

Norman Turner

## THE ESSAY ON CÉZANNE

Part One: Distortion

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

Part Four: Existential Perspective

Instead of measuring the content, meaning and truth of intellectual forms by something extraneous which is supposed to be reproduced in them, we must find in these forms themselves the measure and criterion for their truth and intrinsic meaning. Instead of taking them as mere copies of something else, we must see in each of these spiritual forms a spontaneous law of generation; an original way and tendency of expression which is more than a mere record of something initially given in fixed categories of real existence. From this point of view, myth, art, language and science appear as symbols; not in the sense of mere figures which refer to some given reality by means of suggestion and allegorical renderings, but in the sense of forces each of which produces and posits a world of its own. In these realms the spirit exhibits itself in that inwardly determined dialectic by virtue of which alone there is any reality, any organized and definite Being at all. Thus the special symbolic forms are not imitations, but *organs* of reality, since it is solely by their agency that anything real becomes an object for intellectual apprehension and as such is made visible to us.

—Ernst Cassirer<sup>1</sup>

## Part One

### Distortion

"But it takes a long, long time," wrote Ranier Maria Rilke to his Clara. "When I remember the puzzlement and insecurity of one's first confrontation with his work, along with his name, which was just as new. And then for a long time nothing, and suddenly one has the right eyes."<sup>2</sup>

It is difficult for us today, who find him everywhere enshrined in books and museums, to recapture the baffling novelty and unmitigated impact of Cézanne. His individualistic works, challenging when he died, now have an established place in our minds, where they rest comfortably with those of the greats. Though we have long looked at them, have read about them and have come to understand them, this does not mean we understand them well. In what understanding we do have, a superficial premise is involved. It is stated in a single word, planted on Cézanne early, while he was still alive. His paintings are thought to contain distortions.

Some have more than one point of view. *Still-life with Apples* (R.770) in the Getty Museum is a good example.<sup>3</sup> The mouth of the green olive pot has a much higher viewing point than does the mouth of the ginger-jar, though they sit next to each other. Another good example is *Man with Arms Folded* (R.850). One of his eyes is seen in profile, the other full-face, as if two views of the sitter were combined. Then there are tabletops interrupted by a cloth or other still-life prop. Cézanne at times paints them as if they were at two different levels. The visible segments of the table are misaligned. The viewer, tracking the table-edge from one side of the interruption to the other, finds it re-appearing higher or lower, dramatically so in *Still Life in Front of a Chest* (R.634).

This painting and the already-cited Getty still life display another unusual feature. It has been a commonplace of drawing and painting since the Renaissance to depict round things such plates and mouths of vessels, seen obliquely, as ellipses. Cézanne shows them elongated, irregular, flattened and squared-off. Nor is that all. He treats tabletops, roadways, the sides of buildings, the round shapes just mentioned, or, to broaden the generalization, all things retreating in depth, as wrenched upward or sideways toward the viewer and picture surface. The road in *Turn in the Road at La Roche-Guyon* (R.539) is one among many instances.

In a like manner, that is, a manner that treats the far as if it were near, he overrides, avoids, is unresponsive to what most every student of drawing learns, what every photographer knows: that parallels lying in depth converge on a vanishing point. In Cézanne's paintings they don't converge in this way, the lane in *Lane Through Chestnut Trees at the Jas de Bouffan* (R.617) being but one of several examples. He is equally unresponsive to measurable distances that can be plotted on a map or in a linear perspective

diagram, that situates things in space by exact interval and diminishes them accordingly. In *Chateau de Marines* (R.630), for instance, he hangs the distant building in the nearby trees. Painting Mont Sainte-Victoire from the same or nearly the same spot, he obtains a mountain of different size in different versions, though in meters it is nearly the same distance away. Why would the mountain not have an unvarying size consistent with its unvarying remoteness? The most extreme variation is between the pair of similar views that sometimes hang together in the Philadelphia Museum of Art (R.91; R.912).

During Cézanne's lifetime and after many observers were unable to accept suchlike as consistent with the art of painting at all. Far too odd to fit any known scheme, they could only be caused by an optical lesion or mental defect. When Pissarro reproached Huysmans for excluding Cézanne from his book on modern art, published in 1883, Huysmans coolly wrote back,

Yes, he has temperament, he is an artist; but in sum, with the exception of some still lives, the rest is, to my mind, not likely to live. It is interesting, curious, suggestive in ideas, but certainly he is an eye case, which I understand he himself realizes . . . . You know that after so many years of struggle it is no longer a question of more less manifest or visible intentions, but of works that are real childbirth, which are not monsters, odd cases . . . .<sup>4</sup>

Three years later Zola's *The Masterpiece* was published in book form, after being serialized in *Le Gil Blas*. As with his previous books, Zola sent Cézanne a copy. It confirmed for Cézanne what he already suspected. His oldest and dearest friend saw him as an aborted genius, one who had as the result of his life's work "nothing to show." "Could there be something wrong with his eyes that impaired his vision?" wondered Claude Lantier, Zola's genetically flawed and misfortunate hero.<sup>5</sup>

The printed opinions of others reinforced what Cézanne privately accepted as true. He was much distressed by what he agreed was an optical defect, thus a defect in all he had done. He knew well what Huysmans and Zola meant. According to Jules Borely, who visited him in 1902, he reached out his arm to measure the steeple of the cathedral between his thumb and index finger as the two men sat in front of a farmhouse facing the town of Aix, and said, "How easily things like this can be distorted (*pour deformer*). . . . I make great efforts and have much difficulty. Monet has the ability to look at something and to draw it instantly in proportion."<sup>6</sup>

Similar remarks were made to other visitors. "Thus Cézanne made no pretense of unawareness of the asymmetry of his bottles, the defective perspective of his plates," R. - P. Rivière and Jacques Schnerb reported.

Showing one of his watercolors, he corrected a bottle that was not vertical with the tips of his fingers says, as if excusing himself for it: 'I am a primitive, I have a lazy eye. I have twice presented myself to the École, but I do not get the proportions right: a head interests me, I make it too big.'<sup>7</sup>

Witness the man who towers over the painting of his time as Einstein towers over the physics of his sorrowfully apologizing for what he was very willing to believe were his deficiencies. The notion of Cézanne's paintings as distorted can be traced to none other than he who made them. And plainly, to Cézanne, the word *déformé* meant something was wrong. Such was his candor that he would not deny his terrible flaw. Yet in his lifetime an upheaval in how paintings were made and seen was already under way. With this epochal sea change the connotation of the word "distortion" rapidly changed poles. What had been negative switched to positive.

The reversal began as early as 1890, when Maurice Denis sounded an opening blast for the movement eventually dubbed formalism: "Any painting — before being a war horse, a nude woman, or some anecdote — is essentially a flat surface covered with colors arranged in a certain order."<sup>8</sup> It was their acquaintance with Cézanne's work that in part enabled Denis and his fellow symbolists to agree that a composition in two dimensions was the sine qua non, for a Cézanne was unmistakably a "flat surface covered with colors arranged in a certain order." To a viewer equipped with this beautifying intelligence, Cézanne's work took on a different cast. Rather than a product of eye disease, as Huysmans said publicly and cruelly in an article published the same year Denis made his excellent *mot*,<sup>9</sup> the singular forms could be attributed to the demands of order. They clearly promoted the integrity of the organized surface, if only they were seen in this way by a viewer prepared to embrace them on those terms, as Rilke eventually learned to do. They belonged to Cézanne's intention, and were not excruciating lapses but contributors to the compositional set. The aberrations still confounded the majority of viewers even as they became, for some, pregnant with new-found meaning. All the elements of a Cézanne, grouped together, were expressive in their own right, these privileged few saw, and could be compared to the self-sufficient relations of music. "Distortion" stayed in the rapidly expanding Cézanne literature — was never questioned — but came to signify a radical innovation and boon to art.

The 1903 Salon d'Automme included some Cézannes. In his review, Mecislas Golberg, linking Cézanne and Gauguin, decided that,

The soul of this Salon is painting in blocks (*peinture par masse*), with which the workers of painting seem intent on replacing the excesses of Pointillism and exquisite nervousness of Impressionism. It's as though the painters, looking through sculptor's eyes, saw things (solely) in terms of surface.

The attempt is interesting in itself as a reaction against analytic excess. While representing an advance, however, it is (also) a negative development, due to the distortions that this art deems indispensable.

From a distance, the heads of Cézanne's card players give me the impression of billiard balls suspended in mid-air.<sup>10</sup>

Though Golberg here gave Cézanne a more positive assessment than had other critics, he declined to bless what he termed negative developments. It was English critic

Clive Bell who, in 1922, made the leap. The task Cézanne set himself, Bell wrote, was, "the creation of form which should be entirely self-supporting and intrinsically significant . . . . To this great end all means were good. To achieve it he was prepared to play the oddest tricks with natural forms — to distort."<sup>11</sup>

If, in this view, distortion was an odd trick on the natural but sign of major achievement, the magisterial and still-resonant voice was that of Roger Fry. In his 1927 book on Cézanne's development Fry discussed the still-life once owned by Gauguin, (R. 418). Pointing out that rectangular and spherical volumes predominate, Fry continued,

That is to say; the forms are the most elementary possible. But the circles of the Compotier and glass seen in perspective give us ovals, and the oval is a form that . . . harmonizes ill with the circle and the right line. So that one is not astonished to find that Cézanne has deformed them into oblongs with rounded ends.

It is probable that Cézanne was himself ignorant of these deformations. I doubt if he deliberately calculated them; they came almost as an unconscious response to a need for the most evident formal harmony.<sup>12</sup>

Fry had full mastery of the English language. His analysis was balanced, questioning, nuanced, and venturesome. A pioneer of Cézanne studies, working with limited access to the work and little documentary material or knowledge of the man whose corpus he explored, he still managed to grasp the whole artist, in all his wealth of extremes, his apparent contradictions. In the writings of some who came after, Fry's subtle and qualified views were elided, flattened, reduced to dogma.

"No earlier book is so well remembered . . . ," wrote Erle Loran of Fry in the introduction to his own book, *Cézanne's Composition*, of 1943. "The distortions," Loran informed us,

were employed here for the sake of making a thrust into space more forceful, there for the sake of holding the plane in related tension to other planes, or to the picture plane.<sup>13</sup>

Loran mentioned Fry's work, and Clement Greenberg mentioned Loran's, in an article published in 1951. There he wrote of Cézanne's

mosaic of brushstrokes that called just as much attention to the physical picture plane as the rougher dabs or "commas" of Monet, Pissarro and Sisley did. The flatness of that plane was only further emphasized by the distortions of Cézanne's drawing, which started out by being temperamental . . . but turned into a method . . . of anchoring fictive volumes and spaces to the surface pattern.<sup>14</sup>

In 1977, William Rubin added to this by asserting that Cézanne was close to Cubism, the movement that flowered after his death. "There is much in his art that is conceptual," Rubin declared, pointing, not unreasonably, to the many Cézanne images of bathers, done in the studio from imagination.

But most important, it should be observed that the majority of the so — called 'distortions' . . . have no connection with perception . . . These alternations of nature . . . in favor of the picture's compositional structure constitute collectively a sophisticated form of conceptualizing that challenges many of Cézanne's own dicta and suggest that the difference in method between him and the Cubists was as much one of degree as of kind.<sup>15</sup>

A dissection is in order. To say an actual thing is "distorted" is to imply a comparison. The thing is distorted, not in respect to itself, but in respect to a class, type or norm. A plate, for example, is a wide, shallow bowl meant to hold solid food. It belongs to a class of things, called plates, all having the same characteristics of width and shallowness, though varying within the class. If before firing the clay lip of a plate is bent up like the brim of a cowboy hat, then it is no longer typical of plates. It is distorted in relation to its class. Human noses, to mention a prodigiously varied example, can be large, small, broad or thin but are restricted to a range determined by genetics and function. No two are alike, but all are within expected limits. Pinocchio's nose, when it grows to the length of a tree-branch, becomes a grotesque, a distortion of human physiognomy.

Turning from material objects to pictures of them, we turn from ascertainable facts of actual things to images. A plate has certain dimensions and weighs a certain number of ounces. A picture of a plate doesn't provide that kind of information. Biological function and the ascertainable properties of things don't apply to images. But analogous reasoning holds. To state that the image of a thing in Cézanne is "distorted" as Golberg, Bell, Loran and Greenberg would have it, "deformed," as Fry would have it, "altered" as Rubin would have it, is to imply or state a comparison; only now the comparison is not to a uniform product or ordinary range of sizes and shapes in actuality but to a pictorial standard. Instead of comparing real things to others of their kind, Golberg, Bell, Loran and Greenberg are comparing Cézanne's images to a class of images with typical features and saying they fail to conform

What is the accepted practice, beyond the limits of which Cézanne's pictures fall? Roger Fry, using the word "deformation," made clear his basis of comparison when he wrote that "circles . . . seen in perspective give us ovals." Erle Loran, using the word "distortions," made clear his criterion of the undistorted when he compared Cézanne's paintings to photographs made of the motifs:

Photography can record the normal, factual vision of the world more accurately than other mediums, and the photographs used for the present study were taken solely for the purpose of recording the subjects at the very places from which Cézanne painted them.

And:

In general, the photographs are simply offered as the best available means of conveying to the reader what every person of normal vision knows about nature.

And:

Diagram I is a tracing from the photograph of the motif . . . , showing the spatial locations exactly as they are . . . .<sup>16</sup>

The photographic images Loran refers to, the perspective image Fry refers to, are in principal much the same. Perspective constructions and cameras share the laws of projective geometry and yield analogous results. The former produces images laboriously, by means of plan and section, the latter mechanically, because a camera is a machine for making perspective pictures, but both reduce the visible to a slice of time and both employ numerative values that vary only according to the focal length of the lens or distance of the viewer from the plane of section. Both can be spoken of under a single heading as “perspective.” And in his conviction that perspective shows “what every person of normal vision knows about nature” and gives “spatial locations exactly as they are” Loran is not alone. It is a conviction that saturates our culture, furnishes every mind. Movies, television, advertising and art that relies in one way or another on perspective tell us every day that this is how things look, and to one and all. Perspective is a lingua franca, the prevalent basis of visual communication in our period. Golberg, Bell, Fry, et. al., asserting that Cézanne's paintings are deformed, distorted or altered in relation to a type of picture they evidently think true in an absolute sense (for otherwise they would not resort to the comparison they employ), merely relate them to a type of picture that constitutes, for us, a common tongue.

The trouble with saying that Cézanne's pictures contain distortions because they differ from perspective pictures lies, not in equating perspective pictures to objective features of the visible, as a model equates to that which it exemplifies, but in equating them, tacitly, to vision. They have universal currency in part because their empirical validity is assumed. This assumption is justified, and unjustified. Perspective pictures can describe with formidable exactitude innumerable facts of things. They state a reciprocal relation of viewer to view such that the one can be extrapolated from the other. Their projective geometry is unconditionally true as defined by the mathematics, and as it bears on actual things. By frequent use of a camera or the perspective method people can learn to see in a perspective way, gradually finding in their examination of actual things the outward manifestation of an inwardly digested precept, so that perspective becomes, for them, a *form of perception*. But our visual experience is focused, continuous, transitive and labile. It is neither defined by optical geometry nor characterized by a fixed ratio of progressive diminution.<sup>17</sup>

Cézanne's detractors believed something was wrong with his eyes because his pictures failed to fit the standard model, which they conflate with “reality.” His admirers believed he saw things as we all do, that this was identical to seeing them as they appear in the standard model (which they conflate with “reality”), and that he then must have deformed or distorted them on purpose for the sake of abstract pictorial order. Thus do detractors and admirers raise their abodes of reason, traditional or modern, on the identical bed of sand.

The corrective to this doubly suspect view lies partly with Cézanne. If, in one mood, he acceded to the blinkered thinking of others, shared, rather pathetically, their prejudice, agreed that his pictures were fouled by a tic, in another mood he spoke elliptically but emphatically of what he was up to. Consider some passages from the group of letters on theory he sent near the end of his life to Emile Bernard:

May 12, 1904:

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

(The artist) 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.

May 26, 1904:

The man of letters expresses himself in abstractions whereas a painter, by means of drawing and color, 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.

July 25, 1904:

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.

October 23, 1905:

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.<sup>18</sup>

The program is straightforward, if complex, and the implications are clear enough. Other segments from the letters are in a similar vein. Cézanne iterates that one learns about art by studying past achievements, but then must make one's individual way in the face of nature. Rather than separating the appearance of nature and the formal resources of his art, as if the one has nothing to do with the other, he consistently ties them together. Submission to nature is linked to mastering the means of expression, and getting to the heart of what is before you is linked to expressing yourself as logically as possible. He rejects the "literary spirit" and its abstractions, that distract one from the proper study, that of nature. One's ideas are not proven verbally, but in the act of image formation, with its concretions. Stating more than once that he wishes to record what he can see, he adds a crucial proviso: that he wishes to see afresh, forgetting "everything that existed before us." Above all, again

and again, he says, in one way or another, that one cannot be "too scrupulous nor too sincere nor too submissive to nature."

Such remarks encourage us to understand that the unusual features of Cézanne's paintings rose from his describing what he saw as scrupulously as possible, in concert with his formal interests. We are further encouraged to understand that these formal interests were cloistered from established procedures in common use during the time of his engagements with Provence. Notable among these was that fixture of European art, employed by many masters, including his admired Poussin, linear perspective, cousin to the photograph. Of Cézanne learning to lay out perspective constructions, there is no record. That his eye never bent to the powerful and even revelatory method is very possible.

Evangelical Loran, preaching formalism, convinced that photographs give "normal, factual vision of the world" and "spatial locations exactly as they are," and that Cézanne sees things according to photography and paints them contrariwise purely for composition's sake, is forced by the logic of his position to disregard what Cézanne says. "Cézanne leaves the subject far behind as he penetrates ahead into the world of abstract space that has by now become so widespread in international art," he writes; and: "I have never been able to correlate Cézanne's statements . . . into any pattern that would fit the interpretation I now give to his work."<sup>19</sup>

Having mentioned the "picture plane" and the "distortions" of Cézanne's drawing that served to emphasize it, Clement Greenberg similarly writes,

The real problem . . . (was) how to relate . . . every part of the illusion in depth to a surface pattern endowed with even superior pictorial rights. The firmer binding of the three—dimensional illusion to a decorative surface effect; this was Cézanne's true object, whether he said so or not.<sup>20</sup>

To Rubin, Cézanne is a proto-cubist, primarily wedded not to actuality but to sophisticated conceptualization, his practice at odds with his dicta. In a footnote explaining his substituting the word "alterations" for the word "distortions," Rubin nonetheless approaches a whole understanding of Cézanne when he writes,

The term "distortion" implies the *a priori* acceptance of the integrity of an object which is then pulled or pushed out of shape. This is essentially an expressionist device, and therefore the term should not be used for Cézanne. Cézanne's selection of "constructive sensations" from the totality of the visual field proceeds from an assumption of the integrity of a picture rather than that of the natural world.<sup>21</sup>

Equating constructive sensations and the visual field, Rubin grows warmer, but then wanders away by breaking the integrity of the picture and the integrity of the natural world apart. Finding that "the majority of the so-called 'distortions' . . . have no connection with perception," Rubin, too, is unable to accept what Cézanne wrote.

In other words, as Cézanne never spoke of that illusive twentieth-century object, the picture plane, disliked the circumscribed "surface patterns" of Denis and the

Symbolists, never spoke of a surface effect that was his true object, and never in his surviving remarks gave preference to the integrity of the picture over that of the natural world, it inevitably follows that the language of Loran, Greenberg and Rubin must supersede Cézanne's own language, casting it out.

If criticism is to philosophy what journalism is to literature, then, in terms of rigorous argument, the line of descent for formalist doctrine is from its inception in Kant's *Critique of Judgment* down through Hegel, Schopenhauer, Ernst Cassirer and Suzanne K. Langer. And it is pertinent here to bring mention Cassirer's words, that are the epigram and guideline of enquiry for this essay.

The point to be made without delay is that Fry, Loran, Greenberg and Rubin have a one-handed grasp on the Kantian exegesis of perceived, perceiver and form, at least as construed by Cassirer, such that their arguments do involve distortion, but not where they see it. They would be quick to hear Cassirer say, "Instead of measuring the content, meaning and truth of intellectual forms by something extraneous which is supposed to be reproduced in them, we must find in these forms themselves the measure and criterion for their truth and intrinsic meaning," but would stop short of hearing him say, "Thus the special symbolic forms are not imitations, but *organs* of reality, since it is solely by their agency that anything real becomes an object for intellectual apprehension and as such is made visible to us."

Claiming that Cézanne had an unacknowledged hankering for autonomous shapes arranged on a surface, these formalists are able to wave away his commitment to observing the actual world by accepting without question the notion that perspective images, falling upon the retina, are equal to "what every person of normal vision knows about nature." Failing to discriminate the symbolic correspondence between actual things and perspective portrayals of them, these formalists assume that optical geometry gives a "record of something initially given in fixed categories of real existence," instead of being an "*organ* of reality," creating, within prescribed circumstances and limits, a phenomenal world. Thus this brand of formalism is a coin with two sides, "advanced" on the face, "retrograde" on the verso. Asserting that "pure" form is a step forward because it leaves behind such antique contrivances as linear perspective, with its unwelcome infusion of science and mimeses, these formalists accept with less doubt than did a skeptical Leonardo da Vinci, with whom it originated, the untenable proposition that perspective images are the simple and absolute truth of what and how we see. Reasoning from a class of picture (perspective pictures), to visual perception (uncritically equated to perspective pictures), to Cézanne's pictures (plainly unlike perspective pictures), to an interest in "pure" painting that they believe supersedes old ways and that they blithely attribute to him (never mind what he avowed), they prop up the dead soldier of perspective the better to shoot him again. Perspective is the neutral and universal medium of perceptual truth, but it is irrelevant to the progress of visual culture — such is the slide in their thinking. Which permits them to

derive this conclusion: As Cézanne was obviously not involved in perspective, he obviously could not have described things as they appeared to him.

If we accept this brand of formalism, we find ourselves in a tangle; first, because we anachronistically give Cézanne ideas about the picture-plane and the virtues of non-mimetic art that followed hard on his heels; second, because we fly in the face of what he himself repeatedly said; third, because we take as a model for vision that which empirical experiment and phenomenological introspection has long discredited; and, fourth, because our underlying assumptions about perception and conception, reality and pictorial form, are poorly made.

In what follows it will be suggested that the singularities in Cézanne's work serve not to unseat observation from painting (a notion his correspondence makes clear he abhorred) but to further his realization of nature (as he himself would say). It will be brought out that a painter who was literate, well-read, thoughtful and considerably more involved in his project than any of his critics, friendly and unfriendly, often spoke and wrote of what he meant to do and was indeed accomplishing. It will be assumed that Cassirer's way of putting the relationship of perceived, perceiver and form is required: that Cézanne's formal devices posited and produced a world of their own; that it was by their agency that the real became an object for intellectual apprehension and so was made visible to him; or, returning to Cézanne's way of putting it, that he better submitted to nature *by* better mastering his means of expression, got to the heart of what was before him *by* expressing himself as logically as possible. It will be shown that in the course of his work perception of nature and conception of the picture were not distinct, as Rubin would have it, but synthesized, "realization" in Cézanne's lexicon being no less than their successful union. It will be accepted that formalist critics are correct in pointing to Cézanne's rigorous organization of surfaces, and to their autonomous significance, comparable to that of music, wrong in failing to appreciate how this order derived from, and therefore signified as well, his profound involvement with his surroundings. It will be argued that in the only sense meaningful to his art Cézanne painted what he saw.

A distortion, Webster says, is a "twisted or misshapen condition." To distort is to "wrest from the true meaning." An anomaly, though, is "anything out of keeping with accepted notions of fitness and order." The first word points to a categorical condition or proposal violated, the second to a rule broken. There are plenty of anomalies in Cézanne vis-à-vis the conventional pictorial vision given in the rules of perspective and optics of photography, which rules he incessantly breaks, but no distortions.

Actually, there is distortion in one Cézanne. Resting on the cloth above the platter in *Peaches and Pears* (R.664) is a fruit so diagonally elongated as to border on the unreadable. Looked at with one eye closed, from the extreme upper left, it assumes normative proportions. Like the *Portrait of Edward VI* reproduced by Sir Ernst Gombrich as figure 216 in *Art and Illusion*, like the skull at the bottom of Hans Holbein the Younger's double portrait of the French Ambassadors in the National Gallery, London, it is an



Rewald 664.

anamorphosis, or at least could easily pass for one. Anamorphoses are stretched linear perspective projections that are corrected by looking at them with one eye from a fixed position, usually a peephole, usually at an extreme oblique angle. They prove perspective while breaking the promise made by perspective of the straightforward, Albertian sort — that the relative proportions of things as projected will be consistent with their ordinary appearance. Though Cézanne spoke of astonishing Paris with an apple,<sup>22</sup> though this strange shape would certainly answer to the ambition, whether the

fruit is an apple or peach is on close examination of the painting itself fairly uncertain.

Why Cézanne would make an anamorphosis, if he did make an anamorphosis, I decline to speculate. The relevant point is that if the elongated fruit is "twisted" in order to "wrest it from its true meaning" in an what surely resembles an anamorphic exercise, the irregular shape of the platter holding it, by not conforming to the oval of a conventional photograph or perspective picture, is merely "out of keeping with accepted notions of fitness and order." The shape of the platter does not posit a categorical shape which is then deliberately altered. Rather than distorted, the shape of the platter is merely anomalous.

Yet this is a painting of everyday things gathered from Cézanne's environment and with an interesting exception soberly described. Not always did he think that household items and an attentive approach to them was consistent with his temperament. Initially, he went elsewhere, to work grandiose and unbesmirched by the influence of others. Devotion to nature came later, a corrective to that flagrant, youthful self.

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#### Notes

1. Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, trans., Suzanne K. Langer (Dover Publications, 1953) p. 8.
2. Rainer Maria Rilke, "Letters on Cézanne," ed. Clara Rilke, trans. Joel Agee (Fromm International Publishing Corp., 1985). p.43.)
3. Rewald catalogue numbers denote paintings. See John Rewald, *The Paintings of Paul Cézanne: a Catalogue Raisonné*, in collaboration with Walter Feilchenfeld and Jayne Warman, 2 volumes, (Harry N. Abrams, 1996).
4. Judith Wechsler, *Cézanne in Perspective* (Prentice-Hall, 1975), p. 30.

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5. Emile Zola, *The Masterpiece*, trans. Thomas Walton, revision and intro. Roger Pearson (Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 417, 52
6. -- Qu'il suffit de peu, disait-il, pour déformer cette chose . . . je m'efforce et suis à la peine. -- See "Jules Borély," *Conversations avec Cézanne*, ed. by P. M. Doran (Editions Macula, 1978), p. 19.
7. See "Revèire and Schnerb," *Conversations with Cézanne*, ed. by Michael Doran; trans. by Julie Lawrence Cochran, intro. by Richard Schiff (University of California Press, 2001) p. 86. (The English edition of the work cited in note 6.)
8. John Rewald, *Post-Impressionism from van Gogh to Gauguin* (The Museum of Modern Art, 1962), p. 518.
9. Huysmans wrote: "Then some oil sketches of plein-air landscapes, efforts still in limbo, attempts at freshness spoiled by retouching, and, finally, baffling imbalances: houses tilted to one side as if drunk, skewed fruit in besotted pottery . . . .  
In short, a revelatory colorist who contributed more than the late Manet to the Impressionist movement, an artist with diseased retinas who, in his exasperated visual perceptions, discovered the premonitory symptoms of a new art . . . ." Françoise Cachin, "A Century of Cézanne Criticism I: From 1865 to 1906," *Cézanne* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1996), p. 27.
10. Cachin, "A Century of Cézanne Criticism I," pp. 35-36. Golberg, who lived in abject poverty and died of tuberculosis in 1907, was a strong influence on radical artists in the early years of the century. Matisse's "Notes of a Painter" were written for Golberg's *Cahiers*. For more on Golberg, see Hilary Spurling, *The Unknown Matisse* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1999) pp. 219-221.
11. Cachin, "A Century of Cézanne Criticism I," *Cézanne* p. 55.
12. Roger Fry, *Cézanne: A Study of His Development* (University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 46. Fry's translation of Maurice Denis, published in 1909-10, includes the following: "What astonishes us most in Cézanne's work is certainly his research for form, or, to be exact, for deformation." Maurice Denis, "Cézanne," trans. Roger Fry, *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, vol. xvi, Oct. 1909 - March 1910, p. 276.
13. Erle Loran, *Cézanne's Composition: Analysis of His Form with Diagrams and Photographs of His Motifs* (University of California Press, 1985), pp. 1, 32.
14. Clement Greenberg, "Cézanne," *Art and Culture* (Beacon Press, 1961), p. 52.
15. William Rubin, "Cézannisme and the Beginnings of Cubism," *Cézanne: The Late Work* (The Museum of Modern Art, 1977), pp. 162-165, 198 (n. 66).
16. Loran, *Cézanne's Composition*, pp. 5, 72.

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17. See, for instance, Wade, Nicholas and Swanston, Michael. *Visual Perception: an Introduction* (Routledge, 1991). For the author's writings on linear perspective, see Norman Turner, "Some Questions About E. H. Gombrich on Perspective," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 50, no. 2, Spring, 1992, p. 139; Norman Turner, "The Semantic of Linear Perspective," *Philosophical Forum*, vol. XXVII, No. 4, Summer, 1996, p. 357.
18. Paul Cézanne, *Letters*, ed., John Rewald (Hacker Art Books, 1976), pp. 303, 303-304, 326.
19. Loran, *Cézanne's Composition*, pp. 117, 8.
20. Greenberg, "Cézanne," *Art and Culture*, p. 54.
21. Rubin, "Cézannisme and the Beginnings of Cubism," pp. 198, n. 66. The point of view expressed by can be traced at least as far back as Bernard, who wrote of Cézanne, in 1904, "Thus, the more the artist works, the further his work distances itself from the objective; and the further it distances itself from the opacity of the model, which has served as point of departure, the more he enters into the painting stripped naked, with no other goal but itself. The more he makes his painting abstract -- after having begun it narrowly, true to the original, and hesitatingly -- the more he simplifies it and gives it breadth.  
Little by little, the work has expanded and has reach the goal of pure design." See "Emile Bernard" in *Conversation with Cézanne*, Michael Doran, Ed., trans. Julie Lawrence Cochran (University of California Press, 2001, p. 36.
22. See Gustave Geffroy, *Conversation with Cézanne*, ed. by Michael Doran; trans. by Julie Lawrence Cochran, intro. by Richard Schiff (University of California Press, 2001), p. 6.