

The Technique of Originality: "Innocence" and Artifice In the Painting of Corot, Monet, and Cézanne

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Received opinion suggests that painting, as an art of depiction, serves as a vehicle of imaginative invention, a means of representing not only how the world appears but how one might desire the world to appear. Painting shows things as they are or, alternatively, as they might be. It is also often stated that arts of depiction do more than represent an external world of nature, whether real or imaginary; they reflect back on their authors and express, even identify, the character of the artist. Whenever one says without qualification that a painting represents a naive vision, one may be making any of three assertions: (1) that the *image* depicted is naive (true-to-nature); (2) that its *creator* is naive (innocent, childlike); (3) that the element of mediation, the *technique*, is naive (primitive, untrained). And there is still another possibility: in the representation of a naive vision, the painter's technique may merely *signify* naiveté without itself being unlearned. Such generalized signification of naiveté may refer to all three of the other senses of naive vision—the innocence of the artist, the genuine simplicity of his technique, the fundamental truth of his world.

The "Myth of the Innocent Eye"

During the nineteenth century, when classicists, romantics, realists, and others argued for the value of the "naive" (usually associated with the "original"), any number of sophisticated references to naiveté appeared in the arts. The innocence of childhood, however, could not be recovered by those adults who desired what they had lost; naiveté could be represented only by means of technical skill, not by direct application of an innocent vision itself. Obviously there is some internal contradiction in self-consciously striving to attain a naiveté antithetical to self-consciousness. From the start, exponents of naiveté questioned themselves and were criticized by doubters; by 1824, E. J. Delécluze, who commented upon both classicism and romanticism, had already noted three major ideological attempts at recovering a primitive innocence within his own lifetime: "All of this," he wrote, seeming to delight in the irony, "is an *artificial naiveté* [*naïveté factice*] which cannot last very long" (1942:135–136).

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Delécluze and others recognized that human expression is an art. A bit of introspection demonstrates the point. Some of us, for example, require a great deal of linguistic experience in order to speak simply—or "sincerely." Certainly we know that a discourse of sincerity can be appropriated by both naive and sophisticated men, and by both honest and deceitful men; we rarely assume complete candor on the part of a speaker solely on the basis of his expressions of sincerity. To mistake a feigned sincerity or innocence for the real thing is to confuse the value signified with the nature of the mark that signifies it. Usually we do more than take signifiers at face value. The interpretation of another's language, or of any other means of expression, can be aided by some assessment of the other's technical capabilities and potential motivation—what does this person want? how could it be attained? can he attain it?

In interpreting visual representations, art historians make judgments concerning the values held by the artists under scrutiny and the ends toward which these artists might direct their works. Often, it seems to me, art historians have overestimated the naiveté of artists of the nineteenth century, especially those realists, naturalists, and impressionists who professed a desire to capture a naive vision of reality. There has indeed been some confusion between what a particular artistic technique signifies and the nature of that signification itself (and of the artist who could conceivably perform such an act of meaning).

The "myth of the innocent eye" is central to the art-historical problem of evaluating the radically naturalistic paintings produced during the nineteenth century. The theory of the innocent eye has two aspects.¹ First, it is a theory of "natural" vision, a proper vision associated with the uneducated, disinterested curiosity of childhood. Supposedly, such vision, at its most primordial, provides sensory experience in the form of conceptually undifferentiated patches of color. Second, the theory of the innocent eye is one of a proper process of painting that represents a "true" vision of (externalized) nature or of one's (internalized) experience of nature.

Perhaps the most familiar statement of the theory of the innocent eye comes from John Ruskin. In 1857 he made the following comment to the reader about to embark on a course of lessons in artistic practice, Ruskin's own *Elements of Drawing*:

We see nothing but flat colors. . . . The whole technical power of painting depends on our recovery of what may be called the *innocence of the eye*; that is to say, of a sort of childish perception of these flat stains of color, merely as such, without consciousness of what they signify. . . .

Now, a highly accomplished artist has always reduced himself as nearly as possible to this condition of infantine sight.² He sees the colors of nature exactly as they are. . . . the whole art of Painting consists merely in perceiving the shape and depth of these patches of color, and putting patches of the same size, depth, and shape on canvas. [Ruskin 1971:27–28]

It seems that Ruskin is calling for a very straightforward and unmediated recording of vision. But he closes this passage with a remark that introduces a code of translation into the painting process; the recording of vision becomes mediated by a technical limitation:

The only obstacle to the success of painting is, that many of the real colors are brighter and paler than it is possible to put on canvas: we must put darker ones to represent them. [ibid.:28]

Ruskin's observation here is a commonplace of painting practice, but it jars with the notion of an innocent eye. How do we know what the artist's innocent eye is really seeing if what he paints is not exactly what he sees? How does the artist know what he sees, both in terms of the colors themselves and in terms of what they ultimately represent? Painting with an innocent eye would seem to require that the artist avoid acknowledging his own subject until *after* he had completed its picture—otherwise he would lose the quality of innocence as he painted.

Despite Ruskin's apparent belief in the necessity of attaining naive vision, it is not at all clear that he really thought it possible, for his technical and practical recommendations to artists do not seem entirely consistent with it. This point has been noted by Ernst Gombrich, whose study *Art and Illusion* squarely faces the problem of relating naive "sensation" to conceptualized or interpretive "perception." Gombrich cites another element of Ruskin's advice on the subject of color:

Color is wholly *relative*. . . . what was warm a minute ago, becomes cold when you have put a hotter color in another place. . . . every touch must be laid, not with a view to its effect at the time, but with a view to its effect in future, the result upon it of all that is afterwards to be done being previously considered. [Ruskin 1971:134]

On the basis of this passage, Gombrich concludes that "Ruskin has, without realizing it, amended his own theory of childlike vision," for the artist seems to depend upon the "knowledge of how colors will affect each other" (Gombrich 1969:309–310).

One of the major aims of *Art and Illusion* is to demonstrate that the theory of the innocent eye is untenable, both as a theory of vision and as a theory of painting; the contradiction that Gombrich notes in Ruskin serves his purpose. In general, Gombrich concludes that

the innocent eye is a myth. . . . seeing is never just registering. . . . The whole distinction between sensation and perception, plausible as it was, had to be given up. . . . Nobody has ever seen a visual sensation, not even the impressionists, however ingenuously they stalked their prey. [ibid.:298]

Gombrich refers to the impressionist painters in the context of a discussion of the innocent eye because he regards impressionism as the least schematic of manners of depiction. But even this art represents nature by way of a special language or system of conventions (ibid.:293, 324). Gombrich openly recognizes the artifice of impressionism, but—along with other, less canny art historians—he implies that the painters themselves may have suffered Ruskin's delusion concerning the possibility of recording naive vision.³

One calls the innocent eye a "myth" when one does not believe in it as a reality. Historians sometimes argue that during the nineteenth century many, if not most, painters of nature regarded the innocent eye as real. But it is generally stated today that there is no innocent or completely externalized and objective vision of reality, no pure sensation without interpretation. This distinction—between what the past regarded as real and what the present regards as mythic—has led historians to presume a passage from innocence to knowledge, from art as naive sensation to art as interpretive perception; and this sense of historical development has been used to explain any number of shifts in style or theory around the turn of the century. Cézanne, for example, as well as the French symbolists and many abstract painters of the earlier twentieth century, have been seen as departing from any attempt to reproduce external appearances because they realized the folly of their impressionist fathers who had (supposedly) thought they could view the world naively, recording it with "accuracy."

It is true that the generation to follow the impressionists sometimes ascribed to these painters the belief that naive vision was possible and desirable and equally true that these impressionist painters were sometimes accused of being positivists. But these claims were the rhetorical pronouncements of a younger generation striving to distinguish itself from an older one, whose most fundamental principles it accepted. The claims made against the impressionists appear to be largely false. They have generally

gone unchallenged because of a mistaken sense of the signification of labels such as "positivist" and "impressionist" and even of broad descriptive terms such as "real" and "ideal" as they were applied in nineteenth-century art criticism (Shiff 1978). The impressionists neither had, nor believed they could have, an innocent eye. They did, however, hold naïveté as a value to be represented even if it could not be attained. Thus the innocent eye was desirable, but, like other objects of desire, it was absent, unattainable. The innocent eye was the *myth* of the impressionists and of other artists of the nineteenth century; this innocent eye existed only in *myth* even among those whom historians have criticized for naïvely believing in its *reality*.

Creation as Making v. Creation as Finding

If historians have often ascribed to nineteenth-century impressionists and naturalists a belief in the innocent eye as the foundation of a theory of painting, it may be the result of their familiarity with critics such as Émile Zola who so often exhorted artists to represent only "what one sees." This call for a direct recording of visual experience stood in conflict with the position of the typical "academic." The academics did not advocate an innocence of vision; instead, they taught the importance of acquired technical convention. They trained artists in technical skills so that they might engage in an active process of invention and composition (creation as *making*) rather than a relatively passive process of observation and discovery (creation as *finding*).

The divergence of academic and antiacademic artists is reflected in many areas of the theoretical discourse that accompanied the painting of the nineteenth century. The use of the terms "imitation" and "copy" within that specialized discourse reveals much. Sometimes the two terms were opposed to each other (especially during the earlier part of the century); sometimes they were used interchangeably (especially during the later part of the century) (Shiff, forthcoming, a). When the terms were used to mark a distinction, "imitation" served to indicate a liberal or inventive use of a source, while "copy" denoted a literal or derivative reproduction.

Charles Blanc, whose *Grammaire des arts du dessin* of 1867 gave an authoritative account of academic theory, defined the imitation of nature in what may seem today to be the most straightforward way: imitation is merely a "faithful copy," the kind of copy one might hope to attain if one valued the "innocent eye." Since academics such as Blanc stressed the intellectual act of interpretation and not the recording of sensory experience, for them imitation (as a copying) could not be art (Blanc 1880:17). In true art, choice or

invention would always be a factor. In a composition of human figures, for example, the artist (according to Blanc) will "choose within the immense repertory of [observed] human forms, those that serve best to translate his emotion or his thought." Even an initial drawing or compositional sketch "is not a simple imitation, a copy mathematically conforming to the original, an inert reproduction, a superfluity" (ibid.:531). Accordingly, Blanc notes that Poussin and Claude transformed the nature they viewed, as if they knew that what they found in their direct observation were not in agreement with their own feeling, their source of originality, or, as Blanc writes, their "genius" (ibid.: 20). For the academic, then, the original expression of the self—its vision and desires—follows from conscious artistic choice, an active employment of artistic techniques.

Surely the academic position seems clear and quite sensible; but the importance it gave to acquired technique—the means of expression with which the active intellect could fashion a work of art—clouded the issue of naïveté and self-expression. For those whose aim was to attain a direct and specific expression either of themselves or of their modern world, a technical procedure inherited from the past might prove to be an inhibiting or limiting factor. In a curious and complex linguistic turn, the naïve "copying" dismissed by academics came to be conceived as an artistic process that might liberate the artist from the techniques of the past, techniques associated with an academic form of education by way of their being acquired through "imitation" of academic models—that is, the paintings of others. The model to be copied by the antiacademic artist became the "original" one, the one present to view in its innocent state, simply the nature that the artist sees.⁴

So much seems to have been invested in resisting academic models that some of those very models for emulation became the subject of critical revision; in other words, some of the great academic heroes of the past were discussed as if they themselves had been antiacademic, concerned primarily with avoiding technical convention rather than mastering it. Such was the fate of Poussin as he was represented in the commentaries of many of his admirers during the later nineteenth century. The motivation behind the revision of Poussin was complex. In part, French critics wanted to divorce this seminal French master from any dependence on the art of Raphael and other Italian classicists.⁵ Poussin's own classicism was to be inherently French in its character, a product of the artist's direct contact with nature and with those ancient sources that were themselves intimately bound to nature. His art would leave all conventional mediation behind and return only to true "origins" (Mantz 1858:41). In 1867, the painter and theorist Thomas Couture wrote: "It is generally believed that [Poussin]

interprets, creates a style that recalls nature somewhat, but which is nevertheless conventional. No, he copies" (1868:247). *Copying*, then, was regarded as a kind of artistic creation that involved no interpretation, nothing of the transformation that a preconceived artistic method would entail. The advantage of the copy was not necessarily that it afforded a greater resemblance to the model in nature (as if the product of an "innocent eye"), but that, whatever the relationship of artwork to model might be, it escaped definition in terms of a conventional transformation.

In 1868, Manet painted a portrait of his friend and critic Zola (Figure 1). Zola referred to the creation of this portrait as an act of copying, and he repeatedly noted that Manet's style was characterized by idiosyncrasy; Manet failed to employ the usual conventional devices for rendering nature and for organizing pictorial composition. All this led not so much to a more objective view of nature, a view potentially corresponding to that of others, but to an image of Manet himself, what we might call the artist's self-portrait. The *Portrait of Zola*, in other words, becomes Manet's self-expression, his own vision and *his own* portrait.

According to Zola, Manet professed a kind of visual innocence; supposedly, the artist admitted to his critic:

I can do nothing without nature. I do not know how to invent. As long as I wanted to paint according to the instruction I had received, I produced nothing of merit. [Zola 1970c:142]

And, as Zola observed Manet at work on his portrait, he stressed the same passive absorption in nature that Thomas Couture had claimed for Poussin:

[Manet] had forgotten me, he no longer knew that I was there, he was copying me [il me copiait] as he would have copied any human animal whatever, with an attentiveness, an artistic awareness [une conscience artistique] that I have never seen elsewhere. [1970c:141]

Manet does not seek out Zola's special character, his intellectual or spiritual qualities; he seems naively to concentrate on the surface appearance. He is "copying" a portrait. Traditionally, portraits had indeed been called "copies" and had been associated with a realistic manner of painting. But there is more significance to Zola's choice of the term "copy" in his description. Manet's "copying" becomes a characterization of his style or technical procedure, not a reference to the realistic nature of his subject matter. What we would today call the subject matter of this portrait of Zola is actually quite complexly presented; Manet depicts Zola surrounded by identifiable works of visual art and literature. Iconographers delight in this painting; as they do so, they sometimes berate Zola

for being insensitive to everything in the painting save Manet's style. But this is naive on the part of the art historian. Surely Zola the aspiring novelist knew about subject matter, symbolization, and allegory. More important than any consideration of subject matter, however, is Zola's observation that Manet attempts to remain apart from any *technical* tradition; his representation does not belong to a sequence of imitative works forming a tradition as many academic portraits do. The only sources to which Manet can openly refer—or to which Zola, speaking for him, refers—are the model in nature and that which cannot be separated from it, the artist's own vision, the expression of his *self*.

Can the self be revealed in, or even influence, a copy? Zola could speak of "copying" and could reintroduce notions of interpretation, translation, and expression, and make these all seem compatible terms. His critical strategy was anything but naive. He implied that copying would assure strict adherence to nature; it would eliminate the influence of other artists by obviating access to the works of art that might serve the more academic painter as models for his own image of reality. I believe that painters of the late nineteenth century recognized what is generally recognized today (especially in view of Gombrich's study), namely, the power that convention exercises over any representation of reality. But these painters made use of their own myth of the innocent eye, the myth of the naive artist, in order to claim a desired independence from the past, a purity of the self. While Zola denied to his favored artists any limiting sources in artistic tradition, he assumed that the self would give form to their work even in the case of painting a direct copy; for no conscious or sane man could negate the living presence of his own particular being.

Zola defined the work of art as "a bit of nature seen through a temperament." "Temperament" was the product of individual physical constitution and caused the actual immediate vision of artists to vary accordingly (Shiff 1978:357–358). Hence Zola always praised an artist for painting "what he sees [ce qu'il voit]." There could be no fixed reality in genuine art; such art must always be the product of human experience. No artist could see or render an invariant reality, nor could a rigid idealism, a normative standard, have any relation to real experience or life. In the artist's "copy" of nature, there would always be a difference, and this difference, this individual identity, was not in the appearance of things, but in a man:



Figure 1 Édouard Manet. *Portrait of Zola*, 1868. Louvre, Paris.

The artist places himself before nature. . . . he copies it in interpreting it. . . . he is no more or less realistic in his own eyes; in a word . . . his mission is to render objects for us as he sees them [tels qu'il les voit], relying on such detail, creating anew. I will express my whole thought in saying that a work of art is a bit of nature [création] seen through a temperament. . . .

A work for me, is a man; I would find [retrouver] a temperament in this work, a particular unique accent. [Zola 1879:229, 225]

Zola's definition of art has two broad implications. First, the modern artist becomes radically individual and becomes the absolute origin of his own style to an extent never so openly advocated by academicians—had they done so, they would have been undermining their academic function in society, their transmission of technical and philosophical principles transcending individual artistic expression. Second, the modern critic, to an unprecedented degree, must yield his normative standard of evaluation to some vague sense of artistic sincerity. Although an intangible sincerity may have been the effect sought, it nevertheless seemed to many critics to be the product of specific technical means. Thus, in 1868, Jules Antoine Castagnary could advise naturalist painters that they might manipulate their compositions so long as the representation appeared in the end to be a simple direct copy, for anything that seemed an unmediated copy would seem "sincere" (Castagnary 1892b:l, 292).

When Manet—or Zola, speaking for him—claimed artistic sincerity by denying any invention or compositional manipulation on his part, he was, of course, creating a very specific verbal picture of the activity of the modern artist, a picture he attempted to represent visually in his painting. Zola stated that Manet's technique was merely to follow nature and find himself: "il s'était trouvé lui-même" (Zola 1970b:97). The painter did not compose but rather recorded chance groupings, and his works were marked by strong contrasts of color (ibid.:102). At nearly every point in his critical analysis, Zola managed to show that Manet's art was as unmediated as it could be.

Zola's project might seem to be to convert the highest artistic expression from the very willful activity that academics such as Blanc conceived to a more passive course of discovery in which one finds oneself only as a result of the artistic process. For Blanc, "the last word in imitation is to produce a copy that one could take for the original; in other words, the masterwork of the imitator would be to make an illusion" (1880:18). Imitation, or copying, is thus performed when the original is already available; it adds nothing new and, as Blanc argues, produces only a potential deception. For Zola, however, art lives and grows as artists do and, so long as art remains independent of convention, its "copy" of nature will reveal an originality ever changing, an evolving artistic temperament:

I am not for any school, because I am for the truth of humanity which excludes every clique and every system. The word "art" displeases me; it encompasses certain ideas of necessary arrangement, of an absolute ideal. To make art, is this not to do something outside of man and nature? For my part, I want to make life; I want people to be alive, to create anew, outside of everything, according to their own eyes and their own temperaments. [1970a:60]

Manet, then, becomes an artist in Zola's sense not by making "art," that is, not by employing conventional artistic techniques to express his ideas, but by following the chance patterns of nature, as *he sees them*, in his own unique and original manner. He finds both nature and himself in this vision, a vision which may indeed, at face value, seem "innocent."

Zola writes that he is displeased by the word "art," with its suggestion of artifice. His rhetorical gesture here verges on the quixotic, for he knew that artists can represent neither the natural nor the original automatically, but must consciously strive after the mastery that would insure originality (Shiff 1978:358–360). Manet himself, according to his friend Antonin Proust, has reasoned in 1858 that there must be some *method* of representing the experience of nature with minimal mediation:

An artist should be a *spontanéiste*. There's the right term. But to have spontaneity, one must be master of his art. Undirected groping never leads anywhere. One must translate what one experiences, but translate it instantaneously, so to speak. [Proust 1897:427]

The solution, then, is not to eliminate the means of making, not to cede all control, but to arrive at a means of immediacy. Instantaneous translation in terms of some medium would be quite a feat, a mastery that would seem to render negligible the influence of the medium itself. Zola, in speaking of Manet's unrestrained "copying" and freedom from rule and thought, describes the artist's work as if its technical principles had indeed become invisible. And when Castagnary, another champion of naturalism, considered the paintings of the somewhat older landscapist Jongkind, he seems to have made the claim for the attainment of a disappearing technique even more definitively:

[Jongkind's] craft hardly concerns him, and this results in the fact that, before his canvases, it does not concern you either. The sketch finished, the picture completed, you do not trouble yourself with the execution; it disappears before the power or the charm of the effect. [Castagnary 1892a:l, 170]

Whether Jongkind has deliberated over his art or not, the viewer cannot say; the *appearance* of spontaneity, if not its reality, has been achieved.

Despite such enthusiastic response to self-effacing procedures, we must suspect that critics such as Castagnary and Zola knew well that specific identifiable, *visible* techniques had been employed by artists who wished to present a naive and original vision. Zola gives clues as to what might define the technique of originality. He notes that Manet's work is characterized by strong oppositions of value (dark/light) and that his "composition" appears haphazard, unplanned (Zola 1970b:102). Zola also relates that Jongkind paints sky and earth with an "apparent disorder" (1970c:160). The technique of originality is thus consistently revealed negatively, as the antithesis of conventional academic procedure—if the one is deliberate, the other is spontaneous; if the one employs ("artificial") chiaroscuro transitions, the other employs ("natural") violent oppositions of value or hue; if the one is orderly or systematic, the other is haphazard; if the one is complex in its internal compositional differentiation, the other is simple in its uniformity. Our question now is this: how, more precisely, did French artists of the later nineteenth century *make* "original" paintings?

Making "Original" Paintings

In 1876, the artist and man of letters, Eugène Fromentin, criticized the painting of his younger contemporaries; he had in mind the works of both the independent impressionists and those academics who exhibited a naturalistic manner. Fromentin felt that these artists worked without adequate observation and manipulation of "values," the chiaroscuro modulation he so much admired in Rembrandt and others. The critic stressed attention to detail and nuance, and he distinguished those who presented a finely worked and highly differentiated picture surface from those who seemed to leave things almost as they found them, as if in a state of innocence. According to Fromentin, the attempted removal of artifice and convention from modern art had merely brought about a loss of imaginative invention (Fromentin 1876:285).

Fromentin's comments appeared in the context of a historical study of the Dutch and Flemish masters of past ages; had he focused instead on the French, Claude would have been his paradigm in the area of landscape art: "we have had in France only one landscapist, Claude Lorrain" (ibid.:271). For Thomas Couture, too, Claude served as a model of excellence: "[his painting] escapes the analysis of its procedure; its technique is so perfect that [any sign of] the worker disappears completely" (Couture 1869:63). Couture seems to claim that Claude had achieved the

Figure 2 Claude Lorrain. *The Ford*, 1636. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund (1928).







Figure 3 Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot. *View of Genoa*, 1834. The Art Institute of Chicago. Mr. and Mrs. Martin A. Ryerson Collection.

technical mastery Manet would later seek, to render technique itself invisible. This genius freed himself from all academic practice; yet Claude became the model for academics. Succeeding generations emulated his refined manner because his well-differentiated light and color corresponded with the academic ideal of a technique subtly responsive to specific expressive aims. While perhaps attaining magical effects, Claude's technique was yet subject to academic analysis of the simplest sort, for his compositions quite obviously depended on the interrelationships of their well-defined parts. His light (and the space it created) exemplified what became a traditional academic principle; as Charles Blanc would say, such pictorial light was properly arranged and composed of its varying elements—"unified, but not uniform" (1880:555).

Analysis of a characteristic painting by Claude—*The Ford* (Figure 2), usually dated 1636—may serve to establish a norm for compositional differentiation, for the achievement of the hierarchical ordering of composite elements that academics advocated. The structured order of *The Ford* seems internalized, having its own sense of scale and system of spatial recession. Once we imagine ourselves to "enter" the painting, we have no difficulty in moving from

part to part, "through the landscape," for we are guided by a sense of continual transition or passage. We seem never to be confronted by spaces or objects (rendered as patches of color) of equal attraction, for each area of the painting holds a unique position in the compositional hierarchy. The foreground, for example, reveals a play of patterns of light and shade (primarily warm greens and browns) which changes gradually as we glance either from right to left or from the illusionistic "near" to the illusionistic "far."

In *The Ford*, Claude renders a figural group in the central foreground with a pattern of differentiated light similar to that seen in the surrounding landscape. One female figure, clothed primarily in white and ochre, constitutes the principal highlight. Two pairs of figures are in dimmer illumination, with the female of each pair highlighted and more luminously colored than the male. This pattern of subtle opposition and variation extends to the vegetation of the middle-ground. To the extreme left, an aged tree trunk with a few live branches is set against a mass of healthy foliage.⁶ Within that mass, one tree with warm yellowish leaves serves to animate the dominant cool green tones of the others, while in each individual tree a highlighted and shaded area are defined. Similarly, to

Figure 4 Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot. *Ville d'Avray*, ca. 1867–1870. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Gift of Count Cecil Pecci-Blunt (1955).



the right of the central river, a second mass of foliage is differentiated by the presence of both a decaying tree and healthy ones.

Claude tints deep blues off into paler tones in order to suggest a gradual spatial transition in the area of the river. There are two groups of boatmen on the river; here, too, the artist seems to achieve maximal compositional variety by placing one group relatively near (large in scale) and toward the left bank, and the other far (small) and toward the right. A passage of hills and valleys beyond the bridge over the river is characterized by systematic variation from larger to smaller forms and from warmer to cooler tones (greens and ochres to blues). The sky above (i.e., adjacent to) the bluish mountains or hills is pale and yellowish, its color gradually shifting to a cooler and progressively deeper blue toward the upper margin of the painting. In sum, there are no areas of abrupt juxtaposition and none of the "flatness" or lack of modulation of which Fromentin might complain. Nuances of hue and especially value suggest a compositional ordering likely to be the product of careful deliberative technique.

This type of composition, associated with Claude and other French masters, structures many of Corot's landscapes, especially those of his early career.

Indeed, Corot was well known for the care with which he established relationships of chiaroscuro values within naturalistic views. His paintings, according to Fromentin, became formularizations of the laws for the use of values (1876:238–239). And Blanc, on his part, compared Corot to Claude as an artist capable of presenting "the sense [sentiment] of the ideal through the sensation of the real" (1876:377). Corot, in other words, did not merely imitate nature; he maintained control over his technique for the sake of poetic expression. Most critics recognized "poetry" in Corot's work; this quality had been defined generally by Théophile Thoré as "the opposite of imitation. It is invention, it is originality, it is the manifested sign of a particular impression. Poetry is not nature, but the feeling [sentiment] that nature inspires in the artist" (1893:I, 20).

Notes from Corot's own hand and accounts of the artist's conversations indicate that he thought systematically about his technical procedure as a means to establish his personal vision. In fact, he seems to have followed the same hierarchy of expressive devices that Blanc established in his *Grammaire*. In undated notes, Corot advised the artist to consider first drawing and the general compositional arrangement, then chiaroscuro values (arranged in sequence from



Figure 5 Claude Lorrain. *Landscape with the Voyage of Jacob*, 1677. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Mass.

dark to light), then color, and finally execution or brushstroke (Courthion 1946:I, 82–83, 89; II, 94–96). Corot even employed an abstract system of notation, involving circles and squares, to aid him in arranging the areas of light and dark in his compositions (Moreau-Nélaton 1924:I, 126). This device may have facilitated the recording of transient effects of natural illumination (a “naïve” vision), but it also indicates the systematic quality of the technical procedure.

Corot's refined and conventionalized approach to rendering landscape effects is evident in his *View of Genoa* of 1834 (Figure 3), a work of small scale yet rich detail. As Claude often did, Corot locates his primary subject, the city itself, in the central middle-ground, and he frames its illuminated brilliance with contrasting darker areas situated to the left and right. The foreground consists of relatively dark tones of great variety — foliage of greens, ochres, and browns differentiated in terms of both value (dark and light) and hue (warm and cool). As the darker masses to the left and right of the illuminated city recede illusionistically from the extreme foreground (the bottom edge of the painting), they culminate in architectural structures, the villa at the left and the tower at the right, which vary both in form (the relatively massive horizontal opposed to the slender vertical) and scale (the larger and relatively near opposed to the smaller and relatively distant). At any point of comparison we might choose in our description of the two landscape masses flanking the city (or, rather, framing it from the central foreground and sides), differentiation or variation will be noted. For example, in the immediate foreground, the central area of landscape is relatively dark, while lighter tones characterize the areas to the left and right. And these two areas themselves are dissimilar, since the right side appears at a lower spatial level than the left and is defined by a more complex pattern of chiaroscuro modulation.

In general, Corot's very simple composition avoids the symmetry we might at first imagine from a verbal description of the arrangement of his subject. The artist accomplishes this through the use of a complex chiaroscuro system, a unified but not uniform light. At the same time, Corot achieves an effective logic of expression by placing his central subject in the composition's highest illumination and by using the surrounding, contrasting forms to direct vision toward it. According to traditional standards, Corot has chosen his subject and his means of expression carefully, leaving little, if anything, to chance.

Like Delacroix, Corot was one of a few French artists who received nearly universal acclaim in the 1860s and 1870s. His more conservative critics tended to appreciate his “poetry,” the expression of his thought through natural effects, while his more radical admirers, such as Zola, emphasized his extreme fidelity to nature (Bigot 1888:65–67; De

Montaignon 1875:22; Zola 1970c:161). Corot himself, especially in his later years, is recorded to have made remarks that the impressionists or any others concerned with originality would indeed have applauded. Many of these statements seem inconsistent with the artist's careful account of his own conventionalized technique. For example, in 1872, Corot spoke of interpreting nature “with naïveté and according to your personal feeling, separating yourself entirely from what you know of old masters or contemporaries” (Courthion 1946:I, 84). And in 1874, he claimed:

No one has taught me anything. . . . Yes, I put white in all my tones, but I swear to you that I do not do this according to a principle. It's my instinct that urges me to do this and I obey my instinct. [ibid.:88]

Corot, then, minimizes the role of system and codified learning, while bringing impulse, instinct, and chance encounter to the fore. Furthermore, his sense of the artist's “impression” is that of the impressionists themselves: he conceives of it as the spontaneous interaction of self and nature; hence, the “first impression,” the object of his art, involves both “imitation” of nature and the expression of personal emotion.⁷

Corot's concern for naïveté and spontaneity seems to have led him to distrust the orderly devices of compositional arrangement, even those he had so carefully studied himself throughout his long career. The conflict he felt was, of course, a common one. Paillot de Montabert, an authority whom Blanc cited many times in his *Grammaire*, had made this pertinent observation in a text completed in 1843:

The word “disposition” [meaning willfull arrangement, a term used to indicate that an artistic composition has been actively constructed rather than passively copied], although it signifies in the language of art a most essential condition, sometimes frightens the exponents of naïveté and spontaneity, and in consequence they are scared away also by the words “arrangement,” “adjustment,” “coordinate,” “symmetry,” “contrast,” etc. [arrangements, agencements, coordonner, symétries, contrastes, etc.]. . . . To be sure, an excellent composition should seem to be a fortunate chance effect; but it will not be at all excellent if, under this appearance of a fortunate accident, it does not allow one to discover the beneficial principle of the beautiful . . . the combinations from which result harmony [and] unity. [Paillot de Montabert 1855:182–183]

Corot might well be included in the category of those “exponents of naïveté and spontaneity” unnerved by the apparent omnipresence of willful pictorial organization — its results were visible in all the compositions he would consider artificial, unnatural.

As if in verification of the genuineness of Corot's remarks on his own naïveté and independence from past masters and fixed principles, many of the artist's

later works (although praised by conservative critics) are not so easily analyzed as is his *View of Genoa*. His *Ville d'Avray* (Figure 4), for example, usually dated c. 1867–1870, does not focus on a central subject. The willow trees occupy the compositional position analogous to that of the city of Genoa in the earlier painting but are located in the foreground, not the middle distance. They are flanked by two other points of interest, the building complex to the left and the receding river to the right. We must ask what constitutes the primary “subject” of this painting: the foreground composition of trees and figures? perhaps the river itself? or possibly Corot’s general “impression”? Several parts of the image seem to vie for the viewer’s final attention without allowing any hierarchical resolution. For the “academic,” this situation might be experienced in terms of an uncomfortably “divided” attention, but, for the antiacademic painter of originality, such lack of conventional resolution would signify a state of immediate consciousness, a wholeness existing *prior* to the application of any differentiating concepts or techniques.

Corot presents a uniformity of elements in his landscape subject, and he reinforces this lack of differentiation through his particular use of chiaroscuro. The general lighting effect in *Ville d'Avray* is much more uniform than that in Claude’s *Ford* or in Corot’s own *View of Genoa*. This can be seen, for example, in the sky, which Corot renders quite evenly; in *View of Genoa*, in contrast, transitions from lighter to darker tones and from warm pinks and violets to cool blues give the sky a more (conventionally) spacious and vaulted character.

The river depicted in *Ville d'Avray* raises the question of spatial differentiation once again. Slight variations in tone indicate that this river runs back into an illusionistic distance at the right side of the picture, but in its compositional placement it seems to extend laterally across the picture, separating foreground from middle-ground. Yet Corot confuses this potentially clear distinction by the central placement of the trees and by their coloring. The two trees seem to link the near bank of the river to its far side, denying spatial differentiation; these trees have obvious physical roots in the foreground bank, yet their foliage, which extends into the compositional area of the opposite bank, is a cool green more similar to other tones of the middle distance than to the somewhat warmer greens of the foreground grasses. In addition, a single small building, seen through a gap in the foliage of the left-hand tree, seems to project forward, further confusing any systematic ordering of the illusionistic spaces of the painting.

The general topographical features of the landscape depicted in Corot’s *Ville d'Avray* resemble those seen in Claude’s *Landscape with the Voyage of Jacob* (1677) (Figure 5), which shares the technical qualities of *The Ford*. In the *Voyage of Jacob* composition, a group of trees forms a strong central focus, and the architectural mass at the left and the area of foliage at the extreme right serve as framing elements as well as secondary accents. If read from left to right as two-dimensional patterns, the sequences of buildings, trees, and foliage in these paintings by Claude and Corot seem alike. Furthermore, as in *Ville d'Avray*, a river traverses *Voyage of Jacob* as if flowing from left to right and front to back. Claude, however, defines each segment of his river as it courses “through” his composition in a manner Corot simply does not follow (although we must assume he had the capacity to do so). Claude uses the course of the river — in addition to the general modulation of chiaroscuro and color from foreground to background — to establish a spatial progression marked by clear steps; he depicts the river (in combination with a tributary?) as winding around the central trees so that it appears first before them and then behind them, distinguishing a singular location for the trees not only beside the framing elements of architecture and foliage but decidedly in front of them. As if to reiterate the spatial hierarchy, Claude presents a caravan of camels, sheep, cattle, and goats winding through the illusionistic space of the composition, parallel to the river. The viewer observes a voyage in duplicate — the river’s and the caravan’s (Jacob’s) — and can see all elements of the landscape as specific spatial markers. Corot’s composition, in contrast, lacks just this specificity of spatial definition.

In general, in *Ville d'Avray* Corot uses neither a hierarchical ordering of dark and light values nor one of warm and cool hues, and does not establish the sense of a single spatial sequence from an imagined “front” to an imagined “back” of his depiction of nature. Within the painting’s surface of predominantly cool coloration, the noticeably warmer areas are found both in the foreground (in the figure at the left) and in the middle distance (in the building complex on the far bank). The foreground area contains a number of specks of impasto to define highlights on the herbage and foliage. The middle-ground contains less of this textured paint, but the difference is slight. Within the foreground, the artist distributes these highlights quite evenly; they do not themselves suggest a variation of compositional parts. In addition, the two human figures and the two trees appear lined up across this area, as if the artist has taken no pains to group them in a picturesque or expressive manner.

This is the kind of straightforward presentation for which impressionists, such as Pissarro, were often criticized in their earlier years; it was said that they lacked skill in composition (Duret 1885a:8–9).

Given the evidence of *View of Genoa* and many similarly conventional paintings in Corot's oeuvre, the artist must have known the extent to which works like *Ville d'Avray* departed from established norms. Even if *Genoa* and *Ville d'Avray* had been painted in the same spirit of "naïveté," with the same spontaneity and speed of execution and the same "sincere" fidelity to nature, one would seem less conventional and more original than the other. *Ville d'Avray* would appear less differentiated compositionally and hence less deliberate; it would serve to convince the viewer of Corot's joint discovery of nature and his artistic self, instead of seeming a proof of the artist's self-conscious application of technique. If Corot's works of the type of *View of Genoa* succeeded according to standards of orderly representation, they might fail (for some viewers) once a *technical* link to the tradition of Claude had been recognized; for Corot would then appear as an imitator — not an imitator of nature, but of art, of Claude. He would appear as a willful maker, not a naïve finder. Works of the type of *Ville d'Avray*, however, solve the problem: Corot's own technique of originality yields an image that cannot be translated into the Claudean system of compositional differentiation.

When Théodore Duret, a critic and a friend of Manet, wrote on naturalism in 1867, he chose Corot as a prime example of an artist who had derived his "original style" from direct contact with nature, independent of any experience of the art of others (1867:21–28). In general, even for critics who did not advocate such a radical break with the past, Corot served as an example of independence and originality. Raymond Bouyer, for instance, called Corot the "petit-fils de Claude," but remarked that his disavowal of academic "servitude" indicated that he had understood the true value of tradition; Corot had honored the original "eloquence" of Claude by resisting the stylistic conventions established by this master's own "academic" pupils (1893:v. 5, 22; v. 6, 125). As it was often said of Poussin, Corot had made a return, but only to "original" sources — to the classic master of his own tradition, Claude, and to nature itself.

Personal "Style"

The young impressionists admired Corot's apparent independence and shared his concern for the development of a personal "style" that did not depend on conventionalized technique. Having isolated himself at Etretat in 1868, Monet wrote that his works would now escape resemblance to those of anyone else and would become "simply the expression of what I shall have personally deeply felt" (Wildenstein 1974–1979:I, 425–426). He wanted specifically to avoid the ideas he would have received in Paris, concepts and procedures that would inhibit his own expression. He spoke of rejecting acquired knowledge in order to concentrate on experience.

A year earlier, in 1867, Monet had worked during the summer at Sainte-Adresse and had produced a series of remarkable studies of the coastline. These paintings demonstrate that the artist had indeed succeeded in rejecting much; they lack even the greatly attenuated hierarchical ordering visible in Corot's *Ville d'Avray*. For example, *The Beach at Sainte-Adresse* (Figure 6) (now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art) seems the pictorial negation of the traditional manner of proceeding in orderly fashion from a linear compositional framework to a systematic application of chiaroscuro, to end finally with a harmony of expressive color. Monet differentiates the parts of his composition primarily by means of color itself and, to judge by conventional standards, seems hardly to differentiate at all. The parts of his composition are so similar in visual intensity that his work might appear either entirely uniform or completely fragmented, a juxtaposition of elements never cohering into a whole. In our analysis, we shall assume that Monet did not work out of ignorance of the standard, but rather, as he himself implies, out of a desire to be different from others for the sake of being true to the sources of his originality, nature and his own self.

Monet's technique obviously suggests that of the "spontaneous" outdoor sketch. By employing a very apparent broad brushstroke, the painter makes reference to a rapid speed of execution and, by implication, the spontaneity and lack of deliberation in his own response to nature. This technique appears quick enough to "capture" the transient impression, a shift of mood in nature or in the artist. But Monet's technique is not that of the *conventional* sketch. He does not establish an "effect" of the usual sort, for his surface of color patches fails to provide, even in rudimentary form, a chiaroscuro system that might characterize a structured completed painting. Instead, the parts of *The Beach at Sainte-Adresse* seem independently observed (at least by conventional standards), without any resolution into a hierarchy. The appearance of an expansive depth of space in this painting derives not from Monet's application of



Figure 6 Claude Monet.
The Beach at Sainte-Adresse, 1867. The
Metropolitan Museum of
Art, New York. Bequest of
William Church Osborn
(1951).

color but from the nature of the motif itself, a shoreline receding to a distant horizon. The artist does not "use" perspective; instead of building a volumetric space, he appears to "copy" what is inherent in the natural site.

The academic sketch, or landscape *étude*, was intended to establish the character of the general illumination in a picture (Boime 1971:137–139). Monet does something of the same sort, but with a calculated distinction. He creates a light that we might consider either extremely particularized (he carefully renders local shadows, but not a broad contrast of light and shadow as in Corot's *View of Genoa*) or extremely generalized (the intensity of his hues remains nearly equal everywhere). By either estimation, Monet seems, in terms of academic theory, to present uniformity rather than the desired unification. But in the artist's own terms (of a later date, 1890), he has rendered "instantaneity" . . . the same light spread everywhere" (Wildenstein 1974–1979:III, 258). His desired spontaneity seems to depend on his rendering the effect he supposes to perceive most immediately, uniform illumination. Any differentiation of this lighting effect, other than the recording of local small-scale variation associated with direct observation, would

suggest deliberation and artifice. In other words, Monet must avoid the imposition of what would be recognized as a familiar pictorial effect of illumination, the generalized differentiation of light achieved by conventional chiaroscuro, just what the *traditional* sketch provided (in its own quest for innocent vision). Because it had been acquired as conventional, the technique of the traditional sketch could no longer be considered "naïve," nor a means to originality.

A more concrete description of *The Beach at Sainte-Adresse* will help to indicate the signified "originality" of Monet's own sketchlike composition. The immediate foreground of the painting seems to divide into three areas. To the left, Monet has painted the beach primarily with gray, umber, and ochre. At the center, he has employed dull yellow-green, dull blue, and green in the water. To the right, the colors of the water are brighter: green, yellow-green, and blue-green. These three areas of modulated color can be followed "back into" the seascape (i.e., upward from the bottom of the painting) according to a conventional shift in the scale of the individual strokes (from larger to smaller) and in their degree of independent articulation (from clear distinction to relative lack of distinction). When the view passes from one of these



Figure 7 Claude Monet. *The Beach at Sainte-Adresse*, 1867. The Art Institute of Chicago. Mr. and Mrs. Lewis L. Coburn Memorial Collection.

broad areas of color to another, however, the radical nature of Monet's technique becomes evident, for no spatial progression, no systematic variation in illumination, is suggested. These areas do not lead to a central subject nor do they set one another off in a rational sequence — all seem capable of competing for attention as if, as I have stated, one were viewing either a fragmented image or an unusually integrated one. In the case of a fragmented image, the abrupt juxtaposition of brilliant hues would suggest a "naïve" vision recording in a simplified manner only the colors nature seems to provide; this is the technique often associated with the Japanese who (it was said) had never mastered "European" chiaroscuro (Duret 1885b:98–99). In the case of an integrated image, the uniformity of the illumination would suggest, in effect, that Monet employed no technique, for he imposed no devices of differentiation upon his vision. *The Beach at Sainte-Adresse* might then serve to signify only "what the artist sees," a "copying" of nature. At the same time, such an image would serve to convey what Monet, in his words, "personally deeply felt"; for what he may have learned from others can, supposedly, be nowhere in evidence in such an ignorant style.⁸

A second painting of *The Beach at Sainte-Adresse* (Figure 7) (also of 1867 and now in The Art Institute of Chicago) could be analyzed similarly in terms of the interrelationship of its parts. By the Claudean standard, its composition, too, must fail, or at least appear extremely awkward. Objects of interest within the composition seem either too similar in scale (e.g., the beached rowboats at center and left) or too dissimilar (e.g., the figural group by the boats and the much smaller figures sitting on the beach). Such failure to establish a definite pattern of variation makes the transition from one area to another difficult, as if no gradual passage were conceivable. Indeed, the composition suggests Zola's description of Manet's painting, given the same year: "he groups figures [or other objects] before him, somewhat haphazardly, and he cares subsequently only to fix them on the canvas as he sees them . . ." (1970b:102). Monet's unconventional composition might qualify as one innocently "found" in nature.⁹

Creating Spontaneity

Robert Herbert has shown that, throughout his career, Monet deliberated over his choices of color and often consciously disguised the true nature of his technical procedure in order to maintain an appearance of spontaneity. He applied impasto to create, as Herbert writes, a "texture of 'spontaneity' " (1979:97). Given the history of modern art criticism, Monet must be judged to have succeeded in his deception; he has been immortalized as the painter of the moment. But Cézanne, too, although known in the critical literature for his reflection and deliberation, developed a style of spontaneity and immediacy; Cézanne, too, employed the technique of originality.

In 1866, Cézanne wrote to Zola concerning the distinction between artificial studio illumination and natural outdoor light — a distinction which was, at that time, becoming so important to critics like Zola and Duret and artists like Monet and Pissarro. Cézanne insisted that the old masters' representations of outdoor scenes lacked the "original" quality that characterized nature; having been painted by traditional studio means, they were "chic," that is, refined in an artificial and conventional manner (Rewald 1937:98–99). By the early 1870s, profiting from the example of Pissarro with whom he worked closely, Cézanne had developed his own "plein-air" style. He employed unusually bright hues and, as we might suspect, an unconventional distribution of values.

Cézanne's *Auvers: Village Panorama*, also called *View of Auvers* (Figure 8), dated c. 1874, reveals one of the artist's typical palettes and a manner of execution common in this period of his career.¹⁰ As a panoramic view of a town, this painting may bear comparison with Corot's *View of Genoa*: both seem to set architectural features against a surrounding landscape and a distant vista. In *Auvers*, Cézanne suggests distance through the progressive diminution of the architectural forms and the relatively loose, broad execution of the background hills and sky. In addition, he uses a somewhat duller coloring in the background areas. Yet, *View of Auvers* embodies no clear compositional pattern or differentiation, for its hues, values, and textures are distributed evenly enough to create a sense of uniform illumination, a light that encompasses but does not determine or define. Bright primary hues — red, blue, yellow, brilliant green — range across the picture along with accents of white.¹¹ Unlike Corot's *Genoa*, Cézanne's *Auvers* gives little sense of framing an architectural subject by a contrasting expanse of foliage, nor does it center one element among others of decidedly different visual character. The village itself, like the general illumination, seems expansive and diffused. Some sense of a differentiating diagonal recession arises from the row of houses in the right foreground and seems reinforced by the placement of a mass of architectural

Figure 8 Paul Cézanne. *Auvers: Village Panorama*, ca. 1874. The Art Institute of Chicago. Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Larned Coburn Memorial (1933).





Figure 9 Paul Cézanne
Bathers, ca. 1875–1876.
The Metropolitan Museum
of Art, New York. Bequest
of Joan Whitney Payson
(1975).





Figure 10 Paul Cézanne.
The Pond, late 1870s.
Museum of Fine Arts,
Boston. Tompkins
Collection, Arthur Gordon
Tompkins Residuary
Fund.

Figure 11 Paul Cézanne.
Paysage d'hiver, late
1880s. Philadelphia
Museum of Art. Given by
Frank and Alice Osborn.



forms in the left middle-ground, but this configuration appears simply as evidence of the artist's direct observation. Cézanne's viewers would not see it as a preconceived pictorial device, the application of a law of perspective, because there is no corresponding variation in illumination (i.e., chiaroscuro modeling). Similarly, the rising slope of land at the left foreground does not serve as a conventional *repoussoir* device, for it, too, is relatively undifferentiated in terms of value, and its green coloration readily agrees with that of the central area which it might otherwise set off.

Cézanne did not paint his *View of Auvers* out of ignorance of convention but by way of an intentional forgetting, the kind of attitude that had enabled Monet to see original "truth" at Sainte-Adresse. Cézanne certainly knew how to employ chiaroscuro modeling; he had done so, albeit in a simplified, condensed form, in many portraits of the late 1860s. If we can allow some of the artist's later comments to bear on the interpretation of *View of Auvers*, they confirm the hypothesis that Cézanne wished to reject traditional technique and become an "original" finder, sensitive to whatever nature might lay before him. He advised

Émile Bernard in 1905 that nature "falls before our eyes [and] gives us the picture. . . . [we must] give the image of what we see, forgetting all that has existed before us" (Rewald 1937:276–277). And in several letters to his son in 1906, he complained that Bernard's own art could not succeed because he was too closely bound to what he saw in art museums, learned in academies, or merely conceptualized by way of his own theories (ibid.: 289, 292–293). Cézanne's flight from artistic convention identified him with the independent impressionists to a degree Bernard never comprehended. At the end of his life, Cézanne could probably still admire the critical statement of Émile Blémont that he had once endorsed in 1876 (ibid.:125). Blémont had written that the impressionists strive to

render with absolute sincerity, *without arrangement or attenuation*, by simple and broad techniques, the impression evoked in them by aspects of reality. . . . And as there are not perhaps two men on the earth who perceive the same relationships with the same object, [the impressionists] *do not see the need to modify their personal and direct sensation according to any convention whatever*. [Blémont 1876, emphasis added]

All who avoid conventional practice remain unique; all such artists maintain their originality.

Clearly, Cézanne's own attitude demanded a *technique* of originality, for he never went so far as to deny the importance of technique itself. He accounted for his own lack of "realization," the incompleteness of his art, and his reluctance to exhibit, by noting that he had not yet found the proper means of expression. Even as he stressed fidelity to nature in the same radical manner that Zola had, he spoke also of technical mastery: "One is neither too scrupulous, too sincere, nor too submissive before nature; but one is more or less master of his model, and above all his means of expression. One must penetrate what lies before him, and strive to express himself as logically as possible" (Rewald 1937:262).

Is there a logic, even a system, in Cézanne's personalized, "original" vision of nature? At this point we can say at least that Cézanne chooses elements of technique that are decidedly unconventional and applies them repeatedly as if they bore some specific signification. In other words, he does not seem bound to a transient observation of nature — ever-changing, ever-original — but masters a technique that *represents* originality. Thus, in painting images of his own imagination or those derived from other representations (photographs, graphic illustrations, other paintings), he repeats the same technical features seen in *View of Auvers*, although no immediate observation of nature may be involved in the process. For example, his *Bathers* (Metropolitan Museum, c. 1875–1876) (Figure 9), an "awkward"¹² arrangement of six female nudes in a landscape, contains the same brilliant yellow-green that accents the foliage in *View of Auvers*. *The Pond* (Boston Museum of Fine Arts, late 1870s) (Figure 10), which Cézanne may have derived from a black-and-white illustration, also displays this color as part of a highly simplified pattern of relatively pure hues.¹³ This harsh yellow-green, made from mixing blue or green with a pure yellow, is an example of what Blémond and other critics would associate with an "unattenuated" or *spontaneous* recording of vision, despite the obviously contrived character of both Cézanne's subjects and his systematic "modeling" in sequences of blue-green, green, and yellow-green. Such a yellow-green tends to appear brighter than its position on a scale of values would indicate. Accordingly, it was avoided by those artists (such as Claude) who were concerned with an orderly hierarchy of values within their painting; they would employ instead an attenuated variation of this color, mixed perhaps from blue or black and a duller type of yellow pigment. Cézanne's unusual color serves to signify in all his painting, whether of observed or imagined subjects, that his technique is original in a double sense: it is derived from his direct "unatten-

uated" observation of nature, and it is independent of the technical tradition it clearly defies. In other words, the technique (or style) of Cézanne's art communicates a message of "direct observation" even when the subject matter can be recognized as an imaginative invention.

It might be argued that Cézanne paints in terms of parts rather than wholes. He moves from part to part on his canvases, unifying the whole only by means of the uniformity of his coloristic illumination, his "atmosphere." "Draw," he said to Bernard, "but [remember that] it's the light-reflection that is *enveloping*; light, by the general reflection, is the envelope" (*ibid.*:276). Drawing, the foundation of compositional differentiation, is subordinated to unifying color. By working from part to part with patches of color, the artist could avoid the sense of a preconceived compositional hierarchy and would seem to respond only to immediate "sensation." His compositions would seem to materialize only as he submitted his vision to a relatively passive observation, and the order of his picture would be that of lived experience rather than learned convention. Defined by juxtapositions of color rather than by line or chiaroscuro, Cézanne's technique of originality — like Monet's — develops in opposition to the accepted notion of a controlled artistic procedure. Indeed, when the artist-critics R. P. Rivière and J. F. Schnerb observed and questioned Cézanne in 1905, they noted that the master worked from part to part on his canvases, allowing one form to define the adjacent one, as if the end of this free process could not be foreseen. Moreover, they discovered that Cézanne was aware of the distortion and fragmentary nature of his images; yet he would make no corrections, being unwilling even to cover awkward bare patches of canvas. He seemed obsessed by a concern for "sincerity" (Rivière/Schnerb's term) to the point of accepting absolutely the results of his own immediate pictorial expression (Rivière and Schnerb 1907:813–816).

Cézanne's paintings, whether or not they are finished in terms of covering the whole canvas, frequently seem incomplete; their images reach the edges of the canvas indecisively and they often lack a central focus. This is a factor of painting many parts (sometimes simply many strokes) with equal attention and intensity and denying them any differentiating hierarchy.¹⁴ *Paysage d'hiver*, or *Winter Landscape* (Figure 11), probably painted in the late 1880s, is an unfinished work in which none of the observed individual elements (farmhouse, trees, foreground field) seems complete; the image appears to have been arrested in a process in which these conceptual "wholes" would eventually have been revealed only as an interlocking configuration of parts. The composition expands by addition of areas adjacent to those already defined. Patches of blue sky, for example, are

Figure 12 Paul Cézanne. *Estaque and the Gulf of Marseilles*, ca. 1883–1885. Philadelphia Museum of Art. Mr. and Mrs. Carroll S. Tyson, Jr., Collection.



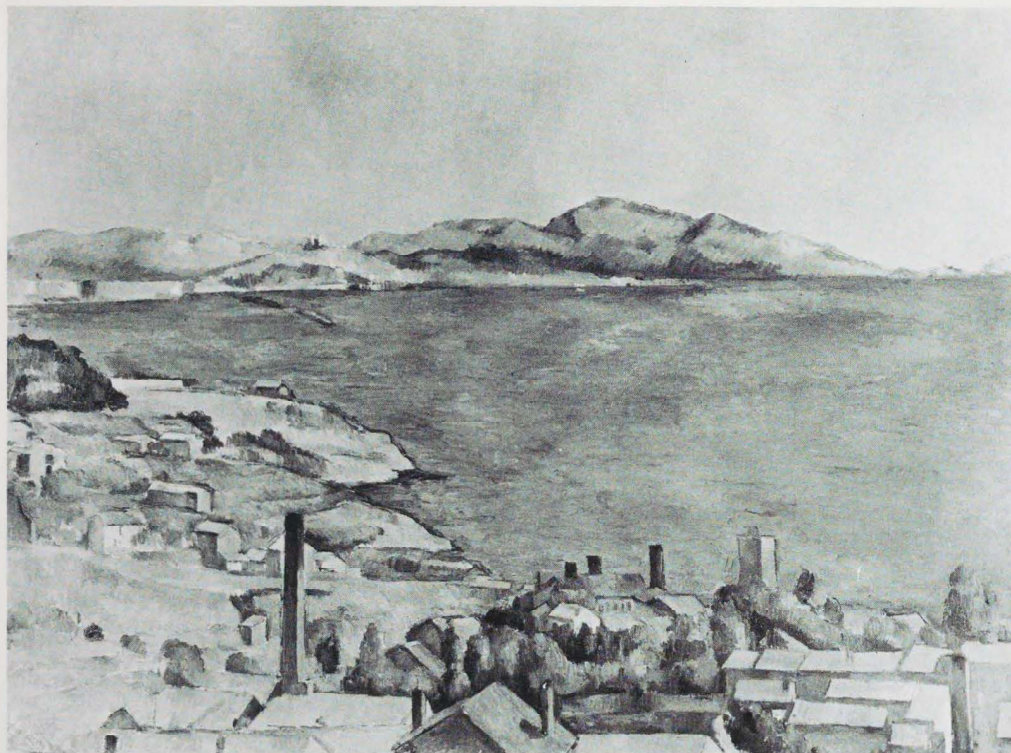
rendered primarily where they border the trees or farmhouse. And although his total image remains incomplete, the artist seems already to concentrate on adjustments among the details, rearranging the pattern of contrasting hues (primarily greens and brownish oranges) in the foreground field.

Cézanne's dual concern for detail and for the unifying pattern of color over the whole picture surface — the two interrelated aspects of his single technique of originality — becomes evident in his paintings of L'Estaque, dated in the mid-1880s. *Estaque and the Gulf of Marseille* (Tyson Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art, c. 1883–1885) (Figure 12) and *The Gulf of Marseille Seen from L'Estaque* (Metropolitan Museum, c. 1883–1885) (Figure 13) are typical of the series of studies made or at least initiated at this site. The vantage point of the Philadelphia version is more distant from the town of L'Estaque than that of the New York version, and the Philadelphia painting remains in a decidedly sketch-like state; but neither version presents an arrangement of the town, bay, and distant mountains that orders these elements into a traditional compositional hierarchy. In both paintings, evidence of the artist's

close attention to peculiarities of the site — contour lines of rock against the sky or bay, architectural elements such as chimneys, or the twisting tree branches in the Philadelphia version — serves to indicate "submission" to nature, not the manipulation of form that an academic might seek as a sign of the studied expression of an artistic ideal. Cézanne does have a definite manner of execution; he chooses his colors carefully and develops patterns of contrasting warm and cool hues to suggest the powerful vibration of a uniform illumination. But all this is done with the artist's assuming, even feigning, the role of the naive finder, avoiding any compositional effects that might be recognized as artifice.

Cézanne began the Philadelphia version of L'Estaque by sketching a few pencil lines to indicate the placement of some of the most important divisions in the natural site, the meeting of land and sea, for example. These lines are very tentative, like those of many of his sketchbook drawings; the formal distinctions they suggest remain subject to continual adjustment. The artist subsequently applied his paint quite fluidly, leaving the directional quality of his strokes apparent. These individual strokes are relatively uni-

Figure 13 Paul Cézanne.
*The Gulf of Marseilles
 Seen from L'Estaque*, ca.
 1883–1885. The
 Metropolitan Museum of
 Art, New York. Bequest of
 Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer
 (1929). The H. O.
 Havemeyer Collection.



form in size, suggesting a uniformity of interest or of detail in the visual field. The scale of the rendered architectural structures naturalistically corresponds to their distance within the implied space of the motif, but this spatial differentiation seems contradicted by the lack of variation both in the brushstrokes that form these identifiable objects and in the intensity of their coloration. The individual architectural elements, then, like the patches of foliage, merge into a general pattern of color characterized by a relatively even distribution of dark and light, and warm and cool contrasts. Accordingly, reddish and yellowish architectural elements become part of a set of warm tones that includes areas of exposed earth or rock and is opposed to the patches of cool vegetation ("modeled" with yellow-green, pale green, deep green, and blue-green). The color of the distant mountains is likewise much more defined by contrasts of hue than of value; here the "modeling" ranges from blue-green, blue, and violet to tones of red-violet and touches of red. The color contrasts in the bay and distant mountains are somewhat subdued, but these areas, like the immediate foreground, are the least heavily painted, the least attended to, and perhaps, in Cézanne's terms, the least experienced or felt.

The New York version of *L'Estaque* appears quite finished by comparison with many works of similar date. Unlike Corot's *View of Genoa* or even his *Ville d'Avray*, Cézanne's *L'Estaque* seems a motif seized from nature with genuine immediacy rather than an arrangement of nature chosen in advance for the canvas; the architecture of the town is disrupted by the edges of the canvas itself, as if the composition had been generated part by part, its final extent not foreseen. The illumination is strikingly uniform. The artist confines variations in chiaroscuro to local areas such as patches of foliage and especially the geometric volumes of architectural elements; here we would expect even a direct "spontaneous" rendering of nature to record strong shifts in light and shadow on the fine scale of architectural detail.

The colors of the more distant parts of the town do not diminish in intensity, nor is there significant variation in the illumination on the bay from the near shore to the far. The entire landscape area of foreground and middle-ground becomes unified in the repetition of warm ochres and oranges which contrast with cool greens and some accents of blue; similarly, the bay



Figure 14 Paul Cézanne. *Mont Sainte-Victoire*, ca. 1885. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer (1929). The H. O. Havemeyer Collection.

displays a regular pattern of blue and blue-green, with some touches of blue tending toward blue-violet. In this painting, Cézanne confined the remaining compositional area, the sky, to minor variations of a single hue (blue-green), but in other paintings, especially later ones, he often created a scintillating pattern of juxtaposed hues even in nominally "clear blue" skies. For example, in his *Mont Sainte-Victoire* of c. 1885 (Metropolitan Museum) (Figure 14), tones of pale blue-green vibrate among pale blues to suggest a brilliant luminosity.

In the *View of the Domaine Saint-Joseph* (Metropolitan Museum) (Figure 15), a painting that might date anywhere from the late 1880s to the late 1890s, Cézanne's predominantly pale-blue sky contains additions of both pale blue-green and pale violet. This extended chromatic range, an exaggeration of hue where perhaps academic convention might have suggested an exaggeration of value, characterizes the entire rendering of this very simple motif. The painting as a whole exhibits a full spectral range, with the warmer hues distributed as accents set against the dominant cooler blues and greens. The foliage and background hills consist of patches of blue, blue-

green, green, yellow-green, yellow-ochre, orange, red, red-violet, and violet — the list approximates a verbal rendering of a color circle. The architecture at the center of the motif is the only interruption to this pattern. Details of the estate buildings are accented in strong blue, red, red-violet, and green, all set against the basic yellows and pale oranges of the architectural planes. Over the entire image, Cézanne maintains such uniformity of light and intensity of color that compositional differentiation and the attendant sense of artistic deliberation either pass unnoticed or indeed are not communicated by such a painting at all.¹⁵

Like the *Domaine Saint-Joseph*, Cézanne's *Pines and Rocks* (Museum of Modern Art, New York) (Figure 16), which dates c. 1896–1900, is another example of an image developed in terms of contrasts of hue that are distributed nearly uniformly. In the area of "foliage" in the foreground of this landscape, patches of yellow-green, red-orange, and blue-violet create a vibrating field of luminosity. In the rocks above this area, the artist placed patches of dull green and ochre among the prevalent blues, violets,

Figure 15 Paul Cézanne. *View of the Domaine Saint-Joseph (la Colline des Pauvres)*, ca. 1888–1898. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Wolfe Fund (1913). Catherine Lorillard Wolfe Collection.



and red-violets, and in the upper part of the canvas, he added red-orange, ochre, and violet to the blues and greens of the sky and foliage. The red-orange of the tree trunks distributes still more warm color throughout this area of the image, so that the cooler colors do not become decidedly dominant. Reciprocally, the linear integrity of these warmly colored trunks and branches becomes attenuated by additions of contrasting cool color painted over the base of warm tones. In general, the sense of an equal distribution of warm and cool colors is preserved in nearly every area of *Pines and Rocks*. Like the *Domaine Saint-Joseph* and so many other works by Cézanne, it lacks the clearly established spatial hierarchy conventionally determined by extended passages from dark to light or warm to cool.

The most thorough and reliable eyewitness accounts of Cézanne's mature technical procedure — those of Bernard (1904, 1907), Denis (1920b), and Rivière and Schnerb (1907) — concur in stating the importance of the artist's use of contrasts of warm and cool colors and his subordination of both line and chiaroscuro values to effects of hue. Cézanne, then,

clearly inverted the conventional hierarchy of procedure established in academic practice: rather than working from line to chiaroscuro (value) to color (hue), he conceived his paintings in terms of relationships of color from the very start; his working process depended on the manipulation of color, the element traditionally believed to be least subject to rational control, the element of spontaneous expressive power (Paillot de Montabert 1855:119–120). According to Bernard (and Rivière and Schnerb), Cézanne believed that “there is no line, there is no [chiaroscuro] modeling, there are only contrasts. These contrasts are not given by black and white, but by the sensation of color.” For Cézanne, nature was perceived immediately as contrasts of color; from these relationships of hue, any pictorial order of shape or modeling would follow, as if automatically (Bernard 1904:23–24).¹⁶ Denis cited Bernard on this point, and amplified it: “In [Cézanne's] truly concrete perception of objects, form is not separated from color; the one regulates the other, they are indissolubly united. And moreover, in the execution, he wants to realize them



Figure 16 Paul Cézanne.
Pines and Rocks
(*Fontainebleau?*), ca.
1896–1900. Collection,
The Museum of Modern
Art, New York. Lillie P.
Bliss Collection.

as he sees them, by the same stroke of the brush." According to Denis, Cézanne's technique depends upon his substitution of "contrasts of hues for contrasts of values. . . . his system excludes certainly the relationships of values in the academic [scolaire] sense of this word, that is to say, in the sense of aerial perspective." Cézanne, then, eliminates the conventional spatial differentiation that might result from a progressive gradation of chiaroscuro, and favors instead a unifying pattern of brilliant hues. Denis observes that, even in the background areas, Cézanne's canvases reveal the scintillating pattern of contrasting colors: "The entire canvas is a tapestry where each color *plays* separately and yet mingles its sonority in the ensemble. The characteristic aspect of Cézanne's painting derives from this juxtaposition, from this mosaic of separate tones gently merging one into the other." As a result of this technique, "the perspective planes disappear, [as do the chiaroscuro] values (in the sense of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts)" (Denis 1920b:257–259). This was all for the good, since Denis had considered conventional chiaroscuro an "artifice of composition" (1920a:214).

In sum, Cézanne's technique of originality was characterized primarily by a unifying and repetitious pattern of contrasting warm and cool colors which seemed to suppress, supplant, or simply supercede a differentiating chiaroscuro. Cézanne's use of color *appeared* naively expressive, spontaneous. But it also could be seen as *signifying* the natural and spontaneous. Although it was a technique suited to an art of immediacy and passive discovery, it might be regarded *either as innocently found or as wilfully made*. Cézanne's most important critics had great difficulty in deciding upon this matter.¹⁷

Cézanne: "Found" or "Made"?

Is Cézanne's art "found" or "made" — independently original or dependent on some form of conventionalized technique? My own answer would simply be that Cézanne was not naive, that he did not have an "innocent eye"; like other artists, he manipulated technique to assert his own values and ideals. But his critics, who shared many of these same ideals, could not easily admit to the use of a self-conscious *technique* of originality in the art of their mythic hero. Instead, they made of Cézanne a new "classic" who represented nature in its originality, naively, even primitively.¹⁸ Furthermore, they compared Cézanne to an earlier French "classic," Poussin; Cézanne became the "Poussin of impressionism" (Denis 1920b:260).

We recall that Poussin himself had been regarded as radically original, as one who had copied his sources directly without the mediation of academic convention and interpretation. As if to dispel any doubt as to the meaning of the Cézanne/Poussin relationship, a particular remark (supposedly emanating from Cézanne) was repeated frequently in the critical literature: it was said that Cézanne wished "to bring Poussin back to life by way of (according to) nature" (Camoin 1905). In French, the phrase was "vivifier Poussin sur nature"; an alternative translation might be "to bring Poussin back to life *on the model of nature*" or (in other words) by following nature, perhaps even "copying" nature. Nature — or one's experience of it — becomes the preferred model: not art, not Poussin, nor any other artist. The ideal of independence and originality that had been associated with Poussin was said to live again in Cézanne's direct experience of nature.

This notion appealed to many of Cézanne's admirers, including Roger Fry, who, like Ruskin, had some difficulty in coordinating a theory of the "innocent eye" with his own practical knowledge of the painter's craft. Fry ascribed an innocence of vision to Monet and impressionist painting in general. In 1909, he wrote that Monet was an artist of "really naive innocence and sincerity" who had an "astonishing power of faithfully reproducing certain aspects of nature" (1956a:25). Yet Fry stressed the logical analysis of the technical elements of expression in his criticism (ibid.:31). He was therefore attracted to Cézanne, in whom he thought he could discern a "post-impressionism," a new movement toward the "classic" that would combine spontaneous expression with technical control:

Classic art . . . communicates a new and otherwise unattainable experience. [Fry 1956b:242]

I call a work "classic" if it depends on its formal organization to evoke emotion. [Fry 1924:152]

Cézanne counts pre-eminently as a great classic master. [Fry 1958:87]

The persuasive power of Cézanne's own technique of originality is indicated by Fry's failure to resolve the question of whether or not this painter had entirely mastered his medium — was Cézanne ultimately a maker or a finder, knowledgeable or naive? In 1910, Fry commented that "his work has that baffling mysterious quality of the greatest originators in art. It has that supreme spontaneity as though he had almost made himself the passive, half-conscious instrument of some directing power" (1910:402). Fry seems to suggest here that Cézanne may have "made" himself naive by a deliberate act; the critic, in his own knowledgeable manner, conceives of the possibility of controlling originality. He is near to admitting the possibility of the mediated *representation* of a desired originality. But Fry had enough respect for the myth of the innocent artist to admire Cézanne for his *lack* of a fully controlled technique. In his definitive study of 1927, he spoke of the artist's "unconscious" impulses:

It is probable that Cézanne himself was ignorant of [the] deformations [in his rendering of still-life forms in perspective]. I doubt if he deliberately calculated them; they came almost as an unconscious response to a need for the most evident formal harmony. [Fry 1958:48–49]

Still, Fry could go on to speak of Cézanne as "interpreting" his vision with an "acquired science" and with a color that had "become increasingly systematic" (ibid.:76). Fry's attention oscillates between the made and the found aspects of Cézanne's art.

Ultimately, this modern "classic" art seems to approach an innocent "copying":

[The achievement of Cézanne's mature style] lies not by way of willed and *a priori* invention, but through the acceptance and final assimilation of appearance. [ibid.:77]

What Fry here calls "appearance" is not identified with the ordinary effects of nature but with a transforming vision peculiar to the artist. It is a vision to which the artist must submit himself; the viewer becomes convinced that the paintings "copy" Cézanne's sensations with immediacy and sincerity. Such "copying," like that which Zola once attributed to Manet, belongs to an art that *finds* its originality in the immediate experience of self and nature. To probe this "naive" art of self-expression, however, one must see it as a technical product of the *desire* for originality. This art advocates originality just as its sympathetic critics do. Even when "original," copies are not found in an "innocent" vision; they are *made*.

Notes

- 1 My discussion of the innocent eye does not include what may be a third aspect of the theory: the broad philosophical discourse (as in Kant and Schopenhauer) regarding the value of "pure" aesthetic perception, a revelatory vision detached from specific material interest and purpose.
- 2 In France, Charles Baudelaire may be regarded as advocating an innocent childlike vision: "Le génie n'est que l'enfance retrouvée à volonté" [Genius is only childhood recovered at will]. But Baudelaire added immediately that this would be an "adult" childhood, endowed with a power of reason to organize the material facts of innocent vision. The artist's eye would be both compromised and fortified by the intellect (1971:11, 144).
- 3 For an example of the confusion of "real" appearances with depicted appearances — a confusion that Gombrich always avoids — within the discussion of impressionist aims and methods, cf. Venturi 1941:38–39.
- 4 The definition of proper models was central to the conflict between romantics and classicists during the 1820s and 1830s and still earlier, around 1800–1810, to the conflict between those who advocated imitation of live models and those who advocated imitation of antique statuary.
- 5 Similarly, Raphael himself was subject to revision and was discussed as a "naïve" painter by many of the same critics who regarded Poussin in this manner.
- 6 Cf. the advice of Valenciennes (1800:425) to the effect that a landscape composition should not have a "monotonous regularity" nor a lack of "contrast on its different planes"; the artist should seek "a site which presents him continually with inequality, that is, correspondences and contrasts." Valenciennes suggests as a suitable landscape element a tree bearing both dead and healthy, foliated branches.
- 7 See Corot's undated notes on this matter and also the report of Mme. Aviat, who painted with him in 1871 (Courthion 1946: I, 89, 95). On impressionism as an expression of both nature and self, cf. Shiff 1978.
- 8 This reasoning is similar to that which Baudelaire applied in his defense of Manet's *Incident in the Bull Ring* in 1864. It was generally recognized that this painting was "original," that is, that its technique appeared so unconventional that it might be judged naïve or even incompetent. Baudelaire could turn this observation to his advantage. But to assert Manet's original genius he had to deny a further observation, namely, that Manet's imagery seemed to derive from other artists, Velazquez and Goya (Shiff 1981:65–68).
- 9 Monet seems to display color, too, "as he sees it" in nature — and, furthermore, as he finds it in his painter's tubes. He inserts the three primaries into his composition (Figure 7) in an unattenuated state: one of the central rowboats is pure blue; a rowboat at left has trim of brilliant yellow; the figure at the extreme left wears blue and red; and a stroke of red is located beneath the female figure at center. These colors call attention to the natural, or immediate, state of Monet's art. The same device of exhibiting the three primary colors is seen in another painting of 1867, Monet's *The Cradle — Camille with the Artist's Son Jean* (in the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon, Upperville, Va.).
- 10 Many of Cézanne's works of the 1870s — many still-lives, for example — appear more dependent on a linear framework than does *Auvers*; this, however, is primarily a factor of the nature of the motif itself and not an indication that the artist considered one manner more successful than another. Coloristically and compositionally, both types of painting, with strong outlining and without, reveal the "technique of originality."
- 11 The colors are set against a gray ground; Cézanne painted on gray grounds very often, especially during the 1870s and 1880s. The use of the middle-value gray ground, a unifying device, was common among the impressionists and others.
- 12 "Awkward," hence naïve or original. Awkwardness was commonly associated with artistic sincerity by both impressionists and symbolists. See, for example, Rivière and Schnerb 1907:813.

- 13 Another example is *Bathers at Rest*, c. 1875–1876 (Barnes Foundation, Merion, Pa.).
- 14 Émile Bernard observed this quality in Cézanne's painting when he first visited the artist; he wrote to his mother (Feb. 5, 1904) that "Cézanne's canvases are made of pieces. He leaves white [spaces] in them everywhere. In sum, he works as Ingres did, proceeding by the detail and finishing the parts before bringing the whole together" (Bernard 1954).
- 15 Although the surface of *Domaine Saint-Joseph* is only thinly covered with paint, the work is signed, indicating that the artist regarded it either as complete or at least as existing in its own final form. Ratcliffe (1961) has argued that Cézanne signed works only as they left his studio, having been purchased or requested by admirers.
- 16 See also Bernard (1907:400) and Rivière and Schnerb (1907:814). The latter write that Cézanne "modelait plus par la couleur que par la valeur. . . c'est par l'opposition des tons chauds et froids que les couleurs . . . arrivent à représenter la lumière et l'ombre."
- 17 I pursue this issue at greater length (especially with regard to Émile Bernard, Maurice Denis, and Roger Fry) in my book, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism* (forthcoming, b). The present essay is derived in large part from this more complete study, in which I discuss additional aspects of Cézanne's style and their interpretation.
- 18 "Classic," in the sense in which it was applied to Cézanne around 1895–1910, usually signified one who establishes, rediscovers, or reforms a tradition and who serves as a model for others without himself being dependent on models. Usually, the "classic" opposes "academic" convention and returns to "nature."

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