

# I

## Introduction

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At the turn of the century, to think of modern art was to think of modern French art. This was not because all modern art was French, but rather because France was the acknowledged source of those critical concepts and practical distinctions to which artists of other countries referred when they intended to mark their own work as modern. The artistic culture of late-nineteenth-century France was rich and diverse. In the mid-century the authority of an academic tradition, already interrupted by revolution and complicated by the career of Jacques-Louis David, had been further challenged by the Realist work of Gustave Courbet and by the connection of that Realism to the revolutions of 1848. Edouard Manet was no revolutionary, but his pursuit of Realist aims in the 1860s took effect in that palpable self-consciousness about the social forms of modernity on the one hand, and the practical means and conditions of representation on the other, which was subsequently to be defined as Modernism. And in the early 1870s – the time of the Franco-Prussian war and of the formation and suppression of the Paris Commune – those who were to be called the Impressionists converged on the project of a modern Naturalism. In the normal history of modern art the Impressionist movement is established as the prototype for avant-gardism in modern art. This status was achieved not as a consequence of explicit radicalism on the part of the artists involved, but rather because there were several of them, and because a conservative resistance rallied vociferously, though in the end ineffectually, against their project.

Realism, Naturalism, modernity, avant-gardism; these concepts and the forms of nineteenth-century French art associated with them were to be substantial points of reference – positive or negative – for the artists and supporters of the early-twentieth-century movements. The relations between these concepts had been subject to various forms of transformation, however. Increasingly after the mid-1880s, the modern was a contested value. The issues at stake are revealed in the alternative conceptions of the Impressionist project and its legacy which were prevalent at the turn of the century. On the one hand it was seen as a continuing Realist tendency modernized by the adoption of a luminous technique (a view of Impressionism broadly consistent with the work of Camille Pissarro); on the other it was associated with intensification of the autonomous effects of art, and thus seen as tending towards abstraction. (A view of Claude Monet's

work along these lines had a decisive effect on the Russian Wassily Kandinsky, according to the latter's own testimony.) The changing interpretations to which Paul Cézanne's work was subject in the years between 1885 and 1910 testify to the continuing problems experienced in characterizing his 'Post-Impressionism', as Roger Fry was to term it in the latter year.

The view of Impressionism as tending towards abstraction is consistent with the position of the Symbolists, in whose regard the once-binding association between Realism and avant-gardism was transformed into a relationship of virtual antithesis. Symbolism was the avant-garde position of the later 1880s and 1890s. The continuing force of its aesthetic theory can be recognized in twentieth-century deliberations on modern art in France and elsewhere, in the form of a deep and prevalent strain of idealism. The importance of this theory lay in its welding together of a claim for the autonomy of language and art as symbol systems, with a claim for the value of aesthetic experience and artistic insight. In Symbolist theory the meaning of a painting is not in principle any more firmly secured by its resemblance to features of the real world than the meaning of a poem is secured by some independent *causal* connection between its various words and the objects those words happen to signify. In each case, it is the internal relations between the parts that secures the possibility of meaning and effect for the whole. Such ideas are nowadays the commonplaces of linguistic and semantic theory. But they remained controversial from the end of the nineteenth century until late into the twentieth. Wherever the effect of these ideas was felt on thought about the arts during this period, the matter of their reception or rejection served more decisively than any other single factor to mark the division between moderns and conservatives.

To this understanding of the autonomy of form, the Symbolists joined a critique of the value of objective perception as a means to knowledge of reality, asserting instead the priority of a disinterested but subjective intuition. Thus Paul Gauguin, who once exhibited with the Impressionists, is to be found at the turn of the century defending himself against criticism of the 'abstraction' of his painting with the assertion that it is 'not a material structure', but rather a 'vision' interpreted 'in an appropriate decor' (IA3). The identification of art with intuition was to be given a philosophical exposition in the aesthetics of Benedetto Croce (IB14), while considerable support for the Symbolists' emphasis on the significance of the 'inner life' was to come from work in the new field of psychoanalysis. Freud was working in Paris in the late 1880s and his *Interpretation of Dreams* was published in 1900 (see IA4).

It remained only to re-establish the Romantic claim that artists are distinguished as such by the relative vividness of their inner life and the relative strength of their intuitions. The 'abstractions' of the artist could then be advanced as the significant forms of an underlying and enduring reality, their critical potential all the greater for their emancipation from the merely apparent and contingent realities of the physical and social world (see IA1). Adoption of such ideas inevitably entailed disparagement of Naturalist and Realist techniques for their supposed subservience to the merely superficial. Thus Cézanne's injunction to Emile Bernard to 'treat nature by means of the cylinder, the sphere,

the cone' (IA6) was seized on not as an instruction in basic modelling, but as a sign that the older painter's enterprise involved seeing through the accidental forms of nature to an underlying world of geometrical constants.

In fact, as implied earlier, Cézanne's work resists explanation in terms of an antithesis between Naturalism and Symbolism. Rather, it serves as demonstration that a commitment to nature as the origin of sensation can be maintained in face of a commitment to the decorative autonomy of the painted surface, if by no means with ease, then certainly with critically remarkable results.

Cézanne's rigour was exceptional, however, and the lessons of his painting were not easily learned. It was widely assumed among the avant-garde factions of the early twentieth century that attention to the specific details of the natural world was inconsistent with fulfilment of the expressive potential of art. As the form of the modern arts which was most clearly both expressive and abstract – which is to say free from the requirements of description – music came to be seen as the type of all the others. Around the turn of the century, musical theories of expression and composition were adopted as means to the advancement of architecture and painting. (Hence, in large part, the importance of Richard Wagner and of his theories to the artists of the avant-garde at the turn of the century.) August Endell and Kandinsky were among those for whom the apparently 'universal' expressiveness of music held out the possibility of an abstract *visual* art, its validity secured not by reference to the appearances of the material world, but rather by the supposed basicness of certain formal principles on the one hand and by the promptings of 'inner necessity' on the other (IB1 and IB7–8).

In Naturalist theories the effect of the work of art was supposed to be traceable back into the world. That it had its origin in that world – in some direct experience of it – was the guarantee of the work's authenticity. In forms of theory subject to the gravitational pull of Symbolism, on the other hand, the effects of art were signs of the authenticity of an inner life; they were understood, that is to say, as originating in the mind or soul of the artist. There were some clear implications of this position. With the abandonment of naturalistic correspondence as a criterion, a premium was placed on the strength and authenticity of individual responses and feelings. A requirement of vividness of expression tended to supplant the traditional requirement of accuracy of description. 'What I am after, above all, is expression,' Henri Matisse wrote in 1908, and he made it quite clear that he saw pursuit of the ends of expression as justifying any liberties he might take with the appearances of people or objects (IB5).

There was a further important corollary to the increasing relaxation of the requirements of Naturalism. This development in modern artistic theory coincided in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with a rapid growth of anthropological study and collection, as scholars and curators sought to make sense of the various appropriations of empire. For those already engaged with modern art, the association of formal expressiveness with authenticity led to substantial revaluation of the generally non-naturalistic images produced by tribal cultures. Recognition of the formal inventiveness – the originality – of

such images involved a reconsideration of their supposed primitivism. Or rather, the concept of the primitive was subject during the period in question to a virtual reversal of its traditional critical function. Formerly a term of disparagement, it came to be used as a measure of vitality, of authenticity and of originality. Following the example of Gauguin, modern artists now claimed kinship with their supposedly unsophisticated counterparts in pursuit of the authentic grounds of feeling and expression hidden behind the veil of appearances. By the first decade of the century, conviction of the authentic expressive power of so-called primitive art had become an item of avant-garde faith, proclaimed by artists and critics in France, Germany, Russia and England (see, for instance, IA3, IB9-11, 13, 15-16). Maintenance of this faith undoubtedly involved a degree of idealization and abstraction of the art of the colonized cultures, which is to say that those involved in appreciation of the objects in question generally paid scant regard to the conditions of their production. On the other hand it can be said that this appreciation entailed a considerable questioning of those measures of skill and sophistication by which the relative authority of European art had previously been established. One important consequence of such theoretical work as Wilhelm Worringer's was that it served to revise the grounds on which comparisons might be made between the art forms of different cultures and epochs (IB4).

The critical revaluation of the European tradition was in general an important aspect of early twentieth-century avant-gardism. The supporters of the modern movements reviewed the art of the past in the light of their present enthusiasms, recasting the terms in which it had previously been conceptualized and valued. Thus, for example, the understanding of 'classicism' was divorced by Maurice Denis and Roger Fry from its traditional association with a canon of literary and mythologizing subjects and reinterpreted in furtherance of the perceived commitments of the modern: on the one hand to signify the concentration of original feeling in visual form, and on the other to suggest that pursuit of such concentration had been the persistent preoccupation of the Western tradition – indeed, that it was the true function of the art of all ages and periods. The defence of a historically-specific modern movement thus took on the character of a universalizing aesthetic system (see IB6, 15 and 16).

## 6 Paul Cézanne (1839–1906) Letters to Emile Bernard

The painter and writer Emile Bernard visited Cézanne in Aix in 1904. In their ensuing correspondence the older artist expounded the priorities of his practice. Bernard drew on these letters in his subsequent writings. His interpretation of Cézanne's work and ideas was all the more influential for appearing to carry the authority of a confidant. From J. Rewald, *Cézanne's Letters*, 4th edition, Oxford, 1976.

Aix-en-Provence, 15 April, 1904

[...] I am happy with the expression of warm artistic sympathy which you kindly address to me in your letter.

May I repeat what I told you here: treat nature by means of the cylinder, the sphere, the cone, everything brought into proper perspective so that each side of an object or a plane is directed towards a central point. Lines parallel to the horizon give breadth, whether it is a section of nature or, if you prefer, of the show which the *Pater Omnipotens Aeternus Deus* spreads out before our eyes. Lines perpendicular to this horizon give depth. But nature for us men is more depth than surface, whence the need to introduce into our light vibrations, represented by the reds and yellows, a sufficient amount of blueness to give the feel of air.

I must tell you that I had another look at the study you made from the lower floor of the studio, it is good. You only have to continue in this way, I think. You have the understanding of what must be done and you will soon turn your back on the Gauguins and [*van*] Goghs! [...]

Aix, 12 May, 1904

[...] My absorption in work and my advanced age will sufficiently explain the delay in answering your letter.

You entertain me, moreover, in your last letter with such a variety of topics, though all are connected with art, that I cannot follow it in all its developments.

I have already told you that I like Redon's talent enormously, and from my heart I agree with his feeling for and admiration of Delacroix. I do not know if my indifferent health will allow me ever to realize my dream of painting his apotheosis.

I progress very slowly, for nature reveals herself to me in very complex ways; and the progress needed is endless. One must look at the model and feel very exactly; and also express oneself distinctly and with force.

Taste is the best judge. It is rare. Art addresses itself only to an excessively limited number of individuals.

The artist must scorn all judgment that is not based on an intelligent observation of character.

He must beware of the literary spirit which so often causes the painter to deviate from his true path – the concrete study of nature – to lose himself too long in intangible speculation.

The Louvre is a good book to consult but it must be only an intermediary. The real and immense study to be undertaken is the manifold picture of nature.

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Aix, 26 May, 1904

[...] On the whole I approve of the ideas you are going to expound in your next article for *Occident*. But I must always come back to this: painters must devote themselves entirely to the study of nature and try to produce pictures which will be an education. Talking about art is almost useless. The work which brings about some progress in one's own craft is sufficient compensation for not being understood by the imbeciles.

The man of letters expresses himself in abstractions whereas a painter, by means of drawing and colour, gives concrete form to his sensations and perceptions. One is neither too scrupulous nor too sincere nor too submissive to nature; but one is more or less master of one's model, and above all, of the means of expression. Get to the heart of what is before you and continue to express yourself as logically as possible. [...]

Aix, 25 July, 1904

[...] I have received the *Revue Occidentale*. I can only thank you for what you wrote about me.

I am sorry that we cannot be side by side, for I don't want to be right in theory, but in front of nature. Ingres in spite of his 'estyle' (Aixian pronunciation) and his admirers, is only a very small painter. The greatest, you know them better than I; the Venetians and the Spaniards.

In order to make progress, there is only nature, and the eye is trained through contact with her. It becomes concentric through looking and working. I mean to say that in an orange, an apple, a ball, a head, there is a culminating point; and this point is always – in spite of the tremendous effect; light and shade, colour sensations – the closest to our eye; the edges of the objects flee towards a centre on our horizon. With a small temperament one can be very much of a painter. One can do good things without being very much of a harmonist or a colourist. It is sufficient to have a sense of art – and this is without doubt the horror of the bourgeois, this sense. Therefore institutions, pensions, honours can only be made for cretins, humbugs and rascals. Don't be an art critic, but paint, there lies salvation. [...]

Aix, 23 December, 1904

[...] I shall not enter with you into aesthetic considerations. Yes, I approve of your admiration for the strongest of the Venetians; we praise Tintoretto. Your need to find a moral, an intellectual point of support in works, which assuredly will never be surpassed, keeps you constantly on the qui vive, incessantly on the search for the means, only dimly perceived, which will surely

lead you, in front of nature, to sense your own means of expression; and on the day you find them, be convinced you will rediscover without effort, in front of nature, the means employed by the four or five great ones of Venice.

This is true, without any possible doubt – I am quite positive: – an optical sensation is produced in our visual organs which allows us to classify the planes represented by colour sensations as light, half tone or quarter tone. Light, therefore, does not exist for the painter. As long as we are forced to proceed from black to white, with the first of these abstractions providing something like a point of support for the eye as much as for the brain, we flounder, we do not succeed in becoming masters of ourselves, in being in possession of ourselves. During this period (I am necessarily repeating myself a little) we turn towards the admirable works that have been handed down to us through the ages, where we find comfort, support, such as a plank provides for the bather. [...]

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Aix, 23 October, 1905

[...] Your letters are precious to me for a double reason: The first being purely egoistic, because their arrival lifts me out of the monotony caused by the incessant pursuit of the sole and unique aim, which leads in moments of physical fatigue to a kind of intellectual exhaustion; and the second, allows me to reassess for you, undoubtedly rather too much, the obstinacy with which I pursue the realization of that part of nature, which, coming into our line of vision, gives us the picture. Now the theme to develop is that – whatever our temperament or form of strength face to face with nature may be – we must render the image of what we see, forgetting everything that existed before us. Which, I believe, must permit the artist to give his entire personality, whether great or small.

Now, being old, nearly 70 years, the sensations of colour, which give the light, are for me the reason for the abstractions which do not allow me to cover my canvas entirely nor to pursue the delimitation of the objects where their points of contact are fine and delicate; from which it results that my image or picture is incomplete. On the other hand the planes fall one on top of the other, from whence neo-impressionism emerged, which circumscribes the contours with a black line, a fault which must be fought at all costs. But nature, if consulted, gives us the means of attaining this end.

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Aix, 21 September, 1906

[...] I am in such a state of mental disturbance, I fear at moments that my frail reason may give way. After the terrible heatwave that we have just had, a milder temperature has brought some calm to our minds, and it was not too soon; now it seems to me that I see better and that I think more correctly about the direction of my studies. Will I ever attain the end for which I have striven

so much and so long? I hope so, but as long as it is not attained a vague state of uneasiness persists which will not disappear until I have reached port, that is until I have realized something which develops better than in the past, and thereby can prove the theories – which in themselves are always easy; it is only giving proof of what one thinks that raises serious obstacles. So I continue to study. [...]

I am always studying after nature and it seems to me that I make slow progress. I should have liked you near me, for solitude always weighs me down a bit. But I am old, ill, and I have sworn to myself to die painting, rather than go under in the debasing paralysis which threatens old men who allow themselves to be dominated by passions which coarsen their senses.

If I have the pleasure of being with you one day, we shall be better able to discuss all this in person. You must forgive me for continually coming back to the same thing; but I believe in the logical development of everything we see and feel through the study of nature and turn my attention to technical questions later; for technical questions are for us only the simple means of making the public feel what we feel ourselves and of making ourselves understood. The great masters whom we admire must have done just that. [...]

## 7 Maurice Denis (1870–1943) 'Cézanne'

The French painter-theorist Denis had a role equal to Bernard's in establishing the terms of Cézanne's modern reputation. In this essay he represents Cézanne's work as the essential form of modern painting: an assiduous blending of the naive and empirical with the classic and rational. Originally published in *L'Occident*, Paris, September 1907, in the year after Cézanne's death. The present translation by Roger Fry published in *Burlington Magazine*, XVI, London, January–February 1910, pp. 207–19 and 275–80. Fry's introductory note voices the avant-garde view that Cézanne's art was central to an epochal new movement.

### Introductory Note

Anyone who has had the opportunity of observing modern French art cannot fail to be struck by the new tendencies that have become manifest in the last few years. A new ambition, a new conception of the purpose and methods of painting, are gradually emerging; a new hope too, and a new courage to attempt in painting that direct expression of imagined states of consciousness which has for long been relegated to music and poetry. This new conception of art, in which the decorative elements preponderate at the expense of the representative, is not the outcome of any conscious archaistic endeavour, such as made, and perhaps inevitably marred, our own pre-Raphaelite movement. It has in it therefore the promise of a larger and a fuller life. It is, I believe, the direct outcome of the Impressionist movement. It was among Impressionists that it took its rise, and yet it implies the direct contrary of the Impressionist conception of art.

It is generally admitted that the great and original genius, – for recent criticism has the courage to acclaim him as such – who really started this movement, the most promising and fruitful of modern times, was Cézanne. [...]

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Roger E. Fry.

# I

There is something paradoxical in Cézanne's celebrity; and it is scarcely easier to explain than to explain Cézanne himself. The Cézanne question divides inseparably into two camps those who love painting and those who prefer to painting itself the literary and other interests accessory to it. I know indeed that it is the fashion to like painting. The discussions on this question are no longer serious and impassioned. Too many admirations lend themselves to suspicion. 'Snobbism' and speculation have dragged the public into painters' quarrels, and it takes sides according to fashion or interest. Thus it has come about that a public naturally hostile, but well primed by critics and dealers, has conspired to the apotheosis of a great artist, who remains nevertheless a difficult master even for those who love him best.

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At the moment of his death, the articles in the press were unanimous upon two points; and, wherever their inspiration was derived from, they may fairly be considered to reflect the average opinion. The obituaries, then, admitted first of all that Cézanne influenced a large section of the younger artists; and secondly that he made an effort towards style. We may gather, then, that Cézanne was a sort of classic, and that the younger generation regards him as a representative of classicism.

Unfortunately it is hard to say without too much obscurity what classicism is.

Suppose that after a long sojourn in the country one enters one of those dreary provincial museums, one of those cemeteries abandoned to decay, where the silence and the musty smell denote the lapse of time; one immediately classifies the works exhibited into two groups: in one group the remains of the old collections of amateurs, and in the other the modern galleries, where the commissions given by the State have piled together the pitiful novelties bought in the annual salons according as studio intrigues or ministerial favour decides. It is in such circumstances that one becomes really and ingenuously sensitive to the contrast between ancient and modern art; and that an old canvas by some Bolognese or from Lebrun's atelier, at once vigorous and synthetic in design, asserts its superiority to the dry analyses and thin coloured photographs of our gold-medallists!

Imagine, quite hypothetically, that a Cézanne is there. So we shall understand him better. First of all, we know we cannot place him in the modern galleries, so completely would he be out of key among the anecdotes and the fatuities. One must of sheer necessity place him among the old masters, to whom he is seen at a glance to be akin by his nobility of style. Gauguin used to say, thinking of Cézanne: 'Nothing is so much like a *croûte* [a daub] as a real masterpiece.'

*Croûte* or masterpiece, one can only understand it in opposition to the mediocrity of modern painting. And already we grasp one of the certain characteristics of the classic, namely, *style*, that is to say synthetic order. In opposition to modern pictures, a Cézanne inspires by itself, by its qualities of unity in composition and colour, in short by its painting. The actualities, the illustrations to popular novels or historical events, with which the walls of our supposed museum are lined, seek to interest us only by means of the subject represented. Others perhaps establish the virtuosity of their authors. Good or bad, Cézanne's canvas is truly a *picture*.

Suppose now that for another experiment, and this time a less chimerical one, we put together three works of the same family, three *natures-mortes*, one by Manet, one by Gauguin, one by Cézanne. We shall distinguish at once the objectivity of Manet; that he imitates nature 'as seen through his temperament', that he translates an artistic sensation. Gauguin is more subjective. His is a decorative, even a hieratic interpretation of nature. Before the Cézanne we think only of the picture; neither the object represented nor the artist's personality holds our attention. We cannot decide so quickly whether it is an imitation or an interpretation of nature. We feel that such an art is nearer to Chardin than to Manet and Gauguin. And if at once we say: this is a picture and a classic picture, the word begins to take on a precise meaning, that, namely, of an equilibrium, a reconciliation of the objective and subjective.

In the Berlin Museum, for instance, the effect produced by Cézanne is significant. However much one admires Manet's *La Serre* or Renoir's *Enfants Bérard* or the admirable landscapes of Monet and Sisley, the presence of Cézanne makes one assimilate them (unjustly, it is true, but by the force of contrast) to the generality of modern productions: on the contrary the pictures of Cézanne seem like works of another period, no less refined but more robust than the most vigorous efforts of the Impressionists.

Thus we arrive at our first estimate of Cézanne as reacting against modern painting and against Impressionism.

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Impressionism – and by that I mean much more the general movement, which has changed during the last twenty years the aspect of modern painting, than the special art of a Monet or a Renoir – Impressionism was synthetic in its tendencies, since its aim was to translate a sensation, to realize a mood; but its methods were analytic, since colour for it resulted from an infinity of contrasts. For it was by means of the decomposition of the prism that the Impressionists reconstituted light, divided colour and multiplied reflected lights and gradations; in fact, they substituted for varying greys as many different positive colours. Therein lies the fundamental error of Impressionism. The *Fifre* of Manet in four tones is necessarily more synthetic than the most delicious Renoir, where the play of sunlight and shadow creates the widest range of varied half-tones. Now there is in a fine Cézanne as much simplicity, austerity and grandeur as in Manet, and the gradations retain the freshness and lustre which give their flower-like brilliance to the canvases of Renoir. Some months before his death Cézanne said: 'What I wanted was to make of Impressionism something solid

and durable, like the art of the museums.' It was for this reason also that he so much admired the early Pissarros, and still more the early Monets. Monet was, indeed, the only one of his contemporaries for whom he expressed great admiration.

Thus at first guided by his Latin instinct and his natural inclination, and later with full consciousness of his purpose and his own nature, he set to work to create out of Impressionism a certain classic conception.

In constant reaction against the art of his time, his powerful individuality drew from it none the less the material and pretext for his researches in style; he drew from it the sustaining elements of his work. At a period when the artist's sensibility was considered almost universally to be the sole motive of a work of art, and when improvisation – 'the spiritual excitement provoked by exaltation of the senses' – tended to destroy at one blow both the superannuated conventions of the academies and the necessity for method, it happened that the art of Cézanne showed the way to substitute reflexion for empiricism without sacrificing the essential rôle of sensibility. Thus, for instance, instead of the chronometric notation of appearances, he was able to hold the emotion of the moment even while he elaborated almost to excess, in a calculated and intentional effort, his studies after nature. He composed his *natures-mortes*, varying intentionally the lines and the masses, disposing his draperies according to premeditated rhythms, avoiding the accidents of chance, seeking for plastic beauty; and all this without losing anything of the essential motive – that initial motive which is realized in its essentials in his sketches and water colours. I allude to the delicate symphony of juxtaposed gradations, which his eye discovered at once, but for which at the same moment his reason spontaneously demanded the logical support of composition, of plan and of architecture.

There was nothing less artificial, let us note, than this effort towards a just combination of style and sensibility. That which others have sought, and sometimes found, in the imitation of the old masters, the discipline that he himself in his earlier works sought from the great artists of his time or of the past, he discovered finally in himself. And this is the essential characteristic of Cézanne. His spiritual conformation, his *genius*, did not allow him to profit directly from the old masters: he finds himself in a situation towards them similar to that which he occupied towards his contemporaries. His originality grows in his contact with those whom he imitates or is impressed by; thence comes his persistent *gaucherie*, his happy *naïveté*, and thence also the incredible clumsiness into which his sincerity forced him. For him it is not a question of imposing style upon a study as, after all, Puvis de Chavannes did. He is so naturally a painter, so spontaneously classic. If I were to venture a comparison with another art, I should say that there is the same relation between Cézanne and Veronese as between Mallarmé of the 'Herodiade' and Racine of the 'Berenice'. With the same elements – new or at all events refreshed, without anything borrowed from the past, except the necessary forms (on the one hand the mould of the Alexandrine and of tragedy, on the other the traditional conception of the composed picture) – they find, both poet and painter, the language of the Masters. Both observed the same scrupulous conformity to the

necessities of their art; both refused to overstep its limits. Just as the writer determined to owe the whole expression of his poem to what is, except for idea and subject, the pure domain of literature – sonority of words, rhythm of phrase, elasticity of syntax – the painter has been a painter before everything. Painting oscillates perpetually between invention and imitation: sometimes it copies and sometimes it imagines. These are its variations. But whether it reproduces objective nature or translates more specifically the artist's emotion, it is bound to be an art of concrete beauty, and our senses must discover in the work of art itself – abstraction made of the subject represented – an immediate satisfaction, a pure aesthetic pleasure. The painting of Cézanne is literally the essential art, the definition of which is so refractory to criticism, the realization of which seems impossible. It imitates objects without any exactitude and without any accessory interest of sentiment or thought. When he imagines a sketch, he assembles colours and forms without any literary preoccupation; his aim is nearer to that of a Persian carpet weaver than of a Delacroix, transforming into coloured harmony, but with dramatic or lyric intention, a scene of the Bible or of Shakespeare. A negative effort, if you will, but one which declares an unheard of instinct for painting.

He is the man who paints. Renoir said to me one day: 'How on earth does he do it? He cannot put two touches of colour on to a canvas without its being already an achievement.'

It is of little moment what the pretext is for this sampling of colour: nudes improbably grouped in a non-existent landscape, apples in a plate placed awry upon some commonplace material – there is always a beautiful line, a beautiful balance, a sumptuous sequence of resounding harmonies. The gift of freshness, the spontaneity and novelty of his discoveries, add still more to the interest of his slightest sketches.

'He is', said Sérusier, 'the pure painter. His style is a pure style; his poetry is a painter's poetry. The purpose, even the concept of the object represented, disappears before the charm of his coloured forms. Of an apple by some commonplace painter one says: I should like to eat it. Of an apple by Cézanne one says: How beautiful! One would not peel it; one would like to copy it. It is in that that the spiritual power of Cézanne consists. I purposely do not say idealism, because the ideal apple would be the one that stimulated most the mucous membrane, and Cézanne's apple speaks to the spirit by means of the eyes.'

'One thing must be noted,' Sérusier continues: 'that is the absence of subject. In his first manner the subject was sometimes childish: after his evolution the subject disappears, there is only the *motive*.' (It is the word that Cézanne was in the habit of using.)

That is surely an important lesson. Have we not confused all the methods of art – mixed together music, literature, painting? In this, too, Cézanne is in reaction. He is a simple artisan, a primitive who returns to the sources of his art, respects its first postulates and necessities, limits himself by its essential elements, by what constitutes exclusively the art of painting. He determines to ignore everything else, both equivocal refinements and deceptive methods. In front of the *motive* he rejects everything that might distract him from painting,

might compromise his *petite sensation* as he used to say, making use of the phraseology of the aesthetic philosophy of his youth: he avoids at once deceptive representation and literature.

## II

The preceding reflections allow us to explain in what way Cézanne is related to Symbolism. Synthetism, which becomes, in contact with poetry, Symbolism, was not in its origin a mystic or idealist movement. It was inaugurated by landscape-painters, by painters of still-life, not at all by painters of the soul. Nevertheless it implied the belief in a correspondence between external forms and subjective states. Instead of evoking our moods by means of the subject represented, it was the work of art itself which was to transmit the initial sensation and perpetuate its emotions. Every work of art is a transposition, an emotional equivalent, a caricature of a sensation received, or, more generally, of a psychological fact.

'I wished to copy nature,' said Cézanne, 'I could not. But I was satisfied when I had discovered that the sun, for instance, could not be *reproduced*, but that it must be *represented* by something else . . . by colour.' There is the definition of Symbolism such as we understood it about 1890. The older artists of that day, Gauguin above all, had a boundless admiration for Cézanne. I must add that they had at the same time the greatest esteem for Odilon Redon. Odilon Redon also had searched outside of the reproduction of nature and of sensation for the plastic equivalents of his emotions and his dreams. He, too, tried to remain a *painter*, exclusively a painter, while he was translating the radiance and gloom of his imagination. [...]

It is a touching spectacle that a canvas of Cézanne presents; generally unfinished, scraped with a palette-knife, scored over with *pentimenti* in turpentine, many times repainted, with an *impasto* that approaches actual relief. In all this evidence of labour, one catches sight of the artist in his struggle for style and his passion for nature; of his acquiescence in certain classic formulæ and the revolt of an original sensibility; one sees reason at odds with inexperience, the need for harmony conflicting with the fever of original expression. Never does he subordinate his efforts to his technical means; 'for the desires of the flesh,' says St Paul, 'are contrary to those of the spirit, and those of the spirit are contrary to those of the flesh, they are opposed one to another in such wise that ye do not that which ye would.' It is the eternal struggle of reason with sensibility which makes the saint and the genius.

Let us admit that it gives rise sometimes, with Cézanne, to chaotic results. We have unearthed a classic spontaneity in his very sensations, but the realization is not reached without lapses. Constrained already by his need for synthesis to adopt disconcerting simplifications, he deforms his design still further by the necessity for expression and by his scrupulous sincerity. It is herein that we find the motives for the *gaucherie* with which Cézanne is so often reproached, and herein lies the explanation of that practice of naïveté and ungainliness common to his disciples and imitators. [...]

What astonishes us most in Cézanne's work is certainly his research for form, or, to be exact, for deformation. It is there that one discovers the most hesitation, the most *pentimenti* on the artist's part. The large picture of the *Baigneuses*, left unfinished in the studio at Aix, is from this point of view typical. Taken up again, numberless times during many years, it has varied but little in general appearance and colour, and even the disposition of the brush-strokes remains almost permanent. On the other hand the dimensions of the figures were often readjusted; sometimes they were life-size, sometimes they were contracted to half; the arms, the torsos, the legs were enlarged and diminished in unimaginable proportions. It is just there that lies the variable element in his work; his sentiment for form allowed neither of silhouette nor of fixed proportions. [...]

On the walls of Jas de Bouffan, covered up now with hangings, he has left improvisations, studies painted as the inspiration came, and which seem carried through at a sitting. They make one think, in spite of their fine pictorial quality, of the fanfaronnades of Claude in Zola's 'L'Œuvre', and of his declamations upon 'temperament'. The models of his choice at this period are engravings after the Spanish and Italian artists of the seventeenth century. When I asked him what had led him from this vehemence of execution to the patient technique of the separate brush-stroke, he replied, 'It is because I cannot render my sensation at once; hence I put on colour again, *I put it on as best I can*. But when I begin I endeavour always to paint with a full *impasto* like Manet, *giving the form with the brush*.'

'There is no such thing as line,' he said, 'no such thing as modelling, there are only contrasts. When colour attains its richness form attains its plenitude.'

Thus, in his essentially concrete perception of objects, form is not separated from colour; they condition one another, they are indissolubly united. And in consequence in his execution he wishes to realize them as he sees them, by a single brush-stroke. [...] All his faculty for abstraction – and we see how far the painter dominates the theorist – all his faculty for abstraction permits him to distinguish only among notable forms 'the sphere, the cone and the cylinder'. All forms are referred to those which he is alone capable of thinking. The multiplicity of his colour schemes varies them infinitely. But still he never reaches the conception of the circle, the triangle, the parallelogram; those are abstractions which his eye and brain refuse to admit. *Forms* are for him *volumes*.

Hence all objects were bound to tell for him according to their relief, and to be situated according to planes at different distances from the spectator within the supposed depth of the picture. A new antinomy, this, which threatens to render highly accidental 'that plane surface covered with colours arranged in a determined order'. Colorist before everything, as he was, Cézanne resolves this antinomy by chromatism – the transposition, that is, of values of black and white into values of colour.

'I want,' he told me, following the passage from light to shade on his closed fist – 'I want to do with colour what they do in black and white with the stump.' He replaces light by colour. This shadow is a colour, this light, this half-tone are colours. The white of this table-cloth is a blue, a green, a rose; they mingle in the shadows with the surrounding local tints; but the crudity in

the light may be harmoniously translated by dissonant blue, green and rose. He substitutes, that is, contrasts of tint for contrasts of tone. He disentangles thus what he used to call 'the confusion of sensations'. In all this conversation, of which I here report scraps, he never once mentioned the word values. His system assuredly excludes relations of values in the sense accepted in the schools.

Volume finds, then, its expression in Cézanne in a gamut of tints, a series of touches; these touches follow one another by contrast or analogy according as the form is interrupted or continuous. This was what he was fond of calling *modulating* instead of modelling. We know the result of this system, at once shimmering and forcible; I will not attempt to describe the richness of harmony and the gaiety of illumination of his pictures. [...]

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He is at once the climax of the classic tradition and the result of the great crisis of liberty and illumination which has rejuvenated modern art. He is the Poussin of Impressionism. He has the fine perception of a Parisian, and he is splendid and exuberant like an Italian decorator. He is orderly as a Frenchman and feverish as a Spaniard. He is a Chardin of the decadence and at times he surpasses Chardin. There is something of El Greco in him and often the healthfulness of Veronese. But such as he is he is so naturally, and all the scruples of his will, all the assiduity of his effort have only aided and exalted his natural gifts.

[...] The two operations, the *Aspect* and *Prospect*, as Poussin says, are no longer separate with Cézanne. To organize one's sensations was a discipline of the seventeenth century; it is the preconceived limitation of the artist's receptivity. But the true artist is like the true *savant*, 'a child-like and serious nature'. He accomplishes this miracle – to preserve amidst his efforts and his scruples all his freshness and naïveté.