



C'S AESTHETICS

Philosophy in the Painting

Joseph Masheck

Art History / Philosophy

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Joseph Masheck

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Abstract art has been a major preoccupation for most of my life, including a mild obsession with its prehistory in a classic search for origins. In that abstract painting was made possible by a cubism whose patron saint was the postimpressionist 'C,' what follows is a search for the implicit philosophical aesthetics of the single most crucial artist for the development of modernism. Implicit aesthetics, I say, because I rely as much upon my understanding of the painter's work in general and of particular works analyzed here as on the letters (which still yield meaning), and more on both these sources than on the same few remarks that art history goes on rehearsing.

But I also write as a teacher who sees a generation afoot that has learned to deal with postmodernism before understanding modernism (if at all)—which might be something like the American way of starting the dinner with the salad, if one ever got some meat. So I am perhaps also doing something constructively remedial about that, attempting to think, on its own terms but 'forward' again, through the work of a mythic founder whose work opened *so much future*.

The actual essay derives from a thesis written several years ago under the direction of William Lyons, now Professor Emeritus of Moral Philosophy at Trinity College Dublin, and subtitled 'Enquiry Into the Premises of Painting.' I was fortunate to be able to pursue this project in fulfillment of two longstanding hopes: to return to Trinity, where some 30 years before I had pursued initial research for what became my Columbia dissertation in art history, and to learn something firsthand about 'doing' philosophy. Philosophical analysis is obviously not my natural *métier*, as any reader can infer; having long respected the great analytical tradition in twentieth-century thought, in almost the same breath as the 'analytical' cubist painting substantially inspired by C, I wished to learn in practice something of the modern philosophical approach. I already

had a strong intuition that such a mode of thinking was especially appropriate to this particular artist—that as a ‘dumb painter’ he was no idiot savant but rather one of the great analytical thinkers of his time—when Bill Lyons’ intellectual sympathy led him to suggest my trying to bring out the philosophical potential of what already concerned me from the art side, in search of the artist’s possibly implicit aesthetics.

It would be too easy to say that the analytical and historical modes of thinking are good for different purposes. For one thing, there are diastrophic new starts in the realm of culture that have no counterpart in the natural world that philosophy as well as science is pleased to assume abides (even for other-worlds ‘thought experiments’). Modernity changed the very nature of Western art more radically than ever before since the Neolithic (which in some ways it recapitulated)—much more than with the Renaissance, and even more than with postmodernism, which as a great unraveling and a phase of extreme eclecticism has had its precedents. Yet after a hundred years of abstract art it still today proves difficult (especially in the literary sphere) to find in aesthetics a reformed, modern sense that representation is neither a necessary nor a sufficient reason—it is not even an *appropriate* reason!—for something’s counting as a work of art. A single example: Gordon Graham in his *Philosophy of the Arts: An Introduction to Aesthetics* (1997), almost obliges, only to backslide on recalling, “Cognition, Aristotle tells us, trades in universals,” because, supposedly, “Paintings, plays, sculptures and so on portray, and must portray, particulars.”¹ Well, since when is a primary color or an elementary geometric form a particular? And how can an aesthetics, it seems almost impertinent to ask, manage to get along in 1997 with definitions of painting as art that rule out Kandinsky, Malevich and Mondrian?

The earlier text carried the formal statement that it was “entirely my own work.” But this statement obscures the enormity of my debt to a great teacher who could repeatedly excise most of every draft and nevertheless convey encouragement as he posed the next challenges to precipitate argumentation. I salute Bill Lyons, then, for his part in all the thinking here but the worst—which for him will include a few choice art-historical ‘bagatelles’ (Kant’s word) that have crept back in.

Stimulating responses from the other readers of the academic version have also improved the essay. Dr. Lilian Alweiss, of Trinity, was helpfully challenging in regard to the account of formalism and what I consider phenomenological naturalism. Dr. Tony O’Connor, of University College Cork, in the National University of Ireland, gave insightful critiques of the analyses of works of art. Professor David Berman chaired the committee. I have also learned from other Trinity philosophers more informally, especially my friend Paul O’Grady.

I also want to acknowledge my dear companion, Marjorie Welish, for her sense of the worthwhileness of the project as a nonspecialist contribution to aesthetics, her untiring analytical criticism and her faith that I would—to use C’s most characteristic expression—*realize* the work. The rewriting of the text for this publication was thankfully encouraged by Aaron Levy, director of the Slought Foundation, who has patiently facilitated its production. For making publication possible we are grateful to the Department of the History of Art and the Center for Visual Culture at Bryn Mawr College. Thanks also to Mr. David Scrase, Keeper of Paintings, Drawings and Prints (and Associate Director of Collections) at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, for permission to use the photograph of the *Still Life with Apples* in the museum’s collection.

As should become evident in reading, the device of reducing the painter’s name to ‘C’ is something more than an analytical affectation: it is a way of defetishizing a name all too famous in one way (art) so that we may perhaps for once assess with some detachment what its bearer may have accomplished on other (aesthetic-philosophic) terms.

1. Gordon Graham, *Philosophy of the Arts: An Introduction to Aesthetics* (London: Routledge, 1997), 49.

ABBREVIATIONS

- B = Bernard, Émile Bernard. *Souvenirs sur Paul Cézanne: Une conversation avec Cézanne; La méthode de Cézanne*. Paris: Michel, 1926.
- C = *Cézanne* (exhibition catalogue), ed. Françoise Cachin, Joseph J. Rishel, et al. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1996. 'C' numbers refer to catalogue numbers (with accompanying illustrations) in this catalogue.
- D = Doran, P. M. (ed.). *Conversations avec Cézanne*. Paris: Collection Macula, 1978.
- G = Gasquet, Joachim. *Cézanne: A Memoir with Conversations*, trans. Christopher Pemberton, preface by John Rewald, introd. by Richard Shiff. London: Thames and Hudson, 1991.
- L = Cézanne, Paul. *Letters*, ed. John Rewald, trans. Seymour Hacker, rev. ed. New York: Hacker Art Books, 1984. Addition of 'z' to page number indicates letter by Emile Zola.
- R = Rewald, John, with Walter Feilchenfeldt and Jayne Warman. *The Paintings of Paul Cézanne: A Catalogue Raisonné*, 2 vols. New York: Abrams, 1996.
- V = Venturi, Lionello. *Cézanne: Son art, son oeuvre*, 2 vols. Paris, 1936; repr. San Francisco: Alan Wofsy Fine Arts, 1989. The 'V' numbers of this catalogue raisonné remain standard.

[J]'avais résolu de travailler dans le silence, jusqu'au jour où je me serai senti capable de défendre théoriquement le résultat de mes essais.

—Letter of November 27, 1889

What concerns philosophy in art coincides to some extent but is by no means congruent with what in art concerns art history. While recent aesthetics has rediscovered the historicity of art, aesthetics has not concerned itself with implicit aesthetic positions occupied or championed by major practitioners, especially within the specifically modern history of painting. The larger topic here however is the seemingly elusive one of the contribution of a painter, through and by means of his works, to aesthetics or the philosophy of art. As such it stands at antipodal odds with the ever notorious case of the anti-artist who managed successfully to sue for philosophical as well as artistic importance (and now all the more ironically, licenses an indulgence in carnivalesque that makes for an upper-echelon version of art as entertainment industry).

A great artist can be too famous for his own good if his or her thinking is packaged and retailed as little more than a single intellectual cliché. As the method here employed is intended to be as analytic as possible, with the art-historiographic in the service of the aesthetic-analytic, it seems beneficial to drop the name of the famous artist-genius subject from the discussion so as to concentrate all the less distractedly on what C was up to in his art. In this way even his own first-person statements may be defamiliarized for fresh assessment.

Here analysis of the evidence not only of the surviving written and transcribed remarks but also of paintings, justifies certain interrelating claims. C developed an

approach to painting as an image-construct consisting of a set of relations. This approach belies not merely a naïve standard view, considered here to be left over from naturalism, that his images never quite 'get right' the stereotypical way 'pictures' (conservative term for paintings) are popularly expected to look; it also belies the more sophisticatedly mistaken if sympathetic view that C secures order for his imagic structure by remedial imposition of geometric form. In fact, a fresh understanding of sensation underwrote his new approach by making for a conversion of natural input into artistic output through measured color modulation (with an organized 'gamut' palette). After qualifying the traditional Renaissance-academic notion of a 'picture' as look-alike phenomenal transcript of natural fact standing in for nature, C's work radically supplants it with an 'objective' image-in-its-own-right constituted out of a multiplicity of judgments, especially judgments of color. In so doing, the artist as much as formulates modernism by definitively shifting the very fulcrum of *mimesis* from favoring *representandum* onto favoring *representans*.

After a chapter devoted to background, in which the problem is presented as still embedded in art-historical tissue, the modality of naturalism is divided in two: a conservative approach to representation as descriptive task and a radically new authorial confrontation with experience whose manifestation in painting is known as impressionism. The centrality in impressionism of 'sensations' leads to an examination of their function, which becomes newly constitutive in the 'postimpressionism' of which C was a principal progenitor. C's postimpressionism is then taken as sufficiently anti-naturalistic—*pace* Merleau-Ponty—to situate the 'truth of art'—on which C made an oracular but cryptic statement that occasioned an extended riff by Derrida—in the realm of art. Thus while the chapters follow the course of the historical development, for so it was that the nature of 'the game' changed, the upshot is aesthetic. What C thereby established was not just another style or mode within the stylistic development of painting as artistic practice but more grandly a distinctly analytical foundation for subsequent modern art.

Proceeding by analysis of implications in texts and some selected images, the essay positions itself apart from a certain late-modernist American sense of formalism that has only become all the more standardized in ritual rejection, in that sense returning here to formalism's more authentic roots, including the work of C. In particular it disclaims the received 'geometric' account and offers instead that C actually developed a logic, or perhaps better, an 'algebra,' of quantified color relations.

To negotiate these matters to philosophic purpose, even an art-historical approach to philosophical sources would have to be withheld in order to isolate what might be

philosophical in the primary 'texts' of art. It was fairly easy to resist the temptation to pursue the notion that there is something that could be considered specifically Kantian 'influence' at work in C: O.K., but why should that matter *to philosophy*? More tempting was the intimation, at a certain stage in working things out, that it would be exciting to explore generational differences in modalities of thought between early-high impressionism (1865-70) and incipient postimpressionism (c. 1885) by trying for as tidy a structuralist polarization as possible in science and art, in pitting Hermann von Helmholtz (*Physiological Optics*, 1867) and Hippolyte Taine (*On Intelligence*, 1870) against Ernst Mach (*The Analysis of Sensations*, 1886) and Gottlob Frege (*The Foundations of Arithmetic*, 1884).

Not that the Helmholtz-to-Mach analogy, at least, isn't promising. Mach's sense in the *Analysis of Sensations* of the object of science as a matter of sense-complexes was in fact a critique of Helmholtz's direct, analog sensing, much as postimpressionist image-building is visibly a critique of passive impressionist sensationalism. For instance, in 1868 Helmholtz had written, "All that we apprehend of the external world is brought to our consciousness by means of certain changes which are produced in our organs of sense by external impressions, and transmitted to the brain by the nerves,"¹ which is pretty much what Mach came to critique as "the Helmholtzian telegraph-wire theory of sensations (*die Helmholtzische Telegraphendraht-Theorie der Empfindungen*)."² Taking C-style 'sensations' as image-constitutive does find analogical support in Mach's contemporary epistemology: "Thing, body, matter are nothing apart from their complexes of colors, sounds, and so forth—nothing apart from their so-called attributes," or, "Bodies do not produce sensations, but complexes of elements (complexes of sensations) make up bodies." Amazingly, Mach was sufficiently familiar with Owen Jones' *Grammar of Ornament* (1856), that great synoptic of decorative form, to note that as spatial experience is already limited vis-à-vis experience in general, limitation to the plane makes for "confidence" not only for the geometer but for the "decorative painter."³ Then, too, as engaging as such a culture-historical canvass might have become, in philosophical terms it promised merely overwrought analogy.

1. Hermann von Helmholtz, 'The Recent Progress in the Theory of Vision' (1868), trans. Pye-Smith, in *Helmholtz's Lectures on Scientific Subjects: Second series*, new ed., trans. E. Atkinson (London: Longmans, Green, 1893), ii, 'The sensation of sight', 202-36, here 203. Meyer Schapiro, *Impressionism: Reflections and Perceptions* (New York: Braziller, 1997), entertains a Machian analogy with impressionism in ch. i, 'The Concept of "Impressionism,"' 21-42, and considers Helmholtz' "traditional approach" to sight, in ch. x, 'Impressionism and Science', 206-29, esp. 216-17.

2. Ernst Mach, *The Analysis of Sensations and the Relation of the Physical to the Psychological*, trans. C. M. Williams, ed. Stanley Waterlow (New York: Dover, 1959), 370; in the original, Mach, *Die Analyse der Empfindungen und das Verhältniss des Physischen zum Psychischen*, 3rd ed. (Jena: Fischer, 1902), 280.

In any case, the present investigation offers a more analytical understanding of the structurally constitutive role of color in C's work, especially in terms of quantified color relations that can even be considered algebraic for the way they consist of mutual 'exchanges.' Not surprisingly, it turns out that the algebra idea is most readily pursued close-in, in respect to still life, where relatively major relations between relatively small quantities of small elements are conspicuously featured. It occurs to me now as unfortunate that Georg Simmel, in developing his thinking on value in *The Philosophy of Money* (1900; 1907), during the last years of C's life, did not really overcome the 'natural' but unwarranted presumption that when objects are exchanged on the basis of value, the same quantity of each object is involved, with one thing of one kind exchanged for one of another. Now if it is under the influence of C's sense of algebraic exchange that I can say this, this suggests that on at least one point C was ahead of at least one philosopher.

There is even some evidence that view here suggested may also have some abiding value to artists in their own thinking. In our time, the Swiss conceptualist Rémy Zaugg has taken new interest in C's deployment of colors, producing, from the 1970s to 80s, large mud-brown diagrammatic paintings lettered with names of the various pigmental hues, in their respective positions, of a painting by C; as critical as it is, this responsiveness to the intellectual appeal of the play of constitutive judgments within the painting must pose more resistance to cultural commodification than could simplistic antiformalism.

The larger point is not to discover in C a missing genius of late nineteenth-century philosophy whose propositions simply happened to take the form of oil on canvas, but to see how primary works of a great thinker, indeed, a great analytical thinker, within the discipline of painting, may not merely illustrate or even exemplify, but may entail and engage firsthand aesthetic thinking sufficiently substantial to amount to a contribution to the philosophy of art.

3. Mach, *Analysis*, 6, 29-30, 178-79. Despite objections to problematic contradictions, the novelist Robert Musil shows considerable sympathy in his 1908 doctoral dissertation for Mach's modern, abstract replacement, in physics, of mechanical causality by mathematical function as a matter of equations between sensation-complexes, where even Clerk Maxwell as well as Hertz still conceived of mental pictures: *On Mach's Theories*, trans. Kevin Mulligan (Munich: Philosophia; Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 17, 33, 47.

1. CRITICAL BACKGROUND

1 Situating the problem between history and philosophy of art; 2 Standard 'formalism' reassessed.

Within the history of art the work of C is of great importance, not for initiating modernism singlehandedly in painting but for establishing it on what can be seen as a newly analytical footing. Now a century after his death, when for better or worse modernism no longer has the standing of aesthetic orthodoxy, it is necessary to reconsider how this establishing of modernism necessarily entailed an insistence on the priority of formal values, despite the fact that this would eventually allow of a formalism in the pejorative sense of an empty aestheticism: for painting in particular, 'just a pretty face.' All the more, however, now that formalism has been unfashionable for a generation, reconsideration of the critical development of C's artistic practice is called for. Putting the art-historical sense of its phases at the service of a philosophical understanding of what is at stake in the shifts of commitment from one phase to the next may highlight the perennial critical claims upon that legendary body of work as somehow invested with the highest aesthetic significance in C's producing it. Conversely, if C's works affected the aesthetics of painting in virtue of the artistic negotiation of those works, their very constitution as images, it ought to be incumbent upon philosophical aesthetics to look into their constitutional workings.

1. *Situating the problem between history and philosophy of art.*

Art history and philosophy may sometimes share common concerns in matters of aesthetics and art theory, but as a rule the former holds to an empirical position and the synthetic view, in contrast to the rational-analytic orientation of the latter. Art history operates out of a concern with material and intellectual origins and historical context, with special attention to shifts of phase, and proceeds taxonomically-descriptively, ordinarily within a developmental narrative. Philosophy, on the other hand, with its logical and epistemological commitments, deals much more with the interplay of concepts. Why then should a certain painter, or painter's work, or, better still, the thinking implicit in a certain painter's work, concern philosophy?

An answer suggests itself by analogy between the philosophical interest of the revised preconceptions of modern science with what deserves to concern philosophy in the artistic revisionism of C—and not because art merely continued (naturalistically) to 'reflect' an altered nature, but because the very approach to nature as given changed in both cases. The most reformed natural science, however, is still but a presumably improved knowledge of *nature* (even if its constructs strike us as startlingly 'abstract' in comparison with the nature we thought we knew), whereas in order to accomplish its equivalent but independent renewal art had to forswear nature as such: art's old fealty to nature was quite annulled. These matters will be accounted for here in analyzing what was entailed in, first the reform, and then the thoroughgoing supersession, of artistic naturalism. For the unseating of nature-description, in favor of the sense of the image as a construct, was an artistic 'Copernican revolution' of sorts, with C as I daresay its greatest analytical proponent.

Aesthetics or philosophy of art must be even less used to turning for insight to art or the history of art for insight than art history is used to looking to philosophy. Enquiring into the work of an artist as great as the early modernist painter C, however, discloses cognitive implications seldom plumbed outside the realm of art and only intuitively pursued within it, despite, in C's case, a huge secondary literature, much of it ostensibly concerned with art theory. The greatest scholar of C produced under the rubric '[C's] Theories About Art' nothing more than an informal anecdotal review of recorded remarks by the artist.¹ While art enthusiasts pick up on but fail to account for a broader and deeper sense of 'cognitive content' in art—well beyond whatever a representation may be paraphrasably 'of'—philosophy by and large overlooks such firsthand artistic testimony as is offered not only in the remarks but also in actual works of this great revisionist artistic thinker-in-painting.

Philosophers do not as a rule seem to expect to recognize artists whose work happens to give them philosophical inspiration as philosophic persons—as if, like idiot savants, the mute *peintre-philosophes* were hardly responsible for whatever thinking their work conceptually advanced. Paul Valéry holds Leonardo da Vinci in a state of philosophical marvel; Sartre's Tintoretto seems too conveniently obliged to remain mysterious; Ortega y Gasset's Velazquez is something like a silent film star playing an introverted gentleman intellectual. While the latterday dispute about Martin Heidegger and van Gogh devolved into belles lettres, it seems that actually C may have been at least as important to Heidegger, if with far less acknowledgment (or notoriety). Part of the problem is that except for Hegel's interest in art as a grand developmental procession, philosophy of art would by and large prefer to assume that the nature of art stays put over time, with the continuity of a second nature, whereas for the art historian (often retailing Hegel unawares), every work occupies a point of intersection of various trajectories—of the one artist and others, of the style in question and culture in question, of the medium. Such developments do see breakthroughs, peaks and steady-state plateaus, including occasionally such great Kuhnian paradigm shifts (as many art historians do now think of them) as that moment of 'postimpressionism,' as it has sometimes been called, in painting, in which C played a decisive part.

It might not be obvious that aesthetic thought, and not merely aesthetic experience, may be garnered firsthand from works of art. But surely not since fifteenth-century Florentine artists engaged not only with mathematical perspective but with neoplatonism had painters and their work been so philosophically consequential as C. Now again with modernism as radically challenging standing naturalist aesthetic presumptions, painting's 'givens' could no longer be taken epistemologically for granted. C, indeed, has occupied the most prominent of places in the foundational period of modernism between Manet and Picasso, by virtue of his actual paintings. Yet if modernism changes the rules of the epistemological game (even if to intensify it), and if C was possibly its greatest proponent or exponent, one might think that that entailed some attainment within the purview of the philosophy of art as well as art-historical renown. Here was a brilliantly intelligent painter who, though he had trouble explaining much more than 'I need nature for my sensations,' nevertheless reformed the aesthetics of painting; hence it should be all the more important to consider not only recorded pronouncements of the artist but also artistic praxis.

More seldom, even, than to art itself will aesthetics be found owing philosophical

1. John Rewald, *Paul Cézanne: A Biography* (New York: Schocken, 1968), 198-205.

insight to art history (possibly because art history is rarely philosophical). At least once, however, modern art history has served to advance the philosophy of art, in a case aesthetically related to C's. I refer to that superlative contribution to modern aesthetics, Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* (1872), and the seminal importance to its genesis of the essentially art-historical distinction between 'Old' and 'New' Stone Ages (or the Paleolithic and the Neolithic), by which John Lubbock first comprehended that essentially the early art of mankind had *first* been naturalistic-representational and, *only afterwards as a sophistication*, had become stylized and geometric-abstract. Lubbock's framing of this distinction in *On the Origin of Civilisation and the Primitive Condition of Man* (1867) is now understood to have likely determined Nietzsche's much better known first-Dionysian, only-later-Apollonian theory,² which means that early modern art history once actually did contribute something important to early modern philosophy of art. Whether or not our C ever read *The Birth of Tragedy*, it is hardly idle curiosity to wonder if his theory of art was comparably reformative. For alongside Lubbock and Nietzsche's insights into progressive anti-naturalistic artfulness and formalization, over and against earlier naturalistic representation, C was working through similarly profound aesthetic revision in praxis.

Such a major shift in critical emphasis away from essentially representational depiction of meaning-laden forms or structures should hardly be reducible to a by now discredited and commonly pejorative idea of 'formalism.' One may well not wish to constrain art to superficial formalism, but not all formalism is superficial. The perennial presumption of representation as what supposedly makes for *meaningful* art was to be overcome by an emphasis on form as fundamental stage (as much as a 'primary quality' for artworks), entailing a new sort of meaningfulness, both cognitively purer and more sophisticated—because cognizant of (formal) means, not merely of (pictorial) effects. Direct appeal to form and structure held more naturalistic demands of mundane 'communication' by representation at bay. Dyed-in-the-wool formalists may like to emphasize how considerably art is 'about other art,' instead of just about apples, mountains, people and such (as if to placate the old demand for representation); but wholesale resort even to such 'aboutness' may compromise commitment to internal coherence as basis of that formal and structural self-sufficiency that warrants aesthetic 'autonomy.' For C, getting down to form was getting down to the brass tacks of a new sort of pictorial construct, not even quite so 'pictorial' in the end, with a new way of giving meaning as art.

How a new structural sort of meaning arises from form will be explained later, as grounded in formal relations that are ultimately functions of color deployment. First it must be

made clear that as strong as it may be, the geometric in C, with its convenient imputation of categorical formality, is not such a simple a priori agency of order as art history is all too often satisfied to declare.

The present essay distinguishes itself from the inherited art-historical account, which commonly resorts to C's famous trope of 'seeing nature in terms of the cylinder, the sphere and the cone' as implying a geometric reduction. Various texts could be cited for taking the reduction to cylinder-sphere-cone as *the* definitive contribution of C to the modern aesthetics of painting, where, in fact, his message was not about reduction at all. To show how all too well established is this one-note conception of C's 'art theory,' which any serious enquiry into what C was aesthetically up to in his artistic production must overcome, it will do to refer to the current edition of what has long been the most widely standard university art history textbook in the United States, the late Horst Janson's *History of Art* (first edition, 1962): "When [C] took ... liberties with reality, his purpose was to uncover the permanent qualities beneath the accidents of appearance. All forms in nature, he believed, were based on the cone, the sphere and the cylinder. This order underlying reality was the true subject of his pictures, but he had to reinterpret it to fit the separate, closed world of the canvas."³

Here is art history in evident need of philosophy. Any investigation seeking further to elucidate C's aesthetic formalism will have to exercise itself in getting over or around this huge reductionist cliché that once may have had its heuristic utility but which now must obscure a lucid analytical view. The trope of 'cylinder, sphere and cone' might have been for C a convenient methodological device, had mere reductive order been his simple goal. But the strong structural coherence of a cognitively articulated interplay of *relations* in C's work is something more meaningful, as should become clear, than simplistic compositional unification. The 'primitive' frankness of C's structural coherence inevitably frustrated viewers committed to a sense of order as something tidily geometric.

2. Davis S. Thatcher, 'Nietzsche's Debt to Lubbock', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44 (1983), 293-310. Cf. relatedly, Joseph Masheck, 'On Cycladic Ultramodernity' (1989) and 'Neolithic-Modern' (1984), in my *Modernities: Art-Matters in the Present* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 33-39, 41-46. Additionally: while it was perspicacious of the anonymous writer of 'A Very Old Master,' in the *Cornhill Magazine* (London) for May 1885, repr. in *Popular Science Monthly* (New York) soon after, to call a paleolithic image "a capital example of early impressionism, respectfully recommended to the favourable attention of Mr. J. M. Whistler," the belated popularity of impressionism was already problematic; for because the writer cannot see the art of "the modern Esquimaux or Polynesians" as developed *beyond* such naturalism, his appeal to impressionism is already obsolescent. R. G. Collingwood, 'Outlines of a Philosophy of Art' (1925), in his *Essays in the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Alan Donagan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), sect. 20, 'Naturalistic Art,' 121-24, confesses to having formerly supposed that prehistorically an earlier "formal" art had become "fertilised by natural beauty"; he proceeds to accuse naturalism of "rest[ing] on a principle of which it can give no account, namely the idealisation of nature by a pure a priori act of imagination" (sect. 21, 'Imaginative Art,' 125).

Regardless of style or school of thought, it would seem that no serious artist or critic, aesthete or art historian has doubted that twentieth-century modernism in art was more indebted to C than to any other artist of the nineteenth century, especially since the emergence of cubism as significantly precipitated by a memorial retrospective exhibition of C's work in 1907. Often enough, the principal token of this debt has been an appeal, direct or indirect, to the same basic statement: I refer more specifically now to C's exhortation in a quite late letter, of the 15th of April, 1904, a source seized upon and reiterated in several subsequent accounts, to "treat nature in terms of the cylinder, the sphere and the cone"—as "*Traitez la nature par le cylindre, la sphère, le cône*" (D 27) is usually given. (More fully, in another rendering: "Allow me to reiterate what I said to you here: deal with nature as cylinders, spheres, cones, all placed in perspective so that each aspect of an object or a plane goes toward a central point"; L 296).

This ever most cited dictum has long been invoked to account for C's artistic philosophy, sometimes as purportedly 'Kantian' for plausibly seeming to imply a schematizing redaction of perception. Ironically, considering its exaggerated reputation, in context C was trying to tell an all too theoretically inclined young colleague, Emile Bernard, to keep his feet on the ground and not overlook the basics, even such already established academic basics of artistic practice as positing the regular geometric solids as guaranteed reliable dummy forms. Certain other lapidary assertions of C as "Art is a *harmony* parallel to nature ..." (26 ix 1897; L 261, emphasis mine), given in a letter to another young painter-amanuensis, Joachim Gasquet, never quite attained the sweeping influence of the 'cylinder-sphere-cone' formula. The artistic task which was for him a task of image reconstitution at a different level—not a given appearance as part and parcel of the way nature just is, but also not imposed upon it by some blunt command to 'shape up' geometrically—was brilliantly negotiated by C in his work, quite beyond his more or less illuminating remarks. So despite the vast literature on this hero of artistic modernism there is room for a reconsideration of what he accomplished of significance in terms of the aesthetics of painting, even if he had never left his advocates such an all too handy device for misinterpretation as the famous trope of the cylinder-sphere-cone.

Art historians are no doubt more used than philosophers to the fact that the conviction of C's art wasn't by any means always apparent; that early on his work looked quite mistaken to many even in higher cultural echelons. In the words of the contemporary critic Mauclair, who understood, in 1904, that C was then as yet "appreciated" only by "a small group of amateurs": "His figures are gauche and of a brutal, inharmonious color, but his landscapes gain by a robust simplicity of vision. These pictures are practically 'primitives,' and

they are admired by young impressionists owing to their exclusion of all craftiness (*de tout ce qui est habile*): one finds a charm of rough (*rude*) and sincere simplicity in these works in which [C] employs just what is indispensable to render what he wants. The still lifes are especially interesting for their *éclat* ..."4 The appeal to a transvalued primitivity, admirable practically as antidote to a prevailing decadence, would be developed in Desmond MacCarthy's introduction for Roger Fry's first 'Post-Impressionist' exhibition, of 1910, in which 'primitive' art is likened to children's art, not as perceptually inept but as conceptually driven—"put[ting] a line round a mental conception of the object"—while C is found to have "aimed first at a design which should produce the coherent, architectural effect of the masterpieces of primitive art."⁵

Meanwhile, saying something similar rather less sympathetically, the reactionary turn-of-the-century cultural critic Max ('Degeneration') Nordau gives a good example of the established view at the end of C's life, when the painter had attained some recognition: "[C] has one thing in his favour which prepossesses us for him, *i.e.*, his uprightness. It is in his nature that ugliness has for him an attraction. He sees only what is abnormal, unpleasant, and repulsive in actual life. If he paints a house, it must be warped, and threaten to tumble down soon."⁶ In the circumstances, the critical function of the cylinder-sphere-cone trope was

3. H. W. Janson, *History of Art: The Western Tradition*, 6th ed., ed. Anthony F. Janson (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 2001), 737. As for the origin of the cylinder-sphere-cone idea, Meyer Schapiro, 'Cézanne and the Philosophers' (1977), ed. Irene Gordon and Paul Mattick, in his posthumous *Worldview in Painting: Art and Society* (New York: Braziller, 1999), 75-105, traces it to Thomas Reid's *Enquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (1764). My friend Paul Mattick reports (105 n. 30) that in editing Schapiro's text he was unable to find there any mention of "a cone, a cylinder and a sphere," as Schapiro had supposed. However, in Reid's ch. vi, 'Of Seeing,' sect. iii, 'Of the Visible Appearances of Objects,' there is a passage about discerning "that this was a cube, that a sphere; that this was a cone, and that a cylinder" (Reid, *Works*, ed. Dugald Stewart, 3 vols. [New York: Duxkinck, Collins and Hannay, R. and W. A. Bartow, 1822], 1: 203); also, in 1774, discussing Hutchinson, Reid mentions "a pebble in the form of a square, a cylinder, a cone &c." (Reid, *Lectures on Aesthetics*, ed. Peter Kivy [The Hague: Nijhof, 1973], 42). Neither Schapiro, Theodore Reff ('Cézanne et la perspective: Quelques remarques à la lumière des documents nouveaux', *Revue de l'art*, no. 86 [1989], 8-15, esp. 14 n. 26, relaying notes from Schapiro's original lecture) nor Mattick seems aware of a French translation of Reid's *Enquiry: Essai sur l'entendement humain d'après les principes du sens commun* (Amsterdam, 1768). It might be possible to sketch a lineage wherein a Reid already influenced by Francis Hutcheson passed the basic notion to Reid's follower James Beattie (who was a source for Kant) and/or to Victor Cousin, whose disciple Théodore Jouffroy was the French translator and editor of Reid. However, the best that this could do for the philosophical aspect of C would be to add uncritical weight to the quasi-Kantian sense of schematism the artist was being talked into late in life in order to make him more intellectually presentable for posterity: it is simply not what we are looking for if we really want to understand C's aesthetics.

4. Camille Mauclair, *L'Impressionisme: Son histoire, son esthétique, ses maîtres* (Paris: Librairie de l'Art Ancien et Moderne, 1904), 151-52.

5. Desmond MacCarthy, 'The Post-Impressionists' (1910), in Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman and Olga Taxidou, eds., *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 174-8; here, 177, 176, respectively.

surely to facilitate thought about how what appeared at first blush primitive and brutal might at least have unsuspected structural—if, needless to say, not geometrically reliable—unity and purity. After all, the reduction of the complex to the simple has an understandable attraction (though in any art the easiest means may well not be the most rewarding).

The great early formalist enthusiasts of C prove in practice *not* to have depended much on the cylinder-sphere-cone trope. Even when Clive Bell as much as roots his aesthetic of ‘significant form’ in the painting of C, there is no simple implication that such form is essentially a trimming down to geometric basics. Actually, as the most intellectually challenging and profound of the postimpressionist’s, C’s very work proved such a harbinger of formal thinking in critics as well as artists that those unfamiliar with the record sometimes credit later critics writing on him with originating just that thinking, instead of acknowledging it *in* his artworks to begin with. Formalist art theory as such can be said to trace back to the early-nineteenth-century German idealist context: even what later criticism owed to Roger Fry and to Bell was in some measure further owed, as there will be occasion to see, to the theoretical work of Conrad Fiedler and Adolf von Hildebrand.⁷ Yet still more remarkable, it well may be maintained, is what Fry and Bell and others derived immediately by perspicacious scrutiny from the paintings of C, as something aesthetically important engendered there by C.

Like the nineteenth-century German formalism that underpinned the modernist formalism of Fry and others, the present investigation emphasizes formal values in C’s painting, though especially formal *relations*, with these more as functions of color than is usually considered. Unlike the usual formalist view of C, however, the present one commits in favor not of reduction to the geometric-solids schematism of ‘the cylinder, the sphere and the cone,’ in which art history has long standardly traded, but, if anything, in favor of a more algebraic sense of structural relations, particularly in a quantitative distribution of color elements. Once acknowledged in good mature examples, these relations better account for a new coherence of formal structure than the conventional solid-geometry approach, which cannot seriously be supposed to sustain C’s literally planar, even if metaphorically spatial, compositions. For whereas the early mature C exercised himself in the perceptual authenticity called for by impressionism, in his fully mature work he sought by means of a rich compositional structure of ‘sensations’ of color to engender a new, and let us say newly abstract, kind of whole, by no means supported by a crypto-geometric armature.

Although the aesthetic version of formalism is of course the notion that works of art stand or fall in respect to the beauty of their forms, or especially of their internal formal relations, formalism was more broadly afoot in early twentieth-century thought. It will suffice

to mention Russell’s presentation, in a chapter on ‘Similarity of Relations’ in his *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* (1919), of “the general principle that what matters in mathematics, and to a very great extent in physical science, is not the intrinsic nature of our terms, but the logical nature of their interrelations.”⁸ This the formalist critic Fry, who studied science at Cambridge, should have been delighted to read before writing his monograph [*C*]: *A Study of His Development* (1927), if not before writing his essay ‘[C]’ (1917), included in his influential *Vision and Design* (1920).

Although C’s letters as well as recorded remarks have long been known as an important source of evidence for his aesthetic thinking, some analysis of actual artworks of his will later serve to render more explicit the implicit aesthetic thinking invested in his work. If C was quite “the Christopher Columbus of a new continent of form,” as Bell once put it, then his work will have contributed to the understanding and theorization of art, so that it must interest aesthetics to enquire how. Because the present enquiry comes late in the history of formalist advocacy, perhaps even as a remedial afterthought after a period of rampant antiformalism, some brief account of prior formalism, specifically in regard to C, is called for; and this should in turn warrant subtler distinctions within the modern tradition, now often all too crudely caricatured, as well as to contextualize C’s own insight.

2. *Standard ‘formalism’ reassessed.*

An effort to comprehend the artist’s work as a matter of aesthetic thought, manifest or latent, must concern the question of formalism because it necessarily takes cognizance of form, which is to say, the extensive character of the elements and relations comprising the work; and if formalism means excessive attention to form, anyone critically considering it will want to be aware of what is just enough formal attention. (The claim is not superfluous: an effort to comprehend the artist’s work as a matter merely of aesthetic feeling might be completely detained by concerns other than form or even what is casually called ‘content,’ such as, for instance, by scale, materials, workmanship, even purely associative values.) All the more because the work of C was important in the very formation of formalist aesthetics, in

6. Max Nordau, ‘Physiognomies in Painting,’ in his *Of Art and Artists*, trans. W. F. Harvey (London: Unwin, 1907), 217-74, here 236.

7. Jacqueline V. Falkenheim, *Roger Fry and the Beginnings of Formalist Art Criticism* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: U. M. I. Research Press, 1980), looks into the German formalist background.

8. Bertrand Russell, *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, n. d.), 59-61, incl. diagram on p. 60.

theory and practice, it is beneficial to review some of the classical formalist views. The main critical framers of these, all enthusiastic devotees of C, include Roger Fry (with Desmond MacCarthy), whose very conception of 'postimpressionism' was strongly beholden to the art of C; Clive Bell, whose term 'significant form' was from the start attuned to C; the art historian Fritz Novotny, the painter Hans Hofmann, the critic Clement Greenberg, and the formally astute but never formalistic art historian Meyer Schapiro.

Now the critical and aesthetic question of formalism in art is certainly all the more pertinent after almost a generation of antiformalism in art criticism and theory. In art history, C ushers along modernism (for better or worse) with his emphasis on form and the coherence of pictorial structure over and against any supposed naive givenness of natural appearances. In criticism, C's work thus becomes not only canonical but absolutely foundational for a polemical modernism of 'pure' form. But all the more because the present, considerably formal, approach to C as a thinker-in-paint entails close attention to form and structure, it demands some account of the main practitioners of C-type formalism so as to distinguish it therefrom, before eventually proceeding to scrutinize in particular the role, in constituting formal structure, of quantitative color relations.

Modern formalism was indebted not only to the late nineteenth-century German formalism of 'pure visibility' of Fiedler (*On Judging Works of Art*, 1876) and Hildebrand (*The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture*, 1893), but, also importantly, to the art history of Heinrich Wölfflin and the many art historians and critics he influenced, especially with his *Principles of Art History* (1915). Wölfflinian analysis invites the spectator into the workings of the work of art, with the visible entailments and sensible consequences of telling formal tendencies of an art or artist. That this is not a matter of mere *intention* but of 'moves' in a 'game' of consequential choices is already clear in a recommendation offered by Walter Armstrong, director of the National Gallery of Ireland at the turn of the nineteenth century (as well as translator of the aesthetician Veron), in introducing an English edition of Wölfflin's *Classic Art* (1899). Described as "one of the pioneers in a field that has been strangely neglected by art-historians and the newest school of art-critics—the field of pure aesthetics," Wölfflin, we are told, "deals here with problems of form alone," including composition, or "design ... in its widest sense." Hence, "The result is a trustworthy guide to the minds of ... [the] painters ... Speaking broadly, his reasoning is the unconscious reasoning of the painter put into words, so that he conveys to the reader the whys and wherefores of things from the artist's own standpoint. Anyone reading Herr Wölfflin carefully may fairly assume that he is following the workings of Raphael's mind as he built up things like the *Disputa*, the *School of*

Athens and the *Madonna di San Sisto*."⁹

Secondly: in the English-speaking art world there was, preeminently, the polemical modernist formalism of Roger Fry, who celebrated the work of C in promulgating the notion of 'postimpressionism' to the English-speaking world in 1910. While modern formalism had not originated with Bell and Fry in England, these two critics placed C's then fairly recent work at the new center of formalist concern. Fry was prime mover of the first ('Manet and the Post-Impressionists') and Second Post-Impressionist exhibitions, in London, in 1910 and 1912, with their influential introductory catalogue essays. The 1910 introduction had in actual fact been written by Desmond MacCarthy, whom art history long marginalized as Fry's exhibition's 'secretary'; its thoughts on C as admirably 'primitive' have already been noted.

MacCarthy's work shows itself even more consequential for aesthetics if we acknowledge his proceeding in 1912 to support Fry's second exhibition with a critical article on 'Kant and Post-Impressionism.' The 1912 exhibition catalogue had essays by others besides Fry's 'The French Post-Impressionists' (reprinted in *Vision and Design*), including one by Bell on the British moderns, from which MacCarthy imported into his Kantian discussion the term 'significant form': "What Mr. Bell means by 'significant form' is what Kant meant by 'free' beauty."¹⁰ Now it is easy to see what particularly inspired the philosophical MacCarthy's own conviction: already in 1910 he had devoted as much attention to C as to all other mentioned artists combined; and again, there was the sense of "design" as generating "the coherent, architectural effect of the masterpieces of primitive art." No matter that MacCarthy subscribed to the geometric-schematic view; he was at least thinking through what such might mean. Hence, "Because [C] thus showed how it was possible to pass from the complexity of the appearance of things to the geometrical simplicity which design demands, ... later designers ... recognize in him a guide capable of leading them out of the *cul de sac* into which naturalism had led them."¹¹

9. Heinrich Wölfflin, *The Art of the Italian Renaissance; A Handbook for Students and Travellers* (London: Heinemann, 1903), 'Prefatory note' by Walter Armstrong, vii-viii.

10. MacCarthy, 'Kant and Post-Impressionism,' *Eye Witness*, 10 October 1912, pp. 533-4, repr. in J. B. Bullen, ed., *The Post-Impressionists in England: The Critical Reception* (London: Routledge, 1988), 374-7, here 377, with discussion of how MacCarthy differs in his view from Fry's (anti-romantic) application of the Kantian distinction of 'secondary' (or adherent) and 'free' beauty.

11. Idem, 'Post-Impressionists,' 176. Care should be taken not to presume on the basis of MacCarthy's having supposedly worked from notes supplied by Fry that the essay is of Fry's "ultimate 'authorship,'" as, for art-historical purpose, does Richard Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism: A Study of the Theory, Technique and Critical Evaluation of Modern Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 155; even if the essay was written from Fry's critical notes, it deserves to be assumed that MacCarthy would have argumentatively determined it.

Bell himself respected the art of C as the very font and origin of right aesthetic understanding, spelling out his C-inspired view of aesthetics as centered on form in a concise essay whose thinking became absorbed into *Art* (1914): 'Post-Impressionism and Aesthetics' (1913). The theory, in a nutshell, is that while what qualifies something manmade as art is its being beautiful and as such delightful to behold, by its "raising aesthetic emotion," what in turn qualifies it as beautiful (for provoking such response), is its "significant form." One hesitates to add unnecessarily to an already unwieldy philosophical literature on the famous term, but a worthy adumbration of it can be read into the record from sixteenth-century mannerist art theory, along with evidence of its immediate enthusiastic reception in contemporary British culture (to this day, like postimpressionism as a category, the now unfashionable notion of significant form has had only Anglo-American currency). As to the first point, apparently unacknowledged is a very early, if not the initial, casting of the term, not inappropriately, in ever-reflexive mannerist art theory, where, in 1590, G. P. Lomazzo offers as one variety of form that he terms "the significant"; while on the forward end of the matter, the fast diffusion in modern British culture of Bell's promulgation of the formally "significant" in *Art*, whose preface is dated November 1913, can probably be gauged by the English mystic Evelyn Underhill's invocation of C himself along with other artists who have also "seized and woven into their pictures ... significant forms which elude you" (*Practical Mysticism*, 1914), as well as by T. S. Eliot's remark "very few know when there is expression of significant emotion, emotion which has its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet" ('Tradition and the Individual Talent,' 1917).¹² The emphasis on the immediate affective carrying power of form within the work is what seems to carry over into the thinking of such different writers. Most importantly, here and now: at the point of origin, Bell understands that he himself has been critically provoked into framing this theory locating the 'X'-factor eliciting proper aesthetic response in "forms and the relations of forms [which] stir our aesthetic emotions,"¹³ ostensibly by *the work of C*. He might seem to invoke *relations of forms* so casually; but if entrancement with the loveliness of the singular form might lead toward the neoplatonic—not something likely to happen with the heartier forms of C—it is in the significance of formal relations that Bell's theory seems most strongly determined by C's art, even, say, in a relation between the sub-forms of the two unequal and asymmetric sides of a vase: "These moving [N.B.] combinations and arrangements I have called ... significant form."¹⁴

As for Fry: the very title of his classic collection of critical essays *Vision and Design* is an indication of his view that the core of C's aesthetics lay in 'design,' by which he meant the interrelation of forms (even in the sheer profile of a vase this will entail relations between

at least two curves, between the two sides). Reviewing a little book on C by C's dealer Vollard, Fry made a point of denying to C "intellectual independence" and most likely "the faintest conception of intellectual truth" (the latter may be tinged with Fry's occasionally detectable anti-Catholicism because it is so awkwardly compensated by adding "this is not to deny that he had a powerful mind."). Only a page later Fry more fully concedes that *obiter dicta* of C on art collected by Vollard, which "have all [C's] pregnant wisdom and racy style, ... often contain a whole system of aesthetics in a single phrase ..."¹⁵ Fry never lost sight of how C came into fullest conviction as a painter in the 1880s, when, as he puts it in his classic *Study of His Development*: "Structure is still the primary consideration, it still prevails over the 'impression,' but those accents which clamp the structure together no longer need to be so heavily insisted on ..." (75).¹⁶

Thanks to Roger Fry's analytical penchant, his C monograph can still be profitably read as a contribution to aesthetics, not to mention (for now) the scrutiny of such works effected by C as it is secondarily *about*. This classic text yields good indications of what it should mean to describe C's art as logical or logically constructed, such as Fry's claim for "his conception of colour not as an adjunct to form ... but as itself the direct exponent of form" (13)—a claim that will find confirmation from a different line of thinking, below. While Fry observes a "constant tendency towards the most simple ... logical relations" (47), he also notes (as if echoing Francis Hutcheson's "uniformity amidst variety" in the eighteenth century):

12. Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, *The Idea of the Temple of Painting* (ch. xxv), excerpted and trans. in Elizabeth Gilmore Holt, ed., *A Documentary History of Art*, vol. 2: *Michelangelo and the Mannerists, the Baroque and the Eighteenth Century* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1958), 82-83 (which seems neoplatonic in comprising not only "the form of the world" and the disposition of the sidereal universe but "likewise ... all the shapes of the elements," distinctly differently from such "visible" forms as pertain to man and nature). Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism* (New York: Dutton, 1960), 21; cf. p. 52. T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent,' in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*, 1st ed. 1920 (London: Methuen; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1960), 47-59; here, 59. With the help of these two high-church Anglicans one might begin to make a case for a specifiably 'spiritual' sense of 'significant form,' though that would digress from the task at hand.

13. Clive Bell, 'Post-Impressionism and Aesthetics,' *The Burlington Magazine* 22 (1912-12), 226-30, here 227.

14. Ibid. Cf. John Hospers, *Meaning and Truth in the Arts* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1946), 191: "Without agreeing with Bell, it is quite permissible, I think, to say that he who does not grasp form simply does not appreciate painting"; yet in order to rule out mere depiction of merely nice shapes, let us go a step further and say that, in view and in light of the work of C, whoever does not grasp *structure* as such, which, C shows, depends on formal interrelations, does not see painting in sufficiently modern view. Thus Bell's formalist modernist aesthetic was framed in cognisance and on terms of *something C was doing in his painting and decidedly within it*, which is just where he promised his painting's truth was to be found.

15. Roger Fry, 'Cézanne' (1917), in his *Vision and Design*, 1st ed. 1920 (New York: Meridian, 1956), 256-65, here 261-2, 263.

16. This and the following quotations from Fry, *Cézanne: A Study of His Development*, 1st ed. 1927 (New York: Noonday, 1958).

"By reason of ... incessant affirmations and contradictions similar results follow from quite different conditions. We thus get at once the notion of extreme simplicity in the general result and of infinite variety in every part.... Nothing is less schematic than these works, even when ... the general forms have an almost geometrical appearance" (51). In this view C's visual thinking entails geometry "as a kind of intellectual scaffolding," but more as something to play against in constituting his image: "his interpretation of natural form always seems to imply that he is at once thinking in terms of extremely simple geometrical forms, and allowing those to be infinitely and infinitesimally modified at each point by his visual sensations" (53). But geometry is simply not the bottom line; Fry sees it as a means to an end. "It is evident," Fry infers, "that all his life he was continually brooding over one tormenting question; how to conciliate the data of Impressionism with—what he regarded as essential to style—a perfect structural organization.... It was his determination to arrive at a perfect synthesis of opposing principles, perhaps, that kept [C's] sensibility at such a high tension... Each canvas had to be a new investigation and a new solution" (57). Finally, Fry generalizes:

We may describe the process by which ... a picture is arrived at in some such way as this:—the actual objects presented to the artist's vision are first deprived of all those specific characters by which we ordinarily apprehend their concrete existence—they are reduced to pure elements of space and volume. In this abstract world these elements are perfectly co-ordinated and organized by the artist's sensual intelligence, they attain logical consistency. These abstractions are then brought back into the concrete world of real things, not by giving them back their specific peculiarities, but by expressing them in an incessantly varying and shifting texture. They retain their abstract intelligibility, their amenity to the human mind, and regain that reality of actual things which is absent from all abstraction (58-59).

At first, "Nothing is less schematic," above, seemed rhetorical, but not finally. Even in negation, as where he applauds C's managing, before a landscape motif seemingly lacking in design potential, solely "by the logical progression of minute variations of tone and colour ... to pose ... a solid and effective element in the plastic construction," quite without "hint of the imposition of a schematic idea" (62), one may detect a Kantian penchant in Fry (the former student of analytical chemistry): "The intellect is bound to seek for articulations. In order to handle nature's continuity it has to be conceived as discontinuous; without organization, without articulation the intellect gets no leverage" (40). But Fry's great text makes evident that in respect to the constitution of the image out of "a logical progression of minute variations of

tone and colour" more remains to be assessed than any formalism of form alone, so to speak, could account for.

Inspired in part by Fry (and MacCarthy), the present essay seeks to reposition stylistic analysis in the analytical tradition of form within which early criticism of C emerged. It may also be said to return to where these former accounts leave off. The intent is to take up the analytic account to show how C extricated himself from nature to create rationalized perceptual schema, not however through imposed geometry, as is generally offered, but especially through a conceptual, visibly quantitative, interrelation of colors, in extension of the sense of a part-by-part notion of color as formal "exponent" elucidated by Roger Fry.

Besides Fry's [C] there is the classic analytic study by Fritz Novotny, to this day still not wholly translated (though at least two other key formalist analysts of C read German, the painter Hans Hofmann and his sometime student, the critic Clement Greenberg): *[C] und das Ende der wissenschaftlichen Perspektive* (1938). For Novotny C's work definitively effects that "radical rejection" of the Renaissance-and-academically established perspective that opens the way to abstract painting (98-99).¹⁷ Here "the overriding importance of purely painterly formal problems does not need to be referred yet further back to a fundamental revolution in the perception of reality"; more important is the "commitment to the surface of the picture" which develops through the nineteenth century, "that 'idea of the surface as the fundamental ground of all painting'" (Novotny quoting Theodor Hetzer, *Tizian: Geschichte seiner Farbe*, 1935) which "causes the 'image' character of the picture to become more and more pronounced" (105). So it comes to be that "in [C's] painting a new reality of the surface of the picture is created, ... [that] seems ... to be one of his most fundamental achievements" (106). But the point is no simplistic reduction to a formalism of mere design, against which Novotny is already braced, but more an affirmation of the image as para-natural, as parallel with nature on its independent terms, in a strong case of sign-value *versus* semantic content:

What matters is not what happens within a symbolic world bounded by four straight lines, but the new value which this thing itself, this surface enclosed by four straight lines, possesses within the idea of a picture. The relationship between ... the value of the representation and the value of the picture, which is the object of analytical

17. Fritz Novotny, 'Cézanne and the End of Scientific Perspective,' excerpt trans. in Judith Wechsler, ed., *Cézanne in Perspective* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975), 96-107. One can even suggest that Greenberg's notion of an 'allover' quality in abstract expressionist painting (which some find vaguely Germanic, like the adverbial *überall*, and want to normalize as 'overall') may have been determined by Novotny's remarks on proto-C "overall compositional form" and "overall composition" (102), what with 'the way in which the construction and effect of the picture-space ... [became] influenced by the plane of the picture and its increasingly pronounced surface structure' (104), and so on.

observation of any work, became one of the most essential of all the problems concerned with representation in the period which marks the end of Impressionism, and above all in the art of [C] (106).¹⁸

In America, C-type formalism among artists and critics has owed much to an influential teacher of the abstract expressionists, the German emigré painter Hofmann, in whose widely studied text 'The Search for the Real in the Visual Arts' (written in 1947) the space-eliciting property of color relations is C-related even as Hofmann emphasizes the eventually caricaturally 'Greenbergian' formalist principle of a suitability of form to medium, especially in respect to the 'flatness' of painting. For example: "A plastic idea must be expressed with plastic means just as a musical idea is expressed with musical means, or a literary idea with verbal means. Neither music nor literature are [sic] translatable into other art forms ..." (40);¹⁹ or again, in the essay 'Painting and culture,' in the same collection, where Hofmann sounds practically Lessing-esque regarding the discrete capabilities and limitations of different media: "The difference between the arts arises because of the difference in the nature of the mediums of expression and in the emphasis induced by the nature of each medium. Each means of expression has its own order of being, its own units. The key to understanding lies in the appreciation of the limitations, qualities, and possibilities of variation and relation of these presentational elements" (57).²⁰ Art history recognizes Hofmann's transatlantic importance for painting, but his theoretical work, itself aesthetically indebted to C, also deserves a place in transatlantic modernist aesthetics.

For a good generation, most credit—and blame—for modernist formalism has accrued to Clement Greenberg, especially among literary critics and theorists unaware of his far from unique position in critical history.²¹ The genealogy neither of formalism in general nor of Greenbergianism is particularly at issue here. What matters is how the present argument differs from previous formalism, including Fry's and Greenberg's—but also, again, that whatever was found formally significant in C's work was after all *put there by C*. A survey of remarks on C in Greenberg's collected writings reveals a very different thrust in his C-ism from that being advocated in the present thesis.²² For Greenberg proves to have been interested in C mainly as a special case in a general account of modernist painting as founded on *impressionist* (not postimpressionist) pictorial *flatness*, to which C's obviously not so simply flat work had to be accommodated. (The problem would deserve critical scrutiny if only because it has conditioned the generalizations of so many.)

In seeking out some form of aesthetics as such in the actual artwork of the great painter who is our quasi-aesthete subject we ought not to overlook that Greenberg the

critic had learned some of his aesthetics in the studio of a painter. Greenberg's early statement in 'Avant-garde and Kitsch' (1939) that "even ... [C] derive[s] ... [his] chief inspiration from the medium [he] work[s] in" carries the note: "I owe this formulation to a remark made by Hans Hofmann, the art teacher, in one of his lectures" (1: 9, with 9 n.2). In 'Abstract Art' (1944) Greenberg writes that C, out "to acknowledge the brute flatness of the surface on which he was trying to create a new and less deceptive illusion of the third dimension, ... broke up ... objects ... into multiplicities of planes ... as closely parallel as possible to the canvas's surface," these painted in "roughly rectangular touches of the brush [which] echo the outline of the canvas"—hence "assert[ing] ... the physical nature of the medium and the materialism of art" (1: 202). For whatever reason, it evidently became important to Greenberg to take such correspondence in artistic practice as materialistically as possible, notwithstanding that Hofmann the teacher, if not Greenberg the student, would surely have been conversant with Kandinsky's almost animistic regard (even at the Bauhaus, as is shown by *Point and Line to Plane*, 1926) for the quite material canvas and brush as very instruments of spiritual transformation. In a 1945 review of Erle Loran's *[C's] Composition* (1943), the importance of "[C's] concrete means and methods" is reaffirmed as Greenberg seconds Loran's argument that (*pace* Novotny, among others) C's "effects of volume and space" were attained, *not* by means of color, but by "linear structure" as establishing illusionary three-dimensionality on the

18. Later, at just the moment of Greenberg's influential collected essays, *Art and Culture* (1961), Novotny is found struggling to render Wassily Kandinsky's less logical-structuralist characterization of C's painting *qua* sign, in that charter of abstraction, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art and Painting in Particular* (1911): "Not a man, nor an apple, nor a tree is represented, but all these are used by [C] to form a mental painterly"—or, to put it literally in an un-English form—"a subjective painterly thing that is called a picture" (whereupon Novotny gives up and quotes Kandinsky's original German) : Novotny, 'The Reaction Against Impressionism from the Artistic Point of View,' *Studies in Western Art: Acts of the XX International Congress of the History of Art* (1961; pub. 1963), vol. 4, in Harold Spencer, ed., *Readings in Art History, 2: The Renaissance to the Present* (New York: Scribner's, 1969), 255-69, here 264.

19. Hans Hofmann, 'The Search for the Real in the Visual Arts,' first pub. in his *The Search for the Real and Other Essays*, ed. Sara T. Weeks and Bartlett H. Hayes, Jr. (1948), rev. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: M. I. T. Press, 1967), 40-48.

20. Hofmann, 'Painting and Culture', loc. cit., 54-58.

21. Beverly H. Twitchell, *Cézanne and Formalism in Bloomsbury* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: U. M. I. Research Press, 1987), finds C-inspired formalism occurring in three 'bursts' captained respectively by Fry, Herbert Read, then Greenberg. All but forgotten now as significant critical context to Greenberg's coming into prominence as America's most famous formalist is the arguably formalist American *literary* criticism of extreme 'close-reading,' the so-called 'New Criticism' of John Crowe Ransom, Alan Tate and others: here already was an approach to texts as autonomous, self-contained formal constructs, with its own Kantian and even German-idealist influenced component; see Rudolf Lütke, *New Criticism und ideale Kunstphilosophie*, *Abhandlungen zur Kunst-, Musik- und Literaturwissenschaft*, 191 (Bonn: Bouvier / Grundmann, 1975).

22. Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian, 4 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986-93), for the following citations.

concrete “flat surface” of the painting (2: 47); again, C realized a “conscious desire” in French painting “to give an account of nature that would be more accurate or truthful ... than any before” specifically in “the context” of “the medium,” in particular, of painting’s flat rectangular format (48).²³

The same view is reiterated in two essays on C of the early 1950s. In ‘[C] and the Unity of Modern Art’ (1951; collected in *Art and Culture*) C manages to lessen the solidity of “pictorial illusion” in affirming “the configuration of the picture as an object—as a flat surface,” C’s “true object” [note the slight metaphoric shift] being a “firmer binding of the three-dimensional illusion to a decorative surface effect...” (3: 87-88). In ‘[C]: Gateway to Contemporary Painting’ (1952), where C “made the relative flatness of the impressionist picture a solid and powerful one” (3: 115), Greenberg tries to make color itself (which C rightly understood as engendering spatial or volumetric effect) follow suit: because C tried to “shade” with “‘natural’ ... color,” he couldn’t get the image as flat as he wanted; but that’s O.K.—motif of the idiot savant?—because it is the source of the engaging “constructivism” of his art’s “solid flatness, or flat solidity” (117), which, supposedly, can be thanked for cubism.²⁴ Two famous later essays collected in *Art and Culture* reiterate the previous points: according to ‘The Later Monet’ (1957), “[C] and the cubists made painting two-dimensional and decorative” (4: 10); and in ‘Modernist Painting’ (1960), perhaps Greenberg’s single most influential text, “[C] satisfied verisimilitude, or correctness [sic], in order to fit his drawing and design more explicitly to the rectangular shape of the canvas” (4: 87).

This brief review of Greenberg on C is enough to show not only what Greenberg was concerned with but how the present consideration differs. While Greenberg obviously held C’s painting in high respect, his view of C seems almost caricaturally unintellectual in the face of the obvious intellectual engagement proffered by the very works at issue, so that the countless astute acts of judgment making up C’s images might as well be mere intuitions that happen only fortuitously to gratify analytical curiosity. Unlike the view of C being explored here, Greenberg’s had little room for C as enough of a thinker-in-art to matter much for aesthetics *per se*.

By way of contrast in the same generation: one sees the formal values of C’s art respected independently of doctrinal formalism in the acutely visual analyses of the 1952 book on C which the great art historian Meyer Schapiro wrote in New York contemporaneously with Greenberg’s main essay on C. Here at the outset, form and composition are introduced as primary for the pictorial construct, but no more so than color: “The mature paintings of [C] offer at first little of human interest in their subjects. We are led at once to his art as a colorist and

composer” (9).²⁵ As Schapiro’s analytical attentiveness to the painting as formal construct takes an artist’s-eye approach, it encompasses color as constitutive imagic matériel: “the visible world ... is re-created through strokes of color among which are many that we cannot identify with an object and yet are necessary for the harmony of the whole” (10). Psychology is not irrelevant to C’s painting, but indirectly: “in the most classical works we suspect that [C’s] detachment is a herocially achieved ideal, an order arising from mastery over chaotic impulses” (ibid.): here the sense of art as life-complementary and compensatory, as against natural-reflective, may derive ultimately, via the expressionist theorist Wilhelm Worringer’s *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style* (1908), from *The Birth of Tragedy*. Schapiro seems peculiarly responsive to the intellectual ‘moves’ in C’s ‘game.’

Significantly, Schapiro does not appeal to the standard cylinder-sphere-cone cliché of geometric schematization. This pupil of John Dewey made no more secret of his distaste for Greenberg’s dogmatic and prescriptive formalism than of his sense of the limitations of the earlier, less teleological formalism of Fry and Bell. Yet no one for whom form and formal structure was unimportant could have remarked, as he does here in describing a certain still life, “a harmony of opposed elements, a strange balance of contrary qualities, united through hidden analogies” (86); nor, in a portrait, “a visibly arranged, formalized composition in which the self-balancing structure ... is in turn opposed to ... rhythmical forms” in a “composition ... carefully thought out” (92), nor in another still life, not only a “formal contrast” of elements by “devices ... frankly exposed” but an entire section which, as “built of straight lines, acquires an appearance of the constructed and the ‘abstract’” (98). To Schapiro, the least formulaic thinker canvassed here, the present approach probably comes closest, if not for emphasizing color as structural, at least for the respect shown even formal structure as a product and manifestation of intellectual-aesthetic activity on the artist’s part.

All in all, the present essay opposes the received (and finally anti-historical) wisdom that is content to see C as an organizer of posited solid-geometric shapes (cylinders-spheres-cones), and seeks quite instead to surmount so-called reductive ‘formalism.’ In so doing, it relates indeed to Fry; but even the Fry who first saw C’s color as formal “exponent,”

23. Presumably C could have advanced all the more readily the happy ‘brute’ materialist flatness to which Greenberg historically conscripted him had he been one-eyed.

24. There would still in 1961 be a problem in theorising C’s color—in the context of Hans Hofmann’s painting, at that: “[C] said, and perhaps he demonstrated (though I am not sure), that fullness of color insured the fullness of form or shape...”; Clement Greenberg, *Hofmann* (Paris; Fall, 1961), 35.

25. Meyer Schapiro, *Paul Cézanne* (New York: Abrams, 1952). Emphasis on internal structure here is more to the present point than the famously Freudian interpretation of Schapiro’s 1968 essay ‘The Apples of [C]: An Essay on the Meaning of Still Life.’

and who discovered in C a strong sense of “logical relations,” did not especially see the latter as a function of the former. And in any event, what Fry meant by such formal exponentiation would have been more or less that convincingly tangible rotundity of the single apple for which he often fell back on the term ‘plastic’ (i.e., sculptural). Hence, a rethinking of formal analysis concerning C has been called for, emphasizing more than previously the comprehensive structural relations built up out of interrelations of color at least as substantially as of pronounced ‘design.’

All formalism, including Fry’s but above all even what one may reckon the implicit formalism of C himself at work in painting, is antidotal to naturalism—to any presumption that art’s appearance be reflective of the condition of nature. There may be endless dispute about whether the viewer of a painting can think at once about form and signification; but there is no dispute that as a rule the practical task of painting any representation will sometimes find the painter at least momentarily not thinking about the motif in order to think only about his or her *painting*, which entails thinking in some sense about color and form. Interestingly, the only serious exception concerns impressionism, where, as will be considered in the next chapter, it happens that C was temperamentally prepared to benefit by an obligation to fix so intently on appearance—which however is not the same thing as fixing on a motif as such—as not to be able to fuss about form, hence (advantageously, in the event) not to be able to worry about conformity to an all too conventional prevailing sense of form.

Formalism has a bad name, and there is certainly such a thing as superficial or simplistic formalism, and not only in painting. But there is one good lesson that even bad formalism teaches: that art doesn’t grow on trees; that art does not occur naturally; that art as such is somehow *anything but* natural, even when and where it does happen to engage nature on its own terms. The question of possible non-descriptive truth ‘in’—*within*—painting, apart from any sort of represented truth statable in (verbal) propositional form, will eventually come forth in consideration of possible truth ‘in’ and of painting as such. With other more immediate tasks ahead, it is necessary first to assess the limits and implications of naturalism, including what it means to speak in the aesthetic, if not in the scientific, sphere of more than one naturalism, even at odds with one another.

II. TWO NATURALISMS

1 Why C should have found himself reacting against established aesthetic views—in two naturalist stages; 2 How C can have negotiated two forms of naturalism without affiliating with artistic realism; 3 That early on C took naturalism as a 'default' aesthetic position, and how this entailed naturalism as against realism; 4 How (even) naturalism in painting involves representations.

Some account of naturalism and its presuppositions is in order, not simply because every artist must begin somewhere and naturalism presented a promising aesthetic outlook when C came of age, but also because in art nothing can occur except it be in one stylistic modality or another, and the status of naturalism as just another of such was critically problematic with C and in his generation. For C as a young man naturalism carried favorable connotations of courageous integrity and seriousness of artistic purpose—as against the seeming dilettantism of art for art's sake. But naturalism raises the question of how as a definite aesthetic (or aesthetics) it might differ from realism; also of how the painter's active role changed when a romantic naturalism was jettisoned in favor, first of a radical naturalist (i.e., 'impressionist'), and then eventually of an anti-naturalist (i.e., 'postimpressionist'), aesthetic. It is worth enquiring how C negotiated two successive varieties of naturalism as distinct from 'realism,' as well as just what naturalism may imply about representation. (Because one must in effect enter a moving stream, the following discussion presumes a basic stylistic sequence for French art in the first half of the nineteenth century—'academic' (neo-)classicism, romanticism and then realism—with subsequent categories to be accounted for with analysis of their entailments.)

1. *Why C should have found himself reacting against established aesthetic views—in two naturalist stages.*

Two major aesthetic reactions produced the C of artistic greatness and aesthetic interest. In the first, impressionism as a radical visual mode of naturalism followed upon a still romantically grounded naturalism, in parallel with that Zolaesque radical literary naturalism which tended to assume an anti-romantically scientific attitude; and then in the second, impressionism gave way to what will be treated here as postimpressionism, this last utterly antinaturalistic. As the second reaction followed upon and presupposed the first, being framed in terms of it, the question of why C should first have sought a more challenging sort of naturalism than that which satisfied his friend Zola in literature has considerable importance in C's aesthetic formation.

The 'why' of both matters concerns just what was aesthetically entailed in the respective shifts. Even the garden-variety 'first' reaction—romantic naturalism—took place against a given background: young C had first to contend with established academic idealism and already normalized and conventionalized romanticism.¹ Of course, beyond even the matter of these background circumstances there is the more general problem of why creative types in general do tend to rebel against the authority of what is established. Solutions to that problem will be many and varied. Some will be in terms of championing something neglected against something established, or what is less obvious in the face of the overly familiar; still others will be in terms of supporting the individual against the mass. For C there was also a variety of corroborating reasons, but fundamentally important was his conflicted early attitude towards romanticism (and finally even towards all naturalism) which was also to some extent a function of personal disposition, as for that matter were the inspiring examples of great romantic individualists of the older generation.

On aesthetic terms, then, C, setting out in the mid-nineteenth century, would seem to have been reacting first of all against the idealist romanticism then generally in effect, though manifestly prepared to salvage something more worthwhile from certain high-to-late romantic figures, notably Delacroix in painting and Baudelaire in poetry and art criticism. Why give wider berth to Delacroix and Baudelaire? For one thing, they were more radical, more penetrating to the groundings, hence all the more admirable to the budding avant-gardist—the very sense of a refreshment in change being one good example of a salvagable romantic notion (e.g., Kierkegaard's idea of 'crop rotation,' breaking with routine to refresh the spirit). Both were figures C could always accept as somehow better than merely romantic or even postromantic. Also, as a youth he had been torn between vocations to literature and art, and

his early enthusiasm for Delacroix and Baudelaire suggests that they struck him sufficiently similarly in cross-disciplinary terms for him to be able to affiliate himself with them on a level 'above' the differences between painting and literature.

In the next section an attempt will be made to distinguish categorically between realism (itself anti-romantic) and naturalism. First, we can perhaps infer what C found wanting in the romantic approach that could only have set him up for the radical naturalism of impressionism. Broadly important here is C's personal disposition; for the unsociable and irascible C would not have wanted to be constrained by any school of thought, whether late romanticism, naturalism or anything else (except perhaps insofar as romantics or naturalists were expected if not obliged to be unsociable or irascible). When in his maturity C became sufficiently self-aware of working along the lines of a reasonably systematic methodology of his own devising for painting, he seems to have resisted framing even that on theoretical terms. Temperamentally, he could never have rested content with conventional classical-to-romantic art as academically produced and disseminated. On the other hand, the privileged vocation of valiantly sensitive, lonely, misunderstood prophet-in-his-own-house would have held appeal. But also, the demand for an impressionist artist to be a dedicated sensory agent, responsive as if on duty on the spectator's behalf, would certainly have struck C as appealingly prophetic or priestly—in a notion of the artist's role that is also romantically rooted.

Without much adjustment, it seems that C went on to project himself as well in the role of the dedicated scientist (the impressionist committed to observational facticity) as a quasi-priestly intercessor with divinely ordained 'Creation.' For besides commitment to a dogged, if necessarily ugly, truth of brutal feeling characteristic of literary naturalism of Zola's ilk, there was in the same radical naturalist camp the more cerebral appeal of a scientific outlook. This entailed above all a commitment to observable fact, even to the admission into literature of social documentary, though the equivalent in painting, meaning, impressionist painting, is more immediately concerned with the personal report on the world as visible spectacle—'objectively' constituted out of firsthand ('subjective') experience.

Aesthetic embrace of the new scientific attitude, though ostensibly antiromantic in

1. While such stylistic terms have aesthetic utility, confusion is possible owing to the very dialectics of contradiction by which each new term is declared. Thus, C was born into a situation where romanticism was already an alternative to 'correct' academic classicism, and his early naturalism (itself impossible without anticlassical romantic underpinning, yet already anti-romantic) would be challenged by impressionism as a more radical mode of naturalism; and finally, postimpressionism would 'counter' that. Although it is important that these terms be carefully deployed, as far as possible without inordinate art-historical elaboration, the reader need not be detained by a justification for each usage because until impressionism gives way to postimpressionism the terms are anyway less distinct than the shifts from one to another phase.

its radical naturalist thrust, can in a certain sense still be considered a romantic affair in that it was an extremist anti-sentimental enthusiasm (thus in some sense deriving from the romantic naturalism it negated). What is readily construed from their surviving early letters is that in reacting against romanticism, young C and his boyhood friend Zola were fully inclined to take up the new naturalist position as giving scope to their adolescent enthusiasm for art as something more virile than romanticism. In their poetics a brave new painting or poem was certainly not going to be about prettiness or what girls would like, not if they could help it. Their art would be tough and have integrity, so they might even become two French cultural heroes, side by side. Entailing, as it effectively did, unpretty choices of snakes and snails and puppy-dog tails instead of sugar and spice and everything nice, even their early romantic naturalism offered the two youngsters the reverse appeal of a gutsy authenticity, with the liberty, even the challenge, to take up positively offensive, hence decidedly antiromantic, subject matters. This would be at once proof against the threat of feminine effeteness and antidotal against backsliding into romanticism.

The part played by Delacroix and Baudelaire in forming C's new naturalist aesthetic—romantic and then radical—should not however be underestimated. As far as Delacroix was concerned, his arch-romantic break with conventional idealized beauty so refreshed and enriched the tradition of high art that, ironically, his work came to appeal even to cultural conservatives. In the spheres of poetry and art criticism Baudelaire played a similar role to that of Delacroix, including, for that matter, an active advocacy of Delacroix. The very extremist exquisiteness with which, in the *Fleurs du mal*—beloved of C—Baudelaire poeticizes subject matters thought to be at very odds with beauty, pointed not to a mere escape from romanticism so much as, eventually, a way out of and beyond naturalism. It was the poet Baudelaire, in his worst and naughtiest 'aestheticism,' who taught the young C an aesthetic lesson he never forgot: that any possibility for fresh new beauty should almost by definition have to be made transmutatively out of matériel considered unbeautiful, possibly even categorically ugly, to start with. By 1856—when C, aged seventeen, had been Zola's friend for four years—Delacroix was pleased to record Baudelaire's praise that he, Delacroix, "call[s] up in painting the sentiment of that so singular ideal which delights in the terrible."² As C first emerged into a full-fledged radical naturalism, the outlook indicated here was manifest in his paintings in terms of thick, apparently crude painting with the palette knife, especially in bad-boy imaginings of daringly violent subject matters: rape, murder.

Let us acknowledge however the crucial role of Zola above all in weaning C away from what might be considered vaguely late-romantic aesthetic presumptions and stimulating

in him, first of all a new radical naturalism—which in painting will mean 'impressionism'—and then considerably more. C would contribute so much to the great modern turn away from the presumption of nature in painting that it is important to establish that such was indeed initially by way of Zolaesque naturalism. For impressionism was the equivalent in painting of the radical naturalism of this novelist who himself wrote art criticism advocating the new impressionist painting—for which, it does not matter, he wanted to retain the term naturalist.

As painting, the impressionist form of radical naturalism had to counter a certain sententious narrativity and often pseudo-photographic literalness—'naturalist' in a descriptive sense quite parasitic upon the literary—that was the staple of a popular reactionary mode promulgated by the academies as up-to-date (a complication usually glossed over in modernist art history). Of Jean-Louis Meissonier, by no means the worst offender, Delacroix, himself quite interested in photography, wrote, "His veracity is horrible; and though it couldn't possibly be more exact, maybe what's lacking is just that *je ne sais quoi* which makes an *object of art out of an object of odium*."³ In the present consideration, pseudo-photographic naturalism of Meissonier's ilk should not be allowed to confuse the distinction, in painting, between romanticism and the visual form of radical naturalism, namely, *impressionism*. Such should be mentioned only to be dismissed—mentioned because as academically and popularly the entrenched rival of the more radical naturalism in painting, which is to say, impressionism, it was part of the very aesthetic conventionality from which C was dissociating himself. But one also does not want journalistic or pseudo-photographic naturalism to confuse the issue because C never practiced it, so it is irrelevant to the question of whatever in his practice was implicitly aesthetic, and should not be allowed to cloud the crucial distinction between romantic naturalism and the radical naturalism of impressionism, suggested here.

A definitive break between romanticism and radical naturalism—Zola's in literature or C's in painting—is indicated by the latter's eschewal of the romantic cult of imagination as a realm of fictive personal projection. While this will be taken up later, it is already relevant in that the affirmation of experiential fact that marks radical naturalism (literary or pictorial), and negation of imagination, are one thing. The way, notably, in which Zola, in *Le Roman expérimental* (1880), theoretically demotes the author as bestower of meaning, calling in scientific terms for a posture of clinical detachment, is remarkably parallel—despite all commonplace misconstrual of impressionism as happily feeling-indulgent (owed no doubt to the name)—to the impressionist painters' rigorous commitment to sensory transcriptions as

2. Eugène Delacroix, *Journal*, ed. André Joubin, rev. ed., 3 vols. (Paris: Plon, 1932), 2: 450-51 (30 v 1856).

3. *Ibid.*, 1: 270 (5 iii 1849); emphasis in original.

untainted as possible by redaction. Neither is the impressionist painting of radical naturalism parasitic on the literary, unlike its pseudo-photographic popular rival: both radical naturalisms, impressionist painting in parallel with radical naturalism in literature, stood in direct and utterly 'experimental' investigative intimacy with nature. Here was no quasi-literary, self-proclaimed naturalist painting of narrative ilk, however de-conventionalized its represented content, because impressionism was on its own terms radically committed to a scientific, even experimental, investigative approach to natural appearance.

In C's reacting against the givens of his artistic situation, Zola's naturalism was clearly critical, and would only become more critical as impressionism, the true pictorial parallel to Zolaesque radical literary naturalism, came to be superseded in turn by 'postimpressionism.' Here, finally, was a strain of painting sufficiently anti-naturalist altogether (while still presenting images of nature) as eventually to be standardly considered part of the prehistory of abstract or nonobjective art. While there is much more to say about the dynamics of this development, for now it is enough to establish that even the later, ultimately antinaturalist, 'postimpressionist' reaction was made possible by the first—that is, by impressionism as radical naturalism in painting.

2. *How C can have negotiated two forms of naturalism without affiliating with artistic realism.*

Quite aside from any attempt to ascertain what it should mean for the case of C to distinguish, say, between the realism of Gustave Courbet, in particular, in painting, and a radical naturalism, whether of impressionism in painting or the likes of Zola in literature, it must be understood that there are various conflicting grounds for distinguishing between realism and naturalism. Even within the usages of art, it is difficult to frame definitions capable of capturing all right examples and only right examples of each, for reasons that include: (a) that too many literary critics and historians have failed to draw any distinction that could account for both terms, so that operational synonymy in the broader field tends to override careful distinction in the narrower, as well as (b), that while realism as a movement in painting largely antecedes naturalism, the painterly realism of Courbet—who also sustained in practice a 'realist' ideology of social types—happens to have been more radical than the popularly encountered, empirically driven but naively factitious, often pseudophotographic naturalism with which impressionism had more sociologically than aesthetically to contend.

Moreover, a serious misunderstanding, if not incompatibility, obtains between art-historical and philosophical distinctions of realism and naturalism. Art historians concerned

about this have tended to draw a subtle but in its way more categorical distinction, while philosophers, apt to criticize the art-historical sense of a categorical or generalizing implication in any and all realism as at some point at odds with a strong tendency to relentless singularity in naturalism (with impressionism implicated as a radical form of the latter), have not as yet helped to settle the matter.

Frustratingly enough, while the pragmatic of the art-historical does not seem to carry in the outside world, standard philosophical dictionaries evidently lose interest in defining the other term once they have defined one. Even the usually rigorous Hospers, in seeking to differentiate realism and naturalism, leaves the opposition incompletely accounted:

Naturalism in literature differs from realism chiefly in its selection of details rather than in the manner of their presentation; naturalism, that is, professes to be as objective as realism in the manner of presentation, the attitude or approach to the material; but in its selection of details it is (in practice if not in theory) definitely biased, it exercises a definite principle of selection: reacting from the Romantic emphasis upon the selection of sentimentally or imaginatively appealing details, it deliberately sets out to present and emphasize those details which are unpleasant, obscene, shocking or horrible. (To this is often appended a philosophical creed about the nature of the universe, asserting causal determinism and the non-existence of God. In this respect also it differs from realism.)⁴

At least this affirms that realism and naturalism are definitely not the same, and deserve analytic distinction. However, the phrase "rather than in the manner of their presentation," which might be gratuitous, needlessly compromises an already trying distinction that is necessarily a matter of stylistic modalities, hence of one or another "manner of ... presentation"; likewise "as objective as realism" blocks elucidation of differing presumptions of objectivity (most problematically with regard to what is categorically, generally or more typically 'objective' and to objects more pointedly particular or unique).

Asserting that scrupulous art-theoretical folk always require of realism something generalizing or categorical (not unlike the philosophical usage 'scientific realism'), whereas naturalism bespeaks more the as-is particularities of raw nature (or the sociologically raw side of human life), finds a modicum of support in the *Oxford Universal Dictionary*. There the

4. John Hospers, *Meaning and Truth in the Arts* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1946), 153. Before going its own way with aesthetics of naturalist cast, Anthony Savile's interesting 'Naturalism and the Aesthetic,' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 40 (2000), 46-63, isolates naturalism from realism. What it seems nobody wants to touch nowadays is the way realism is perhaps necessarily anti-nominalistic.

example of Ruskin's 'Gothic naturalism advancing gradually from the Byzantine severity' (which implies loosening from anti-natural schematization) seems rightly countered by an anonymous 1874 case of "the realistic tendency ... to mistake words for things" (in which the words in question are presumably category names).⁵ But this in itself will establish nothing among those who do not in effect already subscribe to the distinction, or at least seek one.

From the art-historical side: although attempts on my part to defer pragmatically to the usage of the late Otto Brendel, the great historian of Roman art, whom in my youth I heard repeatedly articulate a clear-cut realist / naturalist distinction, seem only to convince other art historians, there is now a valiant attempt by the philosophically committed Renaissance art historian David Summers. Unlike most commentators on naturalism *versus* realism, Summers does not let the matter drop once he has taken hold of either of the two terms. "Naturalism' and 'realism,'" Summers finds, "are sometimes used interchangeably, but it is necessary to distinguish carefully between them. 'Realism' is at base a category of subject matter, and refers to art having a concrete historical reference or an apparent concrete historical reference. Nineteenth-century realist painting, whatever its difference from photography, is like photography in that realistic themes are presented in a naturalistic way ..." (note the hint of the categorical in "realistic themes"). By naturalism Summers understands a certain kind of *art*, "the elements of which are presumed to coincide with the elements of optical experience"; again: "a kind of imitation in which the artificial analogue is a virtual relationship of light, dark, and color determined at least in principle by optics, by the physical geometry of sight."⁶

The latter notion was eventually explicitly rejected by C in an epistolary remark to Emile Bernard (23 xii 1904), which is all the more valuable evidence because its tone of contention mitigates the possibility of its having been coached by Bernard: "This—and I am categorical on this point—cannot be contested: an optical sensation occurs in our visual organ which allows us to [N.B.] classify—by light, halftone or quartertone—the areas represented by the sensations of color. For the painter, therefore, light does not exist" (L 305). By a way of thinking that would unfurl later, this statement of C may be taken to mean that by the stage of actually painting, one is talking about opaque material pigments and sensible distinctions between *them*, as calibrated by the painter, and no longer about the hues that a prism breaks apart in a stream of natural daylight. Even if Summers' distinction leaves realism as a nineteenth-century painting style fairly out in the cold, it still encourages the conclusion that such art itself was nature-bound in a sufficiently *generalizing* way to be captured by Summers' appeals decidedly not to just any subject matter but to categories thereof.

In the case of C or any other artist, the distinction between what is in effect realism or what is naturalism was not something that required conscious assent, and does not derive its relevance in his case from what he may or may not have thought, let alone said or written, about the brace of terms. After a fairly naive commitment to an essentially literary naturalism, C put himself under the impressionist tutelage of Camille Pissarro (between 1871 and 1874). Historically speaking—and not merely 'in retrospect' but as entailed in concomitant developments—C was being trained under Pissarro in impressionism as the advanced, indeed, reformed, 'radical' naturalism very much at odds with the prior categorical 'realism' of Courbet, whose work C also highly respected. Courbet, it happens, had come up with and specified a quasi-Marxist notion of realism with a definite political edge: consider however that without its strong categorical feature of class-consciousness it would not be so surely realist (*versus* naturalist). In admiring his work the bourgeois C was not necessarily admiring contents of particular categories, yet he was necessarily admiring something more categorical than random wildflower 'natural.' Emphasis on the immediately perceptual discrimination of color as a function of light effect, in which Pissarro the master coached C as journeyman impressionist, was, again, a typical radical naturalist trait now quite familiar in impressionism. As far as conventional historical usage carries, that's that.

To show the worthwhileness of a distinction between the two important competing aesthetic terms, as well as to display the operative sense of the present essay, it will be well to attempt a working distinction. Let the following, then, be such, most pointedly in respect to the French nineteenth-century cultural situation; but as that situation was definitive, the proposed definition might reach as far as any. While both realist and naturalist parties claimed to adhere to the value of fact, artistic *realism* tended toward a conceptual-categorical pole and so was prepared to trade in categories, conspicuously (though not only) social and even ideological ones, whereas artistic *naturalism*—whether radical impressionist or of pseudo-photographic ilk—tended towards an empirical pole and hence in one way or another towards natural science. Plausibly, some confusion may derive from the way science itself, oppositely to art, goes about as it were converting naturalism into realism by generalizing rationalization. Courbet's realism is great sociological art, whereas the radical naturalism of C's mentor Pissarro—his impressionism—is more akin to natural science (one might almost say, physics or physical chemistry, as being like 'natural philosophy' rather than 'natural history').

5. *The Oxford Universal Dictionary on Historical Principles*, ed. William Little et al., 3rd ed., ed. C. T. Onions (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 1312, 1666.

6. David Summers, *The Judgment of Sense: Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 3. Thanks to Mary Stieber for this reference.

A recurrent schema among those in the aesthetic realm who purport to distinguish consistently between realism and naturalism, posits aesthetic *idealism* at one extreme and *naturalism* at the other, with *realism* in between. Even as he defers to this schema Stefan Morawski, notably, criticises it for obscuring ‘tensions’ within the discrete modes. Morawski affirms Zola as spokesman of naturalism, meaning, the position “that empirical data must provide the primary orientation for the artistic method”; and he is hardly alone in finding literary naturalists to be likely adherents of fatalism: “The human being is considered a fixed entity with eternal problems of love, death, hatred, sorrow and the like, and naturalism may assume (as in its nineteenth-century formulation) that man tends above all else to an animal and biological fate.”⁷ Morawski, one can say, has Zola’s number, but not necessarily C’s. For in his painted version of radical naturalism pure appearances quite displace such ‘literary’ content (as even he had earlier indulged as a romantic naturalist), as will be accounted below.

The realism of Courbet apparently indicated the escape route from romantic naturalism, in the phenomenal direction of the radical naturalism that we call impressionism, because such realism refused to respect the art-academically established protocols of unreformed naturalism. Pissarro, C’s mentor in impressionism, had studied under Courbet, whom C quoted (indirectly) in 1878 as representing “the conscientious artist” (L 163). Where, in an 1880 article Zola wrote of C as having “the temperament of a great painter who is still caught up in experiments with technique—[and] remains closer to Courbet and Delacroix,” as Rewald has observed, C himself “never gave an opinion on this comment, but since he was in fact [N.B.] experimenting with a new technique at the time and since, furthermore, he was beginning to distance himself from his impressionist friends, it is quite possible that Zola’s statement was a reflection of something he had heard the painter say.”⁸

A proof that in C’s orbit a critical distinction between something termed realism and something else termed naturalism made sense is that Zola actually said he was willing to sacrifice the first to the second. In the essay on ‘Proudhon et Courbet,’ in *Mes Haines* (1866), after quoting Proudhon’s definition of art as “an idealising (*idéaliste*) representation of nature and ourselves aiming for the physical and moral perfection of our species,” Zola counters: “My definition of a work of art, if I formulated it, would be this: A work of art is a corner of creation (*un coin de création*) seen through a temperament.”⁹ The same statement is put forth famously as a ‘punch line’ at the close of a review (11 v 1866) of ‘The Realists of the Salon.’¹⁰ Rather more argumentatively, however, a week earlier, in a critical essay titled ‘The Artistic Moment,’ Zola had worked out a more extended statement in which, at risk of confusion, the “*réel*” is momentarily identified with “nature” only to be disposed of in favor of an aesthetic

naturalism of authorial “temperament”:

There are, to my way of thinking, two elements to a work [of art]: the real element, which is nature, and the individual element, which is man.

The real element, nature, is fixed, ever the same; it abides equally for everybody; I might say that it can serve as common currency (*commune mesure*) for all works produced, if I admitted they could have a common currency.

The individual element, on the contrary,—man—is infinitely variable: so many works and so many different spirits; it if weren’t for temperament all the pictures would perforce only be mere (*simples*) photographs.

Therefore, a work of art is never anything but the combination of a man—variable element—and nature—fixed element. The word ‘realist’ doesn’t mean anything to me, —I who declare the subordination of the real to temperament....¹¹

(The denial of meaning to “the word ‘realist’” in the penultimate clause is rhetorical naturalist bluster.) That Zola is known to have reveled (notably in *Le roman expérimental*) in assuming the posture of a natural scientist towards what people still presume the ‘subjective’ nature of art, must not be permitted to cloud the fact that in this reflection the doyen of naturalism is prepared to identify ‘the real’ as such with ‘nature’ only to dispose of both on behalf of what he holds up as an essentially authorial *naturalism*. This too, then, goes to show that in the definitive moment of radical naturalism two aesthetics, realist and naturalist, were sufficiently distinct to be opposed in the realm of theoretically aware critique of painting.

It will naturally occur to anyone concerned with the problem of realism and naturalism that if there is more than one naturalism, both (or all) committed to the continuity that makes natural science and especially experimentation possible, then there might by the same token be more than one realism, or more than one way to index the world by categories, if not necessarily ‘by the same token.’ On reflection, it would seem that, though it will not

7. Stefan Morawski, ‘Mimesis and Realism’ (1970, rev.), in his *Inquiries into the Fundamentals of Aesthetics* (Cambridge, Mass.: M. I. T. Press, 1974), 203-50, here 242.

8. Rewald: L 194 n. 5 (ed. note).

9. Emile Zola, ‘Proudhon et Courbet,’ in his *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mitterand, 15 vols. (Paris: Cercle du Livre Précieux, 1966-70), 10: 35-46, here 37, 38.

10. Zola, ‘Les réalistes du Salon,’ loc. cit., 12: 807-10.

11. Zola, ‘Le moment artistique,’ loc. cit., 796-800, here 797.

matter for the case of C, there may well be a single realism—a meta-rubric for all generalizers, extending over unlimited special realisms, all claiming to speak from overlapping sovereignties on general terms of reality at large—in a way that the naturalism of natural science, which is a naturalism bespeaking the world, is finally *not* compatible with a naturalism bespeaking the artist, even when a Zola's authorial art gains excitement by cultivating a scientific flavor. As against these two divergent naturalisms, all realism is an accounting of reality at large that relies on conceptual categorization: if it entails something like software, more than one sort might be workable, with the various systems possibly more or less incompatible. It makes sense to say that 'metaphysical realism,' 'scientific realism,' 'socialist realism' and so on, all otherwise at odds in some significant respect, do have in common a realist approach, while scientific naturalism, aesthetic naturalism and such, which don't even seem sufficiently stable and discrete to be recognizable as 'brands' of thought, despite likely similarities of outlook, tend to eschew categorization in approaching and claiming from different motives the one and only nature. Let us not however lose sight of the remarkable, more than artistic achievement of the likes of Zola and C in nineteenth-century culture, in *calling* such a great question.

Beyond the banal, pseudo-photographic, so-called naturalism of the likes of Meissonier in painting, the naturalist approach was developed in impressionism as committed, over all else, to the registration of visual-sensational appearance, as a synthesis of visual sense data. So sensation-based or phenomenal was impressionist naturalism that the objects of sight, however tangibly solid in actuality, became as almost nothing but things deducible from inflections in an insubstantial specter of sheer appearance. Such must tend to downplay descriptive 'literariness' of content, in even the more conventionally naturalistic sense. By comparison, the tableaux of old-fashioned naturalism, still beholden to academic conventions of descriptive representation, were shown up as vain (if not to those who had eyes but still saw not). In naturalist-to-naturalist terms of literature vis-à-vis art, this meant that what Zola was after, with his irreducibly literary sense of what nature is, must inevitably prove inadequate for C, who must press on alone in the heightened impressionist naturalism of pure visibility.¹² Hence nothing marked the reformed and aesthetically radical empiricism of sheer sight in impressionism more than the emphasis on painting *en plein air*—completely submerged, as it were, in an oceanic luminosity.

All things considered, and led on by our accruing sense of C's progressive naturalism, we may attempt a more stabilized if still not ironclad aesthetic distinction between realism and naturalism with the support of the analytical aesthetician Tatariewicz, who

recognized that to C himself "the art of painting was ... not the imitation of nature but the commentary upon and construction of it." Tatariewicz observes that Polish-speakers have an advantage of a uniquely hard and fast distinction between two conceptions of nature, one (obviously more native Slavic) being '*przyroda*,' which means nature in the way that things in the world just happen to be, disorderly though that may seem, *versus* the (obviously Latinate) '*natura*,' which pertains to the law-given order of things in the world.¹³ On these terms, C was transforming an impressionist *przyroda*, not (back) into an old academic, pseudo-rational *natura*, but rather by double-negation of that into a newly orderly para-nature or para-*natura* answering not however to science but to art. In effect, Zola reversed these terms, in the name of naturalism as something if anything more like Tatariewicz' *przyroda* than *natura*; but the important thing would seem to be his effecting the distinction at all.

3. That early on C took naturalism as a 'default' aesthetic position, and how this entailed naturalism as against realism.

Accounts of the personal development and social emergence of artists and other creative figures understandably begin with their reaction to prevailing givens if only to clear the way for identification of what is new and different. One need not be a card-carrying Hegelian to see that quite conspicuously in the realm of art, and no doubt generally in culture, significant developments begin in the middle of something different enough to make what is new definitively something *else*. In the case of the great painter C, who in so many historical accounts of the rise of artistic modernism is charged with the heaviest individual responsibility, what had first been given in the situation as initial grounding and then initial object of self-defining reaction was a problematic naturalism, itself something of a reaction to standard, government-issue, generalized academic classicism. (Regrettably, tedium threatens where repetitiousness is justified in the interest of distinguishing between naturalisms.)

An artist's work not only originates in a context of standing aesthetic presuppositions; it develops in an aesthetic context that has its own developmental aspect. In C's case, there is the romantic naturalism more simply given and dominant in his early adult

12. If it seems foolish to say that literariness is less of a threat to literature than it is to visual art, it does not seem as foolish to describe poetry that relies too much on point-to-point description as 'prosaic.' Painting at large may be more like either outright poetry, or at least prose-poetry, where syntax is at every point of potential aesthetic consequence.

13. Wladyslaw Tatariewicz, *A History of Six Ideas: An Essay in Aesthetics*, Melbourne International Philosophy Series 5 (Warsaw: P. W. N.; The Hague: Nijhoff, 1980), 283-84, 286, 294.

productions, and the more problematic mode called naturalism and associated all too closely, in terms of prosaic descriptiveness, with the new radical naturalistic literature; but what is more, the radical naturalism in painting that came to be called impressionism. For the early style, the term romantic naturalism conveys how C's early mode embraces an extremist emotiveness, as in themes of personal violence rendered, typically, with a kind of lyric melodrama in thick, indulgently expressive, manhandled paint. However subjectively invested (read romantically), such work presupposes concern with a givenness of nature whose very crudity is supposed (charmingly) to connote natural authenticity.

How different was the positivistic, decisively anti-romantic, radical naturalism shared by Emile Zola in literature, that quite different naturalism of vividly descriptive pictorial (or literary) work which came in turn under the challenge of impressionism—the newly radical naturalism of sheer appearance. If just declaring this is now almost enough, what with naturalism still fairly incorrigibly ingrained in prevailing 'folk aesthetics,' reiterating it can remind all concerned that such naturalism was itself nothing if not a reaction against the institutionalized classical tradition, which always idealizingly claimed to speak more clearly the truth of nature than nature on her own devices was capable of doing; so that whatever else it might involve, any form of naturalism offered escape from that.

We may look more closely at the context of C's first interest in art, when his first naturalism, the simple romantic form, entailed a negation of the classical system of art education then still enshrined on every pedagogical level up to the Académie des Beaux-Arts. C's basic schooling was subject, in particular, to Victor Cousin's official influence. Art itself, 'fine' art as such, was, as every Frenchman who expected to pass an examination would have been eager to affirm by making Cousin's favorite noise, basically a cult of 'the ideal,' a matter of depicting and thereby somehow solemnizing God-given nature in nicely laundered form. Except for the odd licensed romantic genius—as represented from youth to old age for C by those radical romantics the poet Baudelaire and the painter Delacroix—this unintellectual conventionality was presumed to guarantee *beauty* in art. Objects of art were readily disqualified from beauty insofar as they departed imperfectly from 'the ideal,' as evidenced in the most polished enshrinements of nature in the orthodox classical art of antiquity.¹⁴ All naturalism is at odds with the perennial aesthetic idealism enshrined in classical form.

So then one might seek to resist that entrenched outlook, which is just what those old pals, C and Zola, had knowingly set out to do. Swashbucklingly enlightened, they were prepared to grant that as a matter of divine creation 'nature' must be at base good; but they refused to accept that nature only required for beauty some modicum of aesthetic

compensation for imperfection. Up to a point, this view was already franchised by romanticism as a semiconventional way of 'dropping out'; C and Zola would always retain a romantic expectation of originality, which is a very unclassical idea—the drive of all classicism having always been to be *correct rather than* to be original.

But on the terms of his early, romantic naturalism C was also already reacting against art as *arty*. Naturalism of the second, radical sort was proud of showing, especially on behalf of (often socially critical) truth, that it was not in thrall to beauty. This was, in some sense, an easier path to pursue in literature, where a practitioner like Zola could write conspicuously well about horrific social ills; in painting, it made for a more challenging situation (pitiable conditions of life may turn hopelessly picturesque). Young C must have been excited by the promise of a somehow affirmative aesthetic (non-normative sense) of what could be called the ugly truth, which might possibly prove artistically consequential as such, as an anti-aesthetic aesthetic or at least a fresh beauty *contra* conventional beauty. Knowing C by his own testimony, one can construe this as having promised aesthetic escape from the adolescent threat that the whole matter of art, female nudes and all, might be all too sensuous and as such threateningly feminine. For the young C at first, as well as, more abidingly, for his friend Zola, naturalism did offer itself as a strong masculine antidote for the threateningly feminine 'arty.' Still, he must have wondered whether even the toughest naturalism wouldn't amount to just so much more of the same—art. Doubts that still lingered over the first naturalism could have been overcome just by the demands on one's attention (let alone taste) of the later, more radical naturalism of impressionism, even if this seems like just changing from one sort of naturalist to another: it was, but the change was not trivial.

Romantic naturalism had advocated against the refinement connoted by the term 'sensibility.' The classical attitude to aesthetic objects, cool as it was, did not rule out affect altogether (e.g., serenity, exaltation); but what mattered now was the kind of feeling involved. The sensitive and gently privileged young C was convinced that certain feelings deemed categorically aesthetic were too unvirile to entertain (all this is disclosed with pre-Freudian frankness in the writings). C had held first to a possibility of a brave naturalism ready to face

14.. One wonders if in the French intellectual circumstances of C's youth and young manhood, so much that was smugly and comprehensively pseudo-progressive in the prevailing tide of thought doesn't assimilate fairly readily to Victor Cousin (minister of public instruction from 1840 on), while a more sophisticated modernity was stimulated, notably, by Eugène Veron (*L'Esthétique*, 1878). Veron's chapter on painting presents Helmholtz's table of prismatic colors with a most interesting stipulation: such theories as Chevreul's of complementary color may have little practical benefit for painters mixing pigments, "They are however a great help to the comprehension of the effects resulting from the juxtaposition of different colours"; Veron, *Aesthetics*, trans. W. H. Armstrong (London: Chapman and Hall, 1879), 230. F. E. Sparshott, *The Structure of Aesthetics* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), notably, appreciates Veron's aesthetic importance.

down the ugly, and then to a demanding spontaneous impressionism. Both stances demand that one assume his manly responsibility: only a rigorously competent artistic observer—indeed, under impressionism, almost some uniformed sense-data technician—should be expected to handle the demands. But under good (and trustworthy, second-fatherly) coaching by Pissarro, C would rise to the task of being just such a stalwart observer-painter. So, in short, while he readily embraced naturalism—once again: romantic naturalism to start and eventually the radical naturalism that came to be known as impressionism—he was inclined to make his naturalism all the more demanding and less arty. How lucky we are that C never really wanted an easy time of things.

4. *How (even) naturalism in painting involves representations.*

Even radical-naturalist novels by Zola still tell consistent narrative stories; and even radical impressionist paintings still show recognizable landscapes of France—with augmented phenomenal vitality at that. However radical, naturalism tends to beg the mimetic question.

All painting that is 'of' something must be representational because a painting is of something just in that it re-presents to view whatever it is of. Any sort of naturalism is of and about nature, so that all naturalism must involve representations; on the other hand, nature in itself is not naturalistic: only art is naturalistic, and only some of it at that. Art, however, has a problem of there developing received, conventional notations for depicting nature, the sign-character of which goes unacknowledged—say, some stereotypic way to depict an oak tree or running waters or cumulus clouds. In a way, C heads this problem off by cultivating his own method. Because cliché readily sets in, it is incumbent on even the most zealous naturalist painter to cultivate *her own* notation, to paint her 'corner of nature' through—*per*, by means of—her own 'temperament,' which also helps naturalism to avoid conforming to convention.¹⁵ What, after all, is the use of tearing down the fences if one only persists in following the same old paths.

A Chinese connoisseur picks up a stone that strikes him as remarkably like a mountain and takes it home to look at quasi-artistically. No one will dispute that the stone is natural; but it is naturalistic *not* for being a piece (or literal bit or 'corner') of nature: nature is not itself naturalistic, which only things sufficiently detached from run-on nature to be made a point of can be: the chosen stone can be naturalistic only in resembling a natural feature *other than itself*, in this case, a mountain. The culturally European observer will hardly have agreed before it is apparent that, given geological features as in some basic sense transcultural

objects of natural science,¹⁶ the stone looks like a *peculiarly Chinese* mountain. If aesthetically sophisticated, she will proceed to infer that even if local geological differences make it possible to recognize a certain sort of mountain as out of geologic context, discrepancy would not be between sorts of mountain, geologically speaking, but between sorts of mountain-motif, even of specifiable Chinese types (better: specifiable by province rather than by mountain range). The same European, even if used to nuances of potato typology, should have a much harder time selecting, say, a cloud-like potato because assuming as naturalism must that the same clouds pass over Europe and Asia, or at least that they would look the same were conditions more consistent, far more potatoes are shaped like clouds rendered according to European conventions. Consider a bored Irish painter stimulated by Chinese painting, who starts making clouds 'more Chinese,' which seems interestingly natural; but no one will be surprised by the lack of poetic conviction if he shows his students and they turn out 25 different drawings of Chinese-style clouds, few if any convincingly naturalistic at all. With Chinese mountain-rock or Irish cloud-potato, there is only naturalism if something natural—stone or vegetable—is offered as something else (here also natural), which is to say, metaphorically.

A self-determined naturalist painter might feel that he must 'stay close to nature,' in that a 'normal observer' should be able to relate the motifs in his painting to natural and manmade items in the world. In that sense, even in his most seemingly schematized work (such as would eventually interest the cubists) C remained a naturalist, but barely. He worked with the almost familial familiarity of another bunch of homely apples on the same, plain old reliable table, or with the grand reassurance of the same old, day-in-day-out Mont Sainte-Victoire, so stably *given*, through and against the fickle impressionist atmospheric conditions. The stable recognizability of these *données* must have been assuring to this legendarily shy and defensive man whose portraits were always of intimates. There might also, however, seem to be what could be called another naturalism, beholden to nature as source of spiritual refreshment and inspiration yet in accord with which one was inspired to follow up by returning home to paint even, say, 'nonobjective' geometric abstractions in the studio. Then again, mathematics itself is a department of natural science; and what, in painting from the

15. On C's apparently fanatical obsession, cultivation and guarding of his actually rather uneccentric '*petite sensation*,' see Richard Shiff, 'Cézanne's Physicality: The Politics of Touch,' in Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell eds., *The Language of Art History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 129-80.

16. We can ignore Hippolyte Taine's positivist sense of local topographical difference as a determinant of cultural and artistic style, of which C as a known reader of Taine must have been aware, as tangential to the question of overcoming the stereotypic in naturalism.

Renaissance to C, could be as cognitively rigorous as the quasi-mathematical still lifes of C's high postimpressionist achievement.

That more than one naturalism is possible, with a single nature shared in common by all concerned, has as yet posed no difficulty in approaching impressionism as a radical naturalism, distinct both from the popular pseudo-photographic alternative as well as from the romantic naturalism of C's own youthful work. Again, it is less rewarding to wonder if more than one realism is possible: metaphysical realism, scientific realism and the artistic variety do actually seem similarly categorical in outlook, whereas different naturalisms can be surprisingly 'dogmatically' different. The problem of multiple naturalisms in art is not so hypothetical in view of the history of style as such, with so many period styles, even within a single cultural province (whether Italy or China), showing the most extreme differences in modes of representing otherwise similar natural motifs and themes.

The trouble with the 'history of vision' theory of Gombrich and others is that it tends to confirm an incorrigible naturalism. For the notion that the image of nature changes with a developing understanding of nature itself—of how (the same) nature comes to be (differently) seen—can in the end reinforce a presumption that art's representational subordination to nature ought to be as tightly reined as ever.¹⁷ Impressionism was the last valid renewal of the expiring license on naturalistic representation, with sheer elusive light to be the nature-hunter's last legal quarry. Yet even as early as his impressionist experience, C was among the first to break through inherited, superficial, academic-classical notions of proper pictorial composition to painting's (one cannot say 'natural' but might say 'real') operational, syntactic structure, which does go to show that art itself is simply not intrinsically a matter of nature. Even with a possible exception as extreme as monochrome paintings, it might be argued that they should be considered 'natural' samplings of color or qualities of paint that they proffer; but such works make artistic sense presented as exceptions to the givenness of their surroundings. At the opposite extreme: an ornament consisting of a 'found object,' say, a log sliced through to reveal inflections suggesting perhaps a landscape or a hypothetical portrait of the one and only Easter Bunny—a pseudo-naturalism by accident, whose cultural or artistic, and essentially representational, significance is something like remedially supplied.

Nothing is a representation unless somebody has made it one or at least taken it as one. Even taking nature as-is, unmediated, as quasi-artistic, implies by the very operation of the analogy 'like art' (for any analogy must go beyond taking something in its own right), a making, or setting up, of representation. All representations, even the most fictitious, have a content expressible in propositions, and propositions have to be *proposed*, set up. True, there

are what seem happenstance representations, such as the stone as the Chinese mountain or the log as the Easter Bunny; but they seem representational only in that somebody, as it were, adopts something *as* a representation *of* something else. A 'natural sign' is a contradiction in terms except insofar as it indicates such an act of adoption of conventional sort. Titriling the posited log *The Easter Bunny* will not sufficiently heighten 'natural' resemblance for us to expect to elicit recognition behavior *from a rabbit*. Doing so is merely smuggling in metaphor, there really being an 'Easter Bunny' in the linguistic realm where purely literary motifs are found. Even the Chinese rock only looks like a mountain *as if seen larger but at greater distance than is in fact the case*—which discontinuity renders metaphoric.

In the latter example one treats a 'dumb thing,' a blunt natural object, namely, a log, as if, by only a slight mistake, it were basically a representation. One may seem to get further with nonobjective painting by according every candidate image the full status of a representation but distinguishing between sorts of representation, but this move is more problematic than it might seem. All paintings consist of forms, whether specific 'shapes of' anything (else) or not; but even if one maintained that all forms in paintings (even the 'purest,' which are not necessarily 'ideally' geometrically-regular) are signs of other things, beyond them, few if any would prove 'natural' as opposed to artificial and conventional. Modern art—preeminently C's—deserves philosophical credit for showing up, in rendering ostensible and undeniable, the real, determining but often overlooked or underestimated preconditions of all painting, representational or not, as 'linguistic' but hardly a matter of 'natural language.'

So naturalism in art is ultimately no more natural than any other mode of representation, whether professed naturalists like that or not. For all representation is ipso facto artificial, man-made. Nietzsche would point up the contradiction of naturalism seeking applause for supposedly *artful* 'technique.' How C in his way had to work through this problem is no mystery: impressionism was so much an exercise in concentrating scrutiny on his own sensory assessment of what was there before him, and of re-presenting his apprehension in terms of his *petites sensations*, which, though derived from the 'outside' world, must be some person's and could be no one else's. Out of that identity he proceeded to make a still more independent postimpressionist art that, despite his need to continue speaking of nature, especially in explaining himself to others (but also no doubt to reassure himself), stands finally quite antinaturalistically on its man-made own.

17. Technical advances seem inevitably to produce absurd pseudo-naturalisms, as when the new electron microscope supposedly revealed that Jackson Pollock was 'truer' to the way 'nature really looks' than one might have thought. How stubborn is the folk-aesthetic notion that art is just so much portraiture of Mother Nature.

The next chapter will analyse more thoroughly what was entailed in C's subscribing to the radical naturalism of impressionism in painting, including the commitment to working 'immersed' in nature, out of doors, with possible implications of an advantageous spontaneity of approach, and where this left the artist vis-à-vis the great, needless to say, unreformed, painting of the pre-modern past.

III. RADICAL NATURALISM: 'IMPRESSIONISM'

1 What radical naturalism or 'impressionism' can have meant to C; 2 How C would have found congenial Zola's famous notion of art as "a corner of nature seen through a temperament"; 3 Why C should have seen radical naturalism as an antidote to the cult of imagination; 4 How the naturalism of an impressionist painting by C differs from photographic naturalism; 5 Other implications of impressionism: (a) Of 'spontaneity' as a virtue in painting; (b) Painting en plein air; (c) Where the revisionist is to stand vis-à-vis the Louvre.

With naturalism distinguished from realism, and two phases of naturalism distinguished in C's work, it becomes possible to plot how his aesthetics of painting developed—the presuppositions of his artistic practice—by analyzing the definitive shifts in that practice: first that from a late romantic naturalism to a radical naturalism, or 'impressionism' in art-historical terminology, parallel with Zola's radical naturalism in literature, and then from *that* to what art history terms 'postimpressionism' as a finally *antinaturalistic* modality of painting. The distinctions resist complete simplification because, where there was as yet no special term for impressionism, the term naturalism has required constant qualification as 'radical,' as against romantic naturalism and in parallel with radical literary naturalism. Yet by these terms, first C's radical naturalism, or impressionism, and then his supersession of naturalism with postimpressionism, can be clearly articulated. The impressionist phase is important because it was in the painter's passing into and then beyond it that C's signal artistic development took shape.

First, as far as radical naturalism in general was concerned, C's nearly lifelong friend Emile Zola was not only the definitive naturalist novelist but also, as a critic

of literature and art, a definitive theorist of naturalism. This is of more than contextual or even analogical importance to the case of C because the impressionist movement in painting, with which C joined up, was so much the artistic counterpart to radical literary naturalism that at first it shared the same stylistic name. We want to know about the implications of this new naturalism, what made it radical, at the least because it is curious that anything that might be considered culturally radical should have appealed to this constitutionally—in Zola's term, 'temperamentally'—conservative man, C. In a sense, it would have promised not so much compensation as release from any lingering romantic demand of 'imagination.' What, then, about the 'impressions' which the younger generation of painters were cultivating: how could utterly surrendering oneself to impressions amount to anything more than subjective self-indulgence? Where, we also wonder, did C sit in the crisis provoked by photography, whereby, apart from absurd pseudo-naturalistic attempts to vie with photography, painting would have either to be all the more 'natural' in a different way or else to turn away from naturalism (or even nature). In effect, as will be seen, C did both, in that order.

C, whose early works were figure paintings, had 'temperamental' reason to be drawn to impressionism, which was so devoted to landscape (with a decentering of lingering adolescent erotic anxiety); and while his impressionism is authentic it is as authentically different from others' as from pre-impressionist landscape painting. In particular, his radical naturalist, impressionist, experience led C to discover color as his true *métier* in a way that holds interest for philosophy, and not only on the general terms of color as a so-called secondary quality in the world as given to observation but as perhaps the most 'primary' quality *in painting*. Above all, it holds philosophical interest as entailing constant discriminatory translation between two closed and opposed color systems. For the (Newtonian) system of observed color as a negation by absorption of *every* hue *but* the reflected one seen, simply does not jibe with the (Goethe-framed) system of pigmental hues keyed to anticipated synthetic effects. There are, as well, interesting implications in the matters of executional spontaneity as well as of painting *en plein air*. And with the practice of painting 'nature' radically revised, one also wants to know where this would leave the reformed painter and his reformed art in respect to the Louvre, which is to say, in respect to the great, but by definition unreformed, painting of the past. These matters can be explored once an understanding of the nature of radical naturalist or 'impressionist' painting is secured.

1. *What radical naturalism or 'impressionism' can have meant to C.*

It should now be clear that the term radical naturalism was largely rooted in the literary sphere, where there developed an ancillary body of critical theory that underwrote the eventual visual equivalent of radical naturalism now familiar under the name impressionism—though, once again, for quite some time 'naturalism' was the only available term. Hence the problem of what C would have understood by impressionism must be set against the wider critical context of that period; for the aesthetic outlook and practices of 'impressionism' were under way for some years before the painters of the movement assumed its famous name. Thus to speak of impressionism early on is tantamount to referring to the work of those painters who would later espouse the originally derisory name 'impressionists,' almost regardless of whatever that term should have meant. Already in the early-to-mid-1860s the original protagonists—Edouard Manet (though more his own man), Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro, Pierre Auguste Renoir—were aware of sharing a new, revisionist approach to painting, above all in their approach to landscape, and this a good decade earlier than their acceptance of the collective name. Hence, though it is difficult to infer just what C might have understood by the term 'impressionism' in the later 1860s, it is quite possible to ascertain what, in the works of this circle he had yet to enter, would be captured by the term once it was taken up like a proud mantle in the mid-1870s.

The question of what C would have understood as impressionism has no answer outside the operative givens of historical style, but as such the factors at issue can be analyzed to some extent. First: during the foundational years of the movement in question C was still a naturalist who did not even dabble in what would later be termed impressionism. Yet even Monet, Pissarro and Renoir could not yet have produced a solid answer to the question of what they themselves, the pioneers, would have understood by this term 'impressionism,' which was still to be employed. Problematic in the situation is that, once the term was in play, despite its initially negative valence it happily fit an aesthetic practice already in effect. If Monet's hostile reviewer, reviewing his *Impression: Soleil levant* in 1874, had mocked the title of a different painting, a different name might have come about. Whatever it was, it would have identified a commonality already in effect for some years, and we would still find ourselves wondering just the same what C would have meant by that particular 'ism' once he came to subscribe to it.

Since what is known as the impressionist movement was under way well before it had its name and before C participated in it, what impressionism might be cannot depend on whatever C or his artist colleagues might have meant by 'impressions' beforehand. Even in

ordinary usage however an 'impression' has strong empirical implication, while in the context of impressionism it intimates a move toward subjectivity so deliberate as to imply an objectification of (a making of an object of) subjective experience as such. Enquiry into what would have been meant by impressions should take into account the historical dimension.

Aware that there was artistic concern not only with artists' subjective 'impressions,' but also with painting the landscape *en plein air*, well before the name 'impressionism' stuck, it may be possible to circle in on C's own awakening to the radical new approach. The initial phase of awareness can be marked by two letters of 1866. For after first mentioning the changes he is making in a figure painting, C tells Zola that "these people" posing as his mannequins "should really be posing in a studio" (30 vi 1866; L 115); four months later he says in another letter to Zola, "You know, any picture done indoors, in the studio, never equals things done outdoors. In pictures of outdoor scenes, the contrast of figures to scenery is astonishing, and the landscape is magnificent. I see superb things and I must resolve to paint only out of doors" (19 x 1866; 116). As the art historian Rewald rightly notes, the words of the second letter "appear to contradict" the first (L 123 n. 19 [ed.]). But between the two C had spent the summer in the company of Zola, just at the time of Zola's formulation of an important statement of de facto impressionist aesthetics. During the same summer Zola adopted the actual term *naturaliste*—apparently from the positivist cultural historian Taine, whose academy lectures Pissarro had attended—which he proceeded within two years to apply to Pissarro and other impressionists.¹ C himself would still have called merely 'naturalist' the early paintings he would contribute to the first organized exhibition of self-declared 'impressionists.'

The movement was in swing for a good decade when the first proclaimed exhibition of 'impressionists' was held in April and May 1874, at the studio of that practitioner of the new rival art of photography, Gaspard Félix Tournachon, known as 'Nadar.' There is nothing necessarily anomalous in the ripening of a movement's program, especially a movement so empirical as not to be given to theory, before consensus on what name the collective effort ought to carry. What wants explaining is the evolution of the term *impression* from its use under romanticism to its anti-romantic use a generation later. One thing we can say is that to the political anti-aesthete Zola, who himself stuck with the rubric 'naturalists' for these painters, affirmation of 'impressionism,' especially its favoring over a rival '*intransigéant*,' must have seemed irresponsibly to countenance the vague or desultory in art.²

The critic Jules Castagnary, writing in April 1874 in *Le Siècle*, a journal of contemporary cultural critique, found telling the impressionists' eschewal of, to them, phony academic finish, an eschewal bound to make their paintings look sketchy—too sketchy for full-

dress public view—hence, to conventionally bound taste, erroneously or defectively rough. But like it or not, Castagnary also picks up on the fact that the lessening of finish is owed to a shift in the object of representation. At the least, if one insists on continuing to speak of representation in the same old unreformed terms, as if the game of art has not changed, it must seem that its principal object has shifted:

[T]he common concept which united them as a group and gives them a collective strength in the midst of our disaggregate epoch is the determination not to search for a smooth execution, not to be satisfied with a certain general aspect. Once the impression is captured, they declare their role terminated.... If one wants to characterize them, with a single word that explains their efforts, one would have to create the new term of *Impressionists*. They are impressionists in the sense that *they render not a landscape but the sensation produced by a landscape* [emphasis added].

Yet as the same critic thinks these painters misguided, he forecasts the dissolution of the group:

The strongest among them ... will have recognized that while there are subjects which lend themselves to a rapid 'impression,' to the appearance of a sketch, there are others and in much greater numbers that demand a more precise impression.... As to ... painters who—neglecting to ponder and to learn—pursue the impression to excess, the example of M. [C] can reveal to them as of now the lot which awaits them. Starting with idealization, they will arrive at that degree of unbridled romanticism where nature is merely a pretext for dreams and where the imagination becomes powerless to formulate anything but personal, subjective fantasies without any echo in general reason, because they are without control and without possible verification in reality.³

Castagnary seems so wrongheaded as to be consistently off, curiously enough. With his nature misconstrued as mere "pretext for dreams," and imagination becoming, in effect, impotent, C would have been reminded of his youthful aesthetic discussions with Zola. An early letter from Zola to their fellow schoolmate Baptistin Baille (17 iii 1860) contains the

1. F. W. J. Hemmings, 'The Origin of the Terms *naturalisme*, *naturaliste*,' *French Studies* (Oxford) 8 (1954), 109-21, esp. 112-13.

2. See John Rewald, *The History of Impressionism*, rev. ed. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1961), 212, 390.

3. Jules Antoine Castagnary, 'Exposition du Boulevard des Capucines—Les Impressionnistes,' *Le Siècle*, 29 April 1874, quoted, *ibid.*, 330.

report, in indirect quotation, of a statement by C: "there will be no more dreams or philosophy to compare with ours..." (Lz 69).

The historical genealogy of the eventually accepted term only matters here as far as it shows up essentially aesthetic implications. As Rewald testifies:

No one word could be expected to define with precision the tendencies of a group of men who placed their own sensations above any artistic program. ... [W]hatever meaning the word might have had originally, its true sense was to be formulated ... by the painters themselves. Thus it was that from among their midst—and doubtless with their consent—came the first definition of the term. It was one of Renoir's friends [in fact, the critic Georges Rivière] who proposed this definition, writing a little later: "Treating a subject in terms of the tone (*les tons*) and not of the subject itself, this is what distinguished the impressionists from other painters."⁴

How curiously half-baked, this report from the front! Its meaning requires sufficient probing to bring out not only how radical it once seemed to loosen the attachment to 'subject' sufficiently to allow painting to be entertained as being conceivably *about* anything else at all. Rivière is insisting, definitively enough, on an artistic objectification of subjective appearance as such.

Rewald attends tellingly to a review from the summer of 1879, in which Zola "defined" the impressionists' basically naturalistic "concepts." Crucially, Zola says that the painters are seen to concern themselves with "the study of the changing aspects of nature according to the countless conditions of hour and weather.... They pursue the analysis of nature all the way to the decomposition of light, to the study of moving air, of color nuances, of incidental transitions of light and shadow, of all the optical phenomena which make a horizon appear variable and so difficult to represent."⁵ Impressionism, then, makes itself evident as a style of painting predicated on a de-romanticized aesthetic of nature as experienced as far as possible with optical immediacy rather than as cognitively processed in accordance with conventional aesthetic formula (in subsequent denial of impressionism this emphasis would be reversed). The impressionist image consists of patches of light seen as such-and-such hues and tones inseparably from such-and-such light conditions, through as direct an empirical registration as possible.

At least once installed, the term 'impressionism' obviously entailed a favorable sense of something called 'impressions.' There is indeed a question of what C would have understood by an impressionist's impression, even his own. It would have been even less likely for C than for us to think about sensorily derived impressions without engaging the

epistemology of seventeenth-and eighteenth-century empiricism, with its talk of 'sense impressions,' which is to say, of the posited impress made upon the senses when light, sound or other physical contact strikes an organ of sense. An impression was most literally a lasting impacted trace or stamp caused by an impingement from without. So, by the middle of the nineteenth century, 'impressions' would at least have connoted sense-data registered as having impinged on an observer's awareness, with impressionist paintings being as far as possible unredacted versions of just such registrations, unique only (*only!*) insofar as each observer's awareness was personal and subjective and private.

As a general notion, the idea of an art consisting of impressions would have held both (1) positive and (2) negative connotations for C. (1) Affirmatively, it implies the painters' endeavors to grasp a multiplicity of stimuli in fleeting but uncompromised firsthand registration, followed up as it were by a representation of declared new sort, mediated through a personal temperament, and thus as original and real and true as could be. (2) Yet it is probably fair to say that what would have sat less well with C was any sense that the term 'impression' connoted a posture vis-à-vis phenomena that was disconcertingly passive.

Old Camille Pissarro, however, in recalling twenty-five years afterward his time painting with C in the earlier '70s, makes helpful appeal to that other, related term in which C himself had considerable theoretical investment: *sensation*. In two letters in which he praises the works of C just seen in exhibition in Paris in November 1895, Pissarro tells his son that the reason why even C's still lifes, which were "*much worked on and yet unfinished,*" are so amazingly beautiful, and landscapes and figure paintings "unfinished but yet grandiose, ... so painted, so supple," is that "Sensation is there!" And when, next day (apparently perhaps provoked by a misguided article), Pissarro reflects that the experience of their painting together in the earlier 1870s had produced some similarities to C in Pissarro's resultant images, this was not a case of unoriginal "influence" because "each of us kept the only thing that counts, the unique 'sensation!'"⁶ One could almost conclude that the orthodox impressionist impression was more or less identical with what Pissarro and C, discussing just

4. Rewald, op. cit., 336, 338, quoting Georges Rivière, 'L'Exposition des impressionnistes,' *L'Impressionniste* (1877), in Lionello Venturi (ed.), *Les Archives de l'impressionnisme*, 2 vols. (Paris: Durand-Ruel, 1939), 2: 308-14, esp. 309.

5. Emile Zola, 'Nouvelles artistiques et littéraires,' *Le Messager de l'Europe*, July 1879, repr. in his *Salons* (Geneva, 1959), 225-30, quoted *ibid.*, 426. Thus would Pissarro, C's own mentor, come to criticize, in 1883, a certain romanticization of impressionist painting developing in the British 'Aesthetic' movement with the firm injunction that "impressionism ... really should be nothing more than a theory of observation"; Camille Pissarro, *Letters to His Son Lucien*, ed. John Rewald, 3rd ed. (Mamaroneck, N. Y.: Appel, 1972), 23.

6. Pissarro, *Letters*, 275 (21 xi 1895), 276 (22 xi 1895).

what was soon to be christened 'impressionism,' had both understood as *sensation*. If so, where does this get us?⁷

C seems to have been pleased to take to impressionism as calling for a more austere intense scrutiny of natural effect, unlike indulgent romantic subjectivity. If to be a proper impressionist one must submit to sensations, C must have been reassured to find that he might become a kind of expert in the reception and transmission of sensations. How fortunate, in his case, that impressionism should entail a presentation of one's sensations so scrupulously as to resemble, if anything, empirical scientific investigation. His was a sensationalism, then, not so much (guiltily) given over to sensuous 'beauty' as one earnestly dedicated to a sensorial integrity.

These then are the basic empirical-critical elements needed to account for what was aesthetically entailed when C made his turn from romantic naturalism to radical naturalism or 'impressionism' proper. This is corroborated by an aesthetic analysis by another great historian of impressionism, Lionello Venturi, author of C's standard catalogue. Certain points in Venturi's accounts which extend to analytical aesthetics as well as art history will advance the ascertaining of what C would have understood impressionism even to be.

Justifying impressionism as an "aesthetic idea" requires, in Venturi's view, "a precise understanding of the historical phenomenon called impressionism." In the definitive 1870s the founding impressionists—Monet, Renoir, Pissarro—"clarified their palette unconsciously, and divided colours unaware of the theory of complementaries" (35).⁸ In so doing, they effected an "imitation ... not ... of the real nature of objects, but of the apparent nature of appearances" which was hardly aesthetic business as usual. Here for once was painting of *appearance and almost nothing but appearance*, with nature as mere occasion. If appearance is a veil (*à la* Schopenhauer), the impressionist stops there and paints the veil, representationally but non-illusionistically.

Although the impressionists urgently opposed prevailing academic thinking about painting, which was grounded in the classical tradition (with romantic and unreformed naturalist overlays), Venturi notices that already the academic classicist Antoine Quatremère de Quincy had declared, at the beginning of his *Essai sur l'imitation dans les beaux-arts* (1823), "An artist's image is the image of the *appearance* of reality" (38; emphasis added). "What the impressionists actually accomplished was the finding of a form closer to the first impression of the appearance of things than other painters had. And it was closer because of their vivid sensibility whereby they understood the absolute value in art of the appearance,

and their mind was sufficiently free of traditional principles of abstract form to undervalue their impressions" (*ibid.*).

By and large, Venturi deals with impressionism as basically an intuited and untheoretical empirical stance.⁹ Its "ideal of an expression of sensations, derived from nature without any preconceived knowledge of nature" had eighteenth-century aesthetic foundations (e.g. J.-B. Du Bos, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*, 1719, 1740) but was definitively expressed in impressionism (39). Renoir's cult of "irregularity" is taken as part and parcel with a general impressionist non-cognitive emphasis and eschewal of order. If impressionism allowed of any "ideal ... introduced between the object represented and the painting representing it," it was only a certain popular, anti-ideal of anti-bourgeois ordinariness (41). And while he resists the cliché idea that the approach of these "sensationalists" was scientifically attuned, Venturi is prepared to suppose that where they saw such a unity of space and color in sensation as occurs in Ernst Mach's *Analysis of Sensations* (1885), they, the impressionists, "probably" even "contributed" to just such thinking as Mach's (43). *In other words, their art probably influenced his philosophy*—an extraordinary claim. "They reduced the subject matter to the state of the motif," Venturi says, "in order to keep the content of a work of art in the state of sensation" (44).

Other useful testimony too is owed to Venturi as a paramount scholar of the theoretical aspect of the art of C. In the introduction to his catalogue raisonné he cites C's definitional remark, in a letter to Zola of 20 November 1878, about painting as "moyen d'expression de sensations." Now one might casually take this as almost harmlessly aesthetical—a "means of expressing sensations"—or else as a more epistemological affair: a "mode of expression for sensations" (42).¹⁰ Actually, C is here stating what he takes to be

7. Because Kant can be invoked in relation to the very different matter of C's later supposed 'schematism,' it may be worthwhile to recall a contribution to the prehistory of abstract or nonobjective art that bears rather on the notion of the impressionist image as constituted of sensations: in the *Critique of Judgment* Kant divides the fine arts into three categories: arts of speech, visual arts (architecture, sculpture and painting) but then also, as one thing, "the art of the beautiful play of sensations," which includes music together with something called "the *art of color*," in which "sensation of color and tone," by engaging judgment, are not "mere sense impressions." Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. and ed. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 190-94 (Ak. 321-25). Until the shift to postimpressionism, even C must as it were be content with "mere sense impressions."

8. Lionello Venturi, 'The Aesthetic Idea of Impressionism,' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 1 (1941-2), 34-45; all quotations in this and the next two paragraphs from this source.

9. Although he says realism where naturalism would be the better term, Venturi's consistent resort to the term affirms the commonality between the aesthetic outlook of which Zola was a literary captain and of which impressionism, including C's, was the manifestation in painting.

10. Venturi, *Cézanne: Son art: son oeuvre*, 2 vols. (1936; repr. San Francisco: Wofsky, 1989); 'L'Art de Cézanne (étude critique)', 1: 13-65; citations to this text.

Zola's understanding of painting as manifest in his 1877 novel *L'Assommoir*, and looking forward to talking about whether it "isn't the same as mine" (L 174); but C also says that Zola's newer novel *Une Page d'amour* strikes him as "a picture of a sweeter sort of painting than the last (*L'Assommoir*), though the temperament or creative force is ever the same."

Venturi appreciates very well how order, as important as it was for C, was neither a priori nor imposed by fiat but was to derive, such as it might manifest itself, from the negotiation with sensations. Doctrinal modernist accounts often rush on to C's late comments on seeing nature in terms of the cylinder, sphere and cone, while conservatives have stared respectfully at C's supposedly 'impressionist' paintings, embarrassed to enquire why they look so stiff. Venturi appeals (43) to Roger Fry on C's geometric order ("geometrical scaffolding," Fry says in an unquoted phrase): "this is no *a priori* scheme imposed upon the appearances, but rather an interpretation gradually distilled from them by prolonged contemplation."¹¹ Thus C was concerned with the "rapport between order and sensibility," and because "the only order art could give is the endeavoring (*acheminement vers*) for order, ... when he spoke of realizing (*réaliser*), C meant the realizing of order" (*ibid.*), which implies that when C speaks of realizing sensations he means negotiating their constituting a consistent whole. Venturi's account gives a sense of the indispensable importance of C's direct negotiations with his 'sensations' of natural appearance in the crucial impressionist transitional phase.

Venturi comes to accuse Fry of failing to appreciate the developmental (and dialectical, one may add) importance of impressionism for C: "It was perhaps because ... [this] author wished to emphasize the structural and abstract character of [C]'s art that he failed to see how impressionism had taught [C] to construct with color" (col. 355).¹² While "logically one would suppose it would be through impressionism that he would attain maturity," C had first apprenticed himself in a (romantic) naturalism—but also even the Baroque naturalism beyond that, studying Ribera and Zurbarán in the Louvre as well as the more run-of-the-mill academic naturalism of his own day (col. 342). Then in the 1870s, as all accounts agree, "Pissarro ... taught him that reality could be observed with a certain detachment and might be rendered as seen through the artist's temperament, in a moment's fleeting apperception—without his incorporating in this rendering all the aversions and attractions which he might feel as an ordinary individual" (col. 345). Although a notion of impressionist "detachment" might be qualified, Pissarro, above all, "was precisely the one artist among the impressionists who had a feeling for structure ..." And in view of his earlier, simpler naturalism, C, with Pissarro and the other impressionists, found himself sufficiently cognitively preoccupied, with a certain "detachment from reality, transforming it from subject into motif, which was one of the great

accomplishments of impressionism."

Venturi proves alert, as an observer, to the phenomenological implications of C's work ("Objects imposed themselves; and he felt ... their durability as facts"). He clearly understands the main achievement of impressionism (as against academic convention) in the image's being constituted purely with color rather than defined in terms of form and subsequently in-filled. Of C's landscapes of the later '70s he writes, "Everything is built with color... The work does not consist of form filled with color but of the direct use of color areas to build up form. Here again is proof of the importance of impressionism for the development of the artist" (col. 347). This then made possible in turn the truly definitive postimpressionist landscape work of the next decade, beyond what Venturi sees as a definite break: "When he abandoned his impressionist friends, it was to make new researches into abstraction" (col. 350), which was a matter of making the *art object* the "objective" of art as an organized independent entity, not beholden to nature, of real "relations" between pictorial elements.¹³

Thus what C would have considered to be implicated in impressionism, in subscribing to this movement which was for him a vital transitional development, is much more than a question of what he as an individual might have understood of impressions or the artistic development in which he was immersed. What in practice he understood as impressionism becomes clearer as Venturi points towards its further frontier.

2. How C would have found congenial Zola's famous notion of art as "a corner of nature seen through a temperament."

If impressionism was to some extent theory-dependent on the critical thinking of the primarily literary Zola, whose notion of art as "a corner of nature (*création*) seen through

11. Roger Fry, *Cézanne: A Study of his Development*, 1st ed. 1927 (New York: Noonday, 1958), 70. Cf. Fry on C's drawings: "One might compare the synthesis which [C] ... sought for to the phenomenon of crystallization in a saturated solution. He indicated, according to this comparison, the nuclei whence the crystallization was destined to radiate throughout the solution" (64).

12. Venturi, 'Paul Cézanne,' *Encyclopedia of World Art*, 17 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959-87), 3: cols. 339-56, as cited.

13. *Ibid.*, cols. 348-49. There was a less happy factor in leaving Zola behind with his unreformed and perhaps crowd-pleasingly 'rad' naturalism while ever-anxious C charged on into impressionist radicality. As Venturi observes, at a certain point "Zola's whole attitude toward impressionism changed, and his later writings on the subject were very different from those he had earlier devoted to Manet. At bottom Zola realized that he had 'arrived'; the public which liked his novels cared little for impressionism and still less for [C], whom the critics, even those friendly to the impressionists, constantly needed" (col. 353). Zola, in other words, the professional social revolutionary, proved in the end to be, as a man, *square*.

a temperament" might have been the impressionists' slogan, what C would have thought of the famous formula is pertinent to the development of his thinking about the nature of painting; and despite the difficulty of specifying just how C should have found Zola's formula congenial, it makes sense in retrospect to ponder the matter. The 'impressionism' that C took up at a definite point was a critically acute form of naturalism; and as in the present account naturalism is set in opposition to realism, it deserves to be noted that Zola himself had framed his famous doctrine in (literary) opposition to the explicitly realist aesthetic program of art of the social utopian Pierre Joseph Prudhon (*Du Principe de l'art et sa destination sociale*, 1865). In C's impressionist phase, the dictum was implicitly subscribed to as the painter took up this impressionism which, like Zola's, was a radically revisionist form of naturalism.

In the shift from impressionism to postimpressionism, C's painting will change even further from being a matter still of a *describing* at second hand (which might, if anyone insisted, be thought of as a 'mirroring') to the forthright *eliciting* at first hand of the spectator's response. Such eliciting was to be effected by a complex of calculated inferences which is anything but a 'mirroring' of nature or of the way things just happen to be disposed in the world. (Every painter who ever pulled 'natural'-looking effects out of his hat knew better than to say that art innocently 'reflects' nature.) By a radical recentring, impressionism shifted from 'impressed' or blunt perception to scrupulously aware apperception, which is often misconstrued by art-lovers as a turn from objectivity to subjectivity, whereas if anything, as has been suggested, it amounts to an independent objectification of the visual sensory phenomena. If this was indeed the case, it is no wonder that the laboratory-control conditions of the studio (supposedly 'artificial' from the viewpoint of impressionism's residual naturalism) should have been found newly congenial, especially for such painting as could be undertaken indoors, on the chamber-music scale—still life and portraiture. And on second thought, if one tends to allow landscape as an obviously inconvenient exception to this new art of the lab, it should come as no surprise that C, who never gave up his hearty expeditions of painting *en plein air*, also built a studio aimed, like a scientific observatory, at Mont Sainte-Victoire, his favorite landscape motif. Even this might have issued in just so much more naturalism (impressionist or not), had not postimpressionism in general made such a prime aesthetic point of displaying its art-objectifying 'artificiality' *up front*.

To wonder how two different sorts of nature-presentation, as evident in impressionist and postimpressionist painting, might both relate to the artist's presumably singular temperament, is to miss the point that naturalism is finally quite superseded in postimpressionism. Yet half of the question may nevertheless persist: will the individual

artist's temperament go by the boards along with naturalism? (In a way, it will attain all the fuller prominence—but this anticipates.) It needs to be considered that there are two clear ways of interpreting the notion of art being a corner of nature *depicted* through a temperament. The first interpretation is of course the unreformed naturalist one, in which the role of the artist is to produce a complete point-to-point mapping of natural objects in their naturally occurring ensembles (as if that were possible), or in the case of a fiction, a plausible equivalent which might deserve to be mistaken for natural. Beyond his adolescent naturalistic fantasies, themselves safely farfetched, C does not seem interested in any such thing. Whenever this bourgeois artist who worked very much for himself paints more or less the same motifs over and over, artistic development can have little to do with an improved 'cartography' of nature.

The second interpretation of the corner of nature seen and presumably recounted through a temperament is that of the critically reformed naturalism to which C subscribed in taking up impressionism. Temperament now indicates affective predisposition, which may become manifest in an artist's catalytic interpretation of the natural world. Yet compared with postimpressionism to come, the aesthetic output in impressionist painting purports to be a personally filtered but still as it were unanalyzed form of nature, welcoming a sensory response of basically the same order as its purported representandum in the natural world—which is exactly where it remains naturalist. That side of the matter however is inevitably a fiction (not that a fiction is necessarily such a horrible thing), at least in that all discrepancy between a landscape and half a square yard of linen and half a pound of applied pigment is conventionally glossed over. But the artistic output in all *post*-impressionist painting will proffer itself as a forthrightly artificial construct, *despite* being provoked by or extrapolated from nature. It will prove artificial, not because it is a product of sense-data as filtered through temperament but all the more because it is made and put forth in a consistent, undisguisedly individual personal manner and explicitly hallmarked with the stamp of an authorial style.

It deserves to be noted that the (French) *coin* or 'corner' in Zola's famous dictum is also quite as literally translated a 'bit' of nature, a little of it taken unfinessed and unglorified, an insignificant facet of the way things are—a 'slice of life' even as connoting the deliberately unexceptional *specimen* of science. Also, the term 'corner' tends to imply a typically impressionist randomness and fragmentary image quality, rather than a centered or at least axially balanced classical-conventional pictorial unity, though the latter would be regained on newly abstract-mathematical terms under postimpressionism. Given what we know of the artist and his thinking, it seems more than mere conjecture to project that C would have liked the reference to a corner or mere slice of nature in a spirit of impressionist informality. The

sensational atomization of the pictorial so accommodating of temperament in impressionism cleared the way for the artist's still less nature-beholden postimpressionist construction as advantageous for art. For the 'object' of representation was first upstaged, in impressionism, by the artist's 'subjective' temperament-tinged sensations and then, in postimpressionism, by the deliberate, even quasi-mathematical reconstruction (whether geometric or as will be suggested, algebraic) of elements given in sensation, as something self-sufficient and at least on a par of ontological respectability with nature itself.

That every artist is an individualist is a dubious assumption. One is on firmer ground in supposing that every impressionist and postimpressionist was necessarily an individualist with a unique temperament productive of uniquely typical sensations, if only because perception is necessarily selective, and selectivities will differ, at least some in habitual ways. Even before the artist engages in a process of discrimination and subsequent selection, the sensations in question will implicate his or her temperament. Different temperaments and personalities will inevitably notice and select different things, even if the artists or writers in question be unconscious of their doing so. Naïve naturalists, vainly attempting one-to-one mappings of nature, will also be seen to 'select,' and at that according to 'temperament,' whether they realize or, in realizing, acknowledge the fact. On the other hand, temperaments are a generalizing realist's delight, because no temperament, being the temperament of a person of a definite time and place and culture, can be unique. Like colors, the very reference of the term temperament depends on likenesses and unlikenesses within a closed gamut (anciently, one recalls, of only four). Among the telling manifestations of temperament are recurrent patterns of chosen elements in typical relations. C, for instance, shows such a strong tropism toward discovering and/or depicting certain conjunctions of trees and rocks that, even had he been unaware of this, we find ourselves discovering quite definitely characteristic motifs for him a century later in supposedly innocent 'nature.' Likewise his penchant, in still life especially, for subtly articulating occlusion, touch and disjunction in permutations within some closed set of simple props. Such visible patterns of relation may be so distinctive that a counterfeiter might fix upon them to the point of caricature.

What will be ultimately modern in postimpressionism—as importantly as in modern logical or mathematical thought—is the notion of a structure built up not of sensible things as such or even sense data, but of mathematically 'abstract' relations between, say (in the case of C), three or four apples, a fruit compote, one's ladyfriend, a tree jutting at an angle between rocks, a plain blocky farmhouse and/or the profile of a favorite geologic feature. Just such relationality has been underplayed in its more abstract 'mathematical' or 'logical' aspect by

formalists. What is special about the case of C is that while he as well as any other artist found some temperamental scope in impressionism, he was favored by virtue of the fact that his distinctly cerebral temperament was something to which postimpressionism was still better devised to appeal, especially in regard to the calibration of relations.

3. *Why C should have seen radical naturalism as an antidote to the cult of imagination.*

The sort of imagination of which romanticism made so much, what might be called the 'cult of imagination,' had to be rejected by C. Already in youth, C was prepared to stand staunchly against static or rote or formulaic perception which, as soon as schooldays were over, he realized applied to all the disingenuousness of late romanticism. With impressionism, however, he could go boldly after an uncompromised, practically neural immediacy whereby the vivid perception of a scene as a tissue of luminous color patches became manifest through the externalization of sensation.

At the time there could be no greater modern 'imager,' in the literary or fictive sense, than Delacroix, and one had to pack up and move on from there. In helping to wean C from the romantic cult of imagination, Delacroix was the crucial early and abiding inspiration. Here was, so to speak, the thinking man's counter to the supposedly witless romantic imager. Delacroix, the great analytical colorist, must have had importance in the development of C's understanding of the constitutive function of color. Meanwhile, at least the naturalistic demand to attend to *what is there as given* in the world could only forestall indulgence in make-believe, in mere Coleridgean 'fancy' (something not unknown to Delacroix in his more literary-illustrational productions), which early on the young C had been pleased to indulge in an unrepentant adolescent way. Not that unsympathetic critics such as the realist partisan Castagnary (above) didn't misconstrue unconstructed impressionist composition as solipsistically imaginative.

What should it mean to rule out imagination? E. J. Furlong once criticized the contributors to William Elton's anthology *Aesthetics and Language* (1964) for a tendency to eschew imagination along with 'feelings' as so much leftover idealism.¹⁴ One of these linguistic analysts, however, Helen Knight, wondering what it might mean to say "that [C]'s *Green Jar* is ... good," follows through with worthy art-analytical reasons: insofar as the painting is commendable, it is in virtue of a certain apple's being "placed so that it exactly balances the main mass on the right" even as "the lines of tablecloth, knife, and shadows

14. E. J. Furlong, *Imagination* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1961), ch. ix, 'Art and imagination,' 85-94, here 90.

repeat each other," that is, in virtue of compositional competence in a traditional if abiding sense. But if the same painting is good thanks to such "important problems that [C] has solved" as "that he combines a geometrical scheme with the variety we get in natural appearances,"¹⁵ then that cuts rather deeper. Without being detained by what is no guiltier a recourse to schematism than many art-historical accounts, it can be said that once C became a consciously organizing postimpressionist he evidences an intellectual engagement that is in many demonstrable cases not so much a matter of geometry at all as of rather 'alebraic' relational structure. More on this to come.

One can begin to grasp, beyond the obvious rejection of his adolescent indulgence in late romantic projective imagining, what was implicit in one of the most tantalizingly elusive yet altogether plausible of C's pronouncements: "My method, if I have one, is based on hatred of the imagination."¹⁶ In light of so many related remarks, it is fair to say that it was just too easy, and presumptuous vis-à-vis nature as 'creation,' to make things up out of one's head, as C himself repented having done in his early years as a painter. The perceptual demands of impressionist naturalism definitively weaned him from that. To be a good impressionist one must be utterly possessed by one's sensations. The veracity demanded is much more that of an integrity holding between the artist and his sensations than a presumptuous verisimilitude thought to obtain between painted image, as visual report, and nature.

4. *How the naturalism of an impressionist painting by C differs from photographic naturalism.*

The position of the photographer with respect to nature and naturalism is never quite the same as that of a naturalistic painter (ignoring the fact that, from the very inception of photography, photographers have found ways of assuming modes and even assimilating the mannerisms of painters). Naturalism (whether of romantic or literary-radical ilk) is often presumed to be the basic modality of photography, even though literature and art obviously have others and even photography has other 'keys,' as it were, than C-major. Even Zola, who had firsthand photographic experience, said that if it weren't for the presumably less avoidable factor of temperament, paintings would simply look like photographs. Yet photography itself admits of modalities and gives latitude to authorial temperaments, not unlike naturalist and impressionist painting, though this may have become more apparent with time and the exploitation of its artistic capacities. Obviously however, the problem of supposedly non-modal photographic naturalism must extend to the mundane pseudo-photographic naturalism contemporaneous with impressionism as radical naturalism in painting.

Our conventional aesthetic notion of nature readily accepts a presumed synonymy between photographic facticity and the given condition of nature, partly because photography has often seemed content to be conventional. Yet much as 'natural' science relies on scientific 'realism,' quite a bit of photography admits of an actually more specifically realist, sometimes crypto-realist aspect—most apparently whenever it propounds some marked *typicality* of the natural, including the human, world, picked out as such from the happenstance, run-on (linguistically metonymic) way things happen 'naturally' to be. In our culture, everyone who thinks he does happily without an aesthetic allegiance proves a loyal Scout naturalist.

When still new in the mid-nineteenth century, photography might have seemed such a technical upstart as to be categorically modern, yet it had to work against the grain of its own presumed naturalism as merely *given* to qualify itself beside fine art, especially painting, as a worthy modern art. We can forget the empty populism of photography's periodic refusals of the crown of art, accepting, by analogy, that much prose falls within the parameters of literary aesthetics regardless of whether its authors wish to be considered *poetic* or instead (Zolaesque and *positif*) documentary. Likewise, we can set aside as sociological the onus of mechanical and chemical determination of the image in photography versus the connoisseurly premium still thoughtlessly conferred on manual determination in a world now so electronic that the mechanical itself seems almost charmingly 'manual.'

The circumstantial fact that C admired Eugène Delacroix, the great romantic painter, himself an early enthusiast of photography, points up how painting, for centuries the only pictorial game in town, came under challenge on the very grounds of nature-representation. Photography materially required daylight even though color was out of the question. It would have seemed to consumers of both sorts of picture that photos were an obvious alternative to painting; and in just that spirit, photography offered a competing, quicker, cheaper (if problematically more 'accurate') presentation of the appearance of nature. Hopelessly conservative painters, naturalistically inclined but obviously threatened by the 'automatic' naturalism of the mechanical picture with its indiscriminate repletteness of detail, sought to rival it manually in doggedly fastidious paint. However, in some measure precociously, Delacroix, and then too C and the impressionists, all sought, not so much to rival photographic naturalism, at least on the same turf, as to do something else that went beyond it. They sought to cultivate the risky, spontaneous, excitingly unmitigated, 'unfinished' look of

15. Helen Knight, 'The Use of "Good" in Aesthetic Judgments' (1949), in William Elton, ed., *Aesthetics and Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1964), 147-60, here 152.

16. John Golding, 'Under Cézanne's Spell,' *New York Review of Books*, 11 January 1996, pp. 45-49, here 48, quoting C without ref.

what could be called the anti-photographic *counter-naturalism* of impressionist 'radical naturalism.' They conveyed a vitality and sensuous coloristic immediacy that the little black box could just not 'capture' (as that stubborn representationalist term still has it).

The whole idea that the photograph rivals nature, reflecting it immediately and vying with its actuality, is anyway mistaken. Even casual photographic slices of life have the implied propositional, representational structure of being set up, set forth (*proposed*), in the form: 'It is the case that ... ,' or 'This is how such-and-such things sit.'¹⁷ Although it might seem odd to put it so, the photographer, for all his retailing of brute facticity, is often like an 'interior' (if not scenographic) designer, a rearranger of givens within limitations. In any case, the forthright naturalistic photograph will be 'truer to nature' in the sense of an *empirically conventional appearance* of the way things are given in the world. The impressionist (not to mention postimpressionist) painting by C will however inevitably bring forth a stronger sense of a mediating sensibility in the constitution of the image, for the artist's own ('human') 'nature' will be withheld only with difficulty from accounts of even more clinically documentary and photographic forms of naturalistic 'representation,' and hence must all the more inevitably impinge in painting. While it is quite true that the difference must be more than the admission or exclusion of temperament, since temperament can be exercised in both media, perhaps a more substantial claim may be made. The whole appeal of a photographic look in the mid- to later nineteenth century concerns an aesthetic issue of what can be called imagic repleteness: art, including the new mechanical art, was admired for rivaling the challengingly inexhaustible repleteness of detail in nature—which is to say, naturalism at its most unreformed.

Neoclassical theory had called for some degree of (one might say, 'realist') generalization. One thinks not only of Sir Joshua Reynolds but of Doctor Johnson's caution not to "number the streaks of the tulip" (in *Rasselas*, 1759). But the sometimes obsessive need to 'get it all down,' which might make Reynolds' and Johnson's view mere sour grapes, could only have been piqued by photography. One already senses an acuteness, when photography was distractingly new, in a comment of Ruskin in *The Elements of Drawing* (1857). Ruskin, who otherwise, like C, hated and resisted the onslaught of mechanical culture, himself sounds quasi-photographic in saying "You will find ... that Nature's resources in light and shade are so much richer than yours, that you cannot possibly get all, or anything *like* all, the gradations of shadow." Ruskin wants to reassure the student draftsman who tends to think that in drawing a tree he must account for each and every leaf: "You cannot possibly work it out in fac simile [sic], though you took a twelvemonth's time to a tree; and you must therefore try to discover some mode of execution which will more or less imitate, by its own

variety and mystery, the variety and mystery of Nature, without absolute delineation of detail."¹⁸ Clearly here it is in the interest of a painter, when representing nature, that a literalist verisimilitude of utter repleteness *not* be taken as goal. That is something one could not hope to attain, except, of course (as one would rather not say), by selling out and using a camera instead of trying to learn to draw. So it cannot be surprising to find P. Rivière and Jacques Schnerb reporting (in 'L'Atelier de [C]', 1907), that in 1905 C had "animatedly declared" to them "his horror of the photographic eye" as well as "of drawing of an automatic exactitude (*d'exactitude automatique*)," as taught in the academy (D 87).

Ruskin's represents the 'art' side of such a confrontation between the fine art of painting and the upstart mechanical art of photography. Probably any nineteenth-century naturalistic painter who abandoned painting for the new mechanism was seduced above all by the fact that here was a way to effect the one-to-one repleteness one had always wished for. Then again, a reformed (and newly modern) painter—such as Pissarro and C as impressionists—will in some sense have had to find that view mistaken. Otherwise, offering impressionism as a new and more radical way to apprehend the true or truer appearances of nature might have led to the misunderstanding of thinking that it merely promised an *even fuller, part-to-part repleteness* than previous naturalism had ever managed. In facing the question of how C would have understood impressionist 'radical' naturalism *versus* photographic naturalism, then, there can be no doubt that he would have rejected (or in effect, did reject) photography's temptation of replete descriptive verisimilitude (which anyway, to an egoist such as C, would probably have offered too little room for personality) in favor of a new 'truth in painting,' first with impressionism and then more fully with postimpressionism.

In all, naturalism, which everybody proved either disappointed or pleased to find insufficiently mimetic in the conventional sense, proved for C quite insufficiently mimetic in a new, essentially modern sense—insufficient, that is, not as a copy of anything, ever insufficiently replete, but as insufficient in scope for artistic construction.

5(a). *Other implications of impressionism: Of 'spontaneity' as a virtue in painting.*

C's view was probably not that spontaneity, in and of itself, should simply be assumed to be a virtue in painting. Nothing is more apparent in C's development out of and

17. In the way of the *Sachverhalt*, or 'state of affairs' of Wittgensteinian *Bild* (usually given as 'picture', but better 'image') theory (without wanting to beat a dead horse).

18. John Ruskin, *The Elements of Drawing: in Three Letters to Beginners* (New York: Alden, 1885), 52, 60.

beyond impressionism than his need for order and stability over and against the swim of impressionist phenomenal flux, notwithstanding that the 'swim' proved therapeutic. Although 'spontaneous' tends to be a predicate of approbation since romanticism, it is only a virtue in painting under certain conditions. Spontaneity is assumed to be admirably lively, animated (= soulful), hence a likely index of authenticity, if only because being spontaneous precludes whatever inauthenticities require delay for prevarication or second-guessing. It is just because spontaneity cannot be forced, that demanding it may spoil it. Yet it can easily be *trivial*; and *pseudo*-spontaneity is not only possible but rife. Most relevantly for naturalism: authentic spontaneity obliges a direct, immediate responsiveness. Although spontaneity itself is not an altogether settled concept, it can be considered, beyond a general notion of the unpremeditated, as the character of being uninhibited by self-consciousness as to initiative or response. With impressionist painting, spontaneity is crucial in respect to artist's responsive keeping transcriptively abreast—an aim still fundamentally naturalistic—of the most fugitive play of light.

Spontaneity is a component trait of personality which becomes manifest in personal 'output,' artistic or otherwise. But the markedly spontaneous must take their places in the character-trait queue along with the inhibitedly circumspect—meaning C. While there is some sense in which the extraordinarily circumspect person can be said to be relatively lacking in personality, it should not be possible, let alone desirable, to be relentlessly spontaneous. In the arts, a lively expressivity that stops short of hysterical uncontrol is applauded as spontaneous. If it seems reasonable that a conductor should ask a musician to play over a passage only this time 'adding expression,' it should hardly be strange for a critic to testify that a certain drawing or painting by C is extraordinarily 'spontaneous,' meaning, vitally unfeigning. If expression or spontaneity is wanting, what is called for is a more personally committed redeployment of what is there, not any sort of crude augmentation. When the piece was played without sufficient expression, all the right notes may already have been produced in correct order. Likewise it should be possible to say, when two painters painted landscapes from the same motif and under the same meteorological conditions, but one without the spontaneity demanded by impressionism, that one of the two resultant images must disqualify as an impressionist painting. Lacking would be that thoroughgoing responsive commitment that might have fused happenstance elements in an uncontrivedly *spontaneous* impressionist manner.

Certainly spontaneity is a complex question in respect to C. The solemnity of many works of his maturity would seem to rule it out. However bracing spontaneity must have been

for some impressionists, it was probably advantageously challenging for C, who of course could always find contemplative retreat in the studio, composing his more readily controllable still lifes. Yet somehow the demand for spontaneity under Pissarro's impressionist tutelage was vitally necessary before he could proceed to find his authentically serious, not merely inhibited, self. Even *en plein air*, C spent much time making scrupulous adjustments to a particular painting; so that as regards its 'rate' of construction, its real-time execution, such a work might not be considered spontaneous at all. It must have been a beneficial challenge for C to have to be spontaneous enough to qualify as a proper impressionist: not having been suited for it, he had the tenacity to proceed to a mode that could not have developed without impressionism but that put no premium on spontaneity: postimpressionism, which would prove considerably more rationally engaging than spontaneous.

On broad terms: impressionism might look to conventional eyes smudgy or indistinct, but only on the wrongheaded expectation that a painted image rightly assumes a quasi-classical look of polished finish and consistent perceptual 'illusion' instead of showing forth an undisguised buildup of impulsive but dutifully, unmitigatedly faithful, hence even 'accurate,' color smudges. If it still seems incongruous to invoke scientific precision in respect to an art apparently so spontaneous, we may consider in addition that C with his own inhibited, introspective personality had something personal to gain—an overcoming of anxiety—from training in a method that so rigorously preoccupied the artist with his or her sensations of the outside world. So through a complexity of construction and complexity of palette, while quite without dotting the conventionally pictorial 'is' and crossing the conventional 'ts,' C's impressionist work might attain to a kind of mild spontaneity (plausibly fueled by obsessively preoccupied himself with nuance).

As detached as his great mature work becomes, as he releases himself from any obligation of impressionist spontaneity in the interest of formal contrivance and especially of coloristic calculation—what with postimpressionism proving profoundly *anti*-impressionist in its thrust—he will nevertheless practically dread losing touch with what he would always call his '*petite sensation*.' That must mean that something of the spontaneity of immediate sensation does carry over into the finished work, even as it shifts from spontaneity in the sense of perceptual immediacy to some sort of responsive acumen in a synthesis of color effects. (No wonder C always retained for his *petite sensation* an understandably proprietary concern.) In this famous transformation, painting itself became less a question of the immediate and swift recording of sensory input than of sensation-attuned but utterly contrived pictorial output. This transformation, however, could not have come about, as C in fact testifies whenever he

expresses gratitude to Pissarro, without his first knowing the experience of that vivacious spontaneity in respect to sensory input which was the hallmark of orthodox impressionism. To 'be in touch with one's feelings' would not have been a happy prospect for this man who had a notorious horror of being touched at all; but in personal terms this must have been just why the utter *objectification* of sensation demanded by impressionism was just what the doctor ordered. C's concern with spontaneity in painting was thus quite complex, for here was a man who as painter would no doubt have found the cold term 'sense data' oddly reassuring.

As analytically inclined as he seems to have been, in the course of authenticating his sensations C depended upon and respected the impression, and spontaneity was certainly entailed and affirmed in his impressionism. Given a strong element of self-control (or repression) in his personality, and thanks to the latitude for personality opened by modern naturalism, demands of keeping abreast of phenomenal flux seem to have had the unsung advantage for C of putting self-consciousness on hold, in that only one dutifully preoccupied with the spectacle of appearance could do the impressionist job. The larger point for impressionism as a radical form of naturalism, including the matter of temperament, is that only a spontaneous response will be adequate to the fugitive phenomena to be 'captured'; but personally, that was not the most important thing for him.

5(b). *Other implications of impressionism: Painting en plein air.*

C's impressionist experience of working *en plein air*—painting out-of-doors, 'in the open air,' directly, without making preliminary studies—was crucial, for one thing, in fostering a keen empirical apprehension, essentially discriminatory, of color sensations. Indeed, through his impressionist practice C developed a full-fledged analytical approach to employing color. This development was not something which just happened to C, either, like his going prematurely bald; it involved his changing aesthetic thought. Because nature 'comes' metonymically and non-syntactically, plugging directly into it *en plein air* could be considered an ultimate romantic immersion or even communion with it; but C's taking up painting *en plein air* under the impressionist Pissarro differed from casual preimpressionist *plein-airisme* as already practiced even by lesser romantics than Delacroix.

For one thing, there was the difference, already distinct in the Italian high Renaissance tradition (which was the basis of the prevailing academic system in France and elsewhere) between a sketch as working drawing (or 'design') and a comprehensively designed and subsequently executed painting. *Plein-airisme* as much as ruled out studio

work, and elevated, in effect, a full-sized sketch to the status of studio-to-salon painting. Only in light of a conventional distinction between more or less spontaneous but relatively insignificant sketch and significant finished painting could it have been progressive of the romantics to embrace the sketch as truer, relatively uncontrived, as a recording of natural appearance. Thus indeed had mere sketches already been made out of doors before the impressionists made such a point of going further, to a conspicuously livelier and unapologetically sketchy, final *plein-air* image. Yet even the most daringly 'undressed' of oil sketches were not impressionist (*a fortiori* postimpressionist) paintings: getting to that stage required a *change of mind*. The sketch-like painting had to be seen as a fulfillment, worthy in virtue of its immediacy, which in turn was a function of a newly scientific way of looking at nature, even apart from authorial spontaneity.

When the romantic painters of the so-called Barbizon school had already painted *en plein air*, for them this was simply a way of gaining an ultraromantic immediacy with nature. But they saw no more contradiction in bringing the result back to the studio to work on than if they had gone to the computer room after embracing their sweetheart to write in sober reflection a love poem about embracing their sweetheart. So the *plein-air* excursions of the Barbizon painters, though art-historically transitional, did not radically affect the artistic results, especially not in regard to the constitutive syntax of color.

For the impressionists, on the contrary, *plein-airisme* entailed a close empirical study of optical color under optimally natural conditions of daylight, which by definition could not be gained indoors. Delacroix, with his powerful sensibility, had had an important role in the opening up of this development so consciously, programatically, pursued in the next generation by the radical-naturalist impressionists with their direct and wholehearted immersion in the unsteady flux of optical phenomena. Significantly, in the generation after the impressionists Delacroix's precocious importance was celebrated. He was effectively made an honorary proto-postimpressionist by C's contemporary Paul Signac, specifically for his close analytical attention to, and concomitant theorization of, 'complementary color.' Signac's tireless praise of Delacroix in his analytical treatise on color *D'Eugène Delacroix au néoimpressionisme* (1898; 1899) includes, for instance, this excerpt from a biography of the great romantic painter by the aesthetician Veron:

Until the last day of his life, he studied the laws of the complementary colors, the ways in which they are modified by light, and the effects of the contrast of tones.

Delacroix made frequent use of this optical mixture, through which he creates the sensation of a color which was never on his palette. In this respect he has achieved an amazing sureness of touch, because in him science and consciousness were added to his natural gift.¹⁹

Delacroix, who certainly stimulated C's own, eventually more invasively analytical, approach to color phenomena, also bridged the literary and the artistic. For besides advancing his proto-analytic theory of color in which hues played in dialectical conjunction and interdependence with their spectral complementaries, Delacroix's *Journal* constitutes one of the great bodies of reflection on painting, fine art and general culture. Too, Delacroix was an invaluable 'role model,' showing the insecure C that a brilliantly civilized and well read man—an intellectual painter, no less!—could be aesthetically daring and *avant-garde*. And so, even before impressionism, C would have confronted the matter of optical color; and his adoption of *plein-airisme*, when in due course it came, was more than a handy new tactic. It was a quasi-scientific analytic procedure of considerable intellectual interest.

Something not usually taken sufficiently seriously in this connection: that the one thing which matters in working *en plein air* is the full-spectrum daylight. Anyone who doubts the importance of this should get up early enough on a cold misty morning to see how the visibility of distinct form does not take hold until first distinctions of color have set in.²⁰ Fugitive though it is, daylight is so much the very medium of natural color that the task of a painter of appearances of nature who pursues color scientifically is to paint what is revealed in daylight as reflected by the surfaces of objects, which means, in effect, translating between the two systems: as first analyzed in light by the painter ('additive') and as synthesized in the process of painting with pigments ('subtractive').

It is quite possible that the interest in France, at the time, in the modern analysis of color in respect to painting benefitted by a better distinction in French usage than in British English between the concepts of *matière colorante* or *pigment*, on one hand, and *couleur* on the other. *Matière colorante* means dye or pigment, or more generally, a coloring agent, while *couleur* means more distinctly an appearance (in terms of hue) of things to the human eye.²¹ In painting one has the challenging task—one committed to impressionism, that is, with its *plein-air* chromatic veracity—of making the former the medium for an effect of the latter.

In sum: Delacroix, though no *plein-airiste*, was, as well as a major inspiration to C, a great analytical student of 'optical' color whose scientific insights were to be taken up by the neoimpressionist postimpressionists. C had nothing to do with that contingent, but in a broad

sense he may be said to have paralleled its more scientific mobilization of Delacroix's analytical colorism. Notwithstanding all his testimonials to the value of the experience of nature out of doors, when C turned toward postimpressionism, remarkably enough, he seems to have had no qualms about painting indoors—quite categorically for still life—as well as out. Yet it should be added that he did eventually resort to a purpose-built studio designed to accommodate daylight. The real point seems to be that in his full-fledged postimpressionist phase C developed a new, reformed 'studio' approach to painting in pursuing greater control than ever in that deployment of pigmental color—*matière colorante*—which *is* painting, i.e., which materially constitutes it. Thus the studio itself becomes the coloristic laboratory of this distant follower of Delacroix.

5(c). *Other implications: Where the revisionist is to stand vis-à-vis the Louvre.*

Among the consequences of rejecting romantic naturalism was a disregard for academic painting as based on secondhand cultural 'information' about nature in codified examples, but also the possibility of a new and sustained regard for direct study of masterpieces (as well as nature) as firsthand artistic testimony of the visual understanding of past masters.

First, having opened the present account with C's own *anti*-romanticism: what C was advocating in the longer haul, by his initial rejection of the received romantic and also postromantic wisdom in the aesthetics of painting, was not just another style but rather the whole larger modern(ist) project. The modernism which was to be opened up with postimpressionism by the likes of C (considerably in parallel with post-Baudelairean literary *symbolisme*) was a genuinely new aesthetic (even if nothing in art is precedent-less).

The classic modernist position vis-à-vis the artistic patrimony of the past is no simple negation but something more dialectically complex. More often than not, the modernist does not want to burn down the museum or the library but on the contrary to reclaim its still

19. Paul Signac, *From Eugène Delacroix to Neo-Impressionism*, 3rd ed. (1921), trans. Willa Silverman, in Floyd Ratliff, *Paul Signac and Color in Neo-Impressionism* (New York: Rockefeller University Press, 1992), 199-285, here 221.

20. As Marjorie Welish called to my attention on an early train from Glasgow to Edinburgh in February 1999.

21. That German is often similarly ambiguous about '*die Farbe*' leads to the speculation that Wittgenstein's posthumous *Bemerkungen über die Farben / Remarks on Colour* (ed. G. E. M. Anscombe) might have been rather less slippery had it been written by an American, for whom the phrase 'to buy a box of colors' sounds almost as crazy as 'to pick a basket of smells,' and who would be obliged by the most ordinary exigency of usage to decide in every instance just which of the two divergent terms was meant.

worthy treasures so far as possible on modernist terms. C's case is especially clear, in that his respect for the Louvre and what it represented—i.e., an abiding, historically transcendent (and largely French!) artistic glory of the ever-exemplary works it contained—entailed respect for bourgeois high-culture, at least in the hope of adding to it by one's daring creativity. Such radical conservatism seems an important grounding of C's point of view.²²

That a painting by Raphael might still have more to offer the modern artist than anything by the academics who thought they had Raphael's 'number' now seems like a vaguely familiar argument, but C would seem to have been among the first moderns to bring it to the fore. When the modern practitioner (artist or experienced art-viewer) engages a pre-modern work, he or she can readily engage the formal and structural workings that were there all along but generally unattended to, hence unremarked, by non-professionals. The modern analytical appreciation of form and structure finds abundant satisfaction in premodern as well as modern art. Indeed, seen from the modern side, those oblivious or hostile to modernity must be depriving themselves in their contentment with less than is available there when they view the older, classic works; and if the new works seem demanding, that is also because they advance a newly formal-analytical understanding that, too, extends over even the most otherwise pictorially committed structures of the old works.

The Louvre, or any other art museum, is not, after all, just a kind of used car lot of defunct styles—no more than the history of philosophy ought to be considered a chronicle of error. Beyond art's general 'human' significance, which concerns the reason why anyone, not just an artist, conservative or radical, should care to visit a museum of past art, C means something more by advocating study of great art as enshrined in the Louvre. He does not exactly say this, but he makes it possible to say: that every work of art will have something to teach the enquiring artist on the practitioner-to-practitioner basis of shop-talk—one could insist, of Aristotelian *techné* in its fully intellectual implications. In other words, the point for our larger argument is that the study of previous art in the museum is appropriate, ultimately, in that art is not a merely manual activity but deeply cognitive. Although its cognitive processes may sometimes be difficult to spell out, it has an ongoing, consequential history of 'solutions' to inescapably intellectual problems in art.

Suppose that a certain museum painting is romantic: for example, *The Massacre at Chios*, of 1824 (Paris, Louvre), by Delacroix. A modern observer will have grounds for holding that romanticism has become inadequate to contemporary artistic requirements, citing, in the case of Delacroix's *Massacre*, the grand-operatic pictorialism of the painting's horrific political content; yet the same canvas proved to hold considerable potency for self-

proclaimed 'neoimpressionist' color theory. In any case, this or another work may exemplify the particular authenticity of the romantic artist's driving passion, which new artists could appreciate as an admirably passionate reaction against what the romantics themselves had seen as empty academic-classical conventions designed to enforce a vapidly idealized 'beauty.' After all, it was the romantics themselves who first 'sued' tradition, so to speak, demanding for formerly supposedly barbarous medieval art the regard previously reserved to the official pedigree of Greek, then Roman, then Italian Renaissance and finally—deliberately positioned as successor in the same line—French academic classicism. So C could very well continue to admire in the late romanticism of his heroes, Delacroix and Baudelaire, an authenticity just like that which led him to react against the late romanticism in which they themselves had participated.²³

Besides passionate authenticity, however, another factor of timeless importance was embedded in the work of even some of the most romantic of late romantic artists: a sheer practitioner's adroitness in the actual constituting of the image (subsuming 'composition' in the narrow sense, that mainstay of academic classicism). The romantics still today look quite to have flaunted their adroitness as practitioners of painting, players in the ongoing if ever evolving game, in particular their *syntactical artfulness*. Without being distracted by the question of whether nineteenth-century romanticism is as a rule modern, protomodern or not really modern at all, something in romantic painting of more abiding modern interest is its emphasis on the vital constitution of the image out of its undisguised painterly constituents. Above all, in the context of the very marked naturalism of the nineteenth century, the plethora of historical syntaxes in the Louvre, beyond the variety of individual artistic temperaments, was bound to call critical attention to the formal and syntactical aspect of art, since nature is syntaxless.²⁴

Finally, a shift of thinking can be tracked in several accounts of what the museum connoted for C, with the theme of beneficial resort to the Louvre seeming to acquire a more

22. This is not the only respect in which C's position bears comparison with Nietzsche's in the same generation; compare an aphorism of that deeply antinaturalistic iconoclast in his *Gay Science* (1882): 'The good men in all ages are those who dig the old thoughts, digging deep and getting them to bear fruit—the farmers of the spirit. But eventually all land is exploited, and the ploughshare of evil must come again and again' (§ 4); Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: with a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), 81. One of the little ditties prefixed to this book (No. 55) points up the limitation of 'Realistic Painters' (65).

23. Provoked by remarks of Matisse on his teacher Moreau, the critic Pleynet points up another, related reason why the revisionist C should have recommended study in the Louvre: that it should be safer to study works of proven standing in the history of art than to risk influence from the sanctioned but aesthetically dubious art of the moment. Marcelin Pleynet, *The System of Painting* (1977), trans. Sima N. Godfrey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 13.

pointed meaning in C's maturity, beyond the old Renaissance humanist dialectic of nature versus the corrected models of classical art. C writes to Charles Camoin: "[Thomas] Couture used to tell his students: *Keep good company*, meaning: *Go to the Louvre*. But after seeing the great masters who rest there, one must hasten to leave and to revivify oneself through contact with nature, with the ... sensations within us" (13 ix 1903; L 292, emphases added). While the implication, here, of sensation as something in the artist awaiting externalization is pure C, it seems safe to assume that C himself subscribed to the advice of Couture (a late romantic-naturalist but a gifted teacher). As for C writing to Emile Bernard, "The Louvre is a fine place to study, but it must be only a means. The real, the great study is the endless variety of the natural scene" (12 v 1904; L 297), even an unreformed naturalist could agree to that. And according to Bernard, C told him that the impressionists Monet and Pissarro had freed him from the "too preponderant influence of the museums" and redirected him to nature (D 32). Then there is a 1905 remark suggesting, so much more postimpressionistically, a radical renovation of French classical tradition, i.e., of what 'the Louvre' stands for, whereby C told Camoin that he was concerned to "*vivifier Poussin sur nature*"—to vivify Poussin after (or in terms of) nature (the verb often later rendered as "*refaire*"²⁵). With the famous, significantly past-perfect, remark reported by Maurice Denis, toward the very end of C's life, the supercession of impressionism is complete: "I had wanted to make of impressionism something solid and durable like the art of the museums" (D 170). By that point there must have been knowing contradiction of C's own earlier impressionist practice in the new antithetically *post*-impressionist approach to painting—an aesthetic negation which the knowing embrace of impressionism had initially set up.

24. Modernism is always willing to hold the semantic in abeyance or even to sacrifice it in the interest of the foregrounding of the syntactical realism of art—its actuality precisely *qua* syntactical—which is to emphasize where the artistic *work* of producing the 'work' is done.

25. On which, see Richard Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism: A Study of the Theory, Technique and Critical Evaluation of Modern Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 181.

IV. SENSES OF SENSATION

1 How C might have taken impressionism to be a scientific approach to painting, not only anti-academic but empirical, even experimental; 2 That the new way of observing nature meant a demanding new analysis by C of visual sensation in painting; 3 How C's 'temperament' was revealed or expressed in his artworks.

The task of painting in an impressionist manner entailed a commitment to objectifying as far as possible without premeditation, hence beyond the pale of convention, one's (supposedly 'subjective') visual experience as immediately sensed, and as such it would have appealed to C as something as serious and as demanding as modern empirical science. The impressionist task would have made for the exciting prospect of a newly rigorous analytical approach to his visual sensations, appealing to the inhibited C with his distinctly cerebral temperament. However ironic it seems to put it so, C began to warm to painting's demand, or very *promise*, of mental absorption. The happily passive absorption of impressionism offered a relief of distraction to the repressed younger C. Later, developing through his reflexive practice his own postimpressionism would fuel C's most creative work with a steady demand for analytical thinking in the more actively engaging interest of a deliberately constructed art.

1. *How C might have taken impressionism to be a scientific approach to painting, not only anti-academic but empirical, even experimental.*

We can open the question of a scientific approach to nature by turning to the eighteenth-century experimentalist Joseph Priestley, who, rather more distantly than Delacroix, evokes, as C would have noticed, the ultimately theological figure of the Book of Nature (it occurs in writings of the Desert Fathers):¹ "The instruction we are able to get from books is ... soon exhausted; but philosophical instruments are an endless fund of knowledge" (*History and Present State of Electricity*, 1767).² Priestley means actual operational machines, which have the benefit of directly "exhibit[ing] the operations of nature, that is of the God of nature himself"—as if the great advantage of empirical science were that by it natural law could be consulted directly as *primary text*. Landscape painters of this same time and frame of mind already doubted the integrity of "selecting in advance what beautiful nature is and leaving out the rest in the studio" (J. H. Merck, in 1777)—i.e., idealizing nature in painting it indoors. If prevailing nineteenth-century science set out from hypotheses and looked for data to affirm or negate them, C's obsession with his *petites sensations* also recalls the empiricism, both scientific and aesthetic, of Goethe, and Alexander Baumgarten's "*aesthetische Empirik* (aesthetic empirics)" and even "*cognitio sensitiva*," or "sensuous cognition." Hence in turning to a markedly empirical mode of painting, as he did in taking up impressionism, C's new approach avoids conventional artistic rationalizations of nature yet in so doing may be adumbrated in earlier empirical science and aesthetics. With such precedent, C assumed a position of 'perception rules,' of empirical perception before any sort of concept—this to be as much as negated under postimpressionism.

Empiricism is thus at issue in terms of C's first subscribing to that outlook of radical naturalism which would come to be known as impressionism, while something quite opposite, a shift to calculated and practically 'artificial' rational construction, over and against nature as empirically given, comes into effect with his eventual shift into postimpressionism. One cannot survey C's recorded reflections on painting and fail to notice the painter's ready empirical appeal, from at least the taking up of impression, to 'sensation'; yet by a late letter (26 v 1904), from well beyond the impressionist stage, C shows considerably less concern with phenomenal flux as such than with the "concretization" of sensation into a "logical" response to nature. This testimony from the later, less spontaneous, even anti-impressionist, phase suggests a point of precipitation at which the touches of color first become subsumed into a kind of crystallization of deliberated relations. C tells the younger painter Emile Bernard that whereas the man of letters "expresses himself with abstractions," the painter quite differently

(N.B.) "concretizes (*concrète*) ... his sensations, his perceptions (*ses sensations, ses perceptions*)"; and that he now sees the painter's proper stance vis-à-vis the visible as indeed something quite unlike any descriptiveness of literary sort, namely, "to penetrate that which he has before him and to persevere in expressing himself [N.B.] as logically as possible (*persévérer à s'exprimer le plus logiquement possible*)" (D 28).³

To say that the concretization of sensation is a matter of making expressive statement attain to some "logical" form is here a very postimpressionist way of speaking (notwithstanding Bernard's tendency to Kantianize C's remarks); but what would have been true from impressionism onward is that the art object which the painter produces is something much more concrete than the "abstractions" of (verbal, but also by extension, all) *description*. This should help to account for the fact that C had in effect two related but finally categorically different conceptions of the artist's approach to his empirically or even quasi-scientifically garnered sensations. First, passive non-interference on the artist's part allows evanescent sensations of shifting hues to condense into a kind of natural colloid (impressionism); then a more transitive 'concretization' of just such through logical ordering takes effect when the artist assumes responsibility respecting distinctions, effecting a deliberated statement of, by the same token, more crystalline form, and as ostensibly structural as that would imply, postimpressionism.

1. Cf. Eugène Delacroix, *Journal*, ed. André Joubin, rev. ed., 3 vols. (Paris: Plon, 1932), 1: 163: "How necessary it is to shake yourself up (*se secouer*) from time to time, ... to go read [the book of] creation (*chercher à lire dans la création*) ..." (19 i 1847). Precociously, Leonardo is said to have imagined all philosophy written in the book of nature, in mathematical language.

2. Alexander Rueger, 'Experiments, Nature and Aesthetic Experience in the Eighteenth Century,' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 37 (1997), 305-22, with quotations here from 309, 317, 314-15, respectively. It deserves to be noted in a philosophical consideration of C that the terms for the 'realizing' of 'sensations,' both highly characteristic in C's statements, find adumbrations in Leibniz as well as Kant. C relies heavily on the transitive verb 'to realize,' in the sense of to bring to fulfillment, '*réaliser*,' which seems indispensable to his account of what he does in using paints to 'realize'—to actualize or effect—those ever-problematic other substantive things, his 'sensations.' Now '*petites sensations*,' even more than another of C's terms, '*sensations colorantes*,' is suggestive of Leibniz' favored term '*petites perceptions*,' and Leibniz resorts to the exact Latin equivalent of the French '*réaliser*' in declaring that "eternal truths must have their existence in some subject which is absolutely or metaphysically necessary, that is in God, through whom these truths, which would otherwise be imaginary, are (to use a barbarous but expressive word) *realised*'—at which point his modern editor objects: "The word realiser is a barbarism in Latin"; Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, 'On the ultimate origination of things' (1697), in his *Philosophical Writings*, ed. G. H. R. Parkinson, trans. Mary Morris and G. H. R. Parkinson (London: Dent, 1973, repr. 1995), 136-44, here 140 with n. Kant says that by virtue of schemata "sensibility ... realises (*realisiert*) the understanding in the very process of restricting it" (A147/B187); Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781; 1787), trans. and ed. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1956), 187; in the orig., *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, ed. Albert Görland (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1913), 147.

3. With these passages I do not follow Rewald's standard translation (L 297-8). Delacroix had been inspired by a conversation in which Chopin revealed his respect for harmony and counterpoint, the "logic in music," as perhaps tantamount to "art itself"; *Journal*, 1: 284 (7 iv 1849).

For this as indication of an eventual postimpressionist 'logical' stabilization against phenomenal flux a certain philosophical analogue can be suggested with Michael Dummett's remarks on how, in accord with present-day analytic philosophy, one can speak of abstracting from the continually changing colors of an object as seen a more stable or standard color. Considering that standardly "phenomenalist" dispositional analysis of colors on the order of "An object is red if it looks red to normally sighted viewers in normal light" is too crude, since "it is an integral part of being red to look orange in some circumstances and purple in others" (etc.), Dummett argues that when we manage to "prescind from ... the variety of factors for which we have learned to make unreflective allowance ... and so to employ a more refined sense of 'looks red,' to be glossed as 'If we were unaware of the lighting (the reflections, the shadows), we should judge it to be red,'" we then "approach the kind of scrutiny to which a surface must be subjected by a painter who wishes to recreate the visual impression."⁴ Despite the appeal to the term 'impression,' this similarly shifts the emphasis from impression to (re-)creation.

The gut-level appeal to C of a scientific approach would have been its promise of truth in terms of the ordained laws of nature, that is, as tantamount to insight into 'creation'; less metaphysically but without contradiction of that, he would have valued the promise of rational soundness. C hated the technologization of modern life with the intensity of a Heidegger (indeed, it appears that Martin Heidegger may have been stimulated or confirmed in his own outlook not only, notoriously, by the art of van Gogh, but also, though the likely influence is less well known, by C's work).⁵ Yet science had truth to tell about the workings of (divine) creation, and reason itself might give insight into the world's (pre-)construction.

One is inevitably curious about how C could have reconciled the ruthlessly empirical, 'scientific' approach of impressionism as radical naturalism with the religious view of God as creator that, from all his relevant remarks, meant much to him. Indeed, two characteristic things about him might seem irreconcilable when put forth in tandem: (a) that C's approach to painting, from the engagement with impressionism, had a strong data-bound, positivistic aspect and (b) that he was a Catholic believer who took nature as God's artifact. That both facts are however true can be accounted for historically. The easy explanation would be an historical appeal to the fact that some Catholics were numbered among the positivists, but that neither suits the character of the uncompromising C nor explains enough.

According to a prevailing cliché of liberal Protestant cultural history, religion was devastated by science, especially Darwinian evolutionary theory, in C's time, with only people of low-level mentality clinging to faith out of ignorant, superstitious need. C's friend, the

militantly disbelieving Zola, rather zoologically as well as sociologically called his ongoing series of novels in the 1870s and '80s, 'Les Rougon-Macquart,' the *Histoire naturelle et sociale* of a family. On the other side, the so-called 'modernist' Catholic theological controversy that developed in the later nineteenth century, long caricatured as polarizing a doctrinally reckless 'left' and an intellectually bankrupt 'right' prepared to retreat into fundamentalism, has turned out to have been more nuanced than was long thought. For C as both a practicing Catholic and a committed modernist in the artistic but not the churchly sense, the situation must have been frustrating. In his generation an intelligent Catholic such as he could surely tell, even before the church reacted against attempts to translate all too much of faith into finally inhospitable scientific terms, that militant disbelief was already establishing itself as middlebrow progressivist orthodoxy, with modernity as such, including art, presumably on its side.⁶

C saw this situation forming and was already frustrated by it a hundred years ago. Understanding that such was his position as a frustrated Catholic modernist of art heightens the urgency of the question of what he would have meant by assuming in effect a scientific approach to painting. By the evidence of his landscape painting, C must be counted one of the great empirical enquirers into nature of the nineteenth century—which, at a time when doing natural science still largely consisted of observation and morphological analysis, should be tantamount to saying, one of the great scientific painters of the time. His speciality can be said to have been the science of appearance, even if now that does not seem like saying enough. Basically, a science of what he called "sensations" developed under the tutelage of Pissarro, that genial materialist who would no doubt also have seemed sympathetically patriarchally wise.

4. Michael Dummett, *Origins of Analytical Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 92-93.

5. Important here is Christoph Jamme, 'The Loss of Things: Cézanne, Rilke, Heidegger' (1990; 1992), in Karsten Harries and Christoph Jamme, eds., *Martin Heidegger: Politics, Art and Technology* (New York and London: Holmes and Meier, 1994), 139-53; Jamme's other contributions to the subject include "'Zwiefalt' und 'Einfalt': Heideggers Deutung der Kunst Cézannes," *Philosophische Schriften* 4 (1991), 99-108. See also Michael E. Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics and Art* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), esp. 'Rilke, Cézanne and the Disclosure of the "Thing,"' 237-41.

6. Ignoring the fact that the Genesis account does present the phylogenetic sequence of evolution in one might have thought perspicacious order, and the fact that the theory of evolution will not be 'ratified' as law because it has no predictive value, many who could be called negative fundamentalists for categorically disallowing any value to theology here first presumed that 'creationism' (if that is the obligatory alternative to the cult of science) has no logic on its side. Unfashionable though the subject might be in the supposedly pluralistic art world, I bring it up because anyone who read all of C's letters and other recorded remarks and pondered what he might have considered his personal 'philosophy' has to wonder that this man who sounds like Taine, Helmholtz or even Mach when 'talking shop' should have been an upholder of papal infallibility.

But the advance C struggled to make, which, significantly, was to involve the very negation of aesthetic naturalism, even in its radical impressionist form, though certainly not the negation of nature itself as synonymous with sacred 'creation' (indeed, as much as predicated upon it as the ground of appearance), was something no doubt metaphysical as well as scientific. C strove to project an ontology of appearance in keeping with an impressionist 'scientific' attunement to optics, as if pursuing a kind of 'critique of pure appearance.' An admittedly crude generalization may however helpfully magnify an important distinction: what the empirical was to impressionism the mental or cognitive will prove in general to have been for postimpressionism.

Nature is the object of 'natural philosophy,' which is to say, the 'logic' of physics in its broad reaches; and in a definably modern sense, nature is whatever physics and the other (less basic) sciences of nature comprehend.⁷ Because an art beholden to nature, as naturalism must be, is at the least parallel to science in sharing the same object, art may tend either to vie with science, as in the Renaissance, to side with it like a fellow-traveler, as with nineteenth-century naturalism, or to try to stand aloof from the worldliness of natural science—like literary *symboliste* literature and, in its way, postimpressionist painting. C sided with science when advancing his sensation-attuned naturalism of advanced impressionism. The impressionists' scientifically optical approach to natural appearance, including 'broken color' and avoidance of secondaries and black in favour of an 'optical mixture,' is generally referred to the optics, and especially the color studies, of Michel-Eugène Chevreul, Hermann von Helmholtz and others. That Pissarro, C's impressionist mentor, was a devotee of Chevreul, supports the present view of C's impressionism as a 'scientific' approach to painting. As for the more pointedly scientific detachment of the declared 'neoimpressionism' of Seurat and his colleagues in the younger generation: to stress the latter prematurely here might detract from what it actually meant, first, for an impressionist to have taken up a declared scientific stance toward painting. Zola's fascination with the worldly doings and failings of the human animal had convinced him that he was authentically in touch with the realities of naturalistic life in the naturalistic world, and C had his corresponding phase of tutelage in impressionism, whose visual-analytical commitment drew him away from merely descriptive naturalism; and once C's equivalent of Zola's empirical 'take' on the visible world became analytic, and, so, rationalized, a new, essentially *post*-impressionist, view detached itself from impressionism as so much now obsolescent Zolaesque radical naturalism.

As C was finding his definitive mode in the later 1870s, conservative naturalism of pseudo-photographic ilk was clearly losing conviction, according to the contemporary analysis

of the formalist theoretician Conrad Fiedler. In the context of positivism this conventional, non-impressionist naturalism had broken with romanticism in order to face nature forthrightly. Like modern scientists, aesthetic naturalists (to some extent the generalization captures both impressionists and contemporaneous 'square' naturalists, as well as Zola in literature) took it as their task to "immerse themselves" in the "study and observation" of actual life (699),⁸ supposedly "mak[ing] all the old conflicts of aesthetics superfluous, all the earlier demands of aesthetics vacuous" (700), as a new "truth" to "reality" superseded obsolete ideal beauty and truth. This sounds so direct and forthright; but Fiedler had to wonder about the implicit epistemology: "Although the adherents of the new movement claim to have elevated art onto the same high ground as that which is occupied by the spirit of scientific enquiry, they none the less seek to ground art in a view of the world which science has long since had to overcome in order to make further progress in its knowledge of the world," which is "the key point from which modern Naturalism is both to be explained and refuted" (701). "The decisive turning point in our striving for knowledge takes place when ... we realize that external reality, which appears to be absolutely real, is in fact a deceptive illusion. Our faculty of knowledge (*Erkenntnisvermögen*) is not confronted by an exterior world which is wholly independent of us, like an object in a mirror (*wie ein Spiegel*)," so that the world of perception must be processed through the artist's mental activity (*geistigen Vorganges*), which is synthesizing as well as clarifying (701; Ger., 170). In analogy with Fiedler, then, C changed the relation of painting to nature: painting became, like Fiedler's "new truth to reality," if anything a *less* perceptually direct report on nature and rather *more rationalized*. As C himself is reported as saying in one of his 'Opinions,' published soon after he received the letter quoted above, the painter should work at developing not only the eye but also "the brain, by the logic of organized sensations (*logique des sensations organisées*), which gives the means of expression" (D 36).

A simpler matter than what could be called the available philosophical scientism: while anyone looking for the most obviously 'scientific' form of image in C's time would have

7. Something about painting in general which, independently of the question of representation, must inevitably interest philosophy: that the physical optics of vision, whether one is looking at the world and the canvas or only the canvas, have no immediate relation to the physical chemistry of painting, which means painting can never be reduced to physics because it has at least two physical aspects, neither one of which reduces to the other, and which do not even correlate except as 'orchestrated' by the painter.

8. Conrad Fiedler, 'Modern Naturalism and Artistic Truth' (1881), excerpts trans. Jason Gaiger in Charles Harrison, Paul Wood and Jason Gaiger, eds., *Art in Theory 1815-1900: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 698-702, as cited; in the original, 'Moderner Naturalismus und künstlerische Wahrheit', in Fiedler's *Schriften zur Kunst*, ed. Gottfried Boehm, *Theorie und Geschichte der Literatur und die schönen Künste* 16, 2 vols. (Munich: Fink, 1972), 133-82.

referred to photography, this would have been misleading as photography was all too preoccupied with naturalistic aesthetics. What, however, could look less like a photographic 'picture' than even an impressionist or 'radical naturalist' painting by C? Once it becomes a question of his mature, postimpressionist work, and most obviously then in his practice of still life, it is clear that where C really does produce a concretization, as already discussed, such must grow out of a categorically more deliberated manipulation of color and form than impressionism, with its commitment to sensory input, allowed. Meanwhile, the responsibility of being a good impressionist—being able to lend oneself so completely to the processes of looking-scrutinizing-painting-scrutinizing, and on and on—must have helped the constitutionally shy C to overcome a too inhibiting self-consciousness, while the newly anti-impressionist postimpressionism would afterward allow self-consciousness to center on the production of a demandingly calculated object. The rigorous perceptual demands of the impressionist method obliged a constant attending to one's sense-data; for impressionism, as has already been explained, was schooling in the unredacted registration—the more spontaneous, presumably, the better—of even very fleeting optical phenomena. Not so, postimpressionism (which operates with the detachment of Dummett's "prescinding"). Put simply, what sometimes looks to unaccustomed eyes like descriptive vagueness in impressionism is often an 'accuracy' (of distinctness if not 'clarity') of *overall* phenomenal effect, a very generalized accuracy that could only be accomplished by suspending conscious concerns and taking objects and persons, sites and weather conditions, as little but interference patterns for impressions (as will be considered presently, this is part and parcel with a virtual disappearance of narrative if not of generalized genre).

There was no good reason for this squirishly self-contained, wished-to-be-hearty, country intellectual who happened to be attuned to painting and some modern culture, to set himself against natural science as such. C's painting became doggedly empirical in its way, as empirical as any other impressionist's. He was also highly intellectual in a specifically rationalist way. This side of him becomes still more evident when the center of artistic concern shifts from the understanding of the fleeting effects of sunlight, to a new sort of still more scientific, stably 'concretized' image constructed more artificially *out of* such natural matériel. Then it could be said that, by analogy with the term natural philosophy, C made 'natural phenomenology' the business of art, or, at least, of impressionist and, then, differently, postimpressionist, painting. In C's hands, such natural phenomenology was allied to optics and to a thorough scientific knowledge of color and a thorough empirical knowledge of paint—thus finally at very much an opposite pole from natural effect.

2. *That the new way of observing nature meant a demanding new analysis by C of visual sensation in painting.*

In taking up impressionism C was subscribing to a new method of observing nature for the sake of imaging it in painting, including the observational awareness of that imaging as a process. The impressionist method was demanding in its rigor, as required by the need to rise responsively to the challenge of realizing, and in that, fixing—though not yet as 'concretizingly' as would prove to be the case with postimpressionism—the extremely evanescent visual data of its principal object: the fluctuating appearances of light. It is fitting to call the impressionist approach objectifying because it sought to arrest and at least momentarily fix the artist's usually fugitive sensory response to nature's plethora of stimuli, and as such, was anything but a solipsistic indulgence in subjectivity. Putting it so—once again, that the subjective is objectified—implies a qualification of nature 'in herself' as old art's honored object. Just so, it begins to suggest that the answer to the question about the new method of observation versus the new method of analyzing sensation may be answered by subsuming the former to the latter. The point of the new method of observing nature was the sharpening of one's sensations of nature in order to produce a greater vividness of relayed phenomenal effect. Nevertheless, this must be a subsumption, not a negation, because—as becomes more apparent in the postimpressionist turn away from direct contact with nature to cultivate, more rational-scientifically than empirical-scientifically, so to speak, the artificiality of art—the sensations analyzed for processing were themselves directional, sensations-*of*, and at that, *'of nature*. So the center of gravity of representation in painting definitively shifted from the things to their look, and from mere observing, even 'scientifically,' to a rational 'postnaturalistic' processing.

It will be necessary to consider in more detail the question of C's new manner of approaching nature, meaning, now, not only the impressionist mode of observation as a justified break with the received naturalistic notion of representation in art, but C's yet more objectifying postimpressionist revision of that. As to the former: happenstance though they might appear at first hand, impressions were the hard-won, scientifically motivated, perceptual basis for the presentation of 'nature' in vividly immediate transcription by the impressionists, including, for a time, C. The now newer method of observation entailed a definitive, differently, yet at least as science-driven, aesthetic shift. Even impressionism in its once demanding naturalism, its almost petri-dish receptivity to unredacted traces of sensation, was still solidly beholden to nature. Like *symbolisme* in literature, postimpressionism would be more contrivedly concerned with anything but naturalistic effects as actively extrapolated from

nature. Thus the postimpressionist projecting of a 'synthetic' image *out of* sensations would supersede the impressionist analysis of sensation as, in turn, the analysis of sensation had superseded passive observation of nature.

The claim calls for substantiation. C's transforming encounter with impressionism pointed up a critical problem. Impressionist images are full of quite unreformedly *represented* subject-matter, natural and even sociological, though it is worth noting that the subject matter is almost always agent-less phenomena—sheer 'prevailing conditions,' one might say. Besides the play of light, the subject matter was usually such 'actions' as changing weather, the virtually statistical movement of a crowd, the stirring of many waves or countless leaves, and only generalized genre scenes, without implication of narrative complexity. But since their more comprehensive subject-matter is the very contingency of effect of whatever is visible under such-and-such conditions, any judgments implicit in such images are judgments not about objects or sites seen, let alone narratives, but about the *seeing*. And since nature is now but the occasion of sensations to be attended to and registered impassively, as if the painter were a kind of receptive apparatus, the very 'object' of the representation, and with it the analysis attendant on it for purposes of painting, has shifted. The pivotal thing for C was his astutely assuming analytical responsibility for his now to be concretized *realization* (in that favorite term) provoked by nature. This is the impressionist commitment to a science of appearance, and beyond it, to the building up, *post*-impressionistically, of a purely rationalized construct out of such analyzed sensations. Hence the double transformation, from conventional naturalism to the radical naturalism that is impressionism, and then from impressionism to postimpressionism.

Let us return again to the impressionist shift of attention from nature to *sensation of* nature, which in postimpressionism had such profound implications for painting as formerly presumed to be a kind of receptacle of represented 'subject matter.' This must be why, though impressionism, itself a special form of naturalism, was an outgrowth of older ('romantic') naturalism, of which C already had experience, impressionism (or 'radical naturalism') should have been such an education for him as a maturing painter. The naturalism which he had practiced as a young painter was of a hopelessly postromantic literary sort. Pictures purported to be radical in virtue of the daring subject matter of their implied ... *stories(!)*. But notwithstanding their literary shock potential, rapes and murders are really no better guarantee of pictorial radicality than apples or mountains. Indeed, at least apples, a mountain or one's wife can just *be there*, quite without need of narrative justification. And speaking of the 'pictorial' in the narrow sense of the picture-like, it is significant that impressionist paintings

can still be called 'pictures' with small harm done, whereas postimpressionist, not to mention abstract, paintings are really too free of depictive duty to be captured, let alone restricted, by that term. Unlike naturalistic pictures, even when they report a certain 'state of affairs' under such and such atmospheric conditions, impressionist paintings don't offer more in the way of a story than "Once there was a situation such that ... ," or than "On a certain business day in the center of Paris, it stopped raining in mid-afternoon, and as the sun came out from behind the clouds it threw a dramatic chiaroscuro over just and unjust alike. The end." Insofar as there is in fact practically no 'story,' the modernist likes to say that this carries painting along the way to 'nonobjective' art. Here, with impressionism, redundant middle-class commonplaces, as far as figural 'subjects' go—trees, rivers, houses, sailboats; apples, some in bowls, some not—were depicted with an unsettling manner of presentation that at the time must have looked practically 'deconstructed.' Radically enough, *effect* or unadulterated 'presentation' displaced content. To exaggerate for emphasis: with impressionism, 'content,' in the old sense, basically functions as an inert foil in a play of light effects.

The impressionist method of observation itself entailed not merely a change in the way paintings were painted; it also entailed a definitional shift in the aesthetics of painting. With it, one could no longer presume the traditional, narrowly mimetic sense of representation. The field would have to accommodate a new sort of depiction attuned to the translational 'realization' of optical sensation-complexes—a definite shift in the center of aesthetic gravity from 'tenor' to 'vehicle' or from the semantic to the syntactical. Sacrificing the world's familiarly conventional pictorialization was a necessary but not ultimate step to impressionism, and then to postimpressionism and eventually nonobjective painting. So C and the other aesthetically revisionist painters of the 1880s were to distinguish themselves by pushing the analytical tendency still further. In the fullness of postimpressionism he, for his part, would work wonders in rationalizing visual perception into a system of color relations deriving its analytic matériel from sensation.

Not only does analytical description presume observation, it also presumes thought; and while not all thought is analytic, all analysis is thought, including analysis of sensations. Even though impressionism *per se* was 'only an eye,' as C's notorious comment on Monet had it, with C it had to become more, even if that necessitated exceeding the limits of impressionism as such. Obviously there is a sense in which all rendering, no matter how bluntly descriptive, would require some kind of thought; more active thinking, however, can make of the artist a kind of transformer of sensational input as extrapolated into an artistic output concretized, offered to sight, on its own firsthand visual terms. So while impressionism

taught C initially to be 'only an eye,' and so freed him from received thinking, it also prepared him for *new thinking*.

Why else would anyone assume that an ordinary person, let alone a *demi-kilo* of decaying local fruit (to invoke the *topos* of it taking so long for C to paint a still life that its apples rotted), was worth devoting that many hours of *thinking* in order to *paint*? The question is not rhetorical: C was not pointlessly going out of his way to make things harder for himself. No; before long, by frequent resort to the immobility of still life he practiced setting up 'control' situations in which the motif would at least stay put. And what, on the other hand, should we say about such a long-term investment of attention in studying how the light spreads over the (self-symbolically) bald, stony pate of an obdurate little mountain? Why assume we are even very *good* at sorting out our own sensations, when sometimes even when quite alert we cannot even tell a hot touch from cold. It is too bad that in casual literary usage, 'impressionism' so often connotes vagueness, whereas the truer, more technical meaning implies an unadulterated direct report of sensory experiences more vivid and 'true' to sensational source stimuli than could ever have been imagined before in painting, and which, again, would supply the further artistic self-sufficiency of postimpressionism.

Impressionism made the artist aware of himself as a kind of sensory apparatus, such that the true kingdom of observable nature was thereby to be found through one's capabilities of assisting integral realizations. What one as an artist was obliged to effect was the making of keen, on-the-spot analytical judgments in the face of fugitive appearances, especially within that complex of mutual distinctions making up the system of color as such. Proceeding in terms of such judgments seems intuitive in impressionism, in which one temperament is invited to show itself as distinct from another; in postimpressionism it will become even more rationalized and systematic. An analogy (of sorts): we tend to suppose atmospheric haziness as less than ideal, an imperfect or visually compromised state; yet it is our intuitive calibration of fickle atmospheric nuance with concomitant color shifts that constitutes the visual sense of distance known as 'atmospheric perspective.' The more one contemplates such interplay between the sensed and the reckoned, the more crucial for C does its exposition seem. The practice of impressionism must have led C to exercise and render more explicit such calibrating capacities, which, even if one wants to consider them still 'natural,' open the way to more calculated artificiality.

Once inspired by Delacroix's analytical sense of breaking down color into its interactive chromatic components, one might come to see how very much painting really *consists of* color, and perhaps to understand color itself as nothing but a system of

distinctions—not in nature but in sensations of nature, and above all, in painting sensations. What a painting even *is*, what constitutes it as an image, is a structure of elements, a set of distinct (discernable) colors ordained to stand together in such-and-such relations by an artist (however 'scientific') as specifically visual sense-composer, or re-composer. If an artist is to learn to 'observe nature better' in some modern way, it would be by learning to scrutinise his or her own sensations, sensory responses, and take them into account. C's formative impressionism obliged a deeper sensitivity, above all, to colors as co-present in mutual relations. This sensitivity was to be employed first in nature as sensed but then finally and importantly in a painted image as product of just such analysis of sensations, gradually built up out of nothing but color touches. If, put thusly, the final stage sounds synthetic in its thoroughgoing concretization, it presupposed a 'realization' analysis that could be of nothing else than sensations of nature, rendered rational. That, in turn, must have been something more than merely a new style of otherwise business-as-usual natural observation.

3. *How C's 'temperament' was revealed or expressed in his artworks.*

Temperament has been taken here as a person's affective disposition, a summary *character* of sorts. Whether he ever commented on the celebrated formula of his old *copain*, of art as "a corner of nature seen through a temperament," C is well known to have shared certain major aesthetic principles with Zola. That the dictum might be Zola's best known aesthetic pronouncement does not necessarily mean that C subscribed to it, even though it belongs to the radical naturalist aesthetic that for a time both shared. We suppose pragmatically that he implicitly did because the way he was playing his game in art so paralleled up to a point the way in which Zola was playing his equivalent literary game: and in Zola's game, which also after all extended into art criticism, this was a reliable term for a settled factor. So, why not?—in a sense. Consider, further: all art might be at least tinged with temperament, like it or not (as if it were disappointing to discover that temperament might disqualify from the attainment of a universal or ideal). C's impressionism may look like a personal as well as 'scientific' record of natural appearance, and there might somewhere be a seeming contradiction between the advantageously subjective-temperamental and the disadvantageously subjective-scientific, but perhaps not in respect to C's personal conjunction of the empirical and rational.

Why should evidence of temperament not imply contamination of the radical naturalist sensorial report; or why, more broadly, should temperament not be suspect as likely

to muddy the waters? The temperament or evident artistic personality of a jazz musician which could manifest itself in choice and deployment of tunes, variations of rhythm and phrasing, patterns of inflection, and such would be altogether affirmative and appealing to connoisseurs of the artist's composition and/or performance. A painter's temperament might become likewise manifest and rewarding, so that as it would make sense to say that in some jazz, at least, the performer *is* his music, a painter might *be* his painting, which then would seem to display temperament. This is something more complex than simple expressivity because even traits of an inexpressive or anti-expressive nature, such as impassiveness or positive reserve may be temperamentally manifest. There are comments by C to the effect that the landscape plays upon the painter's temperament or artistic disposition, which in turn comes into play in the process of painting. For painting, even when nonobjective, is a game of selectivities, of choices with entailments and consequences, by no means only in choice or editing of 'object,' if any, or of subject matter in any sense. Much more telling is the selectivity of what internal artistic 'game' move to make next, such as where a touch of paint must go and of what color, and what this does to the standing accumulation of prior choices and how it affects subsequent options. Even apart, then, from the 'graphology' of painting—which is not prominent in every style, not all styles placing a premium on evidence of personality (any more than they do on spontaneity)—temperament can be evident in a painter's 'plays' (as for that matter it also is within narrower limits than for art, in sports). With this way of seeing the temperamental role of a painter C, it seems, would have concurred. Even in view of his newer postimpressionist 'objectivity' towards the art object, it is possible to say that, temperamentally speaking, only C could have or would have produced, say, the Fitzwilliam Museum's *Apples* (to be analyzed below). Why? For one thing, while it looks detached, it is not difficult to detect C's own specific *temperamental detachment* in it. Only C would have set up just such an analysis of appearance to begin with and then proceeded to build up out of innumerable intuitions of pigmental color, placement and touch, in just such a rigorous construct.

C seems to have liked to invoke the term 'nature,' too, in the sense of the nature of something as its essential character, as in the sense of what a good portraitist would convey of a sitter's nature as of the personality (originally Shaftesbury's 'characteristic'). Probably there is in this usage a hint of that attitude of the countryman which by all reports tended to be overindulged by C. This is the usage of saying that somebody did something, or better, had to do something, because it was 'his nature,' as if to say his fate or *karma*. C's own quite scientific, analyzing attitude to sense-data and their 'translation' onto canvas tended to stamp its conveyed impressions 'copyright C,' that is, with the phrasing and rhythms and patterns of

inflection of C's own temperament. But what is more, C's constructs were quite idiosyncratic, often seeming decidedly 'non-natural' in a characteristic way. It would certainly accord with what we know about his personality, from his own letters, recorded remarks and the testimony of others, to say that it is characteristic of C to show himself in his painting by keeping a certain distance yet nevertheless truly to show himself *precisely in keeping just that sort of distance*, especially in his decisive combinations of things—over and above such forensically simpler traits as typical still life objects, landscape sites, sitters, favorite colors or even the graphology of brushwork. His special intellectuality *is* his personality, and just what allows him to be such a great postimpressionist; so it is no wonder that his most characteristic work should come to move and inspire the founders of that most cerebral of modernisms, analytic cubism.

C's Impressionist (or radical naturalist) manifestation of temperament cuts two ways. One expects *all* impressionists, on Zola's terms, to manifest temperament, and differently at that. The matter of C's impressionism as differing from that of other members of the impressionist movement has been entertained in the account of what C was pragmatically taking on by affiliating himself with the movement. However, without getting into too much art-historical detail it would be difficult to pursue the differentiation within impressionism of such artists as Manet (otherwise a sort of radically aestheticist 'realist') or Degas (similar yet just as significantly conservative), or, within the central committee, differences between Monet, Pissarro or Renoir that are often great enough to distinguish their works from many yards off. Let us simply accept that there is nothing unlikely or unexpected in the claim that each painter's impressionism was effectively a function of a manifestly distinct 'temperament.'

In some cases it is possible to go further because two painters are found taking somewhat different slants on the very same site, such as the case of two freely different versions of the same refreshment pavilion at a suburban site of resort, *La Grenouillère*, in 1869, namely, those of Renoir (Stockholm, Nationalmuseum) and Monet (New York, Metropolitan Museum) (229).⁹ There the differences are all the more interesting. For the identical site-motif includes a small artificial island whose regular circular form, seen obliquely, is completely incidental and no threat to picturesque asymmetry in the Renoir, but obsessively emphasized by several rowboats radiating like tangents from it in the version of Monet. There are even what can be called 'mutual' cases, simultaneously different but affiliated in that they are somehow *about one another*, as with the two paintings done at Argenteuil in 1873, the one by Monet, titled *The Artist's Garden at Argenteuil* (284), plausibly the very canvas he is in turn

9. The several paintings mentioned in this discussion are illustrated in John Rewald, *The History of Impressionism*, rev. ed. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1961), cited here by page.

shown painting within Renoir's image *Monet Working in His Garden at Argenteuil* 1873 (Hartford, Wadsworth Athenaeum) (285).

It may, however, be possible to take the problem to a higher level in the critical case of Camille Pissarro's extended 'master class,' as it were, for C. For on occasion Pissarro and C worked side-by-side on the same motif, pointedly, it seems, as if by definition under the same atmospheric conditions and in the same fluctuating light—so that it is even possible to scrutinize the heightened results as induced, one could almost say, under experimental parallax. The wonderful example of this is the brace of 1877 canvases of which each is known as *Orchard in Pointoise; Quai de Pothuis* (both, 411).

A tally of corresponding features will show Pissarro's version as much more concerned with the natural as such, C's with the cultural as such; and likewise Pissarro's with the lively and happenstance, C's with a static solidity that is often considered quasi-classical in his work. Both images show the same bit of orchard set at the foot of a hill populated by half a dozen houses and kindred structures, and cropped practically identically, though C's canvas is just a little (respectfully?) smaller. As to parts as well as the whole, it is downright intellectually exciting to see every term find its equally and oppositely significant counterpart, with an as it were aptly different, exactly opposite but equivalent, predicate implicated. Because these two same-but-different 'states' of pictorial 'affairs' are so replete with positive and negative connections, it is challenging to capture as many as possible with only a few comprehensive statements. It can be established, for instance, that in Pissarro's image the townscape plays second fiddle to the orchard, which consists of a rustle of fruit trees in flower, presided over by one large and central, patriarchal tree, whereas in C's the blocky solid geometry of buildings planted as if in a great rock garden on the hill, dominates, and the fruit trees, diminished in relative importance, stand in more regular fashion, spaced equidistantly on the implied grid of an orchard. This is to say that, where Pissarro's image is above all of nature, agricultural and horticultural, C's of the same motif, under exactly identical contingent conditions, is above all cultural, preoccupied with manmade, anti-naturally geometric structures as interjected within the natural context; moreover, the identical natural context is taken by C much more on geologic-structural terms. It would be difficult to evade the inference that these are two very different statements, not only about a certain site where nature and culture happened interestingly to interface, but about the two respective artists' sense of art as such. One says so of course with the wisdom of historical hindsight; but then this is just what will be entailed in C's eventual 'postimpressionist' supersession of impressionism as such (and *a fortiori*, of impressionism's residual naturalism).¹⁰ What does

not depend on history is the deduction that the two images differ essentially as to the respective temperaments of their authors.

Surely the orderliness which we pick up on in C's work, as even here, before his rejection of impressionism, is strong evidence of a special individual character in his case—even if a critical difficulty would arise in taking anything 'rational' as a mark of idiosyncrasy. Literally painting side-by-side with Pissarro, however, C must have felt the opposed tensions, as pupil, in having to check any late-romantic naturalism while being encouraged to be receptive to sensation and less inhibited in a sense-aware and responsive painterly output. By the time C and other founding postimpressionists-to-be had clearly departed from impressionism, and consequently downplayed the old representational presuppositions of 'picture'-making, Renoir, notably, had become so antithetical toward a postimpressionist structural tropism as to fancy in resistance an appeal to the naturalism which was the very grounding of impressionism: "If we examine the most renowned artistic or architectural works from this point of view, we soon realize that the great artists who created them, [N.B.] concerned to follow the procedures of nature, whose faithful pupils they always remained, took great pains not to transgress its fundamental law, that of irregularity."¹¹

Now leaving aside the contradiction implicit in the notion of a law of lawlessness or a regularized irregularity, there is something wrong, not only with the arch-antipathy toward natural law but with the very banality of a call, in effect, to eccentricity. The reaction of attempting to legislate 'natural' impressionist irregularity would probably have seemed quite potty to C. Except in terms of entropy (just then being framed as a physical concept), the notion that nature should be considered to be governed by a *law* or principle of irregularity, hence seemingly of dis-order, could hardly have seemed to C to avoid contradiction: an irrationalist outburst, surely, from a particularly unintellectual impressionist sensationist, and no doubt good reason to be out of that orbit.

At an opposite extreme of theoretical scrupulosity: the practice of impressionism seems to have led C to distinguish between the term *sensation colorée* (colored sensation) and the more active—and more postimpressionist, or at least proto-postimpressionist, being more constitutive as well as quasi-pigmental—*sensation colorante* (coloring sensation). On the face of it, early reports fail to sustain a distinction, yet the more constitutive *sensation*

10. Perhaps one can say so without getting into a pointless argument about whether C is 'classical' or not, but at least in reproduction Pissarro's image looks to be permeated by a lyrically humid tonalism where C's offers a pelucid 'Mediterranean' light.

11. Pierre Auguste Renoir, 'The Society of Irregularists' (manuscript of 1884), trans. Carola Hicks in Harrison et al., *Art in Theory*, 855-56, here 855.

colorante does come to the fore, for perhaps two and one-half reasons. Although Bernard uses both terms in his 1904 article 'Paul [C],' it is first, speaking freely on his own, that he employs "*sensations colorantes*," without inverted commas (D 34); and when twice in succession he comes to ascribe "*sensations colorées*" to the painter in his list of 'Opinions' in the same place, these phrases occur immediately after conveying C's impressive statement about "the logic of organized sensations" (D 36). Secondly, the edge also goes to *sensation colorante* in view of C's own employment of that term (in the plural) in a letter (23 x 1905) to Bernard after his article appeared.¹² Additionally, there is the philological 'half' reason that a person who bothers to draw a fine distinction might not employ it every time, while one not bothering to draw a distinction would be less likely to call up a synonym.¹³ By this stage however there was in place a certainly distinct (if not always clear) aesthetic difference for C between one sense of sensation—receptive, (residually) naturalistic and impressionist—and another—constitutive, antinaturalistic and, what can now be confirmed, postimpressionist.

12. Paul Cézanne, *Correspondance*, ed. John Rewald (Paris: Grasset, 1937), 277, quoted in Richard Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism: A Study of the Theory, Technique and Critical Evaluation of Modern Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 295 n. 30. For another text of Bernard, purporting to quote C directly with *sensations colorantes*, and texts by Maurice Denis and R. P. Rivière and Jacques Félix Schnerb, see D 78, 178, 89, respectively.

13. I find encouragement for my view of the matter in the study of Michel Prieur, 'Cézanne et la sensation colorante,' *Études Philosophiques* (Nice), no. 20 (1973), 95-113.

1 Phenomenology of C's painting in and out of doors; 2 How in studio painting C developed an 'algebraic' constitution of structure, especially through quantitative deployment of color.

It is not simply a datum of art history that whereas as an impressionist C had mainly produced landscapes, as a postimpressionist he produced some of his own finest works as part of the greatest body of still life painting since Chardin. He even made of his single favorite landscape motif a kind of still-life object in taking it again and again in the same basic view as a singularly stable form, even literally painting it from indoors, though still under his direct gaze, through his studio window. Turning away from *plein-air* landscape to close-in tabletop still lifes was a considerable part of C's philosophically consequential turn from impressionism to postimpressionism. One way the philosophical consequence can be approached is through Merleau-Ponty's interest in C from the viewpoint of phenomenology—the only school of thought to have embraced C's work as philosophically important. But it also will be worthwhile to analyze some works by C firsthand for their potential to contribute to the issues under discussion, especially still lifes as painted definitively indoors, as proffering color and its differentiation as the very métier of C's reformed—postimpressionist—image structure.

1. *Phenomenology of C's painting in and out of doors.*

Fact A: For obvious reasons impressionism had little to do with still life, except perhaps on rainy days. Fact B: C painted many still lifes and indeed, with J.-B. Chardin, in the eighteenth century (to whose art his own works sometimes allude), he ranks as one of the two greatest of Western still-life painters. That both A and B are true, points to C's still-life work as a significant part of his development as a postimpressionist. In its sometimes downright antinaturalism, postimpressionism permitted (though it did not exclusively entail) a return to the studio as site of a newly analytic spirit of enquiry into painting. The task of the painter became less a passive reception of sense data, however analytically negotiated, and more the active constitution of a new sort of image deliberately constructed—ultimately out of sense-data, yet self-sufficient and hence independent of nature. So profoundly do the implications of the return to the studio extend, beyond the category of still life, to the very presuppositions of postimpressionism, that one might say that a return to still life made sense *because of* a postimpressionist outlook. In reaction against 'naturalistic' impressionist atmospheric and meteorological happenstance, with the artist as a kind of expert hypersensitive passive receptor, there was good new reason for the postimpressionist painter, very much in the business of image-construction, to engage the much more limited and controlled conditions of still life on a tabletop.

Before C's still lifes not only Merleau-Ponty but Fry and Meyer Schapiro are among the analysts who have been struck by a sense that in producing them the artist was transposing from tangibilities into visibilities, meaning from three to two dimensions. In thinking on C's chunky, obdurate forms, whether spheroidal apples or quasi-crystalline farmhouses, first projected (impressionistically) as a sheer luminous tissue, then thoroughly reconstituted (postimpressionistically) without spatial illusion yet allowing of a (critically celebrated) metaphorical 'plasticity,' the Berkeley of *A New Theory of Vision* (1709) seems as relevant as modern phenomenology, regarding visual apprehension as removed from but dependent on experience of the tangible. If the real content of C's art was his 'realized' apperceptive 'sensations,' such could well take place on the diminutive scale of still life—indeed, with the possibility of more sensitive scrutiny, under more quasi-experimental conditions, than could ever be the case with landscape. With still life's typically closed set of adjustably configured objects stably affiliated in complementary relations, it needn't even matter if one admitted naturalistically conflicting incident angles of source light. What better conditions of control by which the artist might discern his exact '*petites sensations*' and proceed to establish those distinctions of pigmental color which are all the viewer of the

resultant painting will in turn have to go by!¹

The shift whereby still life came to the fore in C's postimpressionist work, rivaling landscape as the paramount impressionist mode, is also consequential for the important phenomenological reading of C's art by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Nevertheless, the phenomenological account falls short insofar as it holds to naturalism and thereby fails when C's art is no longer naturalistic, not even 'radical'-naturalistic or impressionist. As itself predisposed to naturalism, the phenomenological approach overlooks C's definitive antinaturalist turn—he would simply not be the great artist we know if his work had not taken it—and so proves problematically limited by its perhaps inevitable *dis*-inclination toward the *anti*-naturalism of C's most sophisticated work. In respect to painting, where there could be no better case than C's, it may show itself too committed to the empirical to countenance a glorification of the rational within the realm of the visible in art. Even Merleau-Ponty seems patronizingly grateful to C for supplying him with such hospitable, supposedly 'natural' experience, which however is really the end-product of demanding, and visibly articulated, cognition. This should become clear on looking into the matter of still life, which by definition is produced under controlled conditions, as if in a laboratory, as a matter of reflective, quasi-experimental manipulation.² The freely structured order of still life that becomes for C such a dominant interest is in practice little subject to the only jurisdiction in which phenomenology seems at home: nature.

"He needed one hundred working sessions for a still life, one hundred and fifty sittings for a portrait," Merleau-Ponty declares at the start of his phenomenological reflections on '[C's] Doubt,'³ a monographic essay contemporaneous with *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945). Consider: no impressionist painting, especially no impressionist landscape, can have taken a hundred sessions, because if it took a hundred sessions to paint it couldn't be an impressionist painting. The spontaneity of execution that impressionism demanded was no superfluous bravura; it was driven by the integral purpose—integral to what

1. Interesting concerning the haptic and optic, and especially the curious semiotic detachment (hardly what is usually considered expressive) with which C actually negotiated his brushwork, is Richard Shiff, 'Cézanne's Physicality: The Politics of Touch,' in Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell, eds., *The Language of Art History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 129-80.

2. The art historian Svetlana Alpers has explored the idea of studio as laboratory: 'The Studio, the Laboratory and the Vexations of Art,' in Caroline A. Jones and Peter Galison, eds., *Picturing Science: Producing Art* (London: Routledge, 1998), 401-17.

3. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Cézanne's Doubt' (1945), in his *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Deyfus (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 9-25, here 9. The next several citations to this text.

is even meant by the 'radical naturalism' of impressionism—of keeping abreast of the fugitively instantaneous in natural appearance (the very attempt to keep descriptively abreast being itself naturalistic). This, Merleau-Ponty's opening observation, warrants the inference that it was over and against the challenging experience of impressionism, known to have made C anxious about the fugitive character of natural effects, that the painter should have returned to the studio with a newly analytical resolve to negotiate more controlled states of affairs. After all, the landscape as a function of ever-changing light, the preeminent impressionist subject matter, is quite precluded in the sort of sustained scrutiny referred to by Merleau-Ponty's remark: one could never expect to return a hundred times to the same light conditions in a given landscape, even over a season.

Merleau-Ponty's essay on C is much better known in art circles, though in the major work *Phenomenology of Perception*, C's art also looms large. In both discussions the philosopher seems to seek to save naturalism with the help of C, whereas all postimpressionism, including C's, goes ultimately against such residual naturalism, however 'radicalized' in impressionism. There is still, a century after postimpressionism, tremendous resistance to accepting the fact that the affirmation of art-as-such in postimpressionism, which really initiates modernism in art, was, in its commitment to art as an independent construct parallel to nature, a *denial of nature* as preconditional objective in art. While it is well and good to admire C for having striven for and attained a remarkable fit with the way the world seems, there is really something wrong with taking his finished, ultimately antinatural products as raw-material samplings of what planet earth is like. Merleau-Ponty patronizes his admired C when he takes what is already C's worked-out thinking all too handily as so much nature or, perhaps even so much natural human experience.

That the view expounded here calls for criticism of Merleau-Ponty's does not negate the fact that Merleau-Ponty's reading of C's work has value as well as conviction. If Merleau-Ponty disappoints by addressing more about the real world *through* C's painting than *by virtue of his painting*, so that in a sense he inadequately respects the work as artwork, he nevertheless manages (as art people don't necessarily do) to respect C's paintings as philosophically engaging. He picks up responsively on C's attunement to what Sartre called the "pith" of the world, which is no trivial thing, though, again, there is ingratitude in mostly overlooking the primary pith of the painting in order to pretend to look through it at the supposedly primary but in the event secondary pith of the world as represented, as much as taking a telling metaphor as if it weren't one so as not to have to pay for it philosophically.

The problem concerns a view purporting to stand above naïve naturalism but that

tends to retreat into it. For one thing, a new form of representation which diverged from conventional representation only in the interest of representing how things *more truly naturally* are (as naturalists must always think), can hardly be very reformed. Thus Merleau-Ponty could only be right if, on the terms framed here, C himself were wrong, i.e., mistaken in coming to think of his art antinaturalistically. In his treatment of C Merleau-Ponty shows an unfortunate tendency to backslide into presuming representation of the way things naturally and constantly are as given in the office of painting. Hence the real trouble is that, while Merleau-Ponty's naturalism may well suit the empirical dimension of phenomenology, it can only obscure C's profound aesthetic shift away from impressionism as radical naturalistic and into postimpressionism as *anti-naturalistic*.

Consider a few instances of the problem from '[C's] Doubt.' "[T]he canvas—which no longer corresponds point by point to nature—affords a generally true impression through the action of the separate parts upon one another." So far, so good. However, the next sentence reads: "But at the same time, depicting the atmosphere and breaking up the tones submerges the object and causes it to lose its proper weight" (12). Submerges it in what—other mere forms? Where is this object's true weight recorded as fact? Let me answer from my understanding of Merleau-Ponty: this is nothing but an inadvertent appeal to the presumed solidity—even normal specific gravity!—of the natural world. And are we to think represented atmosphere is capable of somehow swallowing up represented objects just because real atmosphere is capable of swallowing up real objects (*represented* clouds, for example, don't occlude 'represented' anything)? One cannot suppose so without mistaking a sign for a thing (another naturalistic fallacy?). "We see things," Merleau-Ponty says; "we agree about them; we are anchored in them; and it is with 'nature' as our base that we construct our sciences." O.K., but next: "[C] wanted to paint this primordial world, and his pictures therefore seem to show nature pure, while photographs ..." (13). Now, just what is this "pure" nature? Merleau-Ponty assures us that when we look sufficiently "globally" at a painting by C "perspectival distortions are no longer visible in their own right" (14), which is a valid and important aesthetic point: but in view of the conventionality of perspective, just what, however primordial, could these seeming deformations possibly be such measurably deviant *distortions of*? This is a surprisingly unembarrassed example of the naturalist's presumptuous sense of nature as presenting itself in a consistent C-major key. More could be said about the way C has been diagnosed—gently yet *naturalistically*—as schizophrenic, for propounding a world "reduced to the totality of frozen appearances, with all expressive values suspended" (20), this despite whatever one had been led to think was affirmatively expressive (backsliding into uncritical

normalcy again). That one manages to infer non-naturalistic truth in what Merleau-Ponty says is insufficient excuse for his unexamined naturalism.⁴

This is such a complex situation to account for that perhaps another attempt is warranted. Again: Merleau-Ponty is actually so good on the subject of C's work, even in a way in which C himself would probably have applauded, that one hesitates to criticize him right where for once one finds such a strong and sympathetic connection between modern philosophy and modern art. There does, however, seem to be on his part an assumption that naturalism is at work just here, where we thought it had been overcome. He is not merely sophisticated enough not to make the mistake of thinking that C's images are eccentric 'distortions' of natural truth, mere unreformed, business-as-usual 'pictures' in which something has gone wrong in the mundane task of pictorialization. Merleau-Ponty is even willing to take sophisticatedly C's somehow odd-seeming images as gainfully insightful, more profoundly truth-telling than pictures ordinarily are. Precisely so, it seems that Merleau-Ponty is *naturalistic* in (still) taking C's paintings as *reports on the world*, albeit ones which are better than commonplace but which otherwise still function as data reports. Thus when he admires the sophisticated painting-to-world fit, however miraculously accomplished by C, Merleau-Ponty is missing the point that at least the definitive, postimpressionist (which entails 'post-naturalist') work of C is a move away from any 'correspondence theory' of painting as necessarily representing the visible world. This has to be spelled out because one wishes a philosopher as insightfully aware of C as Merleau-Ponty had better understood the *antinaturalism* driving modernism in painting, including all the postimpressionist work of C. Obviously this cannot mean that we don't see well observed views of the landscape along with more freely disposed still lifes: but (and to give credit where due, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology helps make it possible to say this) what we see, we should realize, is already a product of rational, even distinctly analytical thought and in that sense not natural, *a fortiori* naturalistic, at all.

On the other hand, (we) antinaturalist modernists reading Merleau-Ponty on C are likely to overlook something very useful for the perennial problem of the disjunction between observed transparent color-in-light and opaque material color-as-pigment. Merleau-Ponty quite shakes up this problem with the rather startling claim in *The Phenomenology of Perception*: "We must rid ourselves of the illusion, encouraged by physics, that the perceived world is made up of colour qualities. As painters have observed, there are few colours in nature" (305).⁵ But thanks to the physics of color, and because color is all it finally has to work with, painting as such may really be a process of coming up with and putting forth original

compounds of secondary visual qualities—the palette as a keyboard of qualities—with postimpressionism as the modality that finally made something of this. In that sense, Merleau-Ponty, through his phenomenology, perhaps did intimate the crucial importance of color as such, rather than simply of nature as colored, for modern painting. One thing he may mean, then, is that the world stands waiting to be 'read' by sensibilities capable of apprehending it in coloristic terms, and in this there is a lesson in works of such great painters as C, where the world is 'rewritten' in structured conjunctions of secondary visual qualities. That we applaud.

There is, however, an important point which Merleau-Ponty leaves implicit: that despite there being "few colours in nature" there are to be sure *many colors in painting*, so that if and when the imagic world seems meaningfully colored it is because of the painter's investing it with her analytical experience. It is from that investment that we benefit when we derive from painting understanding about the way the world looks to be. The operative analogy is not of painting mirroring nature but perhaps of the painter as a power transformer whose work converts from nature, more specifically, nature as colored, into painting as a very different system of color constitution; and in this respect there is no denying that Merleau-Ponty is perceptive:

There is ... a "logic of lighting" or again a "synthesis of lighting," a compossibility [sic] of the parts of the visual field, which may well be specified in disjunctive propositions, as when the painter tries to justify his work to an art critic, but which is primarily experienced as the consistency of the picture or the reality of the spectacle. What is more, there is a total logic of the picture or the spectacle, a felt coherence of the colours, spatial forms and significance of the object.... The colours of the visual field ... form an ordered system round a dominant which is the lighting taken as a level. We now begin to see a deeper meaning in the organization of a field: it is not only colours, but also geometrical forms, all sense-

4. A forthright metaphysical appeal might be preferable to crypto-naturalism. Compare a statement by the father of abstract painting: in contrast with certain earlier modern painters who had "sought for the 'inner' by way of the 'external,'" Kandinsky writes of C: "By ... [a] road ... more painterly, a great seeker after a new sense of form approached the same problem. [C] made a living thing out of a teacup, or rather, in a teacup he realized the existence of something alive. He raised still life to the point where it ceased to be inanimate. He painted things as he painted human beings, because he was endowed with the gift of divining the internal life in everything. He achieved expressive color and a form that harmonizes this color with [N.B.] an almost mathematical abstraction. A man, a tree, an apple, are not *represented*, but used by [C] in building up a painterly thing called a 'picture.'" Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art and Painting in Particular* (1911), trans. Michael Sadleir, rev. by Francis Goffing, Michael Harrison and Ferdinand Ostertag, *The Documents of Modern Art* (New York: Wittenborn, 1947, repr. 1970), 36.

5. Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), as cited.

data and the significance of objects which go to form a system. Our perception in its entirety is animated by a logic which assigns to each object its determinate features in virtue of those of the rest, and which 'cancel out' as unreal all stray data; it is entirely sustained by the certainty of the world. In this way we finally see the true significance of perceptual constancies. The constancy of colour is only an abstract component of the constancy of things, which in turn is grounded in the primordial constancy of the world as the horizon of all our experiences. It is not, then, because I perceive constant colours beneath the variety of lightings that I believe in the existence of things, nor is the thing a collection of constant characteristics. It is, on the contrary, in so far as my perception is in itself open upon a world and on things that I discover constant colours (*Phenomenology*, 312-13).

Yet note even here, the perhaps all too reassuring reminder of the "constancy of things" however untrustworthily a "constancy of colour" might declare it. Merleau-Ponty's thinking does threaten to collapse back into naturalism, taking the art of C along with it. Even apart from an apparently incorrigibly naturalistic sense of representational content, he allows the (mis)construal of paintings as happenstance objects occurring naturally, part-and-parcel with everything else in the "visual field" and its same old raw, unprocessed light, plus whatever "forms" might be all too literally "spatial." If paintings were just other things that we occasionally ran into when looking around wherever we happened to find ourselves, it must be nonsense to credit them with anything more than we credit all those equally light reflective and absorbing leaves or *even more* space-displacing stones which, when noticed, just so happen to trigger metaphysical thoughts.

It is unfortunate for art when the ontological specialness of artworks is capitalized upon as mere convenient world-ontology, whether by poets or by philosophers. Merleau-Ponty evidently does love C's art, so much so however that one might not suspect him of exploiting it by putting it to work for his own project—as many poets have done by visiting representational paintings for conveniently 'pre-cooked' poetic material. What he is right about with C is mainly a certain kind of meaning in C's work to the extent that it shows C as amateur phenomenological to begin with. Beyond that, Merleau-Ponty can be credited with recognizing color as an analytical, not merely intuitive, affair. One would like to add that he understands that art is not a mirror of nature, but for him as a 'full-time' phenomenologist concerned "finally [to] see the true significance of perceptual constancies," naturalism evidently proves incorrigible.

Especially problematic in the text quoted above is the claim "The constancy of

colour is only an abstract component of the constancy of things, which in turn is grounded in the primordial constancy of the world as the horizon of all our experiences." Unless there were a sense in which the art in question could exceed the horizon of the ordinarily given, this proposition could not hold true of painting, at least not of C's and all subsequent modern painting which follows from it. The very grounds of applicability of the premise "the constancy of colour is only an abstract component of the constancy of things" are undercut in C's postimpressionist work, which quite detaches itself from nature and teaches by example that in painting color is *prior to all else*. For the opaque *pigmental* colors, with all their oddly irrelevant chemical properties, are finally all there is on the defining, ground level of painting; and these are already art-colors and not natural-science colors—not unlike the sounds which are all there is to music, as already deriving from 'artificial' relational ranges (including harmonic systems) and not from natural noise. This also points up the naturalism of Merleau-Ponty's failing to take into account there being not one but two, quite incommensurable, systems of color: that the (Newtonian, 'additive') optical color system pertaining to the play of light in nature is not paralleled by the (Goethean, 'subtractive') color system pertaining to the mixture of oil or any other pigments, except as the artist sees fit to 'convert' or translate between the systems; *and even then only the source system is natural*, and not even a wilfully and successfully 'naturalistic' *artistic* transposition. Color in art is at most *half* natural.

Merleau-Ponty chronically backslides into presumption toward the artist supplying him with matériel so convenient for speculation: as if the God of nature were effectively responsible for whatever C's work so wonderfully shows forth; *as if C were merely to be thanked for inventing a sort of X-ray the better to get at nature with*. Although he conveys a convincing intuitive grasp of much of what is going on in C's work, he is limited by his own principle "The real is to be described not constructed or constituted" (as translated from *The Phenomenology of Perception* by Moran), because the describability of an apple-*motif* in painting, already constituted and constructed by C, is mistaken for some uncannily description-amenable apple not constituted or constructed by (human) art. Moran, who considers Merleau-Ponty's own "outlook" as "*naturalistic*" (emphasis his) for its sense of the cultural realm as embedded in "the natural order," notes how in '[C's] Doubt' Merleau-Ponty "portrays [C] as a phenomenologist of the primordial, visible world, a painter who reveals how the human world is installed within 'inhuman nature.'"⁶

Actually, in the '[C's] Doubt' essay Merleau-Ponty tampers with a fragile source text, a seventeen-year-old recollection of Emile Bernard that is a prime document in the matter

6. Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London: Routledge, 2000), 402-3 (quotation), 403, 405.

of the interplay in painting of sight and cognition (and perhaps design)—of raw, natural input and processed artistic output, one can say. In Merleau-Ponty's version of the account Bernard asks, "But aren't nature and art different?" to which C replies, "I want to make them the same. Art is a personal apperception, which I embody in sensations and which I ask the understanding to organize into a painting."⁷ But between the question and the answer in the source account another question and answer occur, so that, first, the answer to the question of whether art and nature are different, is "Il s'agit des deux," of which one possible reading is that any difference between those terms is not what is at issue, followed in any case by a fresh question: "Then you conceive art as a union of the Universe and the individual?"⁸ This means that the first sentence of C's next answer as transcribed by Merleau-Ponty, "I want to make them the same," said supposedly in reply to a question about distinguishing nature and art, though actually about a subtler distinction between human and, so to say, outside nature, *is a naturalistic caricature wrongly imputed to C*. Hence the second sentence of the same purported reply, "Art is a personal apperception, which I embody in sensations and which I ask the understanding to organize into a painting," while in itself a fair rendering, loses its contextual sense of pressing on with, if anything, an anti-naturalistic thrust. Finding Merleau-Ponty thus *neutralizing an anti-naturalistic* remark of the painter only gives further evidence of an incorrigible tendency towards naturalism on the part of this sympathetic, perceptive and, on his own terms, authentic, philosophical enthusiast of C.

How is the C-viewer to escape a naturalistic reading of his most importantly post-naturalistic work if it continues to be wrongly presumed, with the advertised approval of phenomenology, not only that C's paintings report on nature (possibly better than ever!) but that art itself only retails handy slices of the phenomenological raw material of life in nature. What, for instance, can it mean for Merleau-Ponty to have offered on one and the same page of *The Structure of Behavior* (1942) both that "it seems impossible for us to treat a face or a body, even a dead body, like a thing" and also that "[C] has taught us to see faces as objects?"⁹ Treating a face as an object is surely treating it as a thing. Merleau-Ponty diverges most seriously from what C propounds definitively in his mature, anti-naturalistically postimpressionist work. Aside from some good insights to be gained from Merleau-Ponty, what is dubious (as in the case of Martin Heidegger on van Gogh), is an all too easy resort to painting for getting ontologically in touch with the world by having somebody else—the 'dumb artist'—do the donkey work. The ruling out of such easy resort must be an unacknowledged 'ideological' gain for art and the artist thanks to modernism.

Phenomenology in general has, uniquely among philosophical movements, tended

to celebrate C's work, even to the point of adopting it as kindred in spirit. This has been a mixed blessing for the ultimate repute of C because phenomenologists have proved all too willing to look 'through' C's paintings at whatever they represent of the world, which means taking even antinaturalistic images naturalistically. Almost invariably, it seems, the phenomenologists fail to distinguish the painting's appearance on their way to such a convenient form of pre-intensified natural appearance.¹⁰

What Merleau-Ponty says about form often indeed indicates an incorrigible, if otherwise sympathetic, naturalism. He likes the conventionality of orthodox pictorial representation, whereby, for example, the artist will represent the more distant as smaller. But the images C has constituted afresh out of his colors must look like deformations according to conventional standards: e.g., blocky, solidly prismatic farmhouses in quasi-Byzantine inverted perspective—and for good new anti-naturalistic reason! For such things really only make sense as elements in a comprehensive construction. Merleau-Ponty is an inspiring thinker himself inspired by C; but unless the crypto-naturalism in his vision of C is criticized, the artistic prime mover in the inspirational matter is patronized like an idiot savant.

Undoubtedly the rigorous observational demands of impressionism had first exercised C in taking charge of his painting as something being brought into being through his eye and brain and under his hand. However spontaneous and unredacted the impressionist image might be at any stage of its rendition, one could surely not find oneself painting it

7. Merleau-Ponty, 'Cézanne's Doubt,' here 13.

8. Emile Bernard, 'Une conversation avec Cézanne,' in his *Souvenirs sur Paul Cézanne: Une conversation avec Cézanne; La méthode de Cézanne* (Paris: Michel, 1926), 98-135, here 99.

9. Direct and indirect quotations, respectively, from Moran, *Introduction*, 415.

10. Forrest Williams, 'Cézanne and French Phenomenology,' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 12 (1953-4), 481-92, salutes the supposed classicism (492) of C's anti-impressionism, especially in respect to Husserl; yet C gets no credit as progenitor of structures, and Williams' call "*Zu den Sachen selbst*" (487) does not even apply to his paintings as such. Where Williams refers to Fry's *Cézanne* on C's achieving "the acceptance and final assimilation of appearances" over and against "willed and a priori inventions of the ego" (485-6), he quotes out of a context where the immediately previous sentence asserts rather less phenomenologically C's having achieved "his early dream of a picture not only controlled but inspired by the necessities of the spirit, ... which owes nothing to the data of any actual vision"; Roger Fry, *Cézanne: A Study of His Development*, 1st ed. 1927 (New York: Noonday, 1958), 77. Galen A. Johnson, 'Merleau-Ponty's Early Aesthetics of Historical Being: The Case of Cézanne,' *Research in Phenomenology* 17 (1987), 211-35, treats Merleau-Ponty's C-ism as based on a Husserl who believed that painting had no real history because paintings "have no texts" (221); perhaps there is no better evidence of taking C all too transparently and for granted. Stimulating now is Véronique M. Föti, 'The Dimension of Color,' *International Studies in Philosophy* 22 (1990), 13-28, criticizing Merleau-Ponty for "slight[ing]" in C's work "the lawlike and to some extent mathematically expressible traits which characterize not only the physical infrastructure of color but also its phenomenal manifestations, preferring an almost mystical discourse ..." (24): "he neglects ... what [Johannes] Itten called '[C]'s logically derived color construction' resting upon 'formal and chromatic principles'" (25).

without thinking about how so many momentary observations, registered notationally in disjunct color daubs, might somehow be advancing the conviction of a pictorial whole. But what must have been positively disturbing of conventional expectation would have been seemingly extreme deformations as perpetrated by this particular impressionist earlier on, dead set as he must have seemed on rubbing in what seemed 'perceptually' to be the case (the oval penny) rather than whatever one thought one knew 'conceptually' to be the case (the circular penny). Thus as radical naturalist C had presented roads like apparently twisted ramps with inconsistently convergent if not contradictory sides in his early-to-high impressionist landscapes: e.g., *The Wine Depot Seen from the Rue de Jussieu* (V. 56; C. 26), 1872; *The House of the Hanged Man in Auvers-sur-Oise* (V. 133; C. 30), 1873 (Paris, Musée d'Orsay); *Mountains in Provence (near L'Estaque?)* (V. 490; C. 56), c. 1879; and especially the lurching shift and wavering borders of *Turn in the Road* (V. 329; C. 76), c. 1881 (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts).¹¹ Even where Merleau-Ponty may accommodate such seeming 'distortion,' he seems unable to credit C's work, which he insists on using merely descriptively: "When I look at a road which sweeps before me towards the horizon, I must not say either that the sides of the road are given to me as convergent or that they are given to me as parallel: they are parallel in depth. The perspective appearance is not posited, but neither is the parallelism. *I am engrossed in the road itself*, and I cling to it through its virtual distortion, and depth is this intention itself which posits neither the perspective projection of the road nor the 'real' road" (261).

So, inspired though he is by C's works, but finally too preoccupied with the "real" "things" to which they lead him back, Merleau-Ponty inadvertently confirms how, if the fluctuating particulars of appearance that so concerned the impressionist painter matter little compared with a sense of how things 'really are,' one might as well paint in the studio, even when working on landscapes. Returning, then, to the question of how, after a stint of orthodox impressionism, with its commitment to radical *plein-airisme*, C can have come to find plausible a newly specialized role for painting indoors, in the studio: By this is meant that first, under impressionism, the studio was considered the place where false naturalism was all too likely to be concocted, and so C made such a point of pursuing nature in the full immediacy of the open air (even heroically in sweltering heat); when subsequently return to the studio was possible on a more analytical basis, instead of a site of concocted illusion it became the site of production of a different sort of contrivance: of structural experimentation through synthesis of color effect.

From any number of possible landscape comparisons I adduce two works that are

not only views of the same site but which offer virtually superimposably equivalent compositions yet differ significantly in regard to the development of impressionism: *Landscape; Study after Nature (The Sea at L'Estaque)*, of 1876 (V. 168; C. 44; Zurich, Fondation Rau pour le Tiers-Monde), and *The Bay of L'Estaque from the East*, c. 1878-82 (V. 408; C. 54; University of Rochester [N.Y.]). The former image is built up in the typical impressionist manner of impulsive wisps of color breezily darting about and constituting a vibrating luminosity, while the landscape is so firmly presumed as natural that even a rising sequence of architectural elements does not overbear a flickering foliage of sun-dappled leaves and blossoms. In the second work, however—begun around the same time but not likely finished until well into the next decade—the structural character of the whole takes its cue from the firmly stepped placement of basically the same architectural elements into the hilly site, these now more distinctly ordered, like the first three notes of a scale, with rosy tiled roofs presenting themselves as planes positioned geometrically in space. True, the zigzagging of a slim tree trunk at far right in the earlier image has design appeal in the surface, but as a little cadenza whereas the equivalent element of the later composition is cut back to a small angle whose legs however affiliate more categorically with a corps of percussive tree trunks. Seen in what one might have supposed an only slightly different manner, the whole immediate site, and to some extent the distant surface of the bay as well (if not the sky), has acquired in the second image the character of an opaque solution out of which the architectural masses have 'grown' like crystals in a daylight that seems more like a steady industrial arc light than a luminous atmospheric ambience. In every way, the latter work is less a transcription of ephemeral sensation than a calculated construction.

Without knowing for a fact that the second painting was worked on in the studio, one can say that it might as well have been, and not disadvantageously: any loss to impressionist naturalism must here be counted a gain for postimpressionist abstraction (in the sense of a process of abstracting), as, if anything, an art for art's sake quite instead of an art for nature's sake. Even though this is a case of two landscapes based on empirical experience, the second of the two paintings bespeaks the detachment of studio work so often evident in still life and has the experience of the first work as much as built into it.

Certainly the studio had a role in furthering C's essentially postimpressionist critique of impressionist phenomenal naturalism, however 'radical' that naturalism might be. Outdoor practice was contingent on the weather, even somberly stable indoor still lifes painted

11. The works discussed in this chapter illus. as numbered in the three catalogues: Venturi's (V) and Rewald's (R) catalogues raisonnés and Cachin and Rishel's 1995 Philadelphia exhibition catalogue (C).

in the studio might have been undertaken because of the weather outside. Such a simple factor will not diminish the importance of C's deepset want to "make something more solid and enduring out of impressionism, like the art of the museums," which of course could be done indoors as well as out, or for that matter even in the Louvre. In the revision of impressionism, the transcending of impressionism's commitment to contingent appearances, eventually extended to taking a certain entire little mountain over and over again in almost the same view, as a great stable still-life-like object of study, seen in many cases, as already suggested in the same view out the painter's purpose-built studio window and thus in extension of studio practice. (Conversely, even though eventual abstract or nonobjective painting, which impressionism and postimpressionism made possible, has never had special need of natural light, the abstract or nonobjective painter may still want the daylight spectrum, even if working indoors under a skylight, for 'true' full-spectrum color, even after dispensing with phenomenal objects taken as 'subject-matter'.)

Still people wonder why C was content in that box of a place with the same few things to rearrange and ever re-paint. Perhaps we should try to see painting *en plein air* not as an approach to nature as sacrosanct motif, like some V. I. P. sitting for a state portrait, but as field study, not so divorced after all from analytical investigations pursued in the 'lab.' The term 'studio,' which is simply Italian for a 'study,' implies a closed place of resort for thinking. Of course, C had already abandoned the studio, at least as a hideout for projecting naturalistic fictions, in order to encounter truer, unmediated impressions dealing directly with nature *en plein air*. His 'return' to the studio, 'back' as it were from the out-of-doors, was informed by his experience of impressionism as the radical finale of previous naturalism and the beginning of the special postimpressionist, objective but conceptualizing detachment of more analytical than descriptive science. For what is reformed about C's mature, definitive still-life production is a forthright structurality constituted out of precisely analyzed discriminations of color and color relations. Given the foregrounding of the analysis and constructive synthesis entailed, such should hardly be considered naturalism.

2. *How in studio painting C developed an 'algebraic' constitution of structure, especially through quantitative deployment of color.*

C's still lifes were dependent on his adroit experimental manipulation of their tabletop arrangements as 'props'—colloquial for 'properties'—in what artists call the 'set-up,' quite before any question of colors in light, natural or for that matter artificial, would arise.¹²

In respect to their tabletop arrangement in the studio, one might have assembled apples, say, in considered 'compositional' positions, though even where C's resultant configurations may be said to take the forms of geometric figures, planar or 'solid,' these do not seem to be obliging geometric schemata—certainly not the notorious cylinder, sphere and cone—but rather to be built up like clusters of units crystallizing, as it were, into *Gestalten*. And often enough in the still lifes it seems that what proves to constitute the structure are relations between quantities of color constituents. The patterns of related elements can be surprisingly 'abstract' in consisting of mathematical relations between quantities, such as a number of green apples in relation to a number of red ones, as will be seen. Of course, the studio was the perfect site for such lab-like projects in rigorously calculated image construction.

Braced, now, against the residual naturalism even of his strongest philosophical advocacy, we can come to terms with what C was aesthetically affirming when turning away from nature, especially from painting *en plein air*, in his markedly hermetic resort to the studio—especially his purpose-built late studio, on the outskirts of the town (Aix-en-Provence)—to concentrate ever so cerebrally on still life in particular. Such resort was by definition a critique of the impressionist approach to painting, though not of landscape as such; and the results would have to be more abstract, in the sense of detached from nature, even anti-impressionistically conceptual, as against perceptual, in thrust. In this, color, which in impressionism had been representationally ancillary to pure but still very natural *light*, would for once not be playing second fiddle to anything more primary as a property than itself, especially not to line as rational, extension-defining outline (in the orthodox academic-classical conception wherein color was always subordinate as mere emotional consort). Now, color, in color *relations*, might even *generate* form.¹³

The present account is by no means the first modernist reading to emphasize that C ordains for color a primary, form-engendering role; but such has usually concerned the

12. The term 'prop,' more familiar in the context of theater, holds philosophical interest. While what is usually expected of an Edwardian side chair on stage is more or less whatever is typically expected of an Edwardian side chair in the ordinary world, on stage the chair's stylistic Edwardianness will be even more 'primary' than its being made of ordinarily correct material with its correct 'extension.' Prop objects are sought only for their relevant properties, however secondary these might normally be, including stylistic, hence formal, properties, so long as these not be contradicted by irrelevant accidental properties, no matter how ordinarily 'primary.' Notwithstanding phenomenology, C might conceivably have painted still lifes from wax fruit.

13. C's avoidance of a continuous defining outline for forms, a familiar theme of connoisseurship, has a rich critical literature. Important in the matter is his own condemnation (in the very letter in which he famously promises "truth in painting"), of "circumscrib[ing] outlines with black, an error that must be strongly combatted" (23 x 1905; L 313). In the c. 1877-78 *Still Life with Apples* soon to be discussed below, the irregular black intervals between fruits are not lines drawn around the forms; on the contrary, regardless of whether they ever were lines, they are painted *up to and over*.

single form—the conviction of the single apple as built up ‘plastically’ out of C’s ‘*petites sensations*’ (his term) made manifest in carefully calibrated color patches. Suggested instead is that even in regard to compositional geometry (standardly presumed to belong to the purview of line quite instead of color) C develops a new sort of structure in which even regular geometric forms (but not only) are constituted as patterns of similarity and differentiation in color relations—quantitative even in the modern logical sense of distinctions between ‘none,’ ‘some,’ ‘all’—between the elements of, probably most definitively but not only, a still-life image. These structures can be considered ‘algebraic’ in that they consist of equational relations of numerical quantities, whether or not they further constitute standard geometric forms. As constellations of color incidents alone, they have a primacy that no pseudo-apriori, imposed geometric form to which C has all too often been supposed to have bent his compositions, could rightly claim. Thus the lucid, virtually algebraic structure of affiliated elements in C’s mature still-life painting was a great sophistication only possible in the studio, and necessarily a negation of (once radical) *plein-air* naturalism.

There is more to say about what C was doing in retreating from plein-air to studio work of an often enough specifiably algebraic structure. Some of the resultant still-life ‘equations’ look dumbfoundingly simple until one realizes how, to give a good typical example (*viz.*, *The Apples* [V. 501, 1885-7, rev. to 1883-6; R. 673, 1889-90]), four larger apples piled in a tidy grocer’s pyramid on a plate at the left ‘equate’ with five smaller fruits likewise piled but decidedly *not* upon a plate to the right.¹⁴ Before even considering the important question of color quantification: all such compositions generally imply something more categorically conceptual than the usual lively impressionist opticality: they clearly appeal to a newly ‘abstract,’ in the sense of virtually mathematically constituted, sense of constellated elements. These elements are somehow balanced, as they would differently be in traditional academic compositions, but now as counters in a logico-mathematical pattern, which may but need not take regular geometric form. If this sounds like a tall order, the new way of thinking appears in ‘experiments’ of once startling simplicity, such as the still life just mentioned, which could be adequately accounted for with simple linear notation. Let ‘A’ stand for *larger fruits which are definably apples*, ‘f’ for *smaller fruits that may or may not be apples*, parentheses for *stacking*, and underlining for an *underlying plate*, and the present arrangement can be adequately expressed thusly: (A A A A) = (f f f f f). In case this still does not seem sufficiently numerical to be described as algebraic, let us rewrite it as 4(A) = 5(f), or better, 4A = 5f. The point is that in the still life in question the compositional structure of elements has a strong *algebraic* conviction, rather than simply the geometric formality usually invoked—as here in terms of two

little pyramids of fruit side by side. Thus in a descriptably algebraic way C’s studio painting is considerably more abstract than would be supposed.¹⁵

C’s algebraic ‘equations’ are subtle and all the more impressive for being challengingly complex yet nonetheless cogent. A fine example of a ‘laboratory’ (almost dissecting-table) still-life study by C, rendering up a decidedly more cognitive than merely sense-perceptual object for, let us say, the spectator’s intellectual delight, is the little *Still Life with Apples* (or simply *Apples*) (V. 190; C. 49), of c. 1877-78, in the Fitzwilliam Museum, at Cambridge, which came into being at just the point where C’s impressionist experience was bringing forth something profoundly new. In the austere brilliant little painting—which, it happens, formerly belonged to the great and mathematically-minded economist John Maynard Keynes—a group of seven apples appears in two horizontal registers, one above the other, on a tabletop—on and *against* it, and ‘upon’ the flat pictorial field even as against a ground with no visible edges of its own (nor, thus any ‘horizon’).¹⁶

One might have taken this image, offhand, as a naturalistic presentation of apples

14. In C’s mature production such distributions have a typically astute accomplishment without seeming commonplace, like particular solutions one has seen before. Here, *The Apples* (private coll.) has further, particular features of the kind—e.g., a further pair of two small fruits, one above the other, parted by the righthand edge and further equating, as small but split and vertically twinned, with the two large and independent ‘apex’ apples of the respective pyramids cutting the horizon of the tabletop. Whatever complexity these and any further equational particulars might supply, one infers the composition in question will be only the more thoroughly algebraic.

15. In a classic theoretical text of early formalism, *The Problem of Form in the Fine Arts* (1893), Adolf von Hildebrand turns to algebra apropos of the relational co-presence of magnitudes in composition: “As in algebra, where numerical values are abstracted and value is expressed only in the relationship between *a* and *b*, so in painting, all real dimensions are turned into relational values that are meaningful only to the eye of the beholder”; *Das Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst* (Strassbourg, 1893), 22, as quoted by Max Imdahl, ‘Delaunay’s Position in History,’ in Gustav Vriesen and Max Imdahl, *Robert Delaunay: Light and Color*, trans. Maria Pelikan (New York: Abrams, 1967), 70-87, here 72, 74. Kant must have liked the symbolic, one might even say, ‘nonobjective’ abstraction of algebraic form: in the *First Critique*, after stating that “in algebra by means of a symbolic construction, just as in geometry by means of an ostensive construction (the geometrical construction of the objects themselves), we succeed in arriving at results which discursive knowledge could never have reached by means of mere concepts” (A717/B745), he affirms that algebra is symbolically “constructive” instead of geometrical (A734/B762). In the *Third Critique* he distinguishes “algebraic” and “mimetic” visible signs as differently though both non-verbally expressing concepts (Ak. 352). Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1956), 579, 590; idem, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. and ed. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 227.

16. Virginia Woolf was impressed by the painting’s color relations when Keynes brought it back from Paris in 1918: she described it excitedly in her diary, mis-remembering the seven apples as six but still struck by “their relationship to each other, and their colour, and their solidity”; Frances Spalding, *Roger Fry: Art and Life* (Norwich, Eng.: Black Dog, 1999), 204. Keynes (who promoted modern art and sometimes wrote about it, though not very well) had requested state funds for a committee to purchase works of art for the National Gallery from the sale of Degas’ collection, and because the director of the gallery was ill disposed toward C, Keynes bought the little still life for himself.

differing irregularly in color, perhaps in this case underwritten by the vaguely linear idea of a ripening sequence (here right-to-left) from green to yellow to red. First, there is geometric structure: an implicit square of four apples to the left and a right isosceles triangle of three apples to the right. Yet there is a still more abstract orderliness, for there is also a more complex algebraic structure. Again and again one can count two pairs and a triplet in surprisingly various combinations, depending for instance on whether the second, third and fourth apples of the top row are taken as a uniquely possible red-yellow-green triplet, leaving (when they are) a vertical pair of the first apples in the top and bottom rows as the two reddest and two horizontal but asymmetrically 'syncopated' horizontal pairs of the only two green units, above, with the two yellowest reds, below.

Other affiliations, positive and negative, can also be picked out among the seven apples. If one prefers to 'cancel out' yellow as the only color of the three in play that is common to all the apples, then *one* (green-marked) apple can be taken to stand alone, the only unit unincorporated in a vertical pair, while two (red-marked) apples very much fuse vertically (also, two apples may be unmarked by indentations, and if so, one belongs to the red party and the other to the green); *three* (reds) constitute the bottom row, while a different triad defines the triangle at the right, and four (2 reds + 2 greens) constitute the top row, while a different quartet defines the square at the left; and so on. The composition, which at first blush might not even look like a composition, let alone an artful one, but more the way things are just simply *laying around* like so many crates on a loading dock, proves on analysis—and so beautifully attuned to analytic regard at that—to be a dense complex of quantitative numerical equivalencies in overlapping algebraic relations.

Possibly no better example could be offered of what is here considered as a structure of algebraic exchanges of color quantities, instead of reliance on geometric structure; it brings forth a promise, but also already a conviction, of visible 'abstraction.' Not that we cannot find geometry here, for again we readily read a square of four apples at the left adjacent to a triangle of three apples at right. But we will not rest content with such weak appeal to thought once the same structure provokes an awareness of number on simple arithmetic terms but inviting us on into potentially complex algebraic exchanges, the larger lesson for incipient modern art being the non-physical yet 'objective' reality of abstract relations. As to arithmetic number, there are many ways in which singularity, duality and plurality can be factored in C's hardly random cluster of apples, such as taking the 'triangle' at right as a *one* and a *two* that together make *three*, this then associated with the supposedly solid *four* to the left—that on second thought proving oddly prepared to split into two vertical

pairs and thereby allowing of a further cluster of *five* at right (there is even a way to count a six against one, filling out the sequence by totalling seven, but, typically, C does not seem to want it to be so obviously conclusive). As more generally regarding algebraic exchange in alternative distributions of the same apples, depending on how they be tallied as to color incidence: the modern logician Frege considers in his *Foundations of Arithmetic* (1884) how, though arithmetic is non-sensorial in character, without mental images, number, like color, has a curious immaterial *objectivity*: stimulated by Berkeley on how "the mind variously combines its ideas," while criticizing J. S. Mill, Frege points up that "two apples are physically different from three apples, ... a different visible and tangible phenomenon," even though "their twoness or threeness" is not "something physical."¹⁷

Again, what seems so algebraic is the way the same given cluster of apple forms can be counted in alternative sub-sets, like variously opposed numerical terms of alternative equations, forgetting the specific apples and attending more abstractly to the numerical relations. This decidedly abstract way of thinking may be in some measure confirmed by Keynes's known insistence that a certain contemporary economist was mistaken to fill out his models with concrete values, "wanting to be realistic and by being unnecessarily ashamed of lean and abstract outlines." No; economics was "a branch of logic": its models might require successive refinement, but, as Keynes wrote after looking at this painting for twenty years, it is "of the essence" of such a model "that one does *not* fill in real values for the variable functions. To do so would make it useless as a model. For as soon as this is done, the model loses its generality and its value as a mode of thought." Quite differently from the natural sciences, where experimentation is expected to yield "actual values" in concrete conditions, in economics—but perhaps also in this painting—"to convert a model into a [specific] quantitative formula is to destroy its usefulness as an instrument of thought."¹⁸

It would be difficult to imagine a representational painting having less to do with working *en plein air* than this little algebraic laboratory study, which one might be excused for inferring was a semi-organized cluster of botanical specimens awaiting comparison as to variations in color. This is an excellent but non-eccentric example of C's typically rationally disposed still-life compositions, which testify to his resort for good reason to the studio, where

17. Gottlob Frege, *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, trans. J. L. Austin, 2nd rev. ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), §25, pp. 32-33.

18. John Maynard Keynes, *Collected Writings*, 14, *The General Theory and After: Pt. I: Defence and Development*, ed. D. Moggridge (London, 1973); letters to R. F. Harrod, 296-97 (4 vii 1938), 299 (16 vii 1938). Keynes might have known that in the XVIII century the internal constitution of a paintings overall effect comprised its 'oconomie de tout ensemble.'

the effecting of such subtly structural images could take place under controlled conditions, here with a clear shift from impressionist light-centered, *plein-air* naturalism to more abstract, mathematical postimpressionist studio work. What is so insistently telling in this case is the ordering of the composition as even more algebraic than geometric in its structure.¹⁹

Now while highly developed structure as a function of color deployment is evident in all categories of C's painting, his still lifes do hold special modern interest (quite regardless of still life's humble rank in the old academic classical hierarchy of subject-matters) as the category of representation in which structural relations are at the artist's free disposition. True, there was some latitude in the posing of limbs and combining of figures in figure painting. Even with stable landscape motifs there were selective possibilities; for C was well aware of the unlimited potential for varying one's sights on a stable motif: "the same subject seen from a different angle offers a subject of the most compelling interest, and so varied that I believe I could work away for months without changing position but just by leaning a little to the right and then a little to the left" (8 ix 1906; L 322). The fact remains, still life is the category in which we can best observe, close in, C's intimate mathematics, as it were, of free composition. Marvelous as the little Fitzwilliam painting is in the visible logic of its structurality as effected through the algebraic deployment of color differentiation, further examples can substantiate the broader claim of 'equationally' algebraic structure.

At just about the time of the Fitzwilliam *Still Life with Apples* C also painted *The Buffet* (V. 208, 1873-7; R. 338, 1877-9), now in the Szépművészeti Múzeum, of Budapest. This work takes so much more the long view, in particular of a buffet with shelf, as to make its sets of still-life elements seem at first incidental, at least after scrutinizing the small first work so closely. With a triad of yellow apples single red and green apples have been added, or, better, affiliated, one to the left and one behind, with something a bit more than another triad of less categorically red and yellow apples nestled less pertinently off to the righthand side behind a stack of biscuits. Looking for algebraic structure, one finds something of the kind in a two-tiered parallelism between an apple 'triad plus two ones,' below, and items on the shelf above. Two cups-and-saucers, white, with one white covered vessel make a one-plus-two or even $(1 + 1) + (1 + 1) + 1$ triad of light (white) against dark (brown) objects, with evenly spaced elements on the shelf above answering the all-apple complex set up only somewhat more casually against the rumpled white tablecloth below. A single apple above might seem an irrelevant stray, except that its forward-as-downward placement on the very edge of the shelf affiliates it with one peculiarly large red apple, almost in line with it, on the table.

The sense of such structuring by quantified color relations as algebraic, often as if

in little equations, is strengthened where a watercolor less replete as to pigmental color testifies to the process of building up not merely individual forms but 'equational' algebraic structure. Thus in a work of circa 1888-90, *Ginger Jar and Fruit on a Table*,²⁰ C is seen effecting the most scrupulously calibrated bestowal of watery, almost sedimentary coloristic fullness in its three most up-front fruits, all in a line, left to right, and sequenced 'quantitatively' as to size, i.e., small, medium and large, so that $S : M = M : L$. This helps, by comparison, to render distinct the more complex and elaborated, but no less deliberated, structure of *The Kitchen Table* (V. 594, R. 636; 1888-90; Paris, Musée d'Orsay), of the same time. One can compare the first, centre and righthand fruits—likewise small, medium and large—of both compositions, which both in fact involve the same tabletop, same ginger jar and, indeed, fruits so similar that the unfinished but already structurally adequate and structurally sound watercolor composition must have been either a study for the oil painting or an analytic reflection on its structure.

C sometimes produced compositions by a kind of structural twinning, which is also numerical and amenable to algebraic equation. In the wonderful 1889 still life known as *The Blue Vase* (V. 512, R. 675), also in the Musée d'Orsay, a circular plate is seen as stretched to either side and split down the centre, into two, by a vase that occludes it. Concentrating on the split plate in this way—just the kind of thing that early viewers with strong naturalist prejudices would have thought hopelessly inept—is supported by a sense that not only twinings of 'similar' but pairings of 'differents' are well under way in the rest of the painting. Two fruits at the right are only the most obvious pair, with the reddest, supposedly stray, third apple sidling up to the blue vase as its opposite in height and color. Then too there is an understated affiliation of a reddish-brown raffia-bound wine bottle bleeding off the lefthand edge of the composition with the yellowish jamb of perhaps a doorway at the right.

A case so obvious that it would seem almost impertinent to explain away such a beautiful thing's algebraically mathematical form, is the small canvas called *Large Apples*, 1885-87 (V. 502), in the Metropolitan Museum, in New York, where the color structure practically illustrates basic mathematical moves with respect to the number two. Two small green fruits (pears?) are set diagonally in a quartet with two medium-sized yellow apples on

19. While no one statement of C's known to me invokes the term algebra, a perhaps corroborating fact, given the importance of C for the cubists-to-be, is the remark of Maurice Raynal, himself a C enthusiast, in a catalogue preface in 1912: "the cubist painters will soon have created the algebra of painting"; trans. Jonathan Griffin in Edward F. Fry, ed., *Cubism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 92.

20. Illus., John Rewald, *Paul Cézanne: The Watercolors; a Catalogue Raisonné* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1983) cat. 289.

the lefthand side of the image; and this quartet is equated algebraically with four red apples, three large plus one medium-sized, of which two large are behind on a plate, and the other with the medium-sized apple up front and off it—all with a diagonal drift towards the left that produces a leaning quadrilateral. Obviously the verbal account cannot do full justice to the rich structural complexity of similarities and differences implicit in this extremely lucid composition (including binary differentiations single / paired; on plate / off plate; fore / aft), which extends even to the supporting table and its (also skewed) setting in its spatio-structural context. It does however show how the elements, quantified as to color, are calculatedly inter-affiliated in their placements, as much as to say, how they may be taken algebraically.

Finally, with two related later still lifes, a quasi-mathematical deployment of color is even more apparent than in the watercolor *Ginger Jar* and *The Kitchen Table*. For the finished composition of the *Plaster Cupid* (V. 707, R. 782), of 1894-95, in the Stockholm National Museum, could be seen as a new starting point—as for wine into brandy—for the amazingly richer yet altogether concise structural articulation of the *Still Life with Plaster Cupid* (V. 706, R. 786), circa 1895, in the Courtauld Institute of Art collection at Somerset House, London. Ignoring other interesting differences which do not concern color or quantification, it can be noted that in the first work C's usual apples couldn't be more simply divided into two categories: to the lower left, a stack of differently sized red-and-yellow apples plus one green apple, as if to compensate for or to equalize one odd yellow pear atop the heap; and on the same up-turned (and counter-perspectival) tabletop to the lower right, a rolly cluster of four loose pairs of almost identical red-and-yellow apples: already a nice C-style opposition between a controlled jumble and a free but all the more orderly array. The later Courtauld still life, however, develops such thinking further, establishing an understated but strong trapezium—actually the only complete and uninterrupted quadrilateral in the surface design of this image jammed with parts of rectangles seen askew in space—this figure staked out by *one* green apple (upper-right) diagonally opposed to a *triad* of another green plus two red-and-yellow apples (lower-left), and one *pair* of red-and-yellow apples (middle left) diagonally opposed to a fourth and last *pair* so typical of C in its enrichment of similarity and difference in the configuration: one red-and-yellow apple together with one red *onion*.

These are some of the many works of C that testify to a structure built up, not by 'dressing' forms of geometry out in colors, as many accounts have it, but in what are in many prominent cases evidently more algebraic structures of affiliated and equated color elements. Not that the structural function of C's color in itself, even in reciprocal interrelations, has never been noticed before, though the simpler and more manageable cylinder-sphere-cone trope

has held the field. The poet Rilke, in a series of letters to his wife Clara about C, stresses the utter "objectivity" of C's painting as constituted of "sheer color" (18 x 1907). Before his work, it strikes Rilke: "never before has it been demonstrated to what extent painting goes on of its own accord among the colours, how much they must be left entirely alone to explain each other. Their intercourse between themselves: that is the essence of painting' (21 x 1907). "Everything," Rilke reiterates, "has become an affair of the colours among themselves ... *The interior of the picture pulsates with this balance of various and reciprocal influence ...*" (22 x 1907; 161).²¹

Despite ultra-empirical impressionist *plein-airisme*, even landscapes by C, though obviously not as freely composed as still lifes, often have something of the character of his more cerebral tabletop still lifes. The same C who despised the grosser incursions on the countryside of modern industrial culture can be found according such intrusions as a bridge or railway viaduct (not merely a modest farmhouse) equal 'equational' standing with natural objects such as a mountain or the branch of a pine. Clearly the laboratory-like control of painting in the studio allowed C to develop his driven sense of a "logic of organized sensations" (his fine phrase) in constructing what may be considered an algebraic—over and against the conventional 'geometric' understanding—color structure. Thus, of the factors which would have encouraged C to persist in believing (or to resume believing) that there was still a role (or a new role) for 'studio art' after impressionism, most important would have been a definite new postimpressionist, and necessarily *anti*-impressionist, emphasis on painting, and especially still life, as a matter of abstractly 'algebraic' construction.

Analysis of the postimpressionist still lifes as thusly employing quantitative algebraic structure deepens the import of two often quoted theoretical comments by C. First, all devotees of C know a pronouncement from the 'Opinions' of the master reckoned by Emile Bernard in 1904, though not necessarily in its full implications: "One should not speak of modeling; one should speak of *modulating*" (D 36; emphasis in original).²² Now we can see how this entails a rejection of color modification in the service of conventional illusionistic shape-rounding, yes, but very possibly as rather assertively on behalf of a conception of the image as built up out of quantified affiliations and distinctions—the nuances entailed in

21. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Selected Letters 1902-1926*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: Quartet, 1988), 156, 158, 161 (emphasis added). Rilke's epistolary remarks on C are known to have influenced the phenomenologically inclined art historian Kurt Badt as well as Heidegger.

22. See Lawrence Gowing, 'The Logic of Organized Sensations,' in William Rubin, ed., *Cézanne: The Late Work* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1977), 55-71, esp. 57-8; for insightful speculation on C's sense of modulation versus modeling: Joyce Medina, *Cézanne and Modernism: The Poetics of Painting* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 99-106.

modulation, including musical.

Then only a few days before his death, there is the remark made to his son in which C says, in effect, that he has long been concerned with effecting *artistic constructs* only indirectly beholden to nature. The almost testamental statement includes the confession that he hardly has any choice about absolutely needing to work from nature, only to follow up, as if he thereby obsessively earns the right, with one of his most critically antinaturalistic pronouncements: "Any sketches I would do would have to be constructions [from nature] (*des constructions d'après [nature]*) based on the means, feelings and approaches suggested by the model (*basées sur les moyens, les sensations et les développements suggérés par le modèle*). But I am always saying the same thing" (13 x 1906; L 327-8). Postimpressionist art finally over and against impressionist nature.

VI. THE TRUTH OF ART

1 How the problem of truth in art pertains to C's work; 2 C's coherence account of "truth in painting"; 3 Historio-critical notes on the artistic reception of C; 4 Wider ramifications of C's project for aesthetics.

C's project reveals itself on analysis as an important challenge to the implicit or presumed correspondence-theory orientation of conventional thought on art and as the advance of an artistic truth of structural coherence that was vital to the subsequent development of abstract or nonobjective painting—which by definition has nothing to correspond representationally *to*. Somehow what the "truth in painting" which the work of C advanced and of which he came rather cryptically to speak entailed, was that a painting is not necessarily a resembling representation of something else, namely nature (—certainly not a 'mirror'), but really a directly and fully apprehensible thing-in-itself. There is good reason why the greatest artists and critics of the twentieth century respected and celebrated the singular contribution of C as a contribution of the greatest intellectual consequence. What they after all honored was not just his contributing some more lovely things to the world, or some new sort of loveliness that first looked shockingly unlovely, to painting; but his managing to 'realize' the painting as end, or even thing, in itself. After C, abstract art might seem to have been almost inevitable.

1. *How the problem of truth in art pertains to C's work.*

To enquire responsibly into how C might have construed 'truth in art,' first in early maturity as an impressionist and then later more problematically as a postimpressionist, will require some working sense of what artistic truth should be expected to be. Certainly an impressionist painter such as C in the 1870s, could have defined truth in art as faithfulness to an adequately replete impression *of* nature, that is, a faithful rendering of the complex of sensations registered in purely visually attending to some particular 'corner' of nature—with responsibility for conveying with vividness such unalloyed sensations. Just what should this faithfulness have meant? First, an obligation of faithfulness might be said to saddle the impressionist C, though not necessarily the later C, with a notion of artistic truth along the lines of a correspondence theory of truth, in common with naturalism at large, which always and everywhere purports to defer to the way nature just naturally is. And not without evidence: in the same 1866 letter to Zola in which C said he "must resolve to paint only out of doors," he further writes that now it even seems that the would-be *plein-air* "pictures of the old masters" look downright phony—"done by tricks"—for lacking the veracity of report: "for to me none of them have the true and, above all, original look nature alone can give" (19 x 1866; L 116).

From all the evidence, it is safe to say that the (still) standing presumption of artistic truth on a correspondence theory, *vis-à-vis* nature, was tacitly endorsed by C through his impressionist phase: by this is meant that a work of art, presumably representational (that is part of the problem), harbors pictorial elements A', B', C', etc., that correspond, one-to-one, with real-world entities A, B, C, etc., and that the truth of the work is the closeness and adequacy of such correspondence between the respective entities, each particular 'thing' (A) and its equivalent in representation (A'). As C told Pissarro, speaking of his attempt to explain to the local, Aix museum director the worthwhileness of his impressionist mentor's analytically "replacing a model with studies in tonalities" with the rationalization: "I was trying to make him understand by reference to nature" (24 vi 1874; L 147). But in that case he was talking down; for he was either already aware or soon would be, of feeling a certain distancing from nature. He tells Zola that a painting has probably been rejected by the Salon "because of my point of departure, which is too far removed from the end in view, that is, the representation of nature" (8 v 1878; L 166); also to the naturalist writer: "I am still trying to contrive some way to find my way, pictorially. Nature presents the greatest problems for me" (24 ix 1879; L 184). Although C would have shrunk from its full recognition out of practically chivalrous respect for the honor of 'Creation,' this distancing comes to undermine the implicit correspondence theory of truth, which after a phase of uncertainty such as is conveyed in the last quotation, seems to be

replaced by an implicit coherence theory. Spelled out, this might have disappointed or plausibly shocked C, who was famously frustrated and dissatisfied with his own 'realizations' on any lookalike basis. As for a possible artistic truth of *convention* (the other of the three rival theories), it goes almost without saying that, in the West European circumstances given in C's case the principal governing convention *was* just that standard of naturalistic correspondence that his work and that of the other great postimpressionists would finally serve to discredit.¹

A coherence theory of truth in art, or specifically, painting, will require of the work as a condition of truth or authenticity a self-sufficiency predicated on the mutual interrelation of the constituents of the work—constituents almost as inevitably formal and syntactical as material—quite independently of any possible descriptive connection with the world 'outside.' A corollary: that insofar as art is a matter of *homo additus naturae*, in the Zolaesque-impressionist way, the artist's manifest 'temperament' should also be integrally true, such integrity being itself a coherence, a characteristic singularity and identity. To judge by his works as well as his written and recorded remarks, C seems to have drifted somewhat guiltily away from the old standard presumption of a correspondence truth in art, while one principal thing committing him eventually instead to a coherence view would have been his fixation on his (own) '*petite sensation*' as an increasingly apparent constituent contribution to the requirements of the work of art as under way—a work still provoked by nature but with artistic, including formal, necessities of its own.

Support for the conviction of a 'coherence' sense of a truth in C's art comes from his many theoretical remarks on the chronic frustration of attaining a, to him, ever inadequate '*réalisation*,' as he so often put it. His many appeals to this term show that the concept at issue is finally not a matter of rivaling the repleteness of nature but something about the resultant *artwork's* achieving a sufficiency through the artist as mediator between world and work. This the art historian Badt has already considered, though without the emphasis here being put on truth of coherence in the artistic result.²

Nevertheless, Badt calls attention to a telling remark by C which helps to secure the notion that a successfully mediated 'expression' will stand on its own: unlike the writer (who "expresses himself through abstractions"), C says (or rather, *writes!*), "the painter is concrete through line and color, his feelings, his perceptions"; not "unduly subservient to nature, ... he is more or less the master of his model and, above all, of his means of

1. Lawrence Gowing, 'The Logic of Organized Sensations,' in William Rubin, ed., *Cézanne: The Late Work* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1977), 55-71, esp. 63, conveys two reports of C approving a truth of "interpretation." Interpretative truth, while it tends to aim for correspondence (and to discount convention), must at least depend on coherence. For elucidation on the varieties of truth, I am grateful to Tony Dardis.

expression. Penetrating what is before one and persevering in expressing oneself as logically as possible" (24 v 1904; L 298; there is nothing radical about being "unduly subservient to nature," which was a staple of academic-classical art theory). Un beholden to nature and master of his expressive "means," the artist attends to the requirements of the materializing work in its process of realization; hence the ultimate realization in its truth is a matter of output in the art object on its own, in its coherence.

By much the same token, the ultimate realization of the self-sufficiency that C accomplished as a postimpressionist would occur in abstract art, with nothing of referentiality left for a truth of correspondence to be about. A sense of aesthetic truth appropriate to abstract or nonobjective painting may not allow of much in the way of assertion about the world without; but it will tend positively to affirm the anti-illusionism by which modernist painting eschews 'violation' of the medium. This suggests that eventually, and owing ultimately to C's early analytical rigor, non-contradictory coherence will make for 'truth' in painting, with abstract painting as such being true painting, true to painting—indeed, extraordinarily so, since without the compromise of having to sustain correspondence with any referent. Mere non-contradiction had begun with Manet's negation of 'illusionistic' pictorial space; C's approach is more dialectically complex because he wanted somehow to save the tangibility of form and structure—what Fry likes to call their 'plastic' character—though not by conventional linear description as a transliteration of spatial extension but by evocation as a function of pigmental color alone. For this the primary evidence of the paintings is so strong because there it is, the truth of painting, in the paintings.

So much is so readily said because the art of C has determined the way in which for a century ever since, modernist painters have thought about painting. Drawing on his many recorded comments, it is possible to say that C himself would have been better prepared to swear to a conviction about the authentic, hence truthful, relay of his cherished '*petite sensation*.' Lest saying so indicate a threatening factor of correspondence just when it seems clear sailing for coherence-style truth, it deserves to be noted that C had a peculiar way of indicating by this special term not so much the passive identification of hues observed in the motif as the active selectivity he was exercising in respect to the gamut of potentially interactive 'colors,' the pigments which he had to choose from and combine in the process of *realizing* (so transitively), as he did like to say, his image, i.e., making *it* real as such.

As for the other view of correspondence: certainly C's mature postimpressionist antinaturalism concentrates on the complete translation of analyzed sensations into the constitution of the image, in an undisguisedly calculated image as construct. Thus does the

unselfconscious play of 'natural' sensations give way to the principle that to get a like effect in output, vis-à-vis sensory input, one must reasonably expect to transpose causes. This is evident as C moves from impressionism—still bound to nature in a residual naturalist way, even if on the specialized terms of the physics of light and atmosphere—through a process familiar to literary *symbolisme* into the postimpressionism of an art essentially non-natural, manmade, artificial. And this development entails a definite shift, in C's case sufficiently dialectical that prior truth is not eschewed, from a truth of correspondence to one of coherence, yet with an integral strength of internal coherence of elements as very hallmark of the work of C.

Curiously enough, it may have been through his not quite getting the 'hang' of impressionism that C was impelled to break through to his destiny. One needs to understand the importance of his subscribing to impressionism as entailing his weaning himself from unreformed, naive or 'square' naturalism, with its incorrigible presumption that the office of painting is to produce convincing stand-ins for the given, natural world. But what C now produced was something quite braced against being taken intellectually for granted as 'natural' transcription: an 'artificial' construct devised not to mimic but to *evoke*. The core of truth *in* the painting engendered by him was its *coherence*. After impressionism, and thanks to postimpressionism as such, painting's truth would no longer be intelligible as accessible perceptual correspondence with nature but only through a conceptual approach whereby truth *in* painting was attainable as a form of internal integrity in the art-object. (This may seem repetitious, but then perhaps a certain amount of varied repetition will stabilize otherwise elusive meaning.)

Of course C did actually raise the question of 'the truth in painting,' in that notorious phrase from a letter to Emile Bernard (23 x 1905): "In painting, I owe you the truth and I shall tell it to you" (L 313)—or rather, tell you *the truth in painting* ("la vérité en peinture"), as will be considered. Now it does happen to be the case that in it, two paragraphs earlier, C actually has stated a "thesis" that "is to be expounded." What is proposed might sound harmlessly conventional (if not hopelessly naturalistic): "to render the image of what we see, in forgetting

2. After considering 'realization' as implying subjective fulfilment, in Balzac's story 'Le chef d'oeuvre inconnu' (1832), a favorite text of C; in certain reflections of Delacroix; in the critic Jules Castagnary's *Philosophie du Salon de 1857*; and in Zola's criticism: Kurt Badt, *The Art of Cézanne* (1956), trans. Shiela Ann Ogilvie (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), ch. iv, 'The problem of "réalisation,"' 195-228, offers that C's is a special kind of correspondence truth phenomenologically about the world at large (something that would seem too large to test against for correspondence). The integrity of the artist-intercessor makes, through him, for a general truth: "For truth is never attained through rightness (accuracy), the kind of correspondence between an artist's statement, a configuration, and an isolated fact of experience, which can be verified by non-artistic means. Truth is here simply wholeness itself ..." (224), which however begins to sound like coherence.

everything that appeared before us" (L 313). Especially with its shift of tense from one clause to the other, which works to exclude memory itself from the present, C's statement may implicate the theory of the 'innocent eye,' which makes it sound impressionist in its concentration on rendering sheer optical effect over all else. More interesting, however, is an attached, if anything, anti-impressionist qualification, which in effect works to exclude even memory of personal experience. Here C finally negates temperament as such, hence with it, just that which the impressionist "corner of nature" was "seen through": the stated thesis is to be expounded regardless of "whatever our temperament or our strength in the face of nature."

No doubt the best way to answer the question of how C, as an impressionist and then postimpressionist, might have meant truth in art, is by elimination within the basic range of truth-theoretical types: truth by correspondence, truth by coherence and truth by convention. All modernists, standing most obviously opposed to formerly prevailing convention—especially that of representation as a necessary condition for fine art—would happily agree that the answer cannot be truth by correspondence as such is normally considered to concern reports about objective conditions outside the work of art. As an impressionist, C is already found loosening his grip, as artist, on the 'things' that purport to be 'out there' before him and seeking instead to concern himself with, what?—*his sensations*. It would be sophistic to try to say that he simply represented them as before he had represented apples. What is important is what he thought he was building up out of them; and one cannot think in terms of constructs consisting of relations, abstractly 'algebraic' as that sounds, without appreciating how only a truth of *coherence*—the coherence of the balanced equation—could be adequate to the reformed modernist task that C more than any other artist initiated in the art of painting. Thus after impressionism had offered a radically revised and reinforced sense of the possibility of a 'correspondence' more adequate to fickle appearances than previously expected, but also more subjectively engaging, in the work of C and others this was followed upon by a more definitively modern truth of coherence in postimpressionism, where the work takes appearance as pretext yet stands clear of obligation beyond the holding together of its own determined structure, at least in C's case out of sensation.

Everything that C says about painting as a process of bringing an imagic construct into being through a 'logic' with its own demands and determinations comes down in favor of a 'coherence' view (if not always and everywhere exclusively) on postimpressionist terms, despite his (still) considered duty to invest the incipient work with experiential matériel derived from acquaintance with the world. If that were all there were to it, one might just as well have done an honest job of naturalistic description and taken the afternoon off. But what this

headstrong egotist managed in his mature postimpressionist work to comprehend by great struggle was that he could only control the half of it: if the incipient work would come to anything, its own unfolding 'logic' must have its way. Thus even what is put forward in the present essay as the 'algebraic' aspect of C's work, is, like algebra, more than anything a matter of interrelative *internal coherence*.

All in all, coherence is the most adequate answer to the big hovering question of C's inferrable form of artistic truth; and perhaps the further claim can be appended that his expression of truth as coherence, specifically "in painting," also implies a necessary integrity. This might well tend to pick out and serve to justify all those signs of struggle, such as seemingly arbitrary deformations and skewed alignments, that also make it only the more unlikely that C can ever have presupposed the tidiness of a priori geometric armatures or schemata for his compositions. These signs may generally not have seemed advantageous—they do seem to have frustrated the artist himself—but they are 'primitively' authentic: ungraceful, perhaps (at least by conventional standards), but anything but affectedly so.

There will be more to say about truth in view of the wider aesthetic ramifications of C's work in the final section. No doubt little more, however, could be said with surety about what C would have been meant by his sense of the "truth" that he wilfully pursued "in" art, specifically in the art of painting (nor for that matter about whether, or when, this frustrated perfectionist ever felt he had attained it). What can be said with certainty is that he believed himself to be seeking truth *in* painting, and that only in practice, within the practical constraints of that altogether visual and non-verbal art, would it be found.

2. *C's coherence account of 'truth in painting.'*

C's portentous and testamental 1905 promise to Bernard has already been invoked: "In painting, I owe you the truth and I shall tell it to you" (L 313), which is to say, "I owe you the truth and I shall tell it to you in painting," or most simply, "I owe you the truth in painting"—this last a reading solidly underwritten by the original: "Je vous dois la vérité en peinture et je vous la dirai."³ The statement has occasioned an extended riff at the start of Jacques Derrida's *The Truth in Painting* (1978).⁴ Derrida asks, "Did [C] *promise, truly*

3. Paul Cézanne, *Correspondance*, ed. John Rewald (Paris: Grasset, 1937), 277.

4. Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* (1978), trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian MacLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 2-9. This celebrated text seems oblivious to the claims of non-objective painting. (Why are the French still so hung up on representation, which after a hundred years of abstraction cannot be a necessary condition for painting? Something untrue of a classic Mondrian cannot be true of painting in general.)

promise, promise to *say*, to say *the truth*, to say *in painting* the truth *in painting?* (9). Are C's remarks so farfetched as to warrant unmitigated scepticism? Provided Derrida's question be more than rhetorical, one good answer to it might be: "Quite plausibly, yes," with the assertion justified in the following way. Derrida's allowing of but "two models of truth" for painting, namely "presentation" and "representation" (6), with these perhaps reducible to direct and indirect forms of a single (correspondence) model, not only slights truth by convention, which though it does not detain us here does unpleasantly remind us of the, thanks to C, at last expiring academicism. Worse, it gives no berth for just that truth of coherence which seems so important in the case of C.

Let us try to get more sympathetically at what C was saying in his lapidary remark, in part by critical contextualization. Earlier, C had written to the art critic Octave Maus (27 ix 1889), "I had made up my mind to work in silence until the time when I would feel able to back up theoretically the fruits of my labors" (L 227), explaining that theretofore he had made a practice of turning down invitations to exhibit his paintings, what with his "efforts" yielding "only negative results, and fearing some all-too-justified criticism," while now he finally felt confident of having his work properly understood. Eight more years and he could even bring himself (26 ix 1897) to spell out: "Art is a harmony parallel to nature—what can those imbeciles be thinking who keep saying that the artist always falls short of nature?" (L 261).⁵ Taken together, then, the remarks of 1889, 1897 and then finally 1905 warrant a more substantial explanation of the definitive, 1905 truth-in-painting text: namely, that, not only did C find the truth of painting *in*, within, painting, but that the dawning of the truth (another form of 'realization') pertained most specifically to the work he produced in the later 1880s, with which he came into his finally self-convinced *postimpressionism*. Hence this constructive approach to painting is just what opened up a truth-in-painting that was neither a matter of (preimpressionist) imitation nor of (impressionist) temperament-filtration, but finally of outright (postimpressionist) image-construction. And there we are.

Collingwood, for one, would understand what the painter was up to, to judge by an 'algebraically' perspicacious remark on C: "His still-life studies, which enshrine the essence of his genius, are like groups of things that have been groped over with the hands; he uses colour not to reproduce what he sees in looking at them but to express almost in a kind of algebraic notation what in this groping he has felt." Notwithstanding what one may consider a problematic (if not wrong) reading of C's pictorial space as something three-dimensional which one "get[s] at ... through the canvas," Collingwood can observe: "[C's] practice reminds one of Kant's theory that the painter's only use for his colours is to make shapes visible."⁶

The modern aesthetic of coherence within the art object as such, advanced very likely further by C than by any other artist, emphasizes a kind of cognitive structure built into the work as a construct with its own 'logical' requirements of holding together, which is to say, of coherence. This usually consists of such elements as line and color but even more structurally, of their *relations*. In a letter to Bernard, where he signs himself portentously 'Pictor,' C declares: "The writer expresses himself through abstractions, whereas the painter is concrete through line and color, his feelings, his perceptions" (26 v 1904; *ibid.*). Furthermore, it can be inferred that this distinction runs deep in the development of C's aesthetic thinking, for apparently it harks back to *paragone* discussions of the relative merits of art and literature between C and Zola when they were in their twenties.⁷ But then C's second letter (26 v 1904) proceeds to emphasize the 'logical' demands of painting as essential to the painter's very task, which is—"Penetrating what is before one and persevering in expressing oneself as logically as possible" (L 298). Later still he will reaffirm to Bernard, "You'll forgive my always coming back to the same point; but I believe in *the logical unfolding* of what we see and feel by studying nature ..." (21 ix 1906; L 324, emphasis added); and, again, in the letter, a few weeks after that (and already introduced above in the previous chapter), in which, while telling his son that he still has need "to work from nature," the upshot sounds practically like an *Aufbau*—a rigorously logical ('abstract,' one might want to say) *objectification*: "Any sketches or canvases I would do would have to be constructions [from nature] (*constructions d'après*) based on the means, feelings and approaches suggested by the model" (13 x 1906; L 328; square brackets in source).⁸

3. *Historio-critical notes on the artistic reception of C.*

One of the chief founders of abstract or nonobjective art, Mondrian, wrote early on: "Until the modern era, the plastic means of all painting was ... the *natural appearance of objects* rather than *natural form and color*.... A more conscious vision, which saw form and

5. A possible corollary: that C's relentless frustrations with what he always complained of as insufficiency of *réalisation* did not concern nature so much as the self-aware but never complete objectification of sensation (or of "feelings": 8 ix 1906; L 322) in constituting some given production in painting.

6. R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (1938) (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 144, 145.

7. In a letter of the time Zola actually refers to C where, interestingly enough, the novelist-to-be assumes that "actions" are "abstract" things in asking rhetorically of their mutual friend Jean-Baptistin Baille, "how can one judge a being who is neither pure matter, like a picture, nor abstract like an action?" (viii 1861). Paul Cézanne, *Letters*, ed. John Rewald, trans. Marguerite Kay, 4th ed. (Oxford: Cassirer, 1976), 90; oddly enough, this passage is left out of the abbreviated version of the same letter in the now standard English edition (L 96-98).

8. In the original: Cézanne, *Correspondance*, 297.

color as means in themselves, resulted from conscious perception of what was previously perceived unconsciously: that beauty in art was created not by the objects of representation but by the [N.B.] relationships of line and color ([C]).⁹ On the same page Mondrian also credits C with establishing “that painting consists solely of color oppositions.”

Why should modernists persist in celebrating the painting of C if it is still representational? This is not merely an historical question. Writings of the progenitors of abstract painting, when testifying on what painting really is, abound in testimony gained directly and gratefully from the work of C. Take, for example, Kazimir Malevich, in articles intended to constitute a book on *New Art* (1928-30). Although many offhand remarks on C by Malevich fall back on the problematic notion of geometricization, the founder of ‘suprematist’ nonobjective painting—a mode of absolute abstraction predicated on an intuitive “supremacy of feeling” (Malevich) and making direct empathetic appeal in the tilts and skewings of slightly irregular elements—claimed that a “purely painterly perception of phenomena ... enables us to place [C] in a category that is close to the *non-objective, non-imitative* ... and to put him in the forefront of these artist-painters, who have freed *painting* from the state of three-dimensional illusion and brought back two-dimensional plane painting, thus restoring it to its true nature” (24; emphases in original).¹⁰ Malevich well appreciated how in C’s paintings (he mentions landscapes) “the tone of the colouring ... brings all the painterly elements together in one painterly whole” (34); and in this he understands not only how C’s work advances the modernist cause, but also particularly the role of sensations: “for [C] reality served as a form for expressing his painterly sensations without at the same time becoming the form of the sensation,” while “[C]-ism ... regards objects as conditions (but not forms) for the expression of painterly sensation” (134).

Another text of Mondrian picks up on what may be considered the quasi-propositional pictorial structure that C seems to institute; for owing to C’s analysis and reconstitution of visual experience, logical relations comprise the aesthetic of much significant twentieth-century art. In ‘Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art’ (1936) Mondrian articulates the notion of abstract painting as a disencumbering or perhaps decontamination of the reality of formal relations which are to be found in preabstract or representational painting only in a compromised or obscured manner. Although this famous essay has not usually been treated as something to bother about in the department of aesthetics, here Mondrian tellingly shifts the very fulcrum of art’s ‘objectivity’: “Although art is fundamentally everywhere and always the same, nevertheless two main human inclinations, diametrically opposed to each other, appear in its many and varied expressions. One aims at the *direct creation of universal beauty*, the

other at the *aesthetic expression of oneself*, in other words, of that which one thinks and experiences. The first aims at representing reality [N.B.] objectively, the second subjectively.”¹¹ C, of course, had constructed aesthetic objects *out of* his sensations; and one can hardly imagine such claims as Mondrian’s even being so formulable but for the work, which is also to say the embodied thought, of C.

It should be a matter of concern that the momentous developments initiated by C in painting—surely the most momentous revision since the Baroque dissolution of the presumed ideal unity of Renaissance spatial projection—have seemed barely to interest philosophy. C was not the first modernist (an honor in one way disputed between two realists, Courbet and Manet, at the mid-point of the nineteenth century); but it was most crucially C’s work that (toward the end of the century) consolidated and refined the conception of the work of art as self-sufficient art *object*, making cubism and abstraction possible. Hence to think of C’s art object as first of all a *representation* is to miss the (proto-nonrepresentational) point.

This is not the first time that an analytic and constructive notion of C’s postimpressionist accomplishment has been advanced, though it is not fashionable to pursue such supposed ‘formalism’ (!) nowadays.¹² Besides Fry’s little monograph [*C: A Study of His Development*] (1927; 2nd ed., 1952), another classic analytical text is Kurt Badt’s *The Art of [C]* (1956). In one of several mentions, Badt speaks especially of C’s sense of *réalisation*, that is, of the experience of nature successfully subsumed by sensation into painting, as “a ‘realization’ of nature or ‘after’ nature, right up to the point of erecting a ‘construction’ which had for its part in turn to follow nature.”¹³ Observers of C’s work have often found their own ways of rediscovering if not rediscovering this basic ‘constructive’ notion, though Badt has had wide influence: Max Imdahl, reviewing the matter in an investigation of what is so “unliterary”

9. Piet Mondrian, ‘The New Plastic in Painting’ (1917), in his *The New Art—The New Life: The Collected Writings*, ed. and trans. Harry Holtzmann and Martin S. James (Boston: Hall, 1986), 27-74, here 63 (emphases in original).

10. In K. S. Malevich, *Essays on Art 1915-1933*, trans. Xenia Glowacki-Prus and Arnold McMillin, ed. Troels Andersen, 2 vols. (London: Rapp and Whiting, 1969): ‘An Analysis of New and Imitative Art (Paul Cézanne)’ (1928), 2: 19-30; and as following here: ‘New Art and Imitative Art (Picasso, Braque)’ (1928), 31-55; ‘An Attempt to Determine the Relation between Colour and Form in Painting’ (1929-30), 124-46.

11. Mondrian, ‘Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art,’ *The New Art*, 288-300, here 289. In this text Mondrian appeals to the idea of an “algebraic equation,” but negatively, for uninspired art (297).

12. When the development of art-critical formalism is adequately accounted, one sees not only that the American critic Greenberg came to it late but that engagement with the art of C played a definitive part in the enterprise from early on, even in Germany. We can infer that there is something *in* the work of C capable of consistently provoking such critical response, some one cause for such repeated effects,—it being impossible that this reading of his work was a singular delusion and unlikely that it was a misreading shared across several quite different critical generations. If so, the formalism is ‘true’ of, because *true in*, C’s work.

13. Badt, *Art of Cézanne*, trans. Sheila Ann Ogilvie (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), 213.

and hence purely visual in C's art, borrows from Badt the basically coherence formula: "the general portrayal of what existed together and of that which reciprocally objectifies and supports itself."¹⁴ So many are led in effect to a similar conclusion, as if perhaps this has to do with just the way C's work aesthetically 'holds water.'

Provided one can live with a certain quotient of 'fifties existentialist poeticizing, Badt gives considerable insight into C's aesthetics. Apropos of the actively relational, formal unity of C's work, he aptly cites a simplistic comment by Renoir on C that helps to establish what may be understood as a quasi-propositional structure of relational formal unity:

Because ... interdependence of things took priority in his mind over the things themselves and because they were actually released into existence out of it, he inevitably experienced quite peculiar difficulties, since, when actually painting, he saw this interrelationship, first and foremost, establishing it first on the canvas and making it the foundation for his compositions as a whole. In that way he started off with ... the patches of colour which Renoir declared that just two of them on a white canvas already constituted a painting.¹⁵

To solemnize the lively relational affiliation of components in C's images Badt leans heavily on a seemingly Heideggerian intensionality of *Zusammenstehen* (translated as 'standing together') and *Zusammenbestehen* ('existing together'), plus *Sich-erhalten* ('preserving itself or themselves') and a more run-of-the-mill *Zusammenhang* ('interrelationship'). Unfortunately this is at the expense of a sense that the significant coexistence of structural elements might be logical, even logically necessary, on behalf of the final work as a whole. At least Badt's obsession with C's *Zusammenstehen*—which concerns an often and variously celebrated aspect of C's art, whatever one wants to call it—enables him to push back the frontier of viewery comprehension, in respect even to a sense of intelligible beauty that has something essential to do with whatever deserves to be considered aesthetic truth in painting.

As for the former: "The naturally beautiful plays a small enough role in [C's] art, yet the artistic beauty of his work—the harmony and melody evolved through the medium of configuration alone—is strong; that is to say, in terms appropriate to painting, the beauty of the organization of solids and space and the beauty of ornamentation of the surface." But what is more, of the objects depicted Badt finds it possible to claim "that in the process of giving truth a form their everyday outlines are, as it were, burned in fire, and out of the fire of truth the objects emerge in a new form, which, though recognizable, yet at the same time bears witness to this truth, and therefore appears 'deformed, distorted' to the ordinary mind."

Badt may not advance the cause of C's logicity, but he was indeed out to defend something which he saw and definitely considered to be a "truth-content of [C's] pictures." And on his own terms Badt would agree that any truth of the firsthand artistic reconstitution (of nature) becomes formally and otherwise self-sufficient, independent of whatever was initially given to sense, with no firm basis left for 'correspondence' truth.

Richard Shiff, whose more recent historico-critical study [*C*] and the End of Impressionism (1984) I have largely set aside in order to make a different set of points, does however speak to the issue of truth in C's art, including the "*vérité en peinture*" letter. In Shiff's view, C still so clung to the romantic ideals of Stendhal and Baudelaire, as well as to the naturalist views shared with Zola, that when he first encountered the *symboliste* outlook of Bernard in 1904, he struck the younger artist as a bit of a dinosaur: "[C] speaks only of painting nature according to his personality and not according to [the idea of] art itself.... He professes the theories of naturalism and impressionism."¹⁶ I however would prefer to say that if the reclusive C had not kept up with art-world theorising, his thought as invested in his art—that is, his *vérité en peinture*—was evidently sophisticated and second to none in the postimpressionist sphere. This was so even if the nature of his highly considered structure was not a matter of imposed geometry and very much a matter of color deployment. After the master's death, even Bernard came to recognize in the seemingly slight yet ever so "scrupulous, patient, thoughtful notations" of C's watercolors, "a taste for analysis and logic which is almost a new pleasure in art."¹⁷

In the end, the comprehensive reason why it is worth enquiring into what I have suggested be considered an algebraic structure of C's constructed image is that the old, usually unreformed question of truth in art is put to rest when it is clear that such a structure can attain a posited character of standing, of holding true in itself. Simply put, the work of art

14. Max Imdahl, 'Cézannes Malerei als Systembildung und das Unliterarische,' in Ulrich Finke, ed., *French 19th-Century Painting and Literature: with Special Reference to the Relevance of Literary Subject-matter in French Painting* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972), 299-304, here 299; thanks to Neil Donahue for help in translating.

15. Badt, *Art of Cézanne*, 33; on the terminology, 15 ('Translator's Note'). It is difficult to tell from Badt's apparatus whether this phraseology is at all conditioned by Justi's writings on Michelangelo, for it could in turn have influenced Heidegger. A good example, for its appeal to form as a matter of "truth" as well as the sense that "die Gestalten statt im Zusammenhang des Ganzen": Carl Justi, *Michelangelo: Beiträge zur Erklärung der Werke und des Menschen* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1900), 414.

16. Richard Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism: A Study in the Theory, Technique and Critical Evaluation of Modern Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 189 (Shiff's insertion and ellipses).

17. Emile Bernard, 'Les aquarelles de Cézanne' (1924), in his *Propos sur l'art*, ed. Anne Rivière, 2 vols. (Paris: Séguier, 1994), 1: 238-40.

which is the realized image has the character of a structure built up wholly of coherent parts and as such ultimately without outside empirical responsibilities or references or correspondences, let alone artistic convention. There it simply is, in the end: it must count as true, even logically so even if somehow one thought trivially so.

4. *Wider ramifications of C's project for aesthetics.*

It might be argued that the extended analogy of a logical or even 'algebraic' structure in C's work is mistaken owing to there being no ostensible logical content at stake. Well, requiring propositional content of the artistic statement should be suspiciously like demanding a content that could then be said to *correspond* (or not) to the outside world. Why should art be embarrassed to be found *without* propositional claims of that sort? For C, once beyond impressionism, a still life with apples is not a *record* of anything but a *construction* of something. It is not true of something beyond itself, i.e., some part of the world, but true *in* itself. It is not a sign telling us where (otherwise) to look; it is what is to be looked at; not a mirror to nature's beauty, but in itself an instance of the construction of a new (no matter if to established taste, initially threatening) beauty.

Someone like Hospers might not agree that this was the end of the question of truth (see above, chapter I); but in considering the wider ramifications of C's project for aesthetics the present account may be reinforced. For C's convincing revision of the very rules of the game of painting, especially his critical displacement of naturalism by not merely expressively artist-centred but rationally objectified artistic construction, has contributed inestimably to aesthetics as such, above and beyond the history of art.

While the two-dimensional art of painting is simply not necessarily observationally descriptive of a 'real' three-dimensional world, in C's hands at least it offers a structured reality in a more philosophical sense, built up of categorical components of color in accordance with an algebra or a logic (as C himself liked to call it) of constitutive and compositional possibilities. It is in the establishment of this view of the fundamental condition of painting, which departs radically from common naturalistic presumptions notwithstanding his own attenuated dependence on source 'sensations,' that C's formidable aesthetic contribution—more formidable, no doubt, than that of any other single artist since the Renaissance—mainly consists.

Painting is revealed in his hands as an enterprise that is self-sufficient, if not yet altogether 'autonomous,' namely, the rational construction of a less compromised form of

visual meaning. Insofar as C actually continued to appeal to nature as given, it was for the purpose of analysis and *reconstitution*, to such an extent that the sensations available to painting and their logic of combination formed a kind of organon for image-constitution. Thus, for instance, by his principle of *modulation instead of modeling*,¹⁸ a 'passage' (i.e., a distinctly painterly color transition wherein one hue is brushed into by one or more adjacent others) is constituted from several tones out of a sequence of distinctly separate single pigmental hues. On the view presented here, this makes for a situation that can be described as C's production, out of his colors, of a fresh and independent 'synthesis of the manifold' (in Kant's terminology), in rivalry, one could even say, with the mundane synthesis of the manifold which we ever negotiate in our everyday awareness of the world.

In the build-up of this postimpressionist construct that is the painted image, out of many discrete and contextually calibrated judgments of color quality, and into what I have considered algebraic quantitative relations of the constituent pictorial elements, we see C's profound revision of the received wisdom in respect to beauty, truth and representation in painting. It might have seemed easy at first to say that C should be accorded respect as an artist of consequence to philosophical aesthetics. By now, a century after the master's death, it should certainly be right to think that something vital was lacking in any aesthetics which purported to extend to modern art but which said nothing that could not have been said had C never painted. And should anyone assume that it might be less respectable for modern philosophy to 'wait upon' modern art than, as it used to do so willingly, to wait upon modern physics, that would no doubt simply show up a certain prejudice of our culture.

Not so easily explained is how his sweeping importance concerns the epistemology of art, especially C's advancing the very disappearance of 'picturability.' To initiate the depictorialization of painting, leaving the very category disencumbered of any requirement to be a 'picture' of something, surely deserves to have major repercussions in terms of how art *proposes* anything at all. But the disproving of the proposition, 'If not pictorial, then not painting,' turned out to further the disproof of the still stronger proposition, 'if not representational, then not art.' It is a question of art-historical fact, which however is also of philosophical consequence, that the cognitive was promoted above and beyond the 'aesthetic' as a Kantian 'feeling for the beautiful' in nature, to an aesthetic of *constructing the beautiful as such*. Putting it so can only help to flush out any residual assumption that the 'cognitive'

18. Maurice Denis' relay of this distinction in his 1907 article 'Cézanne' belongs to a penetrating analysis: "Volume finds its expression, with [C], in a gamut of hues (*une gamme des teintes*), in a series of brush-marks (*taches*): these marks succeed one another by contrasts or analogies according to whether the form interrupts or continues itself. That is what it pleased [C] to call *modulating* rather than modeling" (D 177).

aspect of art is merely a matter of factual content, true or false, such as whether the Virgin Mary's face ever really looked like some image purportedly copied from a copy of a copy of one by Saint Luke, or simply that a certain landscape by Monet adequately describes winter in the Ile-de-France. That sort of 'cognitive content' has, since C, and often enough in his name, been minimized or abolished, yet somehow art becomes more 'cognitive' than ever; hence it cannot have been the cognitive nature of art. In considerable part, but more than art-historically, this larger project concerned C's postimpressionism as not merely a supplanting of one style by the next but a radical aesthetic de-centering of nature.

Something that deserves clarification, however, for C's work as consequential for aesthetics, is that there are two, sometimes complementary or overlapping but sometimes competing, senses of what the term 'aesthetics' even comprehends. These can perhaps be considered traditional and reformed, with C's contribution as pivotal in the transition from the traditional to the reformed sense. *Traditional* aesthetics was concerned with *aesthesis* or (incoming) sensation, and most happily with exclusively agreeable sensation, probably centered on 'the beautiful' in nature. For once, all reactionaries untroubled by a lack of sympathy with modernity are right in suspecting that orthodox lyrical 'beauty' of a conventional sort has gone by the boards in the work of C. Indeed it has! His best paintings, the most profoundly analytically conceived, can strike the aesthetically traditional and unreformed as annoyingly, deplorably lacking in what the reputation had supposedly promised as beauty. Yet the problem of beauty never quite goes away, if only because C's threateningly ungainly image of a hundred years ago winds up showing itself to those who have looked openmindedly as at least as winningly 'beautiful' as the old art ever was. His art itself teaches us how this must be thanks to something more cognitive than just a capacity to represent beautiful nature beautifully; for C quite disposed of conventional lyrical beauty for the sake of a new delight in image construction of innately 'beautiful' integrity.

The other sense of aesthetics, which has for some time been more engaging, concerns the formerly discretely fenced field called 'philosophy of art,' where the hopeless former question 'What is art?' has effectively been replaced, at huge expenditure of argumentation, by more contingent questions like 'Why is that counted in if this is counted out?' When art history awards extra points for an artist's adding some twist to the way the game is played, an aesthetic accomplishment of this sort is being affirmed. But it has also been a motivation of the present investigation to account for aesthetic consequences of this sort in the development of C's art—above all, one may now stand back and say, whatever might be left of 'painting,' and very likely better off as such, after the demise of 'pictures' in the

premodern, pre-postimpressionist, *pre-C* sense.¹⁹ On just this basis, it may indeed be possible to establish the special aesthetic-philosophic importance of C's revision of the all too presumptuously pictorial, traditional understanding of European painting at large. That to this day the work of C can challenge and upset the conventional sense of the 'pictorial' and stimulate interest in the image in general as a perpetrated structure is lasting evidence of its interest for philosophy of art.

Thus C contributed indispensably to modern aesthetics—meaning not only the aesthetics of modernist art but the modern aesthetic understanding of all art—a rendering evident and undeniable to all who could see of postimpressionist painting as the foundation of a new, implicitly theoretical art, 'objectified' in its very detachment from nature, analytical in respect to givens and affirmative of the image as construct. The premodern notion of the pictorial, sustaining a notion of the fullest possible naturalistic correspondence with part of the world, proved inadequate to the newly analytical task of constructing art in terms of coherence. Art constructs as complexes constituted of evident *relations*: there indeed is the essentially modern notion of the legendarily 'self-sufficient' modern work of art which traces, not exclusively but preeminently to the painting of C. Notwithstanding the sacrifice, where necessary, of correspondence truth, in virtue of an innate commitment to coherence for his construct out of 'sensation,' C was deeply committed to a truth *in*—i.e., within and in terms of—painting.

Also of consequence to aesthetics and even to philosophy at large is the insight that C's aesthetic practice offers into the working of representation. The lesson of C can be taken to establish as a cornerstone of modern art a reformed notion of classical Aristotelian *mimesis* itself, through the innately critical, anti-naturalistic practice in that definitive phase of modernism, postimpressionism. In this there must accrue philosophical credit for C's project because in the end it must be owed to this painter's work in particular, i.e., to his *painting*, more than to any other source, that we today are able the better to understand what Aristotle presents as *mimesis*. For generations Aristotelian *mimesis* has been obliged to underwrite the standard academic-classical, inert 'copy' notion of 'imitation.' In fact, it is possible to maintain that in Aristotle's *Poetics* every statement on *mimesis* is not only fully consistent with, but will finally satisfy a C-conception of art if permitted to carry the more performative connotations of 'rendering' or 'rendition' instead of the traditional 'imitation' in English. For C has taught us

19. I find myself enough of a modernist to be quite unable to comprehend the half-formed distinction and semi-synonymy embedded in the following sentence: "It is worth noting that in those days we set little or no store by pictures and painting"; Leonard Woolf, *Sowing: An Autobiography of the Years 1880-1904* (London: Hogarth, 1962), 109 n 1.

that even before painting was committed to going beyond the imaging of nature to a non-natural condition with its own beauty-of-truth, its true artistic beauty was not a function of borrowed natural beauty but rather a matter of the integrity of its artistic construction.

On the more internal, though not merely technical, terms of painting, what ultimately justifies this view is C's shift from an incoming 'sensation' of subjective impact to objectifying, externalizing 'sensations' constitutive of the painted work of art, of which I have given account. This is importantly consequential in the matter of ('mere') form: for where Tatariewicz writes, not in the interest of art history but of aesthetics, that "The impressionists stress the importance of form in appearance, and the abstract painters stress form in arrangement,"²⁰ he might have credited, in between, the strongest single mover behind this very shift: the postimpressionist C. Relatedly but more historically significant is the fact that, already before C, the realist Manet had as much as wrecked the conventional pictorial *mimesis* of nature, and its corollary, spatial illusionism.

But C went further, and replaced the very idea of form contained in an ambient spatial receptacle with a newly artificial interplay of forms within the non-naturalistic 'space' entailed in the undisguisedly artificial image-construction—from which would derive the possibility of cubism. One hesitates to add such an accomplishment as the last, great as it is, as one more thing on a list, less because it is undeniably historical than because by now its philosophical interest is already otherwise accounted for.

Relatedly, C's art holds out against the still too common presumption that all there is to respond *cognitively* to in art is a question of represented content as susceptible to verbal paraphrase.²¹ It still seems to make a point of expanding the range of what we consider artistic cognition, so that alternative modes and *styles of cognition* can even be accessed as such, with potential for enlivened response. Works of art, even naturalistic representational ones, don't after all grow on trees; and the history of art is the history of constituted artworks, all of which, including the most romantic, the most naturalistic and even the most weakly structural and aleatory, are aesthetic productions of sorts. In the end, it cannot even matter whether there is a history of changing 'visions' of nature—with the scientific and philosophical question of the constancy of nature as engaged or not. For whatever modicum of truth the 'history-of-vision' view may retain is finally not of nature seen through filters *a*, *b* and *c*, but of aesthetic constructs setting forth their visual components according to modes *x*, *y* and *z*.

C's works are among the first and best to teach us that for this last we might better be grateful than disappointed; that it is as human constructions, products of mind, that works

of art appeal to our minds and invite us into their play of thought. In the end, then, the history of visual art, especially of painting, is a history not of a changing vision of presumably stable nature, but of artificial constructs, 'representational' or not, and a matter of seeing in regard to them and of thinking on their terms; and for just such insight we can so largely thank the painter Paul Cézanne.

20. Wadysaw Tatariewicz, 'Form in the History of Aesthetics,' in the *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, ed. Philip P. Wiener, 5 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1973-4), 2: 216-25, here 219. Thanks to Marjorie Welish for this reference. Tatariewicz' *A History of Six Ideas: An Essay in Aesthetics*, Melbourne International Philosophy Series, 5 (Warsaw: P. W. N.; The Hague: Nijhoff, 1980), esp. 'Art and Truth,' 299-309, has also been stimulating.

21. A rare exception: Dorothy Walsh, 'The Cognitive Content of Art' (1943), in Francis J. Coleman, ed., *Contemporary Studies in Aesthetics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), 282-97, likening art to math as offering "delight" as "cognitive satisfaction" in engaging possibilities. At one point Kant barely allows a beauty of cognition. In his lecture notes on logic he first wrote and then deleted "There really is no beautiful cognition (*schönes Erkenntnis*)." Concern with "objects" in thought and their "exhibition" makes it difficult to tell whether he might admit stimulating reflexive thought or thinking with none but logical content as aesthetically delightful (at least in the humanist way of *docere/delectare*), even though non-sensory. Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Logic*, trans. J. Michael Young (Works, 20) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 443. Obviously 'nonobjective' art has a vested interest in the question, its presentations not necessarily being 'of' any things, let alone purported representations of things-in-themselves.

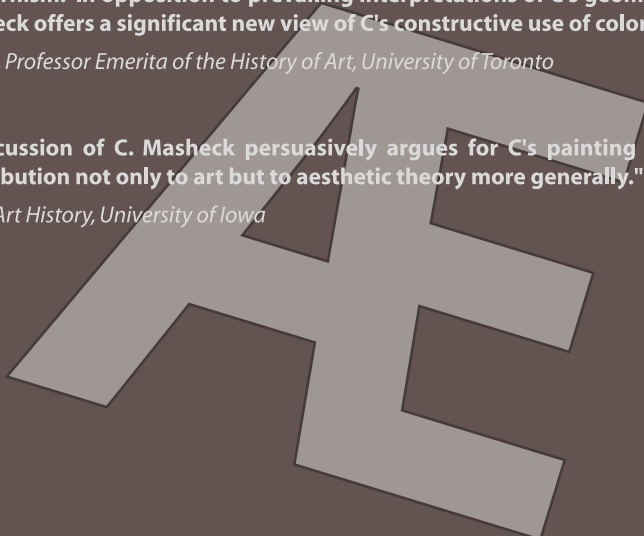
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Paul Cézanne, *Still Life with Apples*, c. 1877-78, oil on canvas, 190 x 270 mm. Courtesy of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, by kind permission of the Provost and Fellows of King's College, Cambridge.



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