

'PARBLEU': PISSARRO AND THE POLITICAL COLOUR OF AN ORIGINAL VISION

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PISSARRO AND IMPRESSIONIST VISION

To judge from their own accounts, and from their later work, both Monet and Cézanne eventually succeeded in seeing their motifs only as blocks of colour or coloured 'taches', as if they were free from knowledge of what they looked at, like men who had just gained their sight.¹ As Charles Stuckey points out, it was Ruskin's injunction to see with an 'innocence of the eye . . . as a blind man would see . . . as if suddenly gifted with sight' that guided Monet to see 'flat stains of colour' and 'patches of colour'; and he also suggests that Taine's ideas on the retinal data of pre-conceptual visual experience might have been equally influential on the Impressionists at large.² From Richard Shiff's work, it is clear that this characteristically Impressionist vision was motivated by a search for naïve 'impressions', and for personal 'sensations' supposedly corresponding to a 'double origin' where nature and the self met.³ By these accounts, therefore, Impressionist vision was meant to result from an intentionality free of interest in a reified world, and instead to be expressive of a more primal and 'original' experience of reality.

Putting aside the vexed question of whether seeing in this way is actually possible for a normal adult, the Impressionists' search for *sensations* untouched by culture or language remains at least doubly paradoxical. In the first place, their frequent statements on the matter suggest the Impressionists adhered almost religiously to the principle that *sensations* were the basis of a way of painting free from rules. Moreover, while *sensations* were meant to be pre-conceptual experiences, it is plain that both Monet and Cézanne had quite specific concepts about them and the vision corresponding to them, and that these concepts were themselves contingent upon particular nineteenth-century beliefs such as Positivism and individualism.⁴ Moreover, to follow Meyer Schapiro, the list of contingencies determining Impressionist perception would also include their desire to find an alternative to the perception characteristic of a society in the thrall of the 'advance of monopoly capitalism'.⁵

In effect, then, and despite the rhetoric of their own statements, it is precisely because the Impressionists' vision was contingent upon the rationality of a particular

culture, and subject to historically specific causes, that it was meaningful. In other words, it was a function of the way in which it was infiltrated by and expressive of its various social determinations, both consciously and unconsciously, that the way of seeing recorded in an Impressionist painting had specific moral and political meanings.

Like his more illustrious colleagues, Pissarro asserted that he too saw in ‘taches’, and painted his own ‘impressions’ and ‘sensations’.⁶ However, Pissarro was more reasonable and explicit about the factors affecting his perception, and less given to romantic claims about it, than his fellows. Indeed, by the 1880s, this artist — whom Renoir recalled as the ‘théoricien’ of Impressionist research⁷ — made many statements to the effect that he intended the scientific knowledge and political beliefs bound up with his vision to be recognizable as such in his paintings.

These connections, and the meaning they gave to Pissarro’s vision, are the subject of the majority of what follows. The remainder is concerned with Pissarro’s unusual sensitivity to blue, what some called his ‘daltonisme’, and the emergence of this aspect of his vision into public sense. In particular, I wish to explain how it was that Pissarro’s preference for blue was far from devoid of meaning, even though the painter himself failed to explain this preference, or even recognize it. The solution I will suggest to this conundrum is that this aspect of his vision was irreducible to existing concepts and rules of seeing, and that it was this that guaranteed its potential to carry an original sense beyond the semantics of the language available to him.

PISSARRO’S PERCEPTION AND SCIENCE

On a few occasions, Pissarro seemed no less naïve than his colleagues about perception. For example, in a letter to Lucien of September 1892, he advised his son to concentrate on rendering ‘sensations libres de toute autre chose que ta propre sensation’.⁸ But it is difficult to believe this statement was intended as literal advice, because the majority of Pissarro’s statements show quite unequivocally that his vision was informed by scientific concepts, and that he knew this. For example, in a letter to Durand-Ruel of November 1886, he mentioned his familiarity with the work of Chevreul and Ogden Rood on colour (probably Chevreul’s *De la loi du contraste simultané des couleurs* of 1839 and Rood’s *Théorie scientifique des couleurs* of 1881).⁹ And in a letter of February 1887 to Lucien, he affirmed his debt to science in a letter concerning a difference of opinion with a patron about its importance to the painter. Indignantly, he wrote:

de Bellio . . . me dit qu’il ne croit pas que les recherches physiques sur la couleur et la lumière puissent servir à l’artiste, pas plus que l’anatomie ou les lois de l’optique . . . ; parbleu; si je ne savais pas comment les couleurs se comportent depuis les découvertes de Chevreul et autres savants, nous ne pourrions poursuivre nos études sur la lumière avec autant d’assurance. Je ne ferais pas une différence entre la couleur locale et la lumière, si la science ne nous avait mis en éveil. Et les complémentaires et les contrastes, etc.¹⁰

Pissarro's paintings of the late 1870s and early 1880s do show he recorded perceptions of colour which owe a debt to the work of Rood and Chevreul, just as he described. In works like *La Côte des boeufs*, *Pontoise* of 1877 (plate 43) and *Jeune Paysanne au chapeau* of 1881 (plate 44), Pissarro separately recorded the local colour of objects and the modifications imposed on it by the various components of the light — illumination, shadow and reflections¹¹ — and he also registered perceptions of contrast effects in his insistent use of pairs of complementaries.¹² Fénéon's criticism of 1886 and 1887 describes the presence of precisely these perceived effects in Seurat's paintings,¹³ but *only* because Pissarro supplied him with an analysis of the components of Neo-Impressionist colour (as is recorded in three letters of September 1886¹⁴ and two letters of April and summer 1887).¹⁵ The fact that Fénéon's *Les Impressionnistes en 1886* more-or-less accurately represents Pissarro's ideas (and *not* Seurat's as is often supposed)¹⁶ is further revealed by the letter of November 1886 to Durand-Ruel,¹⁷ in which Pissarro told his dealer to read Fénéon's pamphlet for an amplification of his own scientific theories.¹⁸

Science did not just enable Pissarro's perception of colours in nature, it also affected his way of rendering what he saw. Put simply, Pissarro's manner of composing a surface was scientific because it was designed to take account of how effects like simultaneous contrast and optical mixture could affect the way colours looked. Following Chevreul, paintings such as *La Côte des boeufs* (plate 43) do not map the colours Pissarro saw directly onto the canvas, but instead modulate patches of colour on the surface so as to take account of how their hues and tones (and position in depth and apparent size) are affected by adjacent colours, and also by more distant colours.¹⁹ Following Rood, other paintings, such as *Jeune Paysanne au chapeau* (plate 44), use small touches of (spectral) colour which form resultants at a distance due to the effect of optical mixture.²⁰ In practice, both effects come into play in deciding the look of a surface, and it is somewhat schematic to separate them out,²¹ even if Pissarro tended to adopt an explanation based on the notion of optical mixture in the later 1880s.²²

SCIENCE AND ANARCHISM IN PISSARRO'S VISION

Science plainly gave Pissarro his concepts of what colour was, and his models of how it behaved, but this does not explain *why* Pissarro read science to help him see, or what he hoped to achieve by using it to hone his colour perception. Even a cursory look at the history of different cultures' colour terms shows that people normally invent or adopt particular colour concepts because they can be used — either to help them make useful discriminations between differently coloured things or effects in daily life, or to discriminate colours precisely for purposes of communication.²³ Put crudely: seeing in a particular way, or 'seeing-as', is normally meaningful because it makes sense within a specific social practice.²⁴ In an activity like painting, seeing can be imaginative, but it gains meaning because it makes sense within the form of life imagined in the painting.

Such a picture of perception makes it imperative to discover just what Pissarro thought science allowed him to imagine (or ultimately, achieve) in enabling him to see as he did.²⁵ On its own though, this is a misleading question, because it



43 Camille Pissarro, *La Côte des boeufs, Pontoise*, 1877, National Gallery, London



44 Camille Pissarro, *Jeune Paysanne au chapeau*, 1881, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Alisa Mellon Bruce collection

is incomplete. Even were we to provide an answer to it, this would still not explain why Pissarro *painted* what science helped him see.²⁶ However, one explanation of why Pissarro both saw as he did *and* painted what he saw, is that, for him, to do so was to refute the way of seeing encoded in dominant conventions of painting at the time. And Pissarro does suggest several times, in his letters of the early 1880s, that he sought freedom from the monolithic tonalism of Salon art, and the freedom to see and paint his own *sensations* of colour in all their variety. In letters of 1883, Pissarro went so far as to oppose his own tastes for colour and variety against 'bourgeois' taste. For example, in February he described his own art as 'l'oiseau rare au plumage resplendissant de toutes les belles couleurs de l'arc en ciel', and in November identified the 'boueuse' technique of Adolphe von Menzel's *Das Ballsouper* (plate 45) of 1878 as 'bourgeois'.²⁷

What these letters suggest is that Pissarro regarded science as a means of liberating his *sensations* from the dull, tonal and 'bourgeois' way of seeing promoted by Salon and Academic art (and not as an end in itself).²⁸ They also imply strongly that there was a political dimension to Pissarro's scientifically-informed chromatic vision: that its very freedom from Salon conventions and its diversity of *sensation* exemplified the anarchism he had come to cherish in the late 1870s and early 1880s.²⁹ In this vein, Pissarro even told Lucien in a letter of April 1891: 'Je crois fermement que nos idées imprégnées de philosophie anarchique se déteignent sur nos oeuvres . . .'.³⁰ And it is difficult to believe he chose his words without regard for the image they conjured.

Pissarro's way of seeing was intended to be anarchist for other reasons as well. For instance, his insistence on recording light and colour *as such* seems to have been intended as a refusal of the traditional use of light in Salon art only to reveal the texture and physicality of objects, or other objects of desire like the female body. At least, in the letter concerning Menzel, Pissarro identified the 'bourgeoisisme' of the German painter's work with its 'lourdeur',³¹ suggesting its heavy handling gave objects (and women) a tactile appeal which satisfied a spectator's possessive fantasies. In contrast, the quite different emphasis in Pissarro's own paintings on immaterial effects of light and colour seems designed to allow the spectator an imaginative experience of freedom from such acquisitive and 'bourgeois' attitudes.

The logic which united the meanings of Pissarro's use of colour was therefore something like this: 'bourgeois' attitudes to things dictate the use of a dull vehicle which can bring out their materiality, and which promotes an aspect-blindness to colour and light. A disinterested vision emphasizes colour and light at the expense of things, and signifies freedom from 'bourgeois' forms of (real or fantasy) life.

All in all, therefore, science allowed Pissarro a certain imaginative freedom from 'bourgeois' forms of life, something akin to the freedom which was the goal of the anarchism formulated by Proudhon. Pissarro avidly read Proudhon in the late 1870s and early 1880s,³² and firmly espoused his theory of self-determination.³³ It is hardly a surprise, therefore, to find him explicitly illustrating the putative benefits of Proudhon's theory in a number of paintings of the late 1870s and early to mid 1880s in which peasants are represented emblematically: emancipated from the drudgery or alienation of labour, and free to enjoy leisure and contemplation at will.³⁴ Among these are *Jeune Paysanne au chapeau* (plate 44), *Le Fond de l'Hermitage, Pontoise* of 1879 (plate 46), *La Bergère* of



45 Adolphe von Menzel, *Das Ballsouper*, 1878, Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen Preussische Kulturbesitz, Berlin



46 Camille Pissarro, *Le Fond de l'Hermitage, Pontoise*, 1879, The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of the Hanna Fund

1881 (plate 47), *Etude de figure en plein air, effet de soleil* of 1881 (plate 48), *Le Repos, paysanne couchée dans l'herbe, Pontoise* of 1882 (plate 49) and *Paysanne assise* of 1885 (plate 50). Crucially, though, these paintings about the freedom which anarchism and science could allow are themselves cast in the very technique which Pissarro considered anarchist because it was the vehicle of a perception liberated by science. Moreover, the spectator sees the painting in the way that the figures represented in the painting see their world. In other words, the spectator is prompted to take on in imagination the disinterested, contemplative vision of the anarchist form of life Pissarro conjures in his paintings.

PISSARRO'S COMMUNITY OF BELIEF

For all the consistency and coherence of Pissarro's ideas, it is nonetheless hard to see how his paintings could have been meaningful in the way he intended, unless they exemplified his own beliefs for somebody apart from himself. Indeed, unless his works had effects upon the social practices of real individuals, it is difficult to see how Pissarro's paintings could have meant, or *done*, anything at all.

Happily, the evidence shows that the synecdoche between Pissarro's anarchist faith and his scientific, colourist aesthetic was anything but private to him. Even the reclusive and conservative Cézanne knew there was a connection between Pissarro's learning from science and his political beliefs. At least, this seems to be what Cézanne meant by a peculiar sentence in a letter which he wrote to Emile Bernard in 1905, which reads: 'l'étude modifie notre vision à un tel point que l'humble et colossal Pissarro se trouve justifié pour ses théories anarchistes.'³⁵

Of course, it does not mean Cézanne shared Pissarro's beliefs just because he understood them. For the conservatives among the Impressionists, painting their own *sensations* of colour meant affirming a different kind of political stance, as the individualism it exemplified was just as much a tenet of bourgeois ideology as of anarchism. Probably because he knew this, Pissarro made fun of how his colleagues saw like him and used the same techniques as he did, and even parodied his own association between colour and anarchism. For example, in the letter of April 1891 mentioned above, he wrote to his son in jest, declaring the reactionary Degas to be 'si anarchiste! En art bien entendu, et sans le savoir!'³⁶

Given these conflicting views, it is no surprise that the community in which Pissarro's work actually did find favour in the 1880s was not that of his fellow Impressionists. Instead, it did so with a small group within the literary and artistic *salon* of the critic and former *communard*, Robert Caze.³⁷ This *cénacle* was in its heyday only for a short time between the winter of 1885 and the spring of 1886,³⁸ but was no less important because of it; for (besides Pissarro himself) it included the novelist and critic Huysmans, Pissarro's longstanding friend Paul Alexis, pseudonymously the art critic 'Trublot' of the radical newspaper *Le Cri du peuple*,³⁹ the incipient Neo-Impressionist painter Signac, and a young Symbolist writer, Paul Adam.⁴⁰

Many of the aesthetic beliefs of this community emerge in the novel *Soi*, which Adam published in May 1886 (with a dedication to Alexis). This work is especially interesting because it featured a character called 'Vibrac' — a radical Impressionist



47 Camille Pissarro, *La Bergère*, 1881, Musée d'Orsay, Paris (photo: R.M.N.)



48 Camille Pissarro, *Etude de figure en plein air, effet de soleil*, 1881, The Toledo Museum of Art, Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey



49 Camille Pissarro, *Le Repos, paysanne couchée dans l'herbe, Pontoise*, 1882, Kunsthalle, Bremen



50 Camille Pissarro, *Paysanne assise*, 1885, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Gift of Mr and Mrs Paul Mellon, B.A. 1929

with a taste for vibrant colour, and a long grey beard — who was only a thinly veiled composite of Signac and Pissarro himself. And so, Vibrac's views on art not only represent Pissarro's in all likelihood; but, arguably, they also reveal the extent to which Pissarro's beliefs were *shared* by his colleagues (or at least the extent to which they did not conflict with Adam's more solipsistic aesthetic).⁴¹ At all events, Vibrac expresses substantially the same arguments about the connections between colour vision and anarchism that Pissarro himself makes in his letters.

Vibrac's beliefs are most clearly elaborated in a long dialogue early in *Soi* with the character Marthe Grellou — a rich woman whose conservative tastes and reactionary values cause Vibrac to spell out the meanings of what he sees and paints. The conversation in question begins with Marthe's response to a snow scene Vibrac is painting. This is probably modelled on one of Pissarro's paintings of the 1870s such as *La Sente des pouilleux, effet de neige* of 1874 (plate 51). Vibrac's painting is significant because it marks his conversion to Impressionism, and we are told:

à cette époque, il parut changer sa manière. Son pinceau s'appuyait en multiples et épaisses maculatures, et portait des ombres mauves ou bleues. Il brossait des arbres lie de vin, crûment.

Ainsi composa-t-il un effet de neige où se montraient à peine deux lignes blanches perdues dans des encroûtements roses, mauves, violets et gris.⁴²

Horrified by Vibrac's frank colour, Marthe blurts out: 'Mais ce n'est plus vous . . . Qu'avez-vous fait là?' But Vibrac, the typical Impressionist, merely replies: 'Mettez-vous plus loin . . .'. Not to be put off, Marthe turns to Vibrac with the accusation: 'Oh! vous exagérez joliment. Et puis, d'abord, la neige est blanche.' But again Vibrac counters her, this time with the response:

Jamais de la vie. Je la vois rose, je la vois mauve dans les ombres, et il y a de l'ombre partout. Oui, c'est un peu blanc, là-haut; eh bien, je l'ai fait.⁴³

Behind the rhetoric of this dialogue, Adam suggests, like Pissarro, that bourgeois art promotes a dull, tonal and hence repressed kind of vision. Because Marthe is used to seeing pictures such as Goeneutte's *Le Boulevard de Clichy par un temps de neige* of the Salon of 1876 (plate 52) in which snow is white, she cannot see it in its full diversity of colour. In other words, Marthe's *sensations* of colour suffer privation because of what Salon art tells her about the way reality looks.

The same dialogue continues so as to allow Vibrac to express another of Pissarro's opinions. In response to Vibrac's observation of colour for itself, Marthe insists that good painting should create 'relief' — or the feeling of three dimensionality — by using glazing. Predictably, Vibrac turns on Marthe with the rejoinder: 'Tenez, vous parlez comme les bonzes des Beaux-Arts.'⁴⁴ Vibrac then goes on to attack another Academic device: the use of 'fonds' — or backcloths — to give a figure in a portrait salience. He directs his invective against Carolus-Duran's use of the technique in particular, which suggests Adam modelled the passage on Huysmans's parody of Carolus-Duran's contrived use of 'fonds' in his *L'Art moderne* of 1883.⁴⁵ Unsurprisingly, Marthe disputes Vibrac's opinion and defends the 'effet' which the technique creates. But this only causes Vibrac to turn



51 Camille Pissarro, *La Sente des pouilleux, effet de neige*, 1874, Phillips, London



52 Norbert Goencutte, *Le Boulevard de Clichy par un temps de neige*, Salon of 1876, Tate Gallery, London

on her with the rejoinder:

Ah! l'effet, l'effet! L'effet c'est bon pour les bourgeois, pour la vente, pour l'enseigne. Ça tire l'oeil, n'est-ce pas, c'est la carotte écarlate à la porte du marchand de tabac!⁴⁶

The point of these latter exchanges is clear enough. Through Vibrac, Adam is arguing that Marthe's 'bourgeois' vision results from Academic painting, where what counts is the artist's ability to see and render the way light reveals the physicality of things or women. And he also makes it plain that such art *is* 'bourgeois' because it appeals to the spectator's avarice and cupidity. For Adam, this appeal is anathema, both aesthetically and politically, as the violence of Vibrac's language makes plain. Implicitly, and like Pissarro, his delight in colour and light is founded in another kind of pleasure: the disinterested contemplation of intangibles. And like Pissarro, Adam seems to think that seeing such effects is to see in a way antipathetic to a bourgeois way of seeing, and the morality it carries.

Elsewhere in *Soi* the various characters articulate different standards of taste based on their individual moralities and political beliefs. Predictably, Marthe admires Cabanel. Early in the novel, she even imagines herself and her cousin, Henriette, as figures in an exotic painting entitled *Intérieur*. And she muses about it, perhaps with Cabanel's *Phèdre* of the Salon of 1880 (plate 53) in (Adam's) mind:

Seul le pinceau de Cabanel [serait] assez délicat pour rendre les nuances ambrées du cachemire tendu sur les meubles bas et les broderies hindoues qui traversaient les sièges par larges bandes. En fond s'étalerait le vieil or de la tapisserie où, de place en place, une simple fleur noire se piquait. Au premier plan, leur groupe, deux teintes tranchées: dans l'une toute la gamme graduée des bruns, dans l'autre une synchronie de blanc et de vert tendre.⁴⁷

However, not long afterwards, Adam has Marthe overhear her radical husband, Luc Polskoff, cast a Huysmansesque insult at one of her favourite paintings, Cabanel's *Venus* of the Salon of 1863.⁴⁸ To Marthe's dismay, he blurts out: 'Cabanel, de la crème délayée dans du sirop de groseilles, le tout sur un fond d'angélique.'⁴⁹ Luc's unintentionally cruel parody of his wife's chocolate-box tastes exposes how Marthe's sense of self is tied up with what she has learnt from Salon and Academic art. In condemning Cabanel, therefore, Adam implicitly condemns Marthe's misrecognition of her femininity in paintings which suggest personal fulfilment is to be found in wealth or sexual attractiveness. Like Pissarro, Adam seems to suggest through Luc that a good painting does not lead the spectator into such fantasies, but insists instead upon the spectator finding pleasure in exercising more aesthetic skills. In other words, for Adam, as for Pissarro, a good painting was one which affirmed the values of a form of life free from materialistic or acquisitive concerns.⁵⁰

Adam's mentor, Paul Alexis, expressed similar tastes and beliefs about the virtues of Impressionism in the column, 'A minuit', which he wrote almost daily in the 1880s. The clearest case of his views coinciding with Pissarro's and Adam's comes in an article entitled 'Mon Vernissage', which he published in *Le Cri du peuple* on 2 May 1886. Here, Alexis, like his friends, was at pains to stress how



53 Alexandre Cabanel, *Phèdre*, Salon of 1880, Musée Fabre, Montpellier

the quality of a work was bound up with the artist's disinterested delight in effects of light and colour. Accordingly, he mentioned how he had a landscape by Signac in his home, but instead of dwelling on the details of what it represented, he simply described it as 'une page toute vibrante d' soleil, avec une Seine toute bleue, toute chaude: de Paul Signac, le jeune et déjà magistral impressionniste.'⁵¹ More light-heartedly, he also suggested that his collection might soon contain: 'un Pissarro qu' j'ai jamais d' mandé ... mais qui, un d' ces quatres matins, j' l' parierais, m' arrivera tout d' même.'⁵²

Alexis succeeded in giving a political edge to these remarks because they appeared in a review of his own collection, which he had written, he told the reader, because he had not been sent a ticket for the Salon *vernissage*. But to make sure his reader would realize the political nature of his opinions, Alexis insisted that he had missed nothing in missing the occasion; rather, he declared he had spent an enjoyable afternoon looking at his own pictures: 'et sans m' mouiller, et sans me buter à c' Tout-Paris brillamment imbécile des premières ...'⁵³

DALTONISM AND ANARCHISM

Plainly, Pissarro, Alexis and Adam all saw Impressionist colour vision as anarchist. However, as is implied by Alexis's pointed emphasis on Signac's 'Seine toute bleue', and by Adam's references to Vibrac's use of 'bleu' and 'violet', it was the blueness

of Impressionist vision that pre-eminently signified its political meaning among the Caze group.

The origin of this peculiar synecdoche probably lay in Huysmans's *L'Art moderne* of 1883, which was undoubtedly well known to Pissarro and his colleagues.⁵⁴ In this work, in an essay on the Impressionists' exhibition of 1880, Huysmans had ribbed the Impressionists for their excessive sensitivity to blue, and even suggested that they suffered from 'daltonisme' — a rare retinal disorder.⁵⁵ Huysmans also accused Caillebotte of having contracted 'indigomanie', and Pissarro of having fallen prey to 'la manie de bleu'.⁵⁶ The reason why the Caze group might have picked on the Impressionists' preference for blue as a sign for their (putative) political radicalism is contained in the logical structure of Huysmans's text. Brutally summarized, *L'Art moderne* elaborated a consistent opposition between 'faux', 'bourgeois' Salon art and Impressionism, which, it argued, exhibited 'vérité' of vision and technique.⁵⁷ Given, therefore, that Impressionism was seen as antipathetic to Salon art and bourgeois values, and that a veridical vision prone to seeing blue was its distinguishing feature, 'daltonisme' could stand metonymically for its value as a vehicle of opposition to bourgeois hegemony.⁵⁸

At least one other critic made the same connection. In his book, *Pour le beau* of 1893, the reactionary Alphonse German wrote: 'l'ambiance ne souffre du daltonisme sensitif par cause originelle, mais parce qu'elle subit l'influence malicieux saturnienne du démocratisme.'⁵⁹

A blue picture undoubtedly signified populist and even socialist beliefs for the additional reason that blue was the workers' colour, insofar as it was the predominant colour of the female peasant's costume and the colour of the male peasant's and the city labourer's blouse. Many of Pissarro's paintings make a feature of such costumes, for example, *La Côte des boeufs*, *Jeune Paysanne au chapeau*, *La Bergère*, *Etude de figure en plein air*, *Le Repos* and *Paysanne assise* (plates 43, 44, 47, 48, 49 and 50). A worker in a blue blouse also features at the extreme left of Signac's *La Neige, boulevard de Clichy* by 1886 (plate 54). Moreover, by the 1880s, when some urban workers had begun to adopt a variant of bourgeois black and white — as can be seen in the foreground of Seurat's *Une Baignade à Asnières* of 1883–4 — wearing such coloured costume had assumed a pointed and even aggressively working-class significance.⁶⁰

In any case, Adam spells out both connections between the blueness of Impressionist painting and its political meanings in an episode at the end of *Soi* which takes place at an imaginary Impressionist exhibition. (The show includes works by Pissarro and a painting by Signac of 'une mer bleue'.)⁶¹ At this event, Vibrac confronts Marthe's nephew Karl, a decadent, morphinomaniac snob, who objects to the large number of working-class people in Montmartre because they spoil an otherwise beautiful view. Vibrac argues violently against Karl, and admonishes him:

Le peuple, c'est la couleur. C'est la seule classe de la société où il y avait tant de bleu et de blanc. Les blouses des travailleurs très pauvres c'est un bleu mort, usé, passé avec d'extraordinaires ombres verdâtres. On voudrait ces teintes-là, en peluche, pour faire des portières.⁶²

To make sure his reader realizes there is something significant about

Impressionist blueness, Adam continues to plug it throughout the remainder of the episode. Indeed, Adam singles out for lengthy description a predominantly blue view of the Seine by Vibrac, which is actually a real painting by Dubois-Pillet (himself a member of the *Caze salon*): *La Seine à Bercy*, of 1885 (plate 55). In this work, Adam tells us ‘La saisissante vie d’un paysage parisien, s’enfonçait dans la toile à travers une atmosphère bleue et grise de matin.’⁶³ He also tells us that the parts of the painting ‘s’unifiaient dans une grande sensation bleue, un glacis bleuâtre d’air’.⁶⁴ And just for good measure, Adam adds, in an uncomfortably neologistic style: ‘le la de cette synchronie sonnait dans la réclame gros bleue du *Petit Journal*, couvrant toute la coupe d’une maison isolée sur la berge.’⁶⁵

Vibrac’s pointed and political preference for seeing blue undoubtedly stemmed from the fact that Pissarro had done several ‘daltonist’ pictures in the late 1870s and early 1880s which not only show (resting) peasants in blue costume, but are also paintings of scenes largely or entirely in (blue) shadow. Examples of such works are *Jeune Paysanne au chapeau*, *Le Fond de l’Hermitage*, *La Bergère* and *Etude de figure en plein air* (plates 44, 46, 47 and 48). And so, these overall blue pictures expressed anarchist sentiments, or contempt for bourgeois materialism, in their iconography; but they also did so in a more purely visual — or psychological — manner, as a blue cast to a painting defies a spectator’s ability to read texture or salience in it, and particularly the skills of a spectator versed in Academic conventions.⁶⁶ In addition, the overall blueness of Pissarro’s paintings reinforced the compositionally unhierarchical effect which their colourist patchiness already gave them. And so, by denying what Baudelaire had called ‘hiérarchie et subordination’, Pissarro’s blueness can be seen to have instituted what the critic saw as a kind of pictorial ‘anarchie’.⁶⁷

Significantly, however, while Pissarro did rationalize about the connection between his preference for colour in general and his anarchism, he never rationalized about the connection between his specific sensitivity to blue shadows and his political beliefs. Instead, to judge from two letters of May 1883 to his son, Pissarro was annoyed and even stung by Huysmans’s accusation that he suffered from ‘daltonisme’.⁶⁸ And so, it appears that Pissarro had a vague sense of why he saw blue (inasmuch as he preferred it), but that it was not until Adam and Alexis had given his daltonism precise meanings, *after the fact*, that it acquired any precise or public significance. Indeed, the peculiarity of the quirky, argotic and ironic prose in which its meanings were elaborated itself testifies to the struggle Adam and Alexis had in making out, and making plain, the potential sense of Pissarro’s idiosyncratic vision.

ANARCHIST IMPRESSIONISM AND ANARCHIST LIFE

It might be said that Pissarro and his friends achieved little in writing about Impressionist vision the way they did, beyond indulging themselves and their audience in useless aestheticizing. But this is not the case: their public appreciation and enjoyment of Impressionism — and its blueness in particular — actually came to have important consequences within their anarchist way of life.



54 Paul Signac, *La Neige, boulevard de Clichy*, 1886, The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Bequest of Putnam Dana McMillan



55 Albert Dubois-Pillet, *La Seine à Bercy*, 1895, Musée Crozatier du Puy-en-Velay

The events which show this to be the case were unfolded in Alexis's 'A Minuit' column. They begin on 10 February 1886, when Alexis opened a subscription fund for the families of the miners on strike in the small southern town of Decazeville.⁶⁹ Indeed, in setting up a mechanism for political action in an 'Art' column, Alexis seemed to want to make the point that art and life were not separate domains. He had almost said as much in an earlier article of 31 January 1886, entitled "'Germinal" à Decazeville', in which he taunted the Minister of Fine Arts, who had recently suppressed a theatrical adaptation of Zola's *Germinal*, with news of the outbreak of the Decazeville strike. Triumphantly, he sniped:

Y viennent de jouer *Germinal*!

Oui, dans la réalité — à Decazeville.

Est-ce que vous n' seriez plus ministre, monsieur Goblet?⁷⁰

Undoubtedly in collusion with Alexis, Signac sent money to the Decazeville fund just in time for his contribution to be featured in the first issue of 'A minuit' to host the subscription (on 10 February). True to form, Alexis prefaced Signac's covering letter with the acid remark: 'Voici un artiste peintre . . . Rien de Cabanel!'⁷¹ And Signac himself wrote in terms which emphasized the connection between his political motives in making a contribution and his preference, as an Impressionist painter — an anti-Cabanel — for blue. In an otherwise nonsensical *double-entendre*, he confided:

Mon cher Tublot

Ci: 5 francs pour la souscription . . .

Une thune c'est bien peu; mais le bleu de cobalt est si cher!

Paul Signac
peintre impressionniste
130, boulevard de Clichy⁷²

Signac certainly did use cobalt blue, even luridly. In contrast to Goenette's tonal painting of the same motif, Signac's *La Neige, boulevard de Clichy* of 1886 (plate 54) makes extensive use of the colour, not just for the worker's blouse (on the left), but also for the shutters on the houses and its many shadows.

Pissarro's sympathy for his colleagues' efforts is revealed by an anonymous contribution of two francs which Alexis featured in his 'souscription' column for 14 February. According to Alexis, the money was sent in by 'un copain à Signac, de Gisors (Eure), qu'avale mal qu' Trublot jaspine mal du Louvre.'⁷³ That this correspondent was Pissarro is revealed by the fact that Pissarro used the form 'Eragny-sur-Epte par Gisors, Eure' for his address in letters of the same week.⁷⁴ His identity is further confirmed by the ironic attack in the letter upon Alexis for having recently made hostile remarks in his column about the Louvre,⁷⁵ as it was about this time that Pissarro probably first made his own inflammatory remarks about the same institution.⁷⁶ (Pissarro had good reason to remain anonymous, as his post had previously been tampered with, and he suspected the police of having him under surveillance as a political subversive.)⁷⁷

Jokes like Pissarro's in this letter may appear trivial in themselves, but they expressed preferences which, within six months, had helped consolidate support for Alexis's fund considerably — and well beyond the rarified confines of the Caze

salon. By 30 April 1886, Alexis's Decazeville fund had amassed the considerable sum of 5,000 francs, which means it must have had wide support among the Parisian workers. And, indeed, evidence exists which suggests that the Parisian workers might have sent money to the fund because they identified with Alexis's politicized taste for Impressionism. Or at least this appears to be the case to judge from a letter which Adam published in the journal *Lutèce* for 31 January 1886. In this, he regaled the reader with the following anecdote, very possibly about Signac's *La Neige, boulevard de Clichy*:

Dernièrement un peintre de mes amis travaillait en plein air, dans une rue de Montmartre. Des badauds massés derrière lui émettaient des stupidités énormes. Survint un garçon boucher qui regarda la toile de façon intelligente et dit:

'Tiens! c'est très chic, ça: c'est de l'impressionnisme.'

Mon peintre de se retourner, ahuri:

'Comment savez-vous?'

'Le Cri, parbleu! dans les articles de Trublot!'⁷⁸

It has to be admitted that the workers' enthusiasm for Impressionism was only one factor in the success of Alexis's column; nonetheless, it does appear that the feelings Impressionism could arouse did at least facilitate real opposition to the bourgeois culture which Pissarro and his friends detested. Alexis's was the first subscription fund to be instituted for the Decazeville miners, but it led to others, which in total amassed between 200,000–300,000 francs, allowing the Decazeville miners to stay on strike for 108 days.⁷⁹ And even though their resistance was finally crushed, and the Decazeville mine was eventually run down,⁸⁰ it can be said fairly that art played some part in crystallizing an effort to transform life.

PISSARRO'S ORIGINALITY

These events are significant, and not just because they suggest art can have a salutary effect on life, even when politically naïve.⁸¹ They also demonstrate the conditions in which originality might be said to be possible, and in the process cast some light on the concept of originality itself.

These problems are best explained by reference to Wittgenstein's (later) thinking about what makes a sign meaningful. In this scheme, the meanings of signs of any sort are normally circumscribed by what they can achieve within particular 'form(s) of life'.⁸² A word, for example, has a meaning within a specific 'language-game'⁸³ where it 'attains a goal'⁸⁴ appropriate to particular circumstances themselves defined by the 'customs and institutions'⁸⁵ of a culture. One of the fundamental jobs which words do is exemplify shared thoughts, feelings and beliefs for the different individuals of a culture so that they can share a rationality and communicate with one another. It follows that a word cannot have 'private' meanings; rather, it must carry a meaning which is at least potentially capable of being made public, and used in social life, if it is to signify at all.⁸⁶

A sign such as painting is rather like a 'paradigm' — or an example of something

corresponding to a name-word — in that it has meaning when it instantiates a set of particular and also shared beliefs (as a thing with a name does). In other words, a painting signifies publicly when it expresses an agreed sense.⁸⁷ This is not to say that paintings cannot function in ways different from language, or that they cannot exert psychological effects on an adequately sensitive and informed spectator irrespective of rules and conventions. (In the case of Pissarro's paintings, the spectator gets posited as a particular kind of disinterested perceiving subject, and s/he experiences a particular emotion as a consequence.)⁸⁸ It is to say, however, that in becoming *public*, the psychological effects of paintings are *ipso facto* subsumed to linguistic descriptions of what those effects are. The meanings of paintings are also measured against the meanings of comparable paradigms (or conventions) whose sense is already established (if contested by different communities of belief). Both ways, paintings become paradigmatic of the intentionality and beliefs of the form of life they are *thought* or *said* to represent or express.

Pissarro's (generally) colourist paintings of his own *sensations* can be seen to have come to signify because they recognizably negated and refused the meanings of existing paradigms — Salon pictures — whose sense was already public (if disputed). For example, in his writings, Théophile Thoré had argued that Salon art represented the vision of a 'bourgeois' class, whose preoccupation with the 'utile' and its obsession for 'argent' made it lose any 'sentiment de la nature', and rendered it 'aveugle devant les tableaux colorés par la lumière.'⁸⁹ All in all then, it can be said that Pissarro's colourist paintings had a weak originality in that they signified a kind of sense already largely defined by language and by the paradigms whose meanings they negated.

However, the kind of theory I am using nonetheless holds to the view that the meaning of a painting is to some extent *sui generis*,⁹⁰ or that it is not reducible to the language used to make its sense public. As paintings of his *sensations*, therefore, Pissarro's colourist paintings had a certain nebulous determinacy, a 'peculiar' or 'particular' psychological effect,⁹¹ which existed prior to their inscription within language as paradigms, and which informed their meaning subsequently. This much also applies to Pissarro's predominantly blue paintings — for the sake of argument, it can be said that they produced a particular effect of immateriality. And it is this that facilitated their entry into public sense, even though they were less reducible to language than were Pissarro's generally colourist paintings. Empirically, the *precise* sense of the blue pictures could not be expressed so easily or so completely in terms of their enacting a simple negation of Salon conventions. And their entry into public sense as paradigms of the particular feelings they exemplified was complicated (and made risky for Pissarro) by the fact that nobody (including the artist) had words with which to describe this effect. They were not empty of meaning because of this, but laden with (as yet) pre-linguistic meaning (which is probably why Pissarro failed to register his preference for blue in these paintings for what it was).

Further light can be cast on the strange situation facing Pissarro's blue pictures before they came to have public sense by comparing this with the situation facing those neologisms which are not composed out of the elements of an already existing language. It is fairly plain that such a word can only make sense when there is

a language-game and a form of life in which it can be used. And so, unless it is to remain 'without meaning' (like some of the words in Lewis Carroll's poems),⁹² or make sense only in the realm of an imaginary form of life (like 'Excalibur'),⁹³ it can signify only if generated in response to some change(s) in social life. In this case it signifies some newly discovered thing, event or experience. This kind of case seems to stipulate that Pissarro's blue pictures could only come to enter language and gain publicity as paradigms once there was a form of life which could guarantee their sense, and/or the sense of the language used to define that.

However, the evidence strongly suggests that Pissarro's blue pictures did not signify publicly merely because they followed upon social changes that had already happened. On the contrary, it seems inescapable that their pre-linguistic, psychological effects actually encouraged Alexis and his comrades to act on the feelings they prompted and evolve new forms of life, or at least evolve new means of resistance to bourgeois economic power. And so, it seems that Pissarro's blue pictures came to gain sense as paradigms of an anarchist set of values precisely because they had been effective in consolidating those values within a new form of life.

This being the case, Pissarro's blue pictures were original in the strong sense that they had the force to signify publicly before they had the chance to do so. And they had this potential to be original because they were grounded in Pissarro's vision, and not in words. Accordingly, it was the irreducibility of Pissarro's 'daltonisme' to rules of meaningful seeing that gave it the potential to carry an original sense.⁹⁴ Or, which is (almost) the same: it was the anarchic quality of the way Pissarro saw that grounded his paintings' ability to signify anarchism without them having to spell out how this was to be achieved.⁹⁵

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NOTES

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1 According to Lilla Cabot Perry, Monet told her in 1889: 'When you go out to paint, try to forget what objects you have before you . . . Merely think, here is a little square of blue, here an oblong of pink, here a streak of yellow, and paint it just as it looks to you . . .'. She also recalls that Monet 'wished he had been born blind and then had suddenly gained his sight so that he could begin to paint in this way without knowing what the objects were that he saw before him.' See L. Nochlin (ed.), *Impressionism and Post-Impressionism 1874-1904: Sources and Documents*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1966, p. 35. In a similar vein, Cézanne reputedly told Joachim Gasquet: 'Je vois. Par touches'; and he is supposed to have said to Jules Borély: 'Voir comme celui qui vient de naître!'

See M. Doran (ed.), *Conversations avec Cézanne*, Paris, 1978, p. 113 and 22.

2 See C.F. Stuckey, 'Monet's Art and the Act of Vision' in J. Rewald and F. Weitzhoffer (eds.), *Aspects of Monet: A Symposium on the Artist's Life and Times*, New York, 1984, pp. 108-9. Ruskin's words are taken from J. Ruskin, *The Elements of Drawing*, 1902 [1856], pp. 5 and 7 (footnote). Pissarro was less enthusiastic about Ruskin than Monet. In a letter of March 1882 to his niece, Esther, he stated: 'Je n'ai rien lu de ce critique anglais. Je ne connais que quelques idées émises par des artistes qui sont plus ou moins au courant de ses théories . . .'. See J. Bailly-Herzberg, *Correspondance de Camille Pissarro*, 4 vols., Paris, 1986-9 (hereafter BH), letter number 103.

- 3 See R. Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism: a Study of the Theory, Technique and Critical Evaluation of Modern Art*, Chicago and London, 1984, pp. 67, 68, 77, 88, 108, 125, 130, 166 and 192.
- 4 For an account of the relation between the Impressionists' concepts of their vision and Positivist theories of perception and the self, see Shiff, op. cit., pp. 3–52.
- 5 See M. Schapiro, 'The Nature of Abstract Art', *Modern Art: the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, New York, 1978, p. 192.
- 6 In an interview of 1903, Pissarro stated: 'Je ne vois que des taches.' See J. House, 'Camille Pissarro's Idea of Unity' in C. Lloyd (ed.), *Studies on Camille Pissarro*, London, 1986, p. 26. For Pissarro's ideas on the 'impression', see Shiff, op. cit., p. 242, n. 26. J. House discusses Pissarro's ideas on *sensation* in relation to Shiff's argument in op. cit., pp. 15–34.
- 7 See Jean Renoir, *Renoir*, Paris, 1962, p. 111.
- 8 'Sensations free from everything but your own sensations.' BH 815.
- 9 BH 358. Pissarro also mentioned Chevreul in a letter of October 1886 (BH 356). Pissarro briefly abandoned Chevreul's subtractive system of colour analysis in the mid-1880s in favour of the additive system proposed by Ogden Rood. For a succinct analysis of the main differences between the two systems and their relation to art, see J.C. Webster, 'The Technique of the Impressionists: A Reappraisal', *The College Art Journal*, no. 4, November 1944, pp. 3–22.
- 10 'de Bellio tells me that he does not think that physicists' research about colour and light can be of use to the artist, any more than anatomy or optics . . . ; but surely, we [the Impressionists] could not have pursued our studies of light with so much assurance, if we had not had as a guide the discoveries of Chevreul and other scientists. I would not have distinguished between local colour and illumination, if science had not given us the hint: the same holds true of complementary colours, contrasts, and the like.' BH 397.
- 11 Rood describes the variations in the colour of sunlight, the different intensities of blueness in the skylight and the manner in which objects pick up reflections of the colour of other objects in op. cit., pp. 46–7, 45 and 5. Since these effects appear earlier in Impressionist painting they may have learned of them from Leonardo's *Trattato* (assuming that they *thought* about what they did), since this work mentioned how the colours of objects in the open air are affected by the colour of the illumination, blue shadows and reflections. See *A Treatise on Painting by Leonardo da Vinci: faithfully translated from the original Italian and digested under proper heads*, by J.F. Rigaud, London, 1835, pp. 150–1, 135 and 147–9, 139 and 147. T. Duret offered a similar taxonomy of the luministic effects treated by the Impressionists in 'Les Peintres impressionnistes', 1878; reprinted in *Critique d'avant-garde*, Paris, 1885, pp. 68–9.
- 12 Rood discusses the physiological effect of successive contrast and the psychological effect of simultaneous contrast in op. cit., pp. 203–8 and 209–17. Chevreul's book is mostly concerned with simultaneous contrast, although he does discuss successive contrast. See Chevreul, op. cit., §§ 79–81 and 133–41. Leonardo mentions an effect which is that of simultaneous contrast in op. cit., p. 269.
- 13 Fénéon analysed Seurat's colour into 'couleur locale', 'orangé solaire', 'ombre', 'reflets' and 'complémentaires' in 'VIII^e Exposition impressionniste', *La Vogue*, 13–20 June 1886; 'L'Impressionnisme', *L'Emancipation sociale*, 17 April 1887; and 'Le Néo-Impressionnisme', *L'Art moderne de Bruxelles*, 1 May 1887. See J.U. Halperin, *Félix Fénéon: Oeuvres plus que complètes*, Paris and Geneva, 1970, pp. 35–6, 66 and 73.
- 14 BH 350, 352 and 354.
- 15 BH 415 and a letter published in H. Dorra and J. Rewald, *Seurat*, Paris, 1959, p. XIX.
- 16 Cf. A. Lcc, 'Seurat and Science', *Art History*, vol. 10, no. 2, June 1987, pp. 203–26, which takes Fénéon's views as accurate testimony of Seurat's intentions. I have argued against his view (even though Seurat *seems* to have endorsed Fénéon's ideas in his letter of 28 August 1890 to Maurice Beaubourg) in my article, 'Seurat: The Natural Scientist', *Apollo*, December 1990, pp. 381–5. For an earlier, but somewhat strategic endorsement of Fénéon's text, see Seurat's letter of 1888 to Signac in J. Rewald, *Seurat*, Paris, 1948, pp. 114–15. Fénéon first tried to elicit information from Seurat in May 1886. In a letter to Edouard Dujardin and Tédor de Wyzewa, he confided that he had been in touch with the 'impressionnistes, Seurat et Signac' and that 'il [Fénéon] espère que les impressionnistes ont obtempéré à sa demande.' Unpublished manuscript, Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, MNR MS 28.²⁸ But as late as September 1886, in BH 352, Pissarro told Lucien: 'j'aurais bien voulu qu'il [Fénéon] s'adressât à Seurat, mais c'est impossible.'
- 17 BH 358. *Les Impressionnistes en 1886* was a *recueil* of three of Fénéon's articles: 'VIII^e Exposition impressionniste' (see n. 10), 'V^e Exposition internationale de peinture et de sculpture', *La Vogue*, 20 June–5 July 1886 and 'L'Impressionnisme aux Tuileries', *L'Art moderne de Bruxelles*, 19 September 1886. See Halperin, op. cit., pp. 29–38, 46–50, 39–42, 50–1, 43–5 and 552–8. It was published at the end of October 1886.
- 18 Pissarro was certainly not satisfied with Fénéon's descriptions of the Neo-Impressionist technique. See my articles, 'Seurat: The Natural Scientist', loc. cit., p. 383 and 'Pictures and History: One Man's Truth',

- Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 10, no. 2, December 1987, p. 100.
- 19 Pissarro's 'élève', Cézanne, neatly formulated the consequences of the effect for painting in a remark he made to Léo Languier in their conversations of 1901–2: 'Peindre, ce n'est pas copier l'objectif: c'est saisir une harmonie entre des rapports nombreux, c'est les transposer dans une gamme à soi en les développant suivant une logique neuve et originale.' See Doran, *op. cit.*, p. 17. For a description of how colours affect one another's apparent size (the Von Bezold or 'spreading' effect), see E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, Oxford, 1987 (London, 1960), p. 260 and n. 61.
- 20 See Rood, *op. cit.*, pp. 117–18. Some time before 1889, Pissarro told G.W. Sheldon that the optimum viewing distance for his paintings was three times the diagonal. See J. House, *Monet: Nature into Art*, New Haven and London, 1986. Significantly, this is greater than the viewing distance of an Academic painting — three times its maximum dimension, according to Charles Blanc in the *Grammaire des arts du dessin* (Paris, 1867, p. 537).
- 21 One of the best descriptions of these effects in combination occurs in the Goncourts' description of Chardin's work. See E. and J. de Goncourt, *L'Art au dix-huitième siècle*, vol. 1, Paris, 1906, pp. 144 and 157–8. Robert Ratcliff kindly drew my attention to these passages.
- 22 Pissarro first mentions his use of 'mélange optique' in letters of July/August 1886 and does so again in the letter of November 1886 to Durand-Ruel (BH 349 and 358). Here he also mentions an idea of Rood's: that luminosity of an optical mixture of pigments is greater than that of a physical mixture of the same pigments (see Rood, *op. cit.*, pp. 124–5). This notion featured prominently in Fénéon's descriptions of the Neo-Impressionist technique (see Halperin, *op. cit.*, pp. 36, 54–5, 67 and 73), but again only because of Pissarro, and not because of Seurat. He probably learned about 'mélange optique' from Blanc's *Grammaire des arts du dessin*, pp. 604–6, which he read 'au collège', or from Blanc's article 'Eugène Delacroix', *Gazette des beaux-arts*, vol. 16, 1864, pp. 112 and 115–16. See Seurat's letter to Fénéon of 20 June 1890 in Halperin, *op. cit.*, p. 507.
- 23 See J. Gage, 'Colour in History: Relative or Absolute?', *Art History*, vol. 1, no. 1, March 1978, pp. 104–30; and U. Eco, 'How Culture Conditions the Colours We See' in M. Blonsky (ed.), *On Signs: A Semiotics Reader*, Oxford, 1985, pp. 157–75 (I am grateful to Ron Baxter for this reference).
- 24 L. Wittgenstein discusses the concept of 'seeing-as' in his *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford, 1958, p. 197^c. Wittgenstein makes the point about the context-dependence of 'seeing-as' with respect to colour in his *Remarks on Colour* (Los Angeles, 1978), where he argues in book 1, § 73 that Goethe's remarks on the characters of colours are of little use because 'Someone who speaks of the character of a colour is always thinking of just *one* particular way it is used.'
- 25 This is all the more pressing a question because what the Impressionists saw was often strongly counter-intuitive. Modern perceptual science tells us that normally we do not see colour patches but reified things, and that we do not directly register the modifications which the illumination, skylight, reflections and contrasts impose on objects, but instead that our perception of colour is relatively constant. Similarly, recent research (and especially that of Edwin Land) shows that the additive system of colour which Pissarro espoused in the mid-1880s is corrigible. See J.D. Mollon, 'Colour Vision and Colour Blindness', in H.B. Barlow and J.D. Mollon (eds.), *The Senses*, Cambridge, 1982, pp. 165–91.
- 26 The case of Leonardo shows why this is an important point, as he knew that a variety of light effects and subjective effects could modify the look of objects in the open air (see n. 9 and n. 10), but never painted what he saw. Within the conventions of the time it simply would not have made sense.
- 27 'The rare bird whose plumage is resplendent with all the colours of the rainbow'. 'Boucuse' means 'muddy'. BH 117 and 188. In a similar vein, Pissarro described the town of Compiègne in a letter of February 1884, as 'pays plat et bourgeois, solennel; un petit Versailles très maussade ...' (BH 216).
- 28 This very belief emerges more clearly in a letter Pissarro wrote to Signac in 1888, in which he expressed his horror at discovering the Idealist foundations of Seurat's art (BH 503). In this, he advised Signac to avoid Seurat's influence and 'Appliquez ... la science qui appartient à tout le monde', but he also told him: 'gardez pour vous le don que vous avez de sentir *en artiste de race libre*'. For a fuller discussion of this letter, see the conclusion to my article, 'Paul Adam, *Soi et les peintres impressionnistes*', *Revue de l'art*, no. 82, December 1988, pp. 39–50. Similarly, in the letter of November 1886 to Durand-Ruel (BH 358), Pissarro stated that 'la seule originalité' consisted of 'le caractère du dessin et la vision particulière à chaque artiste'.
- 29 By 1876, Pissarro was probably reading *La Lanterne de Marseille*, a journal which published Proudhon. See R. Shikes, 'Pissarro's Political Philosophy and his Art', in Lloyd, *op. cit.*, pp. 39–40. According to BH 203, BH 211, BH 304 and BH 449, Pissarro had read Proudhon's massive *De la justice dans la révolution et dans l'église* of 1858 and other works of his.

- 30 'I firmly believe that our anarchist philosophy colours our works. . . .' BH 653.
- 31 'lourdeur' means 'heaviness'. BH 188.
- 32 See n. 27.
- 33 Pissarro spells out his ideas on self-determination in BH 211 (a letter of [January 1884 to Lucien] and BH 300 (a letter of December 1885 to his niece Esther).
- 34 See Shikes, op. cit., for an analysis of the relationship between Pissarro's themes and his anarchism.
- 35 'Study changes out vision to such an extent that the humble and colossal Pissarro finds justification for his anarchist theories.' See J. Rewald (ed.), *Paul Cézanne: correspondence*, Paris, 1978, p. 314.
- 36 'Such an anarchist! In art of course, and without realizing it!' BH 653.
- 37 There is a thumbnail biographical sketch of Caze in J. Ajalbert, *Mémoires en vrac*, Paris, 1936, p. 118. According to BH 309, Pissarro first visited Caze on 22 January 1886.
- 38 Witness accounts of the Caze *salon* arc contained in J. Emile-Bayard, *Le Quartier-Latin: hier et aujourd'hui*, Paris, 1924, p. 170 (quoting Paul Adam); J. Ajalbert, op. cit., Paris, 1936, pp. 110–36, 36; H. de Régnier, *De mon temps*, Paris, 1935, p. 12 and *Nos Rencontres*, Paris, 1932, p. 79; and P. V. Stock, *Mémorandum d'un éditeur*, Paris, 1935, pp. 106–7 and 297–300. See also G. Grappe, 'Quelques Souvenirs sur le symbolisme', *Mercur de France*, vol. 11, 1907, p. 72.
- 39 For a contemporary biography of Alexis, see A. Corbier, 'Paul Alexis', *Les Hommes d'aujourd'hui*, no. 336 (1888?). For further information on Alexis, see B. H. Baker (ed.), *'Naturalisme pas mort': lettres inédites de Paul Alexis à Emile Zola 1870–1900*, Toronto, 1971.
- 40 Adam wrote his own biography under the name of Balthazar de Moncouys in *La Vie moderne* of 27 November 1887. See M. Pakenham, [Paul Adam] *Symbolistes et décadents*, Exeter, 1989, pp. 15–16. Another early biography of Adam appeared in *Les Hommes d'aujourd'hui*, no. 304 (1887). See also, J. A. Duncan, *Les Romans de Paul Adam: du symbolisme littéraire au symbolisme cabalistique*, Berne, 1977.
- 41 *Soi* is a complex novel, and was probably designed to fudge such differences and to appeal to Naturalists and Symbolists alike. For the Symbolist context, see my article, 'Paul Adam, *Soi* et les peintres impressionistes', loc. cit.
- 12 'At this period, he seemed to change style. His brush applied several, thick layers of paint, laying on mauve or blue shadows. He painted wine-coloured trees, crudely. In this way he composed a snow scene with barely two white streaks, lost among crusts of pink, mauves, violet and grey.' P. Adam, *Soi*, Paris, (May) 1886, p. 218.
- 13 Their conversation runs as follows. Marthe: 'But this is not you! What have you done there?' Vibrac: 'Stand a little further back.' Marthe: 'Oh! you have been exaggerating. For a start, snow is white.' Vibrac: 'Not on your life. I see it as pink, as mauve in shadow. All right, there's some white in it, and I have painted it.' *Soi*, pp. 218–19.
- 44 'Enough. You speak like one of the old fossils at the Beaux-Arts.' *Soi*, p. 219.
- 45 See J.-K. Huysmans, *L'Art moderne*, Paris, 1903 (1883), pp. 158–9.
- 46 'Ah! Effect, effect! Effect is fine for the bourgeois, for selling, for shop signs. It attracts the eye, doesn't it, it's the scarlet carrot outside the tobacconist's shop.' *Soi*, p. 221.
- 47 'Only the brush of Cabanel [could be] sufficiently sensitive to render the amber nuances of the cashmere stretched over the low furniture and the Indian embroideries which covered the seats with wide bands. In the background stretched out the old gold of the tapestry, where occasionally a simple black flower was picked out. In the foreground, the two of them, in two contrasting tones. The one, a complete scale of graduated browns; the other, a synchrony of white and delicate green.' *Soi*, pp. 17–18.
- 48 Adam mentions Cabanel's *Venus* as one of Marthe's favourite paintings in *Soi*, p. 233.
- 49 'Cabanel: cream and blackcurrant syrup, sloshed on top of a base of angelica.' *Soi*, p. 119. The insult is Huysmansesque because Huysmans was given to using culinary metaphors to insult Salon art in *L'Art moderne*. In this, he called Cabanel a 'pâtissier' and derided Ballavoine for using 'du jus de grosseille et du petit-lait' (op. cit., pp. 46 and 63). Similarly, Caze spoke of Cabanel's use of 'beaucoup de crème fouettée' in his *Salon* of 1885, published in *Lutèce*, no. 172, 10–17 May; no. 173, 17–24 May; no. 174, 24–31 May and no. 175, 31 May–6 June. Zola had used similar metaphors to criticize Cabanel's *Vénus* in *La Situation*, 1 July 1867. See E. Zola, *Mon Salon, Manet, écrits sur l'art*, Paris, 1970, p. 126.
- 50 Pissarro gave vent to such feelings in two letters of November and December 1883 (BH 190 and 203), in which he bemoaned the difficulty of selling his own works of a 'rustique' and 'sauvage' temperament to the 'bourgeois' of Rouen. Their tastes for paintings which gave a more facile gratification even led him to call them, somewhat insensitively, 'Zouloüs à gants jaune paille, à claque et à queues de pie.'
- 51 'From Paul Signac, the young and already majestic impressionist: a page of vibrant sunshine, with a Seine all blue and hot.'
- 52 'A Pissarro I've never asked for . . . but which will arrive, I'd bet, one of these days.'
- 53 'Without getting sweaty, without bumping into the brilliantly imbecile High-Society of opening nights . . .'

- 54 Pissarro mentioned Huysmans's book in two letters of May 1883 (BH 145 and 146). Signac records that Seurat (also a member of Caze's *salon*) knew and admired *L'Art moderne* in *De Delacroix au néo-impressionnisme*, Paris, 1978 (1899), p. 110.
- 55 *L'Art moderne*, p. 104. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 136. Rood discusses Daltonism in *op. cit.*, pp. 79–82. Daltonism was widely publicized in E. Véron, *L'Esthétique*, Paris, 1883 (1878), p. 277. On the Impressionists and Daltonism, see O. Reuterswärd, 'The Violetomania of the Impressionists', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. IX, no. 2, 1950, pp. 106–10. On Daltonism, see W.G. Wright, 'The Unsolved Problem of Daltonism' in *The Rays are Not Coloured*, London, 1967, pp. 67–87.
- 56 *L'Art moderne*, pp. 107 and 106.
- 57 Setting the book's tone, Huysmans opened *L'Art moderne* with the prefatory remark: 'Contrairement à l'opinion reçue, j'estime que toute vérité est bonne à dire.' For examples of Huysmans's logic, see *L'Art moderne*, pp. 10–12, 14–15, 17, 42–3, 86, 101–3 and 138–9. In a similar vein, Caze described the work of Jean Béraud as 'peu vrai' and even 'faux' in his *Salon* of 1885 (*loc. cit.*).
- 58 This is not to deny that other kinds of pictorial blueness could mean other things to different communities of language-use. Richard Shiff kindly pointed out to me that Cézanne's blueness might stand as a sign of Mediterraneanism for writers like Maurice Denis, and hence acquire a kind of reactionary value. Blue in a painting conventionally expressed 'modestie' or 'candeur' or some such emotion. See D. Sutter, 'Les Phénomènes de la vision', *L'Art*, vol. 20, 1880, p. 219.
- 59 'The artistic climate does not suffer from Daltonism because of any cause in the nature of things, but because it suffers the evil and saturnine influence of democracy.' A Germain, *Pour le beau*, Paris, 1893, p. 123.
- 60 On this subject, and borrowing from Baudelaire's 'Salon de 1846', Jean Richepin wrote: 'Le peuple est vraiment plus artiste que la bourgeoisie. Il n'obéit pas, comme elle, au mot d'ordre tyrannique de la mode, qui nous habille tous à l'uniforme. D'instinct ... il réagit contre cette maladie moderne de l'égalitarisme en matière de costume. ... Ainsi, tandis que nous allons dans la vie ... tristement vêtus de noir ... portant éternellement le deuil de nos gaietés perdues ... et tous uniformément vilains et sinistres, comme une bande de corbeaux, ils travaillent en chantant dans une fête de costumes et de couleurs. ...' (J. Richepin, *Le Pavé*, Paris, 1883, pp. 204 and 207–8).
- 61 *Soi.* p. 422. In the *Petit Bottin des lettres et des arts* (Paris, 1886), Adam had written in the entry concerning Signac: 'Au pinceau: des larges bleucs de fleuve ensoleillé. ...' (p. 125).
- 62 'The people, they are colour. It's the only class of society where there is so much blue and white. The blouse of the very poor workers is a dead blue, a worn-out, had-its-day blue with extraordinary, greenish shadows. One could want those colours, in plush, to make blinds with.' *Soi.* p. 416.
- 63 'The striking spectacle of the life of a Parisian cityscape stretched back into the painting across a blue and grey morning atmosphere.' *Soi.* p. 419.
- 64 'United in a great blue sensation, a blueish glaze of air.' *Soi.* p. 420.
- 65 'The keynote of this synchromy rang out in the deep blue *Petit Journal* poster which covered the whole gable of an isolated house on the riverbank.' *Soi.* pp. 419–20.
- 66 Perhaps this is why Reynolds proscribed the use of blue as the 'predominant colour in a picture', at least according to an apocryphal story. The same story has it that Gainsborough painted his *Blue Boy* precisely to defy Reynolds; however, Lawrence commented that Gainsborough's painting amounted to 'a difficulty boldly combatted, not conquered'. See W.T. Whitley, *Thomas Gainsborough*, London, 1915, pp. 375–7. I am grateful to Michael Liversidge for this reference.
- 67 See C. Baudelaire, 'Le Peintre de la vie moderne', 1863; reprinted in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, Paris, 1976, p. 699. Richard Shiff kindly prompted me to recall this quotation. T. Duret recalls how Cézanne's work was considered 'peinture d'anarchiste' (undoubtedly because of its subversion of traditional pictorial hierarchies) in his *Histoire des peintres impressionnistes*, Paris, 1922 (1906), p. 145.
- 68 See BH 145 and BH 146.
- 69 The Decazeville strike broke out on 26 January. For a detailed analysis of the events in question, see D. Reid, *The Miners of Decazeville: A Genealogy of Deindustrialisation*, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1985, pp. 91–106.
- 70 'They've just performed "Germinal"! Yes, but in reality — at Decazeville. Aren't you minister any more, monsieur Goblet?'
- 71 'Here's an artist of a painter None of your Cabanel!'
- 72 'Dear Trublot, here's 5 francs for the subscription Five francs is not much, but cobalt blue is so dear!' This letter is unpublished elsewhere. Alexis also records a 'magnifique volume valant au moins 100 fr. offert par M. Paul Signac, peintre impressionniste' in 'A minuit' of 9 April 1886.
- 73 'A mate of Signac's, from Gisors (Eure), who finds it hard to swallow that Trublot gossips maliciously about the Louvre.' Not in BH.
- 74 See BH 311 and BH 313.
- 75 Alexis's remarks were made in 'A minuit' of 29 January 1886 and they were prompted by a

- request from the fashionable journal, *Tout-Paris*, to the Louvre authorities, asking for Saturdays to be forbidden to copyists so that their clientèle might enjoy their visits more. Alexis's riposte read: 'Trublot, lui, s'en fiche, des musées et d' tous les antiques. C'est point là qu'y juge qu' les vrais artisses doivent aller chercher leurs inspirations. Le spectacle d' la nature et d' la vie, lui paraît, pour les gas d'attaque qui veulent exprimer leur époque, bigrement préférable aux enseignements glacés et solennels qu'on peut puiser dans la contemplation des oeuvres du passé.' Alexis's hatred of art institutions was part of a more general, anarchist contempt for institutions *per se*. In 'A minuit' of 30 December 1885, entitled 'Trubl', Président' he (imaginatively) abolished 'l'ministère des Beaux-Arts, l'Académie et la Légion d'Honneur' and '[la] censure', 'L'mariage', 'L'héritage au dessus de vingt milles balles'; he replaced prisons with 'hôpitalaux': insisted upon a rapid recall of French troops from Tonkin and instituted free and obligatory education.
- 76 Cézanne reports Pissarro as having wanted to 'brûler les nécropoles de l'art' in a letter of 26 September 1906 to his son (see *Paul Cézanne: Correspondance*, pp. 328–9); but in a letter of 22 December 1885 (BH 304), Pissarro was already writing to his niece, Esther, of 'la nécessité de jeter à terre [les] bastilles de l'art'. Even if he did not name the Louvre among these institutions, he very likely had it in mind.
- 77 See BH 140, a letter of April 1883. In 'A minuit' of 13 April 1886 two francs was donated by 'un peintre impressionniste' whose anonymity may suggest it was Pissarro.
- 78 'Recently a painter friend of mine was working in the open air, in a Montmartre street. Some ruffians crowding behind him were making really stupid comments. There comes along a butcher's boy who looked at the painting intelligently and said: "Hold on! that's very stylish, that. It's Impressionism!" Turning round, my painter friend calls out: "How do you know?" "Le Cri, of course, from Trublot's articles.'" *Lutèce*, no. 220, 31 January–7 February 1886. Adam was a regular visitor to the 'thés' which Signac held in his atelier at 130 boulevard de Clichy around this time, and it is easy to imagine how they might have shared a joke about an incident which could have taken place outside. See G. Coquiou, *Seurat*, Paris, 1924, p. 29.
- 79 See Reid, *op. cit.*, pp. 98 and 105.
- 80 See *ibid.*, p. 106.
- 81 For an account of the shortcomings of Pissarro's anarchism from Marxist and feminist perspectives, see J. Hutton, 'Camille Pissarro's *Turpitudes Sociales* and Late Nineteenth-Century French Anarchist Anti-Feminism', *History Workshop Journal*, no. 24, Winter 1987, pp. 32–61. The other Caze group members were perhaps no less naïve than Pissarro in their thinking, at least when measured against the critical theory of the Frankfurt school. Adam's polemic on Vibrac's delight in painting the poorest workers' clothing amounts to 'making even abject poverty . . . into an object of enjoyment'. See W. Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer' (1934), as reprinted in F. Frasca and C. Harrison (eds.), *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, London, 1982, pp. 213–16 (this extract, p. 215). Signac's use of cobalt blue to paint pictures which expressed solidarity with the Decazeville miners ignores the fact that cobalt mining has always been particularly hazardous because of the poisonous nature of the ore. See R.D. Harley, *Artists' Pigments c. 1600–1835*, London, 1982 (1970), pp. 53.
- 82 On the 'form of life', see L. Wittgenstein, *op. cit.*, 1958, §§ 19, 23 and 241 and pp. 174 and 226.
- 83 For Wittgenstein's ideas on varieties of language-games and their relation to forms of life, see *op. cit.*, 1958, § 23.
- 84 See *ibid.*, §§ 87 and 88.
- 85 See *ibid.*, §§ 198–9.
- 86 Wittgenstein elaborates the (no) 'private language' argument in *op. cit.*, 1958, §§ 268ff.
- 87 Wittgenstein's ideas on paradigms are resumed in *op. cit.*, 1958, § 55.
- 88 For an extended discussion of the psychological effects of paintings, and of their meaningfulness irrespective of conventions and rules, see R. Wollheim, *Painting as an Art*, London, 1987.
- 89 Thoré argued that preoccupations with 'the useful' and with 'money' made the bourgeois lose any 'sentiment of nature' and rendered it 'blind in front of paintings coloured by light'. See T. Thoré, *Salons de T. Thoré 1844, 1845, 1846, 1847, 1848, avec une préface par W. Bürger*, Paris, 1868, pp. 9, 382 and 394. I am most grateful to Leah Kharibian for bringing Thoré's ideas to my attention.
- 90 On the irreducibility of painting to language, see M. Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art*, New Haven and London, 1989 (1982), p. 216. Podro also analyses Hegel's ideas on the subject — his concept of *Darstellung* — in *op. cit.*, pp. 18–19.
- 91 Drawing upon Wittgenstein, Richard Wollheim draws a distinction between a 'peculiar' or 'particular' sensation of the kind that can be described (by reference to another sensation) and a sensation of the kind which cannot. My claim is that blueness gave Pissarro a sensation of the latter category. See R. Wollheim, *Art and its Objects*, London, pp. 109–12. See also L. Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books. Preliminary Studies for the 'Philosophical Investigations'*, *The Brown Book*, §§ 15 and 16. I am grateful to Katy Scott for drawing my attention to this distinction.

92 See L. Wittgenstein, *op. cit.*, 1958, § 13.

93 See *ibid.*, §§ 39 and 45.

94 Wittgenstein discusses the rule-governed nature of seeing-as in *op. cit.*, 1958, § 74.

95 Cf. Wittgenstein, who argues that games can

have meaning even when their participants 'make up the rules as [they] go along', or when 'there is some vagueness *in the rules*'. See L. Wittgenstein, *op. cit.*, 1958, §§ 83 and 100.