-being of his *anima vegetativa*. HENRY MILLER, *Tropic of Cancer*, New York, 1980, 163.

