

Norman Turner

THE ESSAY ON CÉZANNE

Part Three: “A Man Sees Nothing in Nature but What He Knows”

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The first part of this essay on Cézanne mentioned multiple points-of-view, table-tops passing behind cloths only to emerge at difference levels, round objects painted as irregular shapes rather than ellipses, things vertically tilted, parallels failing to converge, and inconsistencies of relative size. It said these features of Cézanne’s work are not distortions relative to our perceptions of the actual world, as formalist critics have argued, but anomalies relative to a generally accepted kind of picture—a linear perspective picture or its mechanically produced equivalent, a photograph. The second part of this essay, of biographical tendency, described Cézanne’s aesthetic wanderings and travails. It said contact with nature became his anchor and constant orientation, rather than a starting point to be overwritten for reasons exclusively formal, as the same formalist critics have asserted. This the third part of *The Essay on Cézanne* will continue to walk in the footsteps of Cassirer as quoted in the lengthy epigram at the head part one, saying that symbolic forms “are not imitations, but *organs* of reality, since it is solely by their agency that anything real becomes an object for intellectual apprehension and as such is made visible to us.”¹ This part will argue that the anomalies at issue—the so-called distortions—are a result of Cézanne’s symbolic construct of the actual world, that is to say, his method of painting from observation.

The history of painting from observation, when someday written, will document an activity of recent origin compared to all of historical time, isolated within the culture that produced it, limited in respect to the number of artists who practiced it. If the activity is defined as directly matching a picture and appearances part by part while standing in front of nature and comparing the two, it begins, sporadically, a mere five-hundred years ago, first in Italy, then in Northern Europe, with a quickening interest in the world around. Examples of it from that time forward are infrequent compared to the immense mass of surviving art-objects, and its apex lies in France some three-hundred years later, with the Impressionists, their counterparts in other nations, their precursors, and their

heirs. About the inherent contradictions, abundant possibilities and complex meaning of painting from observation, little of worth has to this day been said.

To begin with what for my purposes can be called naïve perception, everything within our visual field is oriented in respect to the immediate object of our attention, a locus relevant to a living being or a thing, a position in space, upon which our eyes fixate. As we shift our attention from one fixation to another, the entire field shifts, too, and is realigned and laid down in its myriad elements to conform to the new situation. Our visual field is elastic, every element within it is tied to and under the sway of every other element within it, and it never holds the identical network of spatial relationships any two moments in a row.²

It cannot, for to look is not only to sift through space one fixation after another but to advance in time. Our vision drives from the present toward an adumbrated future. The future approaches from the experiential horizon, enters our present awareness, and is resolved into the visible moment, the adventitious, immediate, physical display (born of light and optics), the fixation within the display to which we temporarily cling, harvesting from it a partial understanding.³ Sending our attention to the location we are about to see, the position in space we are about to mentally occupy, the momentary intelligence of the world around us we are about to add to our store, we arrive at that new locus, take it as our present sight, and proceed to the next, stepping in continuous transition across the physical present, rapidly assembling a mental formation and a surpassing overview. We transcend the unadorned physical present because we endure. In this continuity, this ongoing progress through a temporal space in which we register physically present space, the anticipated future sight is continually consumed and altered as it becomes the undeniably present one in physical fact, the present one is continually supplanted in that time relentlessly goes by, the past is continually swollen with the hoarded total of all that has visually transpired, only to be altered in turn as past time recedes and its traces are overlaid by, and refracted in, the seconds, minutes, days, months and years that so rapidly supervene.

Usually, there is little obligation to think about such matters. Our eyes perform as we wish, time goes by according to circadian rhythms or the measured pace of a time-piece, and things are simply around us, to be navigated among or used according to our need. This is the kind of vision, pragmatic, readily advancing our purposes, generally unremarked, that I here term naïve. With our subjective means, we heedlessly look to our objective goals. Engaged in the occupations of daily life, we have little reason to notice the visual field, much less its immediate disposition, its volatility, its plasticity, its role in our integrity, our continuity, our current state of being. To verbally describe the field, however, as was just done, is to direct our attention away from our pragmatic goals to our means of reaching them, notice that of which we were oblivious, break into pieces that which was undivided, arrange in a linear sequence that which spread outward concentri-

cally from its center in the self, and cast as a mental image, a representation, that which was simply lived.

So it is with a painter working from observation, though his terms tend to the non-verbal. When he takes up his brush, the visual surround is no longer reflexively adjunct to his habits and desires. Not only is he acutely aware of it as an object of attention in its own right, he is aware of it in a specific way that involves deliberation and choice. He chooses from the surround a segment for the rectangle he will work on, deciding what things will be included, what will be excluded. He calculates how the included things will be managed—where they will sit in relation to each other and to the edges, whether some will be cut by an edge, and what will be their relative sizes. He considers what color they are in nature and in the painting, compared to each other; also, how light or dark on a scale of white to black. Questions of paint application he considers as well, along with his procedure for building up forms; and his hand and eye cooperate in catching those aspects of the view he would address, as he deftly, boldly or clumsily transposes his observations into paint. In short, matters relevant to composition and performance enter the experiential train. His visual experience shifts to a phase other than naive, a mode distinct from that of his routine visual business, the mode of pictorial creation. To say there was always a visual field and that it remains as before, except that the painter now regards it as a pictorial object, will not do. It is by virtue of his painting from observation that the visual field has become an object of contemplation in the first place, and has taken on a distinctive cast, an altered character, according to the painting ideas he brings to it. By the agency of his ideas, the visual field becomes laden with potential imagery of a certain sort, and is transformed.

While the painter tended to his routine affairs, his visual experience mainly and simply included two factors, him and the immediate object of his gaze. Now that he is painting, his visual experience mainly includes three factors, and intricately: first, himself, with his individual expectations and sensibility, his own history and outlook as an informed member of an artistic community; second, the still-life, sitter, or landscape, selected as legible for painting, onto which his expectations, sensibility, history and informed outlook are projected; and third, the picture, asserting its own autonomous forces and budding law of growth, its own demand for coherence according to the pictorial syntax deployed in its construction, quite independent of the source. As the painter covers the surface, this third factor comes actively into play. Articulate, lasting pictorial form, virtual space embodied on two dimensions, now participates, in the immediate visual experience of the painter, with the three-dimensional, erosive space of actuality. The continual shifting of attention and realignment of myriad elements that typifies the field of view now includes not only a methodical way of seeing nature but also a concordant painting of nature. Nature to art, art to nature, the painter strives to reconcile them. As he works on the painting, he shapes it to resemble the phenomenal world, certainly; yet, in doing so, he projects on the phenomenal world his pictorial expectations. The appearance of

things is in particular directed ever more strongly by the painting as it emerges from under his hand.

It was just such a tripartite complex that Cézanne had in mind, or was said to have in mind, when quoted by Gasquet as follows: "You were talking to me the other day about Kant. It may sound like nonsense, but I would see myself as the subjective consciousness of that landscape, and my canvas as its objective consciousness. My canvas and the landscape are both outside me, but while the one is chaotic, transient, muddled, lacking in logic or rational coherence, the other is permanent, tangible, classifiable, forming part of the world, of the theater of ideas . . . of their individuality." ⁴

Apropos chaos versus logic, consider by way of illustration the trials of a hypothetical landscapist of the 1860's, an acquaintance of Sisley, Renoir and Monet, but a novice. With knapsack and easel he one fine day tramps the countryside near Barbizon, marching down lanes, wandering through groves of oak and birch and across rocky pastures, looking for a suitable view, a grouping of elements consistent with his idea of what a painting should be. He looks, that is, for a motif. Late in the afternoon, rounding a corner, he finds a woodpile and thatch-roofed farm buildings, a rough track going straight on, some pollarded trees standing along its verge, the whole bathed in warm autumn light. These he can see as pigmented shapes fitted together on a flat surface, within the frame, scaled to size, and unified by a common tint; so there it is, what he was looking for, a desirable image residing in nature, pliantly awaiting his action—or so it seems.

Even while he sets up his easel and gets out his palette, brushes and paint, the sun drops a degree, the shadows creep, his motif slightly evolves, but he is unalarmed. The concept for a painting he has stumbled across in the real world is so immediate, so compellingly apparent, so thoroughly vouchsafed to him in his imagination, he believes he is master of what he sees. Yet everything in this motif, including the "envelope," the illumination produced by the sun shining through haze, is present at the same time. Though he can envision his painting completed, with all its elements likewise simultaneously present, the task of bringing it to that happy state can hardly be accomplished in one swoop. As he touches his canvas here and there, composing his picture bit by bit, the elements of nature he first saw as contemporary aspects of a united whole are seen one after another, as are the elements of his picture as he lays them down. That which is co-present in nature, that which in pictorial terms will be co-present in the final work, must be assembled sequentially. As he touches the canvas he is obliged to focus exclusively on the mark he is making. Doing so, he loses his overview not only of the motif but of his whole composition, together and entire. Or, engrossed in a subset of the motif, say the pollarded trees against the sky, he loses track of their relation to another subset, and to the facets of nature from which they derive. Moreover, the emergent painting soon exerts its own authority, its own direction, tangential to the motif. It asks of him that he respond in kind, adjust what he had originally envisaged. Meantime, the shadows of the actual trees are lengthening and sliding, the light is steadily warmer, and the far pine that at first seemed a mi-

nor ornament within the virtual ensemble, a small, dark triangle against the horizon, has become intrusive, for it is now spotlighted by the sun, which has settled toward the horizon. No longer willing to play a subsidiary role, the pine jabs the skyline, quarrels with the effect, protests with all the vigor of rampant actuality this particular union of nature and art.

That is to say, the initial unitary concept is followed by fragmentary and fleeting ones, loses its simultaneous integrity in the step-by-step manner in which its parts are assembled, is compromised by secondary, confusing details the painter's wandering mind to his annoyance insists on noticing, is led elsewhere by the claims of a coherent surface he has himself created, or is worn away by the ceaseless drama of change nature heaps on his senses. Continuing to paint though the hour, returning to his spot next day at the same time for another session, he finds that what he first saw, thought he saw, faintly recalled seeing, is never again quite there. Unable to cement in his mind the initial glimpse of wholeness, the rhythmic movement and massing of lights and darks that were abstract attributes of what lay before him, and that he hoped to transfix with his colored paste, he chases the movement of the light, notices other but contrary possibilities, proceeds in sequence from one reading of his motif and picture to others, finds himself in a labyrinth of choices, loses his way, watches the heap he has assembled on his canvas fall in a jumble, gives up, stalks disgustedly back to the inn where he is staying, swears emphatically to stop painting forever.

Well did Pierre Bonnard understand difficulties of this sort. "I tried to paint (a bouquet of roses) exactly, precisely," he said to Angele Lamotte.

I let myself be absorbed by the details, I yielded to painting roses. I discovered that I was floundering; there was no way out; and that I could not recapture my first idea; and that I had lost sight of the vision that seduced me, my point of departure.

All around me, I often see interesting things . . . I paint, trying not to lose the immediate conception, I am weak—if I let myself go, as with the bouquet of roses, at the end of a moment I have lost my original vision and I no longer know where (or how) to proceed.

In a word, a conflict is produced between the initial conception, the good idea of a painter, and the changeable, varied world of the object, of the motif, that has caused the first inspiration. The painters who are able to approach the subject directly are very rare and those who are able to get through have a very personal argument. Cézanne in front of the subject had a firm idea of what he wanted to do—and only took from nature that which reaffirmed his concept. He was the painter most powerfully armed before nature, the purest, the most sincere.

Claude Monet painted from the subject, but only for ten minutes at a time. He didn't give things the time to take him in. He would return to work when the light approximated his first vision.

The Impressionists worked from the motif but armed by their method, their manner of painting.⁵

To fend off the chaos and muddle Cézanne refers to, the floundering Bonnard refers to—indeed, to basically see nature as possible for painting at all—painters working

from observation need a will and a way. No single idea, no single practice, gives them the protection and point of view they require. John Constable, for one, was intrigued by meteorology. He taught himself to paint the sky on the basis of a book, Thomas Forster's "Researches about Atmospheric Phenomena," containing the theories of one Luke Howard, who systematically classified cloud forms as "Cumulus," "cirrus," and so on, during the early years of the nineteenth century.⁶ Thus armed, Constable made remarkable discoveries for his art. While doing so he was by no means completely original, though, for his practice was but an extension of customary practice at the time. He divided his work into three types: small open-air sketches on paper, full-size "sketches" for finished works, and the more polished works meant for exhibition, which the first two types were not. If his paint handling and color especially in his later work moderately anticipated that of Delacroix and the Impressionists, who looked back to him with curiosity and respect, his treatment of lights and darks harkened to seventeenth-century landscapists, who were his exemplars.

In France, some thirty years later, painting pictures outdoors and calling them suitable for exhibition, or nearly so, was a venturesome pursuit, the encouraging precedent of Constable notwithstanding. To concepts and procedures usual in French art a self-select few had added a certain impetus, raising issues that had been thought of and talked about before, but less ardently and pointedly, with less searching a result. "Whatever the site, whatever the object, the artist should submit to his first impression," advised Corot. "I always try to see the effect at once. . . . In the same way I work on all the parts of my picture at once, gradually improving each one till I have got the effect complete." If at another time, he said, "I recommend to you the greatest Naiveté in study. And do precisely what you see," to the younger, less seasoned Renoir, he remarked, "One can never be sure about what one has done; one must always go over it in the studio." Bolder advice was given by the painter of marine views, Eugene Boudin, who befriended the young Monet. "Everything that is painted directly on the spot," Boudin said, "has always a strength, a power, a vividness of touch that one doesn't find again in the studio." One must show "extreme stubbornness in retaining one's first impression, which is the good one." Then, adding what Corot certainly would have affirmed, believing as he did in "working on all parts at once," Boudin said, "It is not a single part which should strike one in a picture but indeed the whole."⁷

When Monet and his circle went to Chailly in 1864 to paint in the forest, it was the example of Boudin they followed by painting everything "directly on the spot."⁸ . . . It seems to me," Monet wrote to Bazille in July of that year,

when I see nature, that I see it ready-made, completely written, but then try to do it! All this proves that one must think of nothing but this; it is by dint of observation and reflection that one makes discoveries. So lets dig away and dig without cease.⁹

Talking as they did of summary views of nature, taken in at first glance; of a site and their view of it, the object, the first impression, the effect; then of pictures made of parts, the parts worked on all at once and improved until the effect is caught, these men talked of the conceptual armaments they were developing to assist them during their incursions. Evidently a special attitude was needed, a weapon referred to by Corot when he recommended “the greatest Naiveté in study,” of which more will be said. That painting and reality were not easily reconciled is attested by Monet, who saw nature as if it instantly were a picture, that is, “ready-made, completely written,” but then exclaimed his disillusionment by recalling soberly that discoveries require “observation and reflection,” that is, thought.

While he was painting grain stacks in 1891, Monet wrote to Gustave Geffroy (who in three years would sit for Cézanne):

I am set on a series of different effects, but at this time of year the sun goes down so quickly that I cannot follow it . . . I am working at a desperately slow pace, but the further I go, the more I see that I have to work a lot in order to manage to convey what I am seeking: 'instantaneity,' above all, the envelopment, the same light spread over everywhere; and more than ever, easy things achieved at one stroke disgust me. Finally, I am more and more maddened by the need to convey what I experience . . .¹⁰

Here is documented the extent to which Monet’s perceptions of nature were vivified by words even as he strove in his practice to amend the sense of those words. As the century wore on the word “effect” came to bear less on a thing or assembly of things, defined by the areas of light and shade that rested thereabouts, more on a transient quality of atmosphere. “The envelope” did not refer to things at all, but was the nimbus of light itself, encasing things, coating their features in an over-all particulate content of the gaseous medium, an over-all diaphanous translucency. As the envelope was by definition occasional and fugitive, it followed that as his career advanced Monet was inclined to pursue rare meteorological conditions. The progression of thought, of language and of what was visibly extracted from nature for painting was away from things, toward phenomena of the air, away from the lasting, toward the ephemeral.

Supporting these discussions, these conceptual refinements, was an elaborate scaffold of ideas represented in French painting culture by an elaborate nomenclature, items of which have already been mentioned. If terms such as “motif,” “effect” and “impression” were somewhat malleable, their meaning shifting over time, certain of the tenants behind them held constant, steadily upheld in the instruction received by students of the plastic arts. A student typically began by drawing from reproductions of famous works made available as engravings, proceeded to drawing from plaster casts of antique sculpture, and only after that was allowed to draw a live model. The play of light and shade on the cast or model was said to constitute the effect, and one purpose of drawing was to capture the effect by rendering the lights and darks of which it was comprised,

giving attention to the range of middle-tones that lay between the extremes of white and black, mediating them. One way of building a range of tones was to use hatch-work, the areas of closely parallel lines sometimes crossed with other lines, or cross-hatched, to make a dark area darker, as in an etching. One student recalled that a plaster cast looked white to him when seen in the light, dark when in shadow, adding that “the *unpracticed eye does not perceive* what we call ‘modeling’, that is, the transition from light to shade by means of half-tones” (emphasis added).¹¹

So pervasive was the training that it carried over to landscape drawings. One looked for the effect and blocked in areas of hatchwork to suggest the masses as united by the effect. "Modeling" carried over to painting as well, systematically, in the instruction students received, for they were advised to first establish the darkest darks and lightest lights, then introduce a range of middle tones, carefully adjusted to be distinct yet graduated. If properly done, the relationships tellingly balanced, the effect was captured. One was also advised while sketching to leave each patch of paint unblended, as though laying a mosaic. Unable to match a range that ran in nature from the brilliance of the sky and reflected sunlight to the opposite in darkest shadow, one compressed within the much narrower limits of pigment what would have been unconvincing were it not artfully contrived. Thus even the most tightly controlled, conventional products of hallowed tradition relied on an all-encompassing, inescapable fiction.

All paintings, it was thought, required modeling. Beyond that, they were divided by category: the study (*étude*), a quick painting done in fifteen minutes or two hours and broadly handled; the rough sketch (*pochade*), a quick painting aimed especially at the effect; and the rough draft (*ebauche*), an underpainting to be scrapped, painted over and finished after it dried. Though studies were valued for their summarizing freshness and had an accepted role in the production of the large machines that dominated the huge exhibitions frequent to the period, at mid-century a strict hierarchy, *Histoire* at the top, *Paysage* at the bottom, forbade their acceptance as complete in their own right. The position of landscape studies was ancillary. They were a preparation for complete works, or formed a collection through which the painter might sort for reference while working in his studio on proper pictures that told a story, possibly from Greco-Roman mythology, from European history, or from the Bible, as often as not in a bland mutation of David or Claude.

When those who were to be derisively stamped “Impressionist” began painting, in and around Paris, during the eighteen-sixties, the works that made them notorious, their at first tentative radicalism was powered by an illustrious, long-lived, highly developed canon. The discourse they inherited helped them build pictures from observation without being overwhelmed. In the eighteen-eighties science, too, was brought to the fray, as it had been by Constable with his study of cloud types. Pissarro among others discovered Michele-Eugène Chevreul, whose *The Law of the Simultaneous Contrast of Colors* was published in 1839; also physicist Ogden Rood, whose *Students' Text-book of Color; or*



Figure 1

Modern Chromatics was published in 1879 and soon translated into French.¹² Colored and shaded pictures, exactly matching the objects from which they come, Rood stated, as if to describe Divisionist methods and paintings, are deposited on the retina, "and it is by their action on the retina that we see. These retinal pictures are, as it were, mosaics, made up from an infinite number of points of light." To Durand-Ruel, Pissarro expressed his wish for a modern synthesis of painting methods and science, based on Chevreul, Maxwell and Rood, that would decompose tones into their constituents and replace mixture of pigments in uniform tones with optical mixture of discrete dots.¹³

"But surely it is clear," he wrote to his son during his Divisionist phase,

that we could not pursue our studies of light with much assurance if we did not have as a guide the discoveries of Chevreul and other scientists. I would not have distinguished between local color and light if science had not given us the hint; the same hold true for complementary colors, contrasting colors, etc.¹⁴

Pissarro and his colleagues wanted their motifs and ideas to be modern. Their

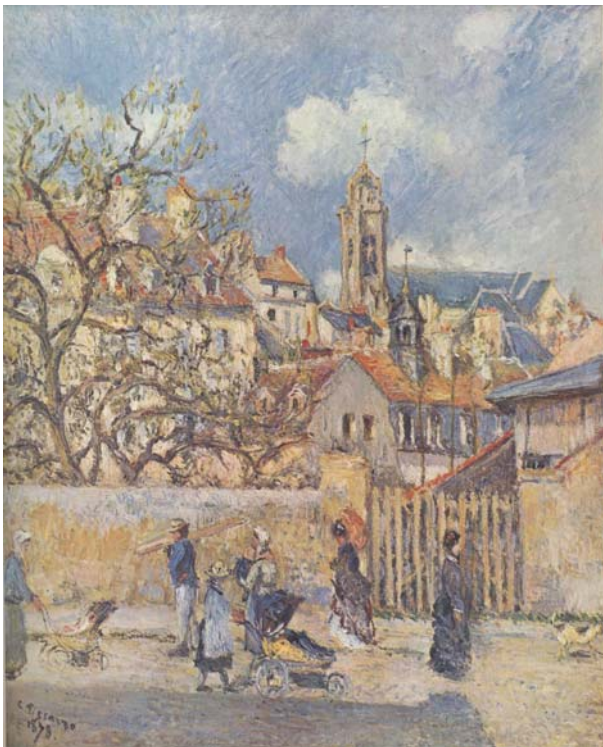


Figure 2

projects had for them a somewhat spurious tinge of experiment—a word they were disposed to use. Combining what they took from the tradition of the *pochade* and what they converted to their own ends from contemporary thought, they discovered for painting a new structure of color in nature, newly to be found in motifs. To the extent the art they practiced was able on its own terms to treat what contemporary ideas brought, they found what those ideas predicted: a play of complementaries and the decomposition of uniform areas into their constituent hues. Local colors, they noticed and discussed, reflected whatever was nearby, or reflected the sky. Shadows, seen this way, were not merely darkened areas of local color but were sprinkled with reflections from nearby objects or the dome above, and were quite varied. Hence the interest in scenes of winter that proposed shadows on snow to be blue, as in Pissarro's *Snow at Louveciennes* (fig. 1). "Turner and Constable," Pissarro wrote to his son, "while they taught us something,

showed us in their works that they had no understanding of the *analysis of shadow*"¹⁵ A robust fruit of these ideas, richly embroidered, is Pissarro's *Park in Pontoise* of 1878, wherein the shadow of a building that stood behind him, running across the bottom four-fifths of the picture, is imbued with the colors of the sky and the warm whites and yellows of the sunlit buildings across the way (fig. 2).

2

All this, familiar though it may be from scholarship, prompts a host of questions: Was it possible for Monet to circumscribe and cut away from an ever ongoing and never repeated temporal succession that which he likened to a distinct entity or quanta, as though the effect were a specimen to be captured and pinned in a tray or an experiment to be identically repeated, or as if the same segment of time on successive days could be lived through again and again, like a length of film repeatedly run through a projector? Consequent to the invention of clocks and of time cut into parts of equal duration, was it not so that Monet's "instant" was conceptually the same as the section of a visual pyramid in linear perspective, a snapshot, a halted slice of space and time that did not subsist in experience, neither on the neural cells lining retina, nor in unmediated duration?¹⁶ And was it not the case, as time slid by, that one minute, one hour, one day melted unstoppably and irredeemably into another, so that the effect must change, and endlessly?

Was Monet a hero of painting because he resembled Cuculain fighting the sea? Slashing away with his long-handled brushes at a furious rate, did he over and over assail the full-flooding prime moment only to have it retreat in the time-flow? Did he first paint toward the "instant" he had envisioned, and that he glimpsed on the experiential horizon, rushing toward him from the future? Did it arrive in the present, sweep over him, bloom into his motif in the physical present, in optical fact, then slide by, so that he no sooner painted from it in the here-and-now than he painted away from it, regarding it so to speak in retrospect as it fled into the past? Was his mental ground one where the anticipated future, the concurrent moment, the remembered past, his pictorial imagination and much knowledge and experience of painting came together? Were his series paintings of the haystack, of Rouen Cathedral, of the row of poplars, and of the Seine attained through astute looking and matching, requiring prodigies of concentration on the physical present, but also elaborate inventions, orchestrations of color that postulated reality at least as much as they recorded it?

Are the terms "effect" and "envelope" mere labels Monet applied to what was plainly there for all to see in the course of daily life, or did these terms enable him to extract from nature, for painting, that which otherwise barely could be discerned? Speaking in his letter of a "series of effects," of "seeking instantaneity," and then of "the envelopment, the same light spread everywhere," did he merely voice formal categories having no connection to his observations, or did he find that naming the categories, envisioning them as attributes of a motif, and observing them in nature coincided? And did clouds look the same to Constable after

he learned their names, their characteristic shapes, the tale they told of future weather? After he grasped the phenotypes, did actual clouds take on, to his new way of looking, various distinctive characteristics they formerly lacked? Did Pissarro, when aided by color science, see shadows "as they really are," to recall Erle Loran's memorable phrase from part one of this essay? If so, how could Constable before him have seen them "as they really are" when he made them a darker variant of local color? Is it not likely that Constable, equipped with Luke Howard's concept of cloud types, found that clouds gained a distinctive appearance in that they fit the conceptual framework, but saw shadows according to van Ruisdael and Rubens, from whom his concept of color was gathered; and that the Impressionists, equipped with the concept of reflections and the decomposition of light, were prepared, while looking at shadows, to see what lay dormant, potentially visible, ready to leap to view at the command of these novel suggestions?

Are the terms "envelope" and "effect" a mere play with words, bearing on the identical perceived phenomenon, or is the perceived phenomenon adjusted with the adjustment of language? Is it not the case that by naming a thing, whether verbally, or through a pictorial device, or in some combination of verbal and visual construct, that an appearance is extracted from the physical present, a resemblance created? And if in the daily routines of life the color of shadows is indifferent, is it not true that the painter must decide, evoking one idea or another to pull forward into observation that which nature is equipped to verify, so that the belief in shadows as brown or speckled coincides with the perception of brown or broken color in shadows? Did not the extensive nomenclature of French painting serve to identify, and thus make visible, what otherwise languished in the netherworld of the unnamed? Did not the student speak truly when he recalled of drawing the plaster cast that "the unpracticed eye does not perceive what we call 'modeling'," and did not Constable have it equally right, and for the same reasons, when he said, in a letter of 1823, "A man sees nothing in nature but what he knows?"

3

So far, these remarks are by way of background. Before leaving them to return to Cézanne, another term, implied by some of the others, must be mentioned. While such words as "motif," "effect," "impression," "envelope," and "modeling" indicate a perceived object, this term indicates the perceiving subject. It points to the experience of he who notices a motif, an effect, or the envelope, or who receives an impression. Like Rood's "retinal mosaic," it comes to painting from Empiricist philosophy and science, if through a curious process of alteration that gives to its meaning a singular twist.

John Locke wrote of the mind as a *tabula rasa*, written on by "sensations." Publishing *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in 1690, assisting on its translation into French in 1700, he contended that we have no innate ideas. Our minds, vacant at birth, are furnished by virtue of the sensations falling to them from experience, and by our reflecting on these impacts. Accumulating sensations, of which it forms simple ideas,

the mind builds up a stock from which it extrapolates complex ideas and ascends to higher levels of abstract reasoning.

“Let us then suppose the Mind to be, as we say,” Locke wrote,

white Paper, void of all Characters, without any *Ideas*; How comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store, which the busy and boundless Fancy of Man has painted on it, with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of Reason and Knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from *Experience*.

First, *Our Senses*, conversant about particular sensible Objects, do convey into the Mind, several distinct *Perceptions* of things, according to those various ways, wherein those Objects do affect them: And thus we come by those *Ideas*, we have of *Yellow, White, Heat, Cold, Soft, Hard, Bitter, Sweet . . .* This great Source, of most of the *Ideas* we have, depending wholly upon our Senses, and derived by them to the Understanding, I call *SENSATION*.¹⁷

Locke’s descendant, Ogden Rood, professor of physics and amateur painter, departed from him mainly in having an improved understanding of the physics of light, and of physiology:

. . . the sensation of sight is produced by the action of very minute waves (of light) on the nervous substance of the retina; that is to say, by the aid of purely mechanical movements of a definite character. When these waves have (a certain length), they produce the sensation of red — we see red light; if they are shortened to (a certain length), they call up in us a different sensation -- we say the light is colored orange; and as the lengths of the waves are continually shortened, the sensation passes into yellow, green, blue and violet. From this it is evident that color is something which has no existence outside and apart from ourselves; outside of ourselves there are merely mechanical movements . . .¹⁸

If these passages suggest Impressionist theory and practice, then we are obliged to wonder how Pissarro made the leap from involuntary stimulation of the retina by light waves to pictures deliberately painted from observation. Equating Rood’s “sensations” with those of Impressionism required him to usefully misconstrue what Empiricist discourse on vision was about. Borrowing ideas from one sphere of activity, he enabled ideas in another by transforming them. The difference is illustrated in a letter to his son from Rouen, where he had gone to seek motifs. “I am letting my view of the landscape resolve itself,” he wrote. “Sensations don’t come all at once—I shall stroll a bit first.”¹⁹ Though sensations were certainly needed for taking a stroll, these were the naïve and involuntary kind, reputed by Locke to be the building-blocks of knowledge, taken for granted by Rood for his “retinal mosaic,” needed by Pissarro to guide himself down the streets of Rouen. But to this kind Pissarro was indifferent. They were not at all the ones he meant. Rather than nerve cells on the retina firing in response to light, the sensations he wrote of were formal elements he read into the scenes of the city, abstract attributes of pictorial art he projected on Rouen. Strolling about and familiarizing himself with the city, he resorted to sensations of the first kind. Little or no envisioning of motifs took place. His view of the landscape was unresolved. Calling on sensations of the second

kind, they became his visual goal, his conscious aim, visible but chosen traits of a given view, bent to the formal properties of painting, tending to motifs, cultivated, willed, incipiently pictorial. Having as their purpose assembly of an image, yet evoked as his perceptions of the actual world, they were needed for resolving landscapes, that is, for seeing select views of Rouen as paintings by Pissarro. Mediating nature and art, bringing them into accord, the role of “sensations” was symbolic in much the sense Cassirer intends when he writes of cultural artifacts as instruments of perception.

Thought by Pissarro to simultaneously and indiscriminately belong to nature, to his optical response to nature, and to his nascent picture of nature, these omnibus symbols were abstract in the particular sense of reducing, condensing, summarizing their ostensible object. Thus did sensations involve reification, for the limitlessly flowing and pre-pictorial world of naive visual experience was seen abstractly, as the structural components of a motif, and those abstractions were then set down as a web of marks concretely representing that motif. The motif, the impression, the effect, the envelope—all were compound of abstractions designated by this term. Yet Pissarro's “sensations” stood obscurely, too, for those of the philosophers and scientists, or rather an idea of what these topics of debate and study might be like, if only he could see them. As he was unable to contemplate stimuli taking place on the dorsal surfaces of his own eyes, a painter's notion of what a retinal mosaic made of “sensations” would resemble if he could examine his own somatic processes was at issue. Adapted from that technique of the schools which called for leaving each patch of relatively light or dark paint standing unblended, as though laying tiles, standing for an Empiricist idea of the initial constituents of knowledge, aimed at Rouen so as to thresh pictorial grain from the many perspectives he enjoyed of that city, reified as material on a surface, Pissarro's imagistic constructs represented not only discernible aspects of the untrammelled scene but a certain scientific and philosophic outlook combined with certain picture-making traditions of French art. The specific, visible mark on the surface, the concrete result of reification, connoted much that stood above and beyond, implied but unseen.

Much the same can be said of the *tabula rasa*, a concept inseparable from that of “sensations.” It, too, came to painting from Empiricism, and it, too, was altered for the needs of art. Writing of the mind as a white paper, devoid of characters, imprinted by “sensations,” Locke wrote of the “understanding” in terms of a primitive camera, a camera obscura,

a Closet wholly shut from light, with only some little openings left, to let in external visible Resemblances, or *Ideas* of things without; would the Pictures coming into such a dark room but stay there, and lie so orderly as to be found upon occasion, it would very much resemble the understanding of a man, in reference to all Objects of sight, and the *Ideas* of them.²⁰

A camera obscura uses the physical laws of light and optical projection to obtain pictures, just as linear perspective predicted, and with which result linear perspective is

essentially in accord. Locke's analogy was that of the mind as an empty surface painted with perspective pictures by means of "sensations." As to how to prove or disprove the thesis, Locke, then Berkeley, and, before them, Descartes, conducted what would now be called a mental experiment. They discussed what would happen were a blind man given sight. The Empiricists argued, against Descartes, that without a fund of knowledge built from experience such a man would not at first be able to see as do the sighted, Locke quoting with approval a letter from his friend, Molyneux, who said a blind man familiar with a cube and sphere through touch would be unable to recognize them at first glance upon recovery. The sensible qualities pertaining to touch are unlike those pertaining to the visual faculty, and of these he would have no experience, the logic ran. In Berkeley's opinion, ". . . a man born blind and made to see would, at first opening of his eyes, make a very different judgment of the magnitude of objects intromitted by them from what others do. He would not consider the ideas of sight with reference to, or as having any connection with, the ideas of touch," and so on.²¹

"The whole technical power of painting," wrote John Ruskin, in 1864, taking up this theme,

depends on our recovery of what may be called the *innocence of the eye*; that is to say, a sort of childish perception of these flat stains of color, merely as such, without consciousness of what they signify—as a blind man would see them if suddenly gifted with sight."²²

But Ruskin's thinking, compared to that of Locke and Berkeley, rode a different wind on an opposite tack. His use of the word, "recovery," bore not on somatic processes generating initial acquisitions of the mind, but on symbol-formation generating a pictorial syntax. Rather than blindness overcome, his thrust was innocence regained. Rather than automatic to a sense newly bestowed, the "childish perception" he wrote of was earned by the already sighted artist through an effort of will, a process of phenomenological reduction, a whittling away of routine expectations, so that things could be seen purely as stains of color, no more. A particular attitude learned on purpose by painters through long practice was at stake, the one mentioned by Corot when he said, "I recommend to you the greatest Naiveté in study," and that was adopted by Monet, Pissarro, and Cezanne, as we will soon see. Just as Pissarro converted empiricist "sensations" to pictorial ends, deciding they were in his motif, in his eyes, and were substantiated both ways by flecks of paint, so did Ruskin convert from empiricism to pictorial ends the *tabula rasa* and recovery from blindness, deciding they were apposite "flat stains of color" seen "merely as such." By converting one kind of thinking to another, from which it was otherwise disconnected, Ruskin, like Pissarro, advanced, not the means and ends of philosophical and scientific discourse on naïve vision, but the formal means and ends of art. Alfred North Whitehead put the matter well when he wrote,



Rewald 169



Chappuis 80

We look up and see a colored shape in front of us, and we say, — there is a chair. But what we have seen is the mere colored shape. Perhaps an artist might not have jumped to the notion of a chair. He might have stopped at the mere contemplation of a beautiful color and a beautiful shape. But those of us who are not artists are very prone, especially if we are tired, to pass straight from the perception of the colored shape to the enjoyment of the chair, in some way of use, or of emotion, or of thought. We can easily explain this passage by reference to a train of difficult logical inference, whereby, having regard to our previous experiences of various shapes and various colors, we draw the probably conclusion that we are in the presence of a chair. I am very skeptical as to the high-grade character of the mentality required to get from the colored shape to the chair. One reason for this skepticism is that my friend the artist, who kept himself to the contemplation of color, shape and position, was a very highly trained man, and had acquired this facility of ignoring the chair at the cost of great labor. We do not require elaborate training merely in order to refrain from embarking upon intricate trains of inference.²³

4

Now we can return to Cézanne. Theodore Reff, providing a name in English for his “flat stains of color,” the “constructive stroke,” argued that the blocky, repetitious tiles of paint first appeared in the mid-seventies, in studio paintings done from imagination, then were applied to paintings done outdoors, from observation.²⁴ But in *The Road* (R. 169), a sober landscape with plein air attributes, assigned by Rewald the date c. 1871, the stroke appears on the rocks and clouds, and is already on the march. Looking beyond the discipline of painting to that of drawing turns up the centuries-old technique of hatching, taught at art schools throughout Cézanne’s lifetime and learned by one and all, as has already been mentioned. Regular, parallel groups of lines appear in Cézanne’s drawings from the beginning, almost automatically, in perfunctory sketches, then with

more nuance and care in drawings done at the *Académie Suisse* (C. 79, 80). The hatching here describes light more than it builds volume, but in a cautious drawing of a Roman bust, dated by Chappuis c. 1859, the technique of constructing a form with planes



Chappuis 205

hatched in pencil is presciently if tentatively evident (C. 58). By the late 1860's the technique has matured to the point where it is ready for transfer to paint, as in a drawing from the model dated by Chappuis 1867-69 (C. 205).

Though the constructive stroke probably didn't start in the imagined paintings only, it could have, for it has no literal counterpart in nature. It is a sensation given a colored body, a small, sturdy shape, signifying what might be called a "virtual datum." Though applicable to nature, it applies also to Cézanne, who knows himself to be the seat of sensations. Its origins are likely various. It comes from the tradition of the *hacheur*, from the dabbed Impressionist mark of Monet, Renoir, Sisley and Pissarro, and from Cézanne's drive to organize his seeing so as to organize himself. It surfaces in his imagined paintings, in his copies from the paintings of other artists, or, more uncertainly at first, in his still-lives or landscapes done from observation. In the later, it lies across some but not all quadrants or denotes discrete fragments of motifs, as in the rough-hewn, parallel palette-knife strokes of *L'Etang des Soeurs* of 1877 (R. 307). In a painting done several years later, *Bridge at Maincy*, securely dated c. 1879-80 by Cézanne's stays at Melun (R. 436), the stroke still clings to foliage as if justified by an imitation of leaves, but by c. 1880, in the lushly verdant *Chateau de Médan* (R. 437), securely dated by visits Cézanne made to Zola, it is rampant. Small, squarish pats of paint, laid down bluntly with a square-cut brush, march diagonally, in parallel, across the entire picture from bottom left to top right, no longer occasioned by such numerable items as leaves but pervasive, an over-all agent of the painted space and of Cézanne's disposition, their steady beat all-consuming.



Rewald 307



Rewald 436

Just as the act of writing can engender new perspectives on and a deeper penetration of one's topic, so can brushing colored paste on a surface like-

likewise be suggestive. Writing and painting don't consist merely of setting a list of ideas



Rewald 437

to words, as does a clerk, or recording a scene, as does a photograph; they are propulsive—a motor that throws off imagery and ideas. Cézanne's perceptions of a still life or landscape are facilitated by the generative formal act itself. His relatively open-ended process of looking and notating, proposing and responding, tokened by the constructive stroke, prompts him to pluck from the apparent world observations he reads into it. Hanging the hat of his pictorial imagination on a sequence of phenomenal pegs that rise from the still life or landscape, he tracks his sensations. His brush records but also exposes the path. A structure emerges, a pictorial theme, to be pursued with cogent purpose.

The theme belongs to the picture, to the apparent world in which it is discovered, and to the inner life of Cézanne, whose being is conveyed forward by each mark. Each mark is discrete but lends itself to serial accumulation and an outcome by no means wholly anticipated. If the first set of marks predict the picture's conclusion by establishing the parameters of its beginning, so that the entire surface is soon brought into play, the first set also launches an exploration.

To Monet and Pissarro a “sensation,” is a unit assigned to the perceiving eye, to nature perceived, and to the picture they are working on. Their logic includes the stimulating moment of nature and the stimulated lining of the retina, both of which are implied in the dab of colored substance on the canvas. Each mark fixes a momentary appearance they project upon and snatch from nature, catching it on the fly. The mark reduces this synthesis of nature and art, this created phenomenon, to a fragment of pigment, a tessera in a pavement. Each mark participates in the emerging network of marks describing the motif, even as it signifies the eye receiving from the physical present a single impact. To Cézanne, the business is more involved. His logic adds to that of Monet and Pissarro the reactive state of he who has sensations. Just as words erupt from innermost being as a florescence of the self, giving utterance to the state of existence from which they emerge, producing that state even as they illuminate it, so it is, for Cézanne, with his “little sensation” and its concrete result. He is alert to the generative and expressive power of his mark in respect to his condition, its ability to regulate and guide his being. Even as a “sensation” voices the wincing but forceful man who studies the world and himself in it, is aimed by him at its place in the emerging ensemble, and is set down as the permanent statement of the unity it has itself created, it becomes a proposition he is obliged to answer. Each mark is keyed to the increasingly specific spatial theme of the picture, to the particulars of the motif, and to the temporary state of the man who wields it. Each mark, set in place, propels the whole complex system onward. Nature, picture and man are des-

ignated in each mark, each mark calls for another, and as the process unfolds the destination is revealed. The resolution of the picture becomes clear, or it does not.

The essential issue is that of “placement,” or “location.” In that each mark occupies a bit of the rectangle, it also establishes a relative position on the rectangle. A mark placed here, near this corner, is a spatial indicator exactly distant from one above and another one over there. Location by location, interval by interval, Cézanne intently measures his way back and forth across a field of canvas that signifies his chosen segment of the visual field, reducing the triaxial space of actuality to the biaxial space of pictorial intervention. The intervals stack along the vertical and horizontal axes to which the emergent image is confined, the rectangle gradually silts in, and marks group into novel configurations neither he nor anyone in the prior history of art could have anticipated. The edges of tabletops go out of alignment, the circular openings of vessels become oblate or follow eccentric orbits, distant things climb toward the surface, roads and floors tilt, parallels fail to converge, Mont Sainte-Victoire expands or dwindles.

That Cézanne takes little account of meteorological ephemera is significant. He speaks often of motifs, rarely of effects. Saying to Ambrose Vollard, who is posing for him, "I have good news for you; if the weather is 'clear gray' tomorrow, I think the sitting will be a good one," he indicates that his response to outdoor conditions is opposite Monet's. He likes thin cloud cover more than full sunshine with its extreme and rapidly changing contrasts, chooses afternoon and morning instead of the dawn and dusk that are for Monet most charged with potential, builds his studio at Les Lauves with its big window facing north, the traditional direction, from which illumination remains fairly constant. The reason he wants the things he is painting to stay put, the reason he becomes upset when the maid removes a rug across from where Vollard is sitting, is that he is edgily tracking ephemera other than meteorological. For Monet, with his Empiricist twist on linear perspective, his pursuit of “instantaneity,” nature rapidly evolves as on a screen while he stands apart, a formidable machine for seeing, a retina attached to a brush. Each mark is fired from the fixed platform of his dead-on eye to strike a passing target, fixing it in time, as on a section of a visual pyramid, consistent with a geometric projection, and with his pictorial imagination. For Cézanne, with his existential outlook, the light, even when the sky is overcast, varies maddeningly in that he varies. Each mark is fired at a passing target from that moving platform, the onward progress of being Cézanne, within his sensate, mobile body, absorbed in its intra-organic processes, reverberating with incoming auditory, visual and tactile strikes from the surround, churning along in its duration, becoming ever more replete in its maturation, in the fullness of passing hours. Vollard is obliged to hold rigidly still, the light on him is steady enough, especially if the weather is “clear gray,” yet even so appearances must be recalibrated as time goes by and Cézanne finds himself in a different affective situation. Vollard does not look the same as before, but looks, rather, to be drifting, uncertain, problematic as to locations, for the state from which he is seen—the figurative and literal angle of view—is steadily evol-

ing. "You understand, Monsieur Vollard," Cezanne exclaims in perplexity and frustration, "the contour keeps slipping away from me!"²⁵

Partly because Cézanne when younger was wary of instruction, as was argued in part two, his mark is less conditioned by established rules of rendering, hence more sheltered from dogma, hence less fettered an agent of Ruskin's innocent eye. His mark is more receptive to possibilities latent in the perceptual manifold, and more discriminating. It more clearly signifies divisions of the manifold into infinite gradations, yet it seats more firmly in the weaving of the picture surface. It is more specific, more thoroughly a reduction of the manifold to the individual, but more bloomingly global. Containing in one, undivided impulse myriad implications, it is, to borrow words from linguistics, more "holophrastic" or "polysynthetic." Concentrating virtues that in his early work had been scattered, gathering within a single decision the intolerable overabundance of thought and feeling he urgently needs to master, the mark develops from a modest start in pencil hatchwork to become in the eighteen-eighties and nineties the engine of an ever-more-mighty ordering of motifs, seen, painted, felt. Such are the strengths of this mark when combating the phenomenal world, profuse, fleeting, tri-dimensional, resolutely non-pictorial, that Cézanne is indeed, as Bonnard said, the "painter most powerfully armed before nature."

To say that constructive strokes stand for perceived facets of a motif and that the finished painting, rendered from those facets, is an outcome of Cézanne's struggle to "realize" nature is accurate, and verified by what he himself said, yet insufficient. Painting with discrete marks that are nominal "sensations" produces a narrative of sight that Cézanne fully and intensely occupies, dwells within. What he looks for and finds in the visual field is by definition already on its way to resembling distinct, regular blocks of paint. A motif for him is nothing less than the readiness of nature to become thematic in this way. By virtue of his discipline, his practice, untrammelled nature is quelled, proffering itself in the guise of parts crisscrossing a surface. His mark enables his interaction with actual things, witnessed as imagery; and the accumulation of marks has, in respect to those things and his witnessing them, its own constructive logic, its own momentum, its own rationalization of who is this man, Cézanne.

5

Between Cézanne and his two colleagues there is a further difference that must be teased from the record, for it concludes part three of this essay and leads to part four.

"When painting," Pissarro said to Louis Le Bail,

make a choice of subject, see what is lying at the right and at the left, then work on everything simultaneously. Don't work bit by bit, but paint everything at once by placing tones everywhere, with brush strokes of the right color and value, while noticing what is alongside. Use small brush strokes and try to put down your perceptions immediately. The eye should not be fixed on one point, but should take in everything, while observing the reflections

which the colors produce on their surroundings. Don't proceed according to rules and principles, but paint what you observe and feel. Paint generously and unhesitatingly, for it is best not to lose the first impression. One must have only one master—nature; she is the one always to be consulted²⁶

"When you go out to paint," Monet said to Lila Cabot Perry

try to forget what objects you have before you, a tree, a house a field or whatever. Merely think, here is a little square of blue, here an oblong of pink, here a streak of yellow, and paint it just as it looks to you, the exact color and shape, until it gives your own naive impression of the scene before you.

Cabot Perry paraphrased Monet as continuing in this vein:

He said he wished he had been born blind and then had suddenly gained his sight so that he could have begun to paint in this way without knowing what the objects were that he saw before him. He held that the first real look at the motif was likely to be the truest and most unprejudiced one, and said that the first painting should cover as much of the canvas as possible, no matter how roughly, so as to determine at the outset the tonality of the whole. Monet's philosophy of painting was to paint what you really see, not what you think you ought to see; not the object isolated as in a test tube, but the object enveloped in sunlight and atmosphere, with the blue dome of Heaven reflected in the shadows.

He always insisted on the great importance of a painter noticing when the effect changed, so as to get a true impression of a certain aspect of nature and not a composite picture . . .²⁷

"I advance all of my canvas at one time," Cézanne said to Joachim Gasquet, or so the poet recalled many years after.

With the same conviction, I approach all the scattered pieces. . . Everything we look at disperses and vanishes, doesn't it? Nature is always the same, and yet its appearance is always changing. It is our business as artists to convey the thrill of nature's permanence along with the elements and the appearance of all its changes. So I join together nature's straying hands . . . From all side, here, there and everywhere, I select colors, tones and shades; I set them down, I bring them together . . . They become objects -- rocks, trees -- without my thinking about them. If, as I perceive them, these volumes and values correspond on my canvas to the planes and patches of color that lie before me, that appear to my eyes, well then, my canvas 'joins hands'. It holds firm. But if . . . I interpret too much one day, if I'm carried away today by a theory which contradicts yesterday's, if I think while I'm painting, if I meddle, then whoosh!, everything goes to pieces.

[The artist's] whole aim must be silence. He must silence all the voices of prejudice within him, he must forget, forget, be silent, become a perfect echo.²⁸

All three speak of a painting as a collection of parts to be treated from the outset as a whole, and, in the same vein, of holding on to one's first impression or sustaining one's vision of the motif. All three equate the motif and the concrete elements of painting, Pissarro equating brush strokes to perceptions, Monet squares of paint to objects, Cézanne colors, tones and shades to rocks and trees. A preoccupation of all three, also con-

sistent with treating the parts as a whole, is to subsume individual objects to the over-all fabric. Pissarro says the eye should not be fixed on one point but take in all; Monet says to forget you have a tree, a house a field or whatever before you; Cézanne says his colors, tones and shades become objects without his thinking about them. Speaking so, all three evoke Corot's advice and certain traditions of French art, toward the later of which they at times express hostility and doubt, though it is a stool they stand on. Empiricist thinking on perception and their creative misunderstanding of same, specifically in regard to the constructs they call "sensations," are evoked as well; and then Corot's words on being naive in one's studies, Ruskin's on being like a blind man recovering his sight.

By means of these precepts all three strive to clear their minds of received knowledge that must yield customary results. "The further I go," Monet writes to Bazille, "the more I regret even the small amount of knowledge that I have. It is certainly that which cramps one the most. The further I go, the more I notice that one never dares to express what one experiences fully." "Ingres is a pernicious classicist," Cézanne says to Bernard, reaffirming his youthful disinclination to foray in Ingres' direction other than on a trial basis, and then satirically, in the cycle of the four seasons he painted for the Jas de Bouffan (as mentioned in part two), "and so in general are all those who deny nature or copy it with their minds made up and look for style in the manner of the Greeks and Romans." To Gasquet, speaking of himself as a primitive of his way, who paints naively, he says, "Facility is the death of art and we must rid ourselves of it," and, "Clichés are the leprosy of art."²⁹ The aim of all three is to go beyond what studio lore has given them, purge themselves of formulations routine and predictable, and fashion paintings at once more individual and more attuned to the prodigious immediate world around them. They will shed ready-made ideas as to how nature looks, avoid bringing to the outdoor site, as mental baggage, ideas that decide pictorial outcomes. Stylistic rigidity is to be overcome, conclusions suspended, even as the singularities of a motif are addressed. The mental framework of the painter is to be flexible, receptive, attuned to the unexpected, the adventitious. So Pissarro says the museums ought to be burned, Monet says he wishes he had been born blind.

And, Cézanne, after saying he wants to silence prejudice, forget, become a perfect echo, next adverts to contemporary photographic techniques. Some early methods required immersing metal plates or sheets of paper in chemicals to sensitize them to light. Thus by analogy he evokes Locke's *tabula rasa*, his "white Paper, void of all characters," when he continues,

And then the entire landscape will engrave itself on the sensitive plate of his being. After that, he will have to use his craft to fix it on canvas, to externalize it; but this craft, too, is always ready to obey, to translate automatically, familiar as it is with the language, with the text to be deciphered, with the two parallel texts, nature as it is seen, nature as it is felt. . .

Gasquet, who claims to have instructed Cézanne on Kant, has the artist discuss the philosopher before returning to this trope:

I was saying to you just now that while an artist is at work, his brain should be unencumbered, like a sensitized plate, a recording machine, and no more. But after repeated dipping in experiences, this sensitized plate reaches such a level of receptivity that it becomes saturated with the exact image of things. Prolonged work, meditation, study, suffering and joy—the whole of life—have prepared it for this.³⁰

The passage may recall Locke but is much closer to Ruskin and Whitehead. Cézanne's plate becomes more receptive after repeated dipping in work, meditation, study, suffering and joy, and the landscape, having "engraved itself" on the "sensitive plate," requires craft "to fix it on canvas." His tablet is well-silvered, a good deal less than blank. The "exact image of things" is enmeshed with the means of painting and all that the life of the painter entails. His mind when he paints is not an empty room, unfurnished, waiting for "sensations" to flood it as a camera obscura floods a dark chamber with images from without, but a habit of observation, a method of looking and marking, cultivated, resourceful, prepared to engage. The *tabula rasa* is considered by Cézanne from a certain outlook, informed by who he is and what he had done as a painter, and free of "style in the manner of the Greeks and Romans." Like Monet and Pissarro he wants to forego visual habits tried and true, "make discoveries," "go further," "pursue his studies." Yet his means of doing so are exceptionally robust. His "little sensation" and its reification, his constructive stroke, are as wide-ranging as speculation, as sure as intuition, as rigorous as logic. With his procedure of looking and marking, his *form of perception*, he extracts from the interchange of reality and the pictorial imagination something beyond.

To Gasquet, he says, or may approximately have said, "What I'm trying to convey to you is something more mysterious, more entangled in the very roots of being, in the impalpable source of all sensations." "A minute of the world passes," Gasquet also reports him as saying. "To paint that minute in its precise reality! Forgetting everything else for its sake. To become that minute. To be, in other words, the sensitized plate. To convey the image of what we see, forgetting everything that appeared before."³¹

"Time and reflection . . . modify little by little our vision," he writes to Emile Bernard in 1905, "and at last comprehension comes to us." At the end of this same letter, the verb *modifier* appears again: "Study modifies our vision to such a degree that the humble and colossal Pissarro finds himself justified in his anarchistic theories." Pondering for years the many-faceted synthesis of art and nature will affect what we see, Cézanne seems to imply. Study will gain for us an eye wholly innocent, an anarchy visual rather than political. The comprehension that had come to him was yielding an "exact image of things" that he thought unheralded, it may be, for six years earlier, in another off-hand remark, he had written to Gasquet senior, "For the time being I continue to seek the expression of the confused sensations which we bring with us when we are born."³²

Piaget speculated that infant vision is made up of mobile, highly elastic, poorly discriminated views that radiate from a being oblivious to his identity. External things, the infant's own body in space, and the sequence of events in time, are not yet organized into objective groups and series, and causality is neither externalized nor rationalized. There is no telling if things impinge on the body, instead of the body impinging on things, as the infantile state of perception is one of "chaotic undifferentiation."³³ Though sensate, the infant knows not his own senses. He cannot hold up his visual experience to scrutiny. He exists in a primal state of reflexes and powers unassimilated to a self and anterior to such expressions of the self as words or pictures.

Acting on a level of awareness cultivated by "long labor, meditation, study, suffering and joy," Cézanne acts on a level altogether more exigent than that of a new-born, though aimed at recovering, for painting, something of that visual plasticity, that obliviousness to causality, and to language and culture. To such a level of awareness talk of the sensitive plate and newborn sensations are but allusions. Repeatedly, with profoundest intellect, most eager appetite, and most iron determination, he employs his elaborated powers of interaction with the visible to sift through and arrange the myriad, the "infinite diversity" of the visual field,³⁴ finding that which has not yet been discovered for art. Monet and Pissarro, though they also object to the schools, informally construe their motifs in terms of a gloried but much-used convention. Space in their pictures is loosely consistent, or at least not blatantly at odds, with the space of linear perspective. To that extent, their results, compared to Cézanne's, familiarize pre-pictorial phenomena in the very act of sequestering them. From early on, Monet's gift for scaling all things from near to far in perspective diminution is prodigious. Cézanne, noting this facility, blaming himself for lacking it, says to Jules Borely, as was quoted in part one, "I make great efforts and have much difficulty. Monet has the ability to look at something and to draw it instantly in proportion." Yet Cézanne, with all the curiosity and trepidation of an explorer, edges ahead on his own. Looking at nature at least as intently as do Monet and Pissarro, but with less baggage, following the course laid down by his "sensations" wherever they take him, regardless of the alarming result, he worries there is something wrong with his eyes, apologizes to visitors for what he candidly admits are his picture's failings, and all the while approaches more closely than do his peers, with more unmitigated force than they, and with deeper conviction, the primal world of the experiential frontier.

Notes

¹. Limitations of scope prevent a proper examination of the scientific literature in support of Casirer's contention. Here are three examples from the disciplines of anthropology and psychology:

(1) In 1817, on the lake-dotted plain near present-day Winnipeg, Lord Selkirk signed a treaty with chiefs of the Salteaux and Cree. The treaty would allow European settlement two miles beyond the western bank of the Red River. The chiefs, having no precedent of individual land ownership, and lacking standardized units such as feet or meters for determining absolute

boundaries, were accustomed to measuring lodge-sites by pacing them off, larger distances by placement of landmarks, journeys by the number of sleeps. They wanted to know how far was two miles. The surveyor's crew ran chains to the proposed limit, yet the chiefs were not satisfied. Then one chief noticed horses grazing near where the surveyor's crew stood. To the agreement of his fellow chiefs, he announced that two miles was the distance a man could see sky under the belly of a horse. (See A. I. Hallowell, "Some Psychological Aspects of Measurement Among the Salteaux," *American Anthropologist*, vol. 44 (1942), pp. 65-66.)

(2) Anthropologist Benjamin Whorf, noting that Eskimos have several words for snow while English speakers have one, argued that language and observation are connected. "From this fact (of different languages) proceeds what I have called the 'linguistic relativity principle,' he wrote, "which means, in informal terms, that users of markedly different grammars are pointed by their grammars toward different types of observations and different evaluations of externally similar acts of observation, and hence are not equivalent as observers but must arrive at somewhat different views of the world."¹ Whorf's thesis, as it is called, prompted systematic investigation of whether color perception is universal. Investigators tested various peoples by comparing their words for color to their evident perception of color on standardized charts, with inconclusive results. But recent study of a remote stone-age people from the upper Sepik River in New Guinea, the Berinmo, had a more definite outcome. To the six basic terms in English for the 160 colors on a Munsell array the Berinmo tongue opposes five. Berinmo, the investigators concluded, "does not mark the distinction between blue and green, but it has a colour (sic) boundary (between 'nol' and 'wor') in a position that does not exist in English. English subjects showed the expected advantage for cross-category blue-green decisions but not for nol-wor decisions; Bernimo subjects showed exactly the opposite pattern." (See Benjamin Lee Whorf, *Language, Thought and Reality* (M. I. T. Press, 1956), pp. 216; 221; Davidoff, Davies and Robertson, "Colour (sic) Categories in a Stone-age Tribe." *Nature*, vol. 398, March 18, 1999, p. 203)

(3) An experiment conducted at Harvard in the late 1940's suggests that modified playing cards are seen in a range of combinations that conflate expectations and the actual display. Twenty-eight students were taken into a room one at a time and shown cards from what seemed an ordinary deck though some cards had been altered, their colors reversed with paint. The cards were flashed for lengths of time ranging from a fraction of a second to a second. Some students were unruffled. Confronting a red six of spades, they favored shape over color and called it a six of spades. Or they favored color over shape and called it a six of hearts. Other students had difficulty. A red six of spades was said to be a purple six of spades, a black four of hearts was said to be a "grayish" four of spades, and a red six of clubs was said to be "the six of clubs illuminated by a red light." Still other students were baffled. "I don't know what the hell it is now, not even for sure whether it's a playing card," one responded. Another commented, "I can't make the suit out, whatever it is. It didn't even look like a card that time." Opportunity to study the cards longer led to recognition. One student suddenly reported there was something wrong with the display. Six claimed the position of the pips on the cards was wrong. "What's the matter with the symbols now? They look reversed or something," said another. "The spades are turned the wrong way, I think," said still another. Such remarks were followed by seeing the incongruous card for what it was as realization dawned. (See J. S. Bruner and Leo Postman, "On the Perception of Incongruity: A Paradigm," *Journal of Personality*, XVIII, 1949, 206-223.)

To possess a symbolic construct is to enable an observation, specifically, in the context of this essay, a visual observation—a something seen. This is demonstrated not only by the Chiefs, who saw by means of sky and horses how to equate an absolute boundary to their very different system of symbolic references, but by the other two examples, one of which treats the integration of language and color perception, the other how learning and expectation direct what we see.

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2. As the painter, Charles Cajori, puts it: "Do you remember that experiment, maybe in the sixth grade, when you put a bunch of iron filings on a sheet of paper and moved a magnet underneath it and watched the filings reassemble themselves? It's similar to the way the eyes, moving, reorder the world." (Charles Cajori, "Interview with Charles Cajori," *Transfer*, vol. 2, no. 2, Fall/Winter, 1989-90), pp. 157-158.)
 3. Rapid eye movements, called "saccadic," move up to 900 degrees per second. This means "normal visual perception of almost any object or scene is a temporally extended event." "Saccades," Stephen E. Palmer writes, "are probably the most interesting type of eye movement because of their frequency and importance in understanding the dynamically selective nature of perceiving complex images. When you think about the limited nature of the visual information available from a single fixation, for example, it becomes obvious that perceiving realistic scenes requires a sequence of many different fixations, which must be integrated into a single unified perception." (See Stephen E. Palmer, *Vision Science: Photons to Phenomenology* (MIT Press, 1999), pp. 520-531; David Noton and Lawrence Stark, "Eye Movements and Visual Perception," *Scientific American*, June 1971, pp. 34-43.)
 4. Joachim Gasquet, *Joachim Gasquet's Cézanne: A Memoir with Conversations*, trans. by Christopher Pemberton (Thames and Hudson, 1991) p. 150.
 5. Angele Lamotte, "Le bouquet de roses," *Verve*, vol. V, Nos. 17 and 18, (1947), unpaginated.
 6. See Basil Taylor, *Constable: Paintings, Drawings, Watercolours* (Phaidon Press, 1975), p. 203.
 7. For "Whatever the site . . ." and "I always try . . .," see Albert Boime, *The Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, Phaidon Press, 1971, Pages 154; 155. For Corot to Renoir and others and for Boudin, see Rewald, *History of Impressionism*, pp. 101, 38.
 8. Monet, especially in the later phase of his career, is known to have worked on his landscapes in the studio, away from the motif, while attempting to sustain the freshness and immediacy of a *premier coup*. Monet outdoors is the Monet at issue here. For a discussion of these interesting complications, see Robert Gordon and Andrew Forge, *Monet* (Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1989) p. 129.
 9. Linda Nochlin, ed, *Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, 1874-1904: Sources and Documents* (Prentice Hall, 1966), p. 31.
 10. Linda Nochlin, ed. *Impressionism and Post-Impressionism*, p. 34.
 11. Boime, *The Academy and French Painting*, p 28. .
 12. The French translation became the "veritable bible" of the Neo-Impressionist movement (Robert L. Herbert, *Georges Seurat* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991), p. 391).
 13. See Rewald, *History of Impressionism*, pp. 512-513.

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14. Camille Pissarro, *Letters to His Son*, ed., John Rewald (Paul P. Appel, 1972), p. 99.
15. Pissarro, *Letters*, p. 356.
16. Various experiments suggest we do not grasp the phenomenal world in the physical present only, that visual experience is not defined by optics, and that there is no retinal image as such. See note 3, above; also Irvin Rock, "Anorthoscopic Perception," *Scientific American*, March, 1981, p. 145; Pritchard, Heron and Hebb, "Visual Perception Approached by the Method of Stabilized Images," *Perception: Selected Readings in Science and Phenomenology*, ed. Paul Tibbetts. New York: Quadrangle/ The New York Times Book Co, 1969, 191-204.
17. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford University Press, 1975), Book II, Chapter I, section I (pp. 104-5). The French translation of 1700 was by Pierre Coste. See pp. xxxiv - xxxvi of the above-cited edition.
18. Ogden N. Rood, *Students' Text-book of Color; or Modern Chromatics* (D. Appleton and Company, 1879), pp. 10, 17.
19. Pissarro, *Letters*, p. 295.
20. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chap. XI, section 17 (p. 163).
21. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Cap. IX, section 8 (pp. 145-46); George Berkeley, *An Essay Toward a New Theory of Vision*, paragraph 79.
22. John Ruskin, *The Elements of Drawing; in Three Letters to Beginners*, (John Wiley, 1864), n.1, p. 22.
23. Alfred North Whitehead, *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect* (Capricorn Books, 1959), pp. 2-3. See also Hilary Spurling, *Matisse the Master* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), p. 150: "Take this chair," said Prichard. "Yes," said Matisse, "but when I paint it, I see it in relationship to the wall, to the light in the room that encloses it and to the objects that surround it. It would be different if I wanted to buy it: I might perhaps have a first impression of its beauty, but then I'd check to see if it was solidly built, etc."
24. Theodore Reff, "Cézanne's Constructive Stroke," *The Art Quarterly*, Autumn, 1962, pp. 214-226. The phrase, "constructive stroke," appears in Denis. Rewald, citing Reff, dates the first appearance of the stroke to "four copies executed roughly between 1877 and 1879" (*Studies in Impressionism*), but later pushes the date of the first of these, a picture of flowers in a Rococo vase (R. 265), back to 1875-77 (*Catalogue*). (See Rewald, *Studies in Impressionism*, p. 109; Rewald, *The Paintings of Paul Cézanne: A Catalogue Raisonné, vol. 1, p. 181*)
25. For the full account of Vollard's sitting for Cezanne, including the details mentioned here, see Ambroise Vollard, *Cézanne*, trans., Harold L. van Doren (Dover Publications, 1984), pp.76-88.
26. Rewald, *History of Impressionism*, p. 458.

27. Lila Cabot Perry, "Reminiscences of Claude Monet," *The American Magazine of Art*, XVII (March, 1927), pp. 120-21.

28. I confess to wanting it both ways, discrediting Gasquet while quoting him anyway. Gasquet committed the Socratic exchanges to paper some six years after Cézanne's death, which tardiness already makes them suspect, and interlarded scraps from Bernard and others, mostly without attribution. The poet may partly have invented what he didn't plagiarize, but if he failed as a reporter he triumphed as a critic. Some of what he gives us is suggestive, penetrating, consistent with what we see in Cézanne's paintings, and compels attention. Yet the more worthwhile passages evoke uneasiness as well as respect. One reason for this is that the oft-quoted passage cited here echoes, or seems to, a passage from Charles Blanc:

The spectacles of nature want the essential characteristic of art—unity. Nature not only varies every moment of the day, but in her infinite complexity, her sublime disorder, she contains and manifests to us that which corresponds to the most contradictory emotions. Capable of exciting these emotions in man, she is powerless to express them. He alone can render them clear, visible, by choosing the scattered features lost in the bosom of the real, and eliminating from them what is foreign to or contradictory of his thought.

Gasquet reports that between painting sessions Cézanne would select and leaf through one of several books lying to hand, Blanc among them, but Blanc published several and Gasquet neglects to mention which one. We know Cézanne expressed himself partly by resorting to these popular texts on painting, for his letters to Bernard are salted with comments that voice his concerns while seeming to echo Blanc. So we confront a mystery: Did Gasquet lift from Blanc what he attributed to Cézanne, or did Cézanne himself borrow from Blanc, then end up quoted by Gasquet with at least middling accuracy? There is no way of telling, and the extent of Gasquet's reliability is a question unlikely to ever be settled. For the quoted passage and the ones that follow, see Gasquet, *Joachim Gasquet's Cézanne*, pp. 148-152. For Blanc, see Charles Blanc, *Grammar of Painting and Engraving*, trans. Kate Newell Doggett, New York, 1874, p. 213.

29 Robert Gordon and Andrew Forge, *Monet*, p. 41; Emile Bernard, "Paul Cézanne," *L'Occident*, July, 1904, p. 23; trans. Judith Wechsler, *Cézanne in Perspective*, p. 41; Gasquet, *Joachim Gasquet's Cézanne*, p. 155

30. Gasquet, *Joachim Gasquet's Cézanne*, pp. 150, 152.

31. *Ibid*, pp. 152, 154. On no particular evidence, I take the "minute of the world" to be that of a single constructive stroke.

32. Also, to Jules Borely, "Oh, how I would like to be able to see like a newborn child!;" to Denis, "I want to use color to make black and white, to re-create what is given by the confusion of the sensations;" and, when Bernard spoke to him of Balzac's "The Unknown Masterpiece," standing up and repeatedly striking his chest with his forefinger to indicate, wordlessly, that he was Frenhofer. See Cézanne, *Letters*, pp. 315; 316; 271; Jules Borely, *Conversations with Cézanne*, p. 23; Maurice Denis, *Conversations with Cézanne*, p. 93; Emile Bernard, *Conversations with Cézanne*, p. 65.

33. See Jean Piaget, "The Elaboration of the Universe," *Perception: Selected Readings in Science and Phenomenology*, ed., Paul Tibbets (New York Times Book Company, 1969), pp. 172-173.

34. Q. In your opinion, what is the great masterpiece of nature?

A. Its infinite diversity.

From "My Confidences," a questionnaire filled out by Cézanne. See Paul Cézanne, "My Confidences," in Michael Doran, Ed. *Conversation with Cézanne*, trans. Julie Lawrence Cochran (University of California Press, 2001), p. 102.

Notes on the Images

Figure 1. Camille Pissarro. *Snow at Louveciennes*. 1872. Paul Rosenberg & Co.

Figure 2. Camille Pissarro. *Park in Pontoise*. 1878. Private Collection, New York.

R. 169. *The Road*. C. 169. Private Collection.

C. 80. *Male Nude*. 1862-64. Present owner unknown.

C. 205. Academy Drawing: *Male Nude in the Pose of an Oarsman*. 1867-69. Boymans-van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam.

R 307. *L'Etang des Soeurs*. 1877. Private Collection.

R 436. *Bridge at Maincy*. 1879-80. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

R 437. *Château de Médan*. C. 1880. Glasgow Museums (Burrell Collection).