

MODERNIST
GAMES.
CÉZANNE AND
HIS CARD PLAYERS

EDITED BY SATISH PADIYAR

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Edited by Satish Padiyar

With contributions by:

T. J. Clark
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Paul Cézanne, *Cardplayers*, c.1892-5.
Oil on canvas. The Courtauld Institute of Art, London.

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MARGARET IVERSEN is Professor in the School of Philosophy and Art History, University of Essex. She is author of *Beyond Pleasure: Freud, Lacan, Barthes* (2007) and *Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory* (1993). Recent publications include *Chance* (2010) and *Writing Art History* (co-authored with Stephen Melville, 2010). From 2008-11, she was Director (with Diarmuid Costello) of the AHRC-funded research project, 'Aesthetics after Photography'. She is currently writing a book on photography, trace, and trauma.



INTRODUCTION

SATISH PADIYAR

This is a collection of essays about Cézanne and the modalities of play. Six perspectives on Cézanne's 1890s project *The Card Players* extend the insights gained by a remarkable and ground-breaking exhibition, *Cézanne's Card Players*, which took place in the autumn and winter of 2010/11 at The Courtauld Gallery, London, before moving to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.¹ The conference 'Modernist Games: Cézanne and his Card Players' took place on a winter's day in a packed lecture theatre at The Courtauld Institute on the eve of the exhibition's closure in London and prior to its re-staging in New York. It provided a sort of interregnum and thinking space, puncturing the contingency of the exhibition in its slightly different formats in the two venues with a set of considered ruminations that referred back to the histories of Cézanne scholarship, as well as to other cultural and visual histories, and gestured forwards to new interpretations of Cézanne and especially of his 1890s preoccupation with the theme of card playing. This collection publishes the papers presented during the conference, with the addition of one new commissioned essay — essential it would seem, in a volume on 'modernist games' — on Cézanne in the orbit of the Surrealists. Its six authors, a mixture of established, emerging and new voices in Cézanne scholarship, offer bold and speculative readings of the art of Cézanne, approaching it from a variety of perspectives but always returning to the question raised by the motif in *The Card Players* itself of the significance of the ludic in Cézanne's art; and to what it has to say, as T. J. Clark puts it in his essay, about a 'form of life'.

What impelled that one-day conference was the continuing enigmatic quality of what the Courtauld exhibition, for the first time, materially brought together — grouping drawings, paintings, and sketches for *The Card Players* from dispersed museum and private collections — as a sustained and coherent late project by this artist, the meaning of which still proved ineluctable. This book is an attempt to throw light on the logic of that late project.

'Modernist Games'; why should these two words reverberate with each other in quite such an interesting and provocative way; and what has this to do with Cézanne?

There is something both obvious and unconvincing about the phrase. Obvious, because the inheritors of Cézanne have been prodigious game-players: from Picasso to the Surrealists, from Duchamp to artists of the Cold War era (who playfully resisted the deadly seriousness of Soviet and recent Fascist experience), and Fluxus; games, or playing (the two are not coincident but related) provided escape from, and criticism of, the stifling rule of authority, or Law, which will always censor the play of language. Yet it is unconvincing, because, as one commentator has recently observed, 'games and play ... are often sidelined in the narratives of modern art as earnest research'.² This, indeed, could well apply to Cézanne, whose self-lacerating, miserable self-image has only encouraged historians and commentators to deny the playful dimension of his art, in favour of a story of a painful life of toil and research. In *The Card Players* this most earnest of artists turns to the pleasures of a game, only to confront us paradoxically with an image that is both playful and seri-

Opposite:

Detail of plate 4.
Paul Cézanne, *Cardplayers*,
c.1892-96, oil on canvas, The
Courtauld Gallery, London.

ous. In his essay André Dombrowski shows us how Cézanne relishes the visual wit and spatial play found in the images stamped on nineteenth-century playing cards; while Gavin Parkinson turns to Surrealist André Breton, who grasped The Card Players' aura of menace. If we continue to think of Cézanne as the 'father of modernism' — and it is precisely the quasi-patriarchal tone of The Card Players that leads me in my essay to interrogate its world of play as gendered and sexualized — what consequences might this unnerving paradox have for the fate of a playful impulse in modernism?³

In 1958, the anthropologist Roger Caillois in his book *Man, Play, and Games* attempted to understand the 'play instinct' in human culture. Callois made a taxonomic distinction between types of games: *Ludus*, games that are subordinated to the disciplining framework of rules, *Alea* (games of chance — like the lottery), and *Ilinx*, games that pursue or end with vertigo, disorder, and physical disorientation.⁴ Given this understanding, could it be that there is a certain disjunction in Cézanne's manner of playing, that in The Card Players he shows us the ordered world of a game — *Ludus* — but in the manner of *Ilinx*, the ambiguity of edges and things, that subtle unhinging of objects from their proper place ends precisely by instating an aesthetic of 'vertigo, disorder, and physical disorientation' (on the level of process, one might say, intentional or not)? In her essay, Margaret Iversen subtly exposes the working of something like *Alea* in Cézanne's brushwork and how its stroke — 'those touches that fall like rain from the painter's brush' — positively 'cultivates the accident'.⁵

To participate in a game, or collective play, produces the sense of actively dwelling in another world, set apart from 'real life'. Charlotte De Mille's essay tunes into the other-worldliness of Cézanne's harmonies, by staging a duet between his working practice and the music of Chabrier and Debussy. A game (of cards), like playing a musical score, gives us a parallel life, in which to act and to risk, to experience the win or the loss, only to be able to begin again. This other-worldliness of the 'game' was one of the central intuitions of the Dutch philosopher Johan Huizinga, whose great cultural anthropological study *Homo Ludens* ('Man the Player'), was completed in June 1938, precisely when the possibility of keeping another world going — a world of fair play — was becoming urgent: Fascism's obscene infringement of the 'rules of the game' compelled Huizinga to reveal the game's fast-abandoned civilizing process.⁶

Modernity, then, has urgently vibrated to the social meaning and subjective experience of the game, as a potentially threatened form of human existence — and of human activity — in the cruel, savagely disenchanting conditions of political and aesthetic modernity. Let us play, the artists have enjoined; and the question is, is Cézanne the first of these to say so, and to act it out in his own way — with wit, with a funerary voice? — for early modernity?

Art historians have not been blind to the play of meaning in Cézanne's work. In a representative book like Sidney Geist's 1988 *Interpreting Cézanne* it becomes indeed the very substance of the discourse.⁷ Geist intricately psychoanalyzed Cézanne's unconscious

subversive wit, and discovered links in his art between wordplay and thing play; all this in order to recover the hidden meanings — psychosexual, mostly — of Cézanne's game of dissolving form and questioning the boundaries of things. I invoke Geist's intricately playful text, which in its interpretive energy perhaps only Cézanne's ludic art could have induced, only to affirm my final introductory point; that in writing about Cézanne one plays with him, enters the game of win or lose, in the arena of producing some meaning to it all.

Finally, my gratitude goes to Series Editor Caroline Arscott, for her boundless enthusiasm for this book; to the two Peer Reviewers, who through their astute comments simply made this a better book; to Carey Gibbons for her always scrupulous editorial assistance; to Karin Kyburz for providing essential help with obtaining image permissions; to Maria Mileeva for engineering the book production towards its final stages; and to Tom Bilson and Jack Hartnell for their invaluable technical and design support.

All references in digital versions of *Courtauld Books Online* are hyperlinked. To navigate to a footnote, click on the reference number in the body of the text. To return back to the text, click on the number at the beginning of the footnote.

1. See Nancy Ireson and Barnaby Wright (eds), *Cézanne's Card Players* (London: The Courtauld Gallery in assoc. with Paul Holberton Pub., 2010). Throughout this book, Cézanne's 1890s project is referred to as 'The Card Players', and individual artworks as *Cardplayers*.

2. David Getsy, 'Introduction', in Getsy (ed.), *From Diversion to Subversion: Games, Play, and Twentieth-Century Art* (Univ. Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 2011), p. x.

3. On the twentieth and twenty-first century Cézannian legacy, see Joseph J. Rishel and Katherine Sachs (eds), *Cézanne and Beyond* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art and New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2009).

4. First published as Roger Caillois, *Les jeux et les hommes. Le masque et le vertige* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1958).

5. Jacques Lacan on Cézanne ('those touches ...'), in Lacan, *The Four Fundamentals of Psychoanalysis* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 110.

6. First published in Switzerland in 1944, it was first translated from German into English as J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens. A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949).

7. Sidney Geist, *Interpreting Cézanne* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988).



A HOUSE OF CARDS

T. J. CLARK

This essay tries to find terms for the five paintings Cézanne did, probably in the early 1890s, of peasants playing cards. Writing about the paintings is scarce.¹ There seems to be a feeling in the literature, half-admitted, half-suppressed, that the canvases do not quite fit with other great things from the same moment — implacable, elaborate still lifes, among the strangest and grandest of Cézanne's creations; two or three touching portraits of Hortense Fiquet; a big square-format *Under the Trees* apparently made with the one-man show of 1895 in mind; and a sequence of *Bathers* that seems to move up gradually, year by year, towards Old Master size. No one knows for sure the order in which the *Cardplayers* were painted, and even our placing them roughly between 1891 and 1895 rests on no very good documentary evidence: we have a letter from the poet Paul Alexis, dated February 1891, which mentions that 'During the day, he [Cézanne] paints at the Jas de Bouffan where a worker serves as model, and one of these days I'll go and see what he's doing'.² But worker, you notice, is in the singular, and anyway Alexis is reporting what he has been told rather than seen for himself. If we try to tie the piece of hearsay to a picture, the best candidate seems to be *The Smoker* now in Mannheim. Signac, much later, said that Alexis owned *The Smoker* for a while: here too the recollection has nothing in the record to back it up, but it would be nice if it were true; especially because, as will emerge later, I am inclined to see Alexis's traces in the *Cardplayers* themselves.³

My sense of the sequence of the five canvases is as follows. (The order is hypothetical, and the reasons for my reconstruction, which diverges from those of the experts at several points, will be largely implicit in the descriptions I give.⁴) The first finished, I think, was the midsize painting in The Metropolitan Museum (plate 1), measuring 26 by 32 inches. It looks to be preparatory to the largest of the series, now in the Barnes collection (plate 2), which is nearly 4 feet 5 inches high and six feet wide. This last was an exhibition picture — its scale and subject matter would not have been out of place at the Salons — but seems never to have been shown in Cézanne's lifetime, nor in the great retrospective of 1907. Reproductions exaggerate the Barnes painting's blueness and heaviness. Of course the picture is solid — solid as a rock. But recently restorers have stripped it of a greying varnish, and the thinness and speed of application of Cézanne's paint have leapt back to life. Depth and solidity in Cézanne are not, even in a curtained interior, purchased at the price of loss of immediacy (or not when things go well): they come out of the flutter of sensation: that is the visual point. When in due course we face the question of actual massiveness and obstruction in the *Cardplayers*, particularly that of the fabric on the wall at right, the balance of qualities in Cézanne's brushwork — the decisiveness, the brevity, the raciness however grave the colour — will make everything hard to decide on.

After the Barnes canvas comes a group of three paintings with just two players at the table. I think the canvas that once belonged to Auguste Pellerin (who also owned the multi-figure picture for a while, before selling it to Barnes) may be the first of the three (plate 5).

Opposite:

Detail of plate 2.
Paul Cézanne, *Cardplayers*,
c.1890-2, oil on canvas,
The Barnes Foundation.

It is the largest: 38 by 51 inches. This is only two-thirds the size of Barnes's picture, but still one of the biggest paintings Cézanne ever did. Then there are two small-to-midsized oils, now in the Musée d'Orsay and the Courtauld collection (plate 3 and 4). The Orsay painting is slightly smaller: just over 18 by 22 inches. The Courtauld's measures 23 inches by almost 29. I use the words 'small-to-midsized' to describe the two paintings a bit uneasily, because one of the several kinds of uncanniness associated with them is that the scale of the two — I mean the effect of the scale, or how that scale is experienced by a viewer, and above all the scale's purpose — is so difficult to pin down and make sense of; even, or maybe in particular, with the two paintings actually side by side. Meyer Schapiro called the Orsay painting small but monumental. It was the monumentality, by the look of things, which made him think the painting 'undoubtedly the best'.⁵ I see what Schapiro was reacting to, but one result of being able to look at the Orsay painting next door to its double — this happened in London in 2010 — was, for me, to make the characterization 'monumental' seem less than the truth. The smallness of the Orsay picture is altogether a stranger thing when your eye moves to and fro in reality (as presumably Cézanne's did) between it and its slightly bigger companion.

The Orsay picture looks compressed. Of all five *Cardplayers* it is the one, I feel, in which the whole of the picture comes closest to obeying the logic of the forms underneath the table (knees wedged together in contrasting trousers), which throughout the sequence are spellbinding, and surely meant as an image — a tremendous synecdoche — of pictorial compactness and horror vacui. I shall argue in the end that the image under the table does *not* govern or epitomize the spatial logic of the *Cardplayers* overall: that the little underworld is there, so to speak, to present the viewer with a model, almost a memento, of the kind of space that, in Cézanne's view, a true picture of a room now had to dispense with. But dispensing with it was hard, and in a sense regrettable. A picture of people close to us in an interior surely carried with it a promise of containment — an easy, emphatic packing-together of forms, with the picture rectangle (itself drifting instinctively toward the square) somehow *being* the room, offering the room's four walls. This was the natural bias of the subject. I think, to repeat, that the achievement but also the difficulty of the five *Cardplayers* have to do with their acting against that bias; relegating the bias, even with a touch of irony, to the square beneath the tabletop. But it must maintain its power, that underworld. It must, to any painter wanting completeness, still be appealing. The Orsay painting is most under its spell.

It is striking, when the Courtauld and Orsay versions are hung together, how decisively the Courtauld *Cardplayers* seems to move to counteract the Orsay table's tremendous four-squareness, and how little, in comparison with Orsay, the forms below the Courtauld table attach to, and provide a key for, the peasants on top. I understand Schapiro's admiration for the dialectical to-and-fro between the players in Paris, with their opposites of colour and drawing and even character; and I too love their solidity, and naïve anchorage to the

picture's sides; but I find myself more deeply drawn in the end to the Courtauld's miniaturization and marooning of its figures — the way it moves them back a little, the way the right-hand player is tipped and swiveled just enough for symmetry to be broken. I find the strange slightly stretched rectangle of the Courtauld painting — the actual shape of the canvas, especially compared to the Orsay's — a stroke of genius. Without the least braying of modernist trumpets contingency has entered the room. The two players strike me as more fully the makers of the world they are in. The picture rectangle is less a priori, less idealized. The weird pulling and smoothing of the table back and back into depth, and the flattening and stretching and separating of the players' hands, and the fading of the bottle barrier, and the nestling of the right-hand man's sleeve further and further into the hard but unresisting tablecloth — all these play a part. In the Orsay picture the front face of the table and the tablecloth half covering it have the finality of a sign-language, balanced and hieratic, with the cloth arranged as if to disclose the table's perfection, a curtain pulled back from a mystery. None of this survives in the Courtauld. And it is a sacrifice, this loss of repose. I regret it until I see again the fierce cutting edge of the tablecloth at right in the Courtauld picture, and the space carved out around it. The Courtauld's right cardplayer is, to borrow a phrase from Keats, still 'feeling about for his couch of space'. The table seems too small for him. His knees are no longer solidly aligned. His chair might almost be pushed back on two legs. This is a card game, not a sacred rite.

I had intended to begin this paper systematically with questions of size, and already I am far off track, disagreeing with Schapiro about the most elusive — disputable — things. But what did the reader expect? My subject is the *Cardplayers*, and I am trying to tune into their form and semantics. At the risk of sounding bullying, let me say that this seems to me equivalent in difficulty to following the harmonic logic of Beethoven's last quartets, or the movement from paragraph to paragraph in Kant's *First Critique*. I think that art history's slight embarrassment at this kind of analogy — its feeling that an art historian making it runs the danger of moving painting into some cultic or trans-historical space — has come to be the discipline's cross. In practice it functions as an alibi (which for some reason the discipline seems constantly to need) for not exposing oneself to what painting is capable of, and not pushing language to follow in painting's wake. I envy the musicologist's certainty that Beethoven's use of music's resources makes most of his listeners, including the professional one, scramble to hear adequately and think hard enough.

I scramble with these five Cézannes. My attempt to get on terms with them will therefore, somewhat ploddingly, go in three directions, or out along three rough lines. I hope in the end they connect. I shall first try to ask — or at least establish as an overriding matrix for the questions that come next — what Cézanne may have thought followed from the choice to make canvases of working men at play; and what his canvases suggest he believed

was involved now, this being the late nineteenth century, in making a picture intimate (intimate as opposed to argue or assert) that embedded in the game the men have chosen — implicit in the circumstance of meeting and sitting together and following familiar rules — something wider and deeper that the men shared was spelt out. Or maybe we should say, externalized — indeed, monumentalized (that word again). Something I want to call, following a famous line in Wittgenstein, the men's form of life.

How does *painting* portray such a subject — such a simple yet powerful formality, such confidence in common? That is the question. Let me give a preliminary answer. I think it does so — this will be my assumption — by discovering the scene's distinctive space. Which is to say, it tries above all to lay hold of the way the particular set of actors occupy their surroundings, in this case the space of a room. Or should we say, the way they *make* that space by occupying it, and playing an old game in it? So that Cézanne's subject, it follows, is the space of a room as it comes into being in the game, in the moment of waiting and concentrating — the force of the rules, the mild suspense, the gravity of those looking on. 'The life of their separateness' is Schapiro's great phrase. (In the Barnes picture the onlookers are specifically figured, and they are a strange duo: a pale slight child with a widow's peak, maybe a little homeless and ghostly, and an upright smoker, not convincingly planted on any floor, infinitely removed from the table yet superintending it. The Metropolitan painting has the smoker more engaged with the game. But I am inclined to make that a reason for the Barnes canvas being Cézanne's second and better thought. Remoteness, in the case of both Barnes onlookers, seems to be all. And eventually, in the Orsay and Courtauld pictures, remoteness of viewing is made fully structural, in a typical Cézanne way. It belongs to us viewers in front of the scene: it inheres in the picture plane.)

So this is my first question: the nature of room-space and occupants. But answering it leads immediately to a second wider one, which has haunted most writing about Cézanne, and is certainly too large and difficult to be dealt with in a single essay: namely, what was Cézanne's *habitual* sense of space in painting; and in the light of that habit, what was the special challenge presented to him by having to paint an interior — a space hemmed in by four walls? I think, as I said before, that those who have written about Cézanne have instinctively felt that *The Card Players* in some sense did not quite fit. A room and a game — an easy or even a stiff reciprocity — do not tally with Cézanne's sense of life. What makes him the late nineteenth century's great portraitist, it is often said, is exactly his willingness to show reciprocity being fought for and lost. Self-enclosure — deep remoteness — is the condition he seems most drawn to. The remoteness of the sitter is echoed in the perplexity of the play between two and three dimensions. But the question ought to be, then, whether the alienness of the subject matter in *The Card Players* — the foreignness of its space and mode of habitation to Cézanne's basic intuition — in the end provoked some of his best thought.



This is too abstract. Let me interrupt the putting of questions, and give the reader a glimpse of Cézanne's unique way of being (pictorially) in the world. The new apprehension arrived early, and was discovered primarily through landscape. It is already there in the stupendous painting from 1871 called *The Railway Cutting* (fig. 1.1). Putting this picture's sense of space and identity into words is not easy, and in any case I do not want to claim that the landscapes of the following thirty-five years all follow *The Railway Cutting's* line. But Fritz Novotny was right to say that what is unprecedented in Cézanne's landscape vision — here is the early painting's representativeness — is the feeling that real, familiar, felt closeness and remoteness have disappeared, and things all seem to take place in a strange middle distance: the things are vivid, certainly, but somehow untouchable: laid out like toys on the floor of a nursery, their intensity imagined more than experienced: emphatically *there* in paint, but with nothing in the picture leading towards them or bringing them nearer, inviting identification or contact: eternally (and the language of eternity does somehow seem to be called for) out of reach.⁶

As a description of Cézanne's art more generally, 'imagined more than experienced' may seem wrong. But I shall defend it. Of course everything for Cézanne is staked on the fact of seeing — on striking through to a physical, phenomenal event in the eye. But in practice, in the picture, this event is registered as a kind of immediacy and intensity that severs it from the ordinary (multiple, pragmatic) world of the senses. Eyesight is raised to a higher power. Maybe it matters that the first perfect realization of the vision came in a picture of a railway driving its abstract economical furrow through a hill. And how — here is my question, ultimately — can the space of a room be reconciled with this structure of apprehension? Are not room-space and 'cutting' — room-space and *unbounded immediacy* — sheer opposites? What have four walls and furniture to do with the notion of 'world' we owe to Cézanne at full stretch?

Well, they coexist only very uneasily. Let me bring on a painting from much the same moment as *The Railway Cutting*, the poet *Paul Alexis Reading to Emile Zola* (fig. 1.2).

1.1
Paul Cézanne, *The
Railway Cutting*, c.1871.
Neue Pinakothek, Munich.



1.2
Paul Cézanne, *Paul Alexis
Reading to Emile Zola*,
oil on canvas, c.1871-72,
Private Collection.

The date the painting is most often assigned in the literature is 1869-70, but I am inclined to push it a year or so later, to round the time of Cézanne's first try at *A Modern Olympia*. (Note the landscape painting on Zola's wall, which looks like a relative of *The Railway Cutting*.) I enter *Alexis and Zola* into the story of *The Card Players* for various reasons. I am surprised that it has not been thought of before in connection with them.⁷ It seems to me the *Ur*-form of the paintings from the 1890s; which is not to say that Cézanne had it consciously in mind those many years later. But a very great deal, for him, had been at stake in the picture of his two friends. It was his deepest dream of an interior in common. If we think of the Barnes painting as in some sense a return to *Alexis and Zola* territory — an effort to make the dream real again — it seems fated that so many of the earlier motifs resurface: the great curtain migrating from left to right, the painting on the wall in much the same position, Zola's carnal, boyish red smock losing its mobility and changing to crystalline blue. But I am not making out the Barnes painting to be Medan in disguise. All I want to suggest is that *Alexis and Zola* 'lay behind' *The Card Players*, and that it is not surprising they did. The picture was latent in Cézanne's mind, as his most intense first effort at picturing room and sociality.

The space depicted in the more famous, slightly earlier (and larger) version of *Alexis and Zola* is, by contrast, not room-space at all. It shows how foreign to Cézanne's natural imagining an interior really was. 'Room' in this case has ceded to dream-veranda, 'wall' to shutter and void. (There are presentiments of the folding doors and sliding panels that make the café background in *Pellerin*.) It is only the second *Alexis and Zola* that even tries to imagine the whole enclosure. And how fraught the imagining is! The great curtain struggles to anchor the flow of the floor. Light glances across it, ebbing and flowing like shallow water in sunshine, and shadow consumes the flowerpot on the floor bottom right. The back wall is now massive and multipartite, perhaps meaning to speak to overdone bourgeois solidity (which of course the young poets shrug off), yet the wall is still mined and overtaken by a black that is funereal, impalpable, fantastic. It is the black of the Poe-like *Black Clock* from much the same moment — which reappears, I think, behind Zola's pinhead. Alexis perches on his chair — his pose half-repeats one struck earlier by Cézanne's father — as if sitting down were the most temporary and delicate thing a human being had ever indulged in. With due reservations, I do think the figure of Alexis points forward to something not far from the right-hand player in the *Courtauld*. And the back wall in *Alexis and Zola* seems to me to anticipate much of the way these surfaces appear all through Cézanne's later painting: of course back walls are a vital part of most still life set-ups, and of many great portraits. The back wall in Cézanne is habitually — often brilliantly and bafflingly — an interrupted, unstable, perforated, half-concealed boundary, opening onto heaven knows what.

Questions one and two, then, have to do with space: room-space in the five *Cardplayers*, and the tension between a room's proximity and finiteness and the way the world occurred, in still life or landscape, to Cézanne more generally. Question three homes in on the room's rear wall.

I want to take seriously the fact that in painting *The Card Players* Cézanne allowed himself, or was bound to acknowledge, a massive end-stop to the illusion, a thus-far-and-no-further. This, to repeat, was against his habits. And it seems that as *The Card Players* developed, he looked, instinctively, for ways to make the wall something else. But not straight away. Again, the anomalousness might turn out to be an opportunity. In the beginning, once the solid back wall presented itself, its all-too-obvious repetition of the picture's surface — a reality that Cézanne was a master at acknowledging, but always dialectically, not in the form of a flat repeat — was allowed to bring on a set of positively florid metaphors of picturing itself, the basic activity, enacted across the wall, or maybe even as the wall. In the Barnes painting, how enormous and naïve the metaphors are! The great bland curtain twists and hardens into the right-hand peasant's smock, as if bodies in painting essentially materialized out of mere coloured folds — and then only partly, the inanimate



1.3
Paul Cézanne, *The Curtain*,
1888-90, oil on canvas, Abegg
Stiftung, Riggsberg.

becoming animate against the odds; and the dark painting (or is it a mirror?) hung on the wall in the centre stands sentinel, clamped in its frame, casting a shadow, offering (within its small rectangle) either blankness or infinite depth; and in answer the pipes and vase, on their string and shelf, hover in front of the wall's surface, the vase hardly belonging to pictorial space at all, as if (again the hint at ontology) a painting were always most deeply an arbitrary quadrilateral into which — or out of which — the things of the world occasionally floated, familiar but transfigured, taking on momentary life. The dark painting is high and central, but empty and incomplete. *The Railway Cutting* is not far off.

These are my lines of inquiry. I dream of the three lines edging closer, so that in the end the full density of the matrix from which *The Card Players* emerged will be clear. But I did say 'dream'.

Let me start with the metaphors on the wall in *Barnes* — maybe the curtain in par-



1.4
Paul Cézanne, *Mardi Gras*,
1888, oil on canvas, Pushkin
Museum, Moscow.

ticular. I want to hold in the mind's eye the great drape in *Alexis and Zola*, and the one in *A Modern Olympia*, and see them as variations on the great pulled-back curtains common to Cézanne's heroes, Rubens and Veronese. We should recall the hangings swept unstably aside in many a great Cézanne portrait and still life. If we want evidence of how much the motif of the curtain per se seems to have mattered to Cézanne, then we could enter in the astonishing 'drapery study' from just before the time of the *Cardplayers* (fig. 1.3), in which curtain and wall and shadow — curtain and picture surface — become the picture as a whole. (The canvas measures three feet by 29 inches: quite large by Cézanne's standards. It looks to be related to the indecipherable backdrop in a portrait of Hortense Fiquet now in The Metropolitan Museum.) And then finally, intimidatingly, there are the curtains framing the strangest of all Cézanne's big figure paintings, the *Mardi Gras* (fig. 1.4). Previously I called the painting of *Alexis and Zola* the *Ur-form* of *The Card Players*, but *Mardi Gras* is closer in time — it was done probably two or three years before — and grander, more contrary. It embodies and monumentalizes the mining of room-space from



within that one would expect from Cézanne. Maybe this is why Cézanne's enthusiasts go on averting their eyes from it. It is too thoroughgoing, too programmatic. And Cézanne himself, one senses, could not continue living on this tilting floor, this curtain drawn back on utter dissolution and obliqueness. Who could? The thing has a stifling, perverse, unconvincing proximity, as if the two figures flashed up before us in a peepshow. Surely one job the enormous answering size of the Barnes painting was intended to do was exorcize the *Mardi Gras* ghost.

But curtains — let me concentrate on them. The trope goes back, as Cézanne knew well, to the beginnings of Renaissance illusionism: at least to the fabulous gold hangings wrenched back across the wall of the *Camera degli Sposi*, revealing the scene on the other side. It is there, of course, magnificently in Vermeer; and sometimes I think I see traces of *The Geographer*, say — an engraving of the painting was published by the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* in 1866 — in the *Alexis and Zola*.⁸ But it is Veronese that Cézanne would have thought about most deeply: dreaming forwards, perhaps, from the great cascade of twisted bed-canopy and clear red toga on the right side of Veronese's *Raising of Jairus's Daughter* in the Louvre. Dreaming forwards ... building into his own world of drapery a sense of the immense, inimitable weight of clothes and curtains as they occur in so many paintings of Veronese's maturity ... or in the prints after the master Cézanne would have studied, like Desplaces's rendering of *Respect* (fig. 1.5). So that in the end I choose as the Barnes *Cardplayers'* full companion — companion, not influence — the astounding meta-picture by Veronese now in Edinburgh, *Venus, Cupid and Mars*, in which the billowing curtain holds



the whole foreground illusion in its folds (fig. 1.6). (Cézanne could have seen a workshop version of the painting in Chantilly, but the team of assistants there have — understandably — given up on the main point of the original: they have left out the incomprehensible torque of the tapestry backdrop into and round the lovers, and therefore the whole ungraspable fading and sliding of Venus's room-space into a half-real, half-fantastic beyond.⁹)

Put *Mars and Venus* side by side with the Barnes *Cardplayers*, but hold *Alexis and Zola* in memory. The curtains in all three pictures, it seems to me, stand for the 'outside' of representation — the heaviness, the materiality, that has to be pulled back for the optical to be got to. The curtains are the weight of the world: things in their ordinary enfolded confusion, their tactile value.

But even this does not quite capture Cézanne and Veronese's point. Yes, the drapery is everything in the world that a picture has to draw back — push to one side, declare

not its province — in order for the world to be pictorial. But the stuff and its weight are still there in the picture; and in the Cézanne they morph outrageously into a figure (the peasant in blue), or rather, into a set of mountainous folds that seem to intimate, as I said before, that ‘figure’ is always secondary to encasing, extrapolating material. Figures come out of folds. Folds are what figures are. The same thought is alive in *The Smoker* now in the Pushkin Museum, a picture from the same time, where sleeve and curtain are explicitly continuous, and where the curtain is rhymed with the curling edge of an oil painting on the wall.

And yet materialism of this kind, strong and strange as it is in Cézanne, is never the painter’s last word. In the Pushkin canvas, for instance, it is counteracted by the multiple, incomprehensible transparency of the space-world under the table — illusionism moving off (again in a way analogous to Veronese’s *Mars and Venus*) into multi-dimensional dream. And in the Barnes painting the curtain is answered, maybe balanced out, by various kinds of pictorial incident — as if by weights and counters moved along the fulcrum of the painting’s top edge. By the framed picture, central but incomplete. By the pipes’ naïve leaping into life. By the smoker’s head with its halo of light blue. And above all by the vase. I put my stress previously on the unreachability — the fundamental homelessness — of things in Cézanne. The vase is an epitome — a brilliant, witty miniaturization — of that. Between it and the symmetry under the table there is total war.

One cannot imagine — look again at the shelf and the play of shadow top left — Cézanne’s world with corners, even corners ironized or destabilized. His walls go on forever. (The contrast with Picasso in this respect — for whom the power of the corner is completely a given — could not be stronger.)

The Barnes painting is overwhelming. The only reservation I would have about it — but is it a reservation so much as a way of getting its structure clearer in the mind? — is that, in contrast to the later *Cardplayers*, the action in Barnes, which is to say also the spatiality, does seem to me to divide in two. The space of the wall and the watchers is one thing — at once immobile and restless, massive but elusive, its great metaphors held in suspense — and the space of the table and players another. I think the background does enough to animate, and even interrupt, the great placidity in the foreground; but my sense of Cézanne’s way forward from Barnes is that he sensed the possibility — which surely he always wanted in painting — of background and foreground being more completely one. Of composure and contingency being interleaved.

Focus on the young man in the centre, his smock and shirt and waistcoat assembled as if from a set of interlocking separate pieces, and his cards the colour of steel; and then swivel to the figure at his shoulder. The little girl in the Barnes is an intruder, a visitor from nowhere: it could hardly be clearer that outside the circle of the three men at the

table things and persons loom up in isolation, as from a great beyond: the dark painting is quietly dominant: the girl’s black-and-white deathliness does enormous work. Maybe what resulted was in the end too unsettling. I think Cézanne went on instinctively fearing (rightly) his own power of pictorial estrangement — the way ‘middle distance’ in his work could so easily take on this kind of uncanny, almost sinister force. One thing that happens in the final three *Cardplayers* is that dream theatre gives way to slice of life.

The phrases that came up with reference to the girl in the Barnes — ‘deathliness’, ‘dream theatre’, and so on — need more justification. They are partly, I think, a response to the oddity of the figure as we have it — is it a girl or a boy?, would be one question — and partly to what we know of the figure’s prehistory. The immediate source of the little onlooker idea seems to have been a painting Cézanne saw regularly in his local museum at Aix, a *Cardplayers* by the Le Nain brothers.¹⁰ The girl in the painting, looming out of the darkness, is a touching invention. A child looks wide-eyed at the doings of her elders. How much she understands is not clear. And this idea seems to have lodged in Cézanne’s imagination from very early on, in truly dreamlike — nightmare — fashion.

I called the 1870 *Alexis and Zola* the *Ur-form* of *The Card Players*. But in the 1950s the art historian Kurt Badt pointed to a much more ancient and infantile image source (fig. 1.7), which crops up in a letter Cézanne sent to Zola in January 1859 — a full decade earlier than the painting celebrating the young men’s freedom at Medan.¹¹ The drawing in the letter was done two days before Cézanne’s twentieth birthday. Zola was just three months younger. What is happening in the drawing hardly needs spelling out: it is a scene of ceremonious cannibalism, with a skull set down on the table between two vaguely eighteenth-century figures, and three more small individuals, by the look of them children, standing ready to partake. The verses below give the main players names. The two men in the doorway are Dante and Virgil, and the figure at the right of the table is The Father — inviting his children and grandchild (*l’ainé, le cadet, le petit-fils*) to make a meal. Badt was struck by the similarities between the cannibal feast and the Barnes *Cardplayers* — the same rigid symmetry of the father and son, plus their mirror-image legs underneath the table, the same transfixed children, even the same picture on the wall. He believed that Dante and Virgil at the door were the first forms of the weird couple in *Mardi Gras*. Nowadays, when psychoanalytic readings are out of fashion, Badt’s is passed over in silence in the literature.¹² And what Badt does with the drawing — his determination to map out an Oedipal drama in it that the Barnes *Cardplayers* essentially repeats — is predictable and excessive, in a period sort of way. But I think the basic link he makes between the Barnes picture and the drawing — back to the nineteen-year-old’s revenge fantasy — is persuasive. One does not have to follow the Freudian script at all closely to sense that making the Father the master of the feast, in the way the poem does, is essentially a displacement of the wish to



1.7
Paul Cézanne, 'Ugolino
drawing', 1859, pen on
paper, Private Collection.

make him the object of it. Cézanne and Zola play all the parts: they are Dante and Virgil, recoiling in horror; they are pseudo-Father and son on either side of the table; and they are, touchingly, with the honesty of the unconscious, still the disbelieving, uncomprehending children, astonished at their own adolescent rage.

Kurt Badt called the fantasy of 1859 the 'Ugolino drawing'. I am not sure this is helpful. I would prefer to give the crude sketch a more general title: something that would do no more than establish that deep down, for Cézanne, people gathered for a game or ceremony round a table are playing with the weight of the world on their shoulders — playing a game with death. The little girl in the Barnes, come straight from the scene's buried starting point, knows this. Between her and the dark profile of the right-hand player, entombed in his armor of blue, there is a tense sad parity.

I turn to the Pellerin, Orsay and Courtauld pictures. What the three final paintings are trying for, especially if the Pellerin canvas was the first of them, is clear enough in general. They move towards a *moment* of sociability, as opposed to the Barnes's for-everness. They attempt to secure a spot of time in which the solidity of a form of life is still evident, but at which one senses the age-old and the temporary — almost the age-old and the makeshift — in balance. (Hats worn indoors speak to the former; the café backdrop maybe to the latter.) The famous quote from towards the end of Cézanne's life — 'J'aime sur toutes choses l'aspect des gens qui ont vieilli sans faire violence aux usages' — rather suffers from being extracted.¹³ It is led up to by a typical piece of self-deprecatory irony: 'Aujourd'hui tout change en réalité, mais non pour moi, je vis dans la ville de mon enfance, et c'est dans le regard des gens de mon âge que je revois le passé'.¹⁴ He knows the fragility of the illusion. And even the much-quoted sentence that follows ends equivocally. The people who have grown old without doing violence to old habits, he says, are essentially passive, 'en se laissant aller aux lois du temps'.¹⁵ And then he adds, 'je haïs l'effort de ces lois'. This is difficult. Michael Doran seems to me to have wrenched the sense when he translated the phrase, 'I hate people's efforts to escape these laws'. It surely just means that Cézanne hates the effort — the force — of time's laws. As we all do. But he is not saying the force is escapable. 'Aujourd'hui tout change en réalité'.¹⁶ In Cézanne's art, as opposed to his day-to-day conversation, the everything-changing is everywhere. That is what the early twentieth century got right about him.

Of the three last *Cardplayers*, the Pellerin version seems the most static. It looks in reproduction — but of course a trip to Qatar might utterly refute this — as if the composure of the canvas, with its curious intermediate scale, was bought at the cost of grayness. It is hard to think of a Cézanne from the 1890s that looks less animated in terms of colour: the right-hand grey coat seems almost a true cool monochrome, and the smoker's face is carved out of wood. If this is true, and not a trick of photography, then surely Cézanne would have been dissatisfied. Colour either animated a world for him, or deserted it. The Pellerin picture has an airless, compartmentalized look. Something about its very shape, and the fit of the figures to the shape, is sepulchral. The Courtauld picture is reckless in its attempt to disinter the scene — to destabilize and reanimate it, and flood it with a greyness that would not be that of a tomb. It could well be, as presumably Schapiro thought, that the Orsay painting was a *rappel à l'ordre*.

Compare Orsay and Courtauld again. The Courtauld's is a wider world, seen from a slightly (decisively) greater distance, with the table more tilted. The players, as I said before, are pushed back a little from the table, less occupying and stabilizing it. Focus for a moment on the table's inner frame and the balance of knees within it: the contrast is touching. The space of the game — again I am partly repeating myself — is more

firmly established in the Orsay picture: the relation of bodies to the picture edge is a pictorial enactment of that, but so is the warmth and solidity of the two players' colour: the fierce reds, for example, florid and supercharged on face and hand, and the purples on the left-hand player's shoulder and hat, and the greens all over the dun coat. Everything that speaks to the peasants' game's *happenstance* quality — its café surroundings signifying a true change of world from the Barnes painting's throne room — is there in the Orsay version, but just subordinate, just (still) background.¹⁷ In the Courtauld the background has entered the game, and started to ruffle the peasants' implacability. Just look at the right-hand player's sleeves... Or the effect of the patches of primer showing through both players' clothes. There are things in the Orsay picture that are astonishing and definitive in ways the Courtauld cannot match: the touch of light on the front face of the tablecloth, for instance, or the fountain of blacks in the window. But they are more than made up for by the Courtauld players' levitating pockets, or the geometry of the right-hand player's cards and two fists. Don't the hands on the table in the Orsay look a touch inert in comparison?

Let me go back finally to the table, and the question of the table's proximity to us. This is always a crucial parameter of Cézanne's pictorial thinking. What happens at the so-called front of the painting — of course it is so-called because paintings do not have fronts and backs — is the fulcrum of the Cézanne effect. It is what Cézanne does so often to our assumption of nearness — of entry across the painting's threshold at its bottom edge — that is the key to the 'out-of-reachness' Fritz Novotny talked about. What I go on to say now applies to the whole sequence of *The Card Players*: the Barnes painting should again be central.

I think that the change in the nature of the room's — the picture's — background is paralleled, as the series goes on, by a change in the way its nearest objects relate to the picture plane. The picture plane is a *notion*. Certainly it has specific effects in (on) painting: painters imagine it as they work, and adjust what they are doing (the particular forms and objects they want to materialize) to the impalpable 'picture plane' idea. It is the impalpability — the virtuality — that is spellbinding. Let us suppose, says a painter like Vermeer or Veronese, that 'in front' of the pictured scene is stretched, from edge to edge of the rectangle, an imaginary hard flat transparency — transparent but ineluctably there — which spells out the nearest nearness possible, in opposition to the back wall's thus-far-and-no-further. This is what the curtain is yanked aside to reveal. It is the threshold of the visible world — the threshold made present.

It would be too easy to say that Cézanne came to doubt all this and filled in the emptiness. He did not — he was too completely part of the Rubens and Veronese tradition. And therefore he went on feeling the pull of that nearby clarity. He went on (as painters do) signaling it, introjecting it. The table in the Barnes, as I said, is an epitome — a measure, a miniature, a projection — of the whole picture rectangle. In all kinds of ways, but certainly including frontality and transparency. (It does not matter that the transparency is



played with and contradicted, as it is at the left-hand side in the Barnes, where table leg and player's trouser swap places every time we look. For transparency is a fiction. It can reassert itself against any amount of pictorial scepticism.) The table is the front of things, we could say, and its hollowness only makes the solidity of the back wall more palpable. In the last three paintings the balance shifts. In the Courtauld picture especially it is the table's less and less graspable relation to the picture plane — its lack of a felt four-squareness or even proximity — that seems in turn to mobilize the wall and window, if that is what they are, behind the two men. Non-wall and non-window, they end up being. Non-background. (Only look at the contrast with Pellerin and Orsay. Pellerin still struggles to assemble a room-space, but the room might as well be a mausoleum. Orsay pushes the back wall up close to the figures, and has it become a grid into which the figures are fitted — almost clamped. The bottle slots into the structure with a faint click. It is only in the Courtauld that the back wall — longer, more tilted, more muted, the bottle disappearing into it — fully attains its own makeshift spatiality.)

A last way of putting it would be as follows. It is the Courtauld painting, I believe, that most fully deserves to live in the same space as the very greatest of Cézanne's still lives — the *Ginger Jar and Fruit-dish*, for example (fig. 1.8), from a few years before. And in neither case do I mean to instate instability and strangeness as the whole story. The familiar utensils in the still life, the solid cupboard, the immovable table — they do indeed stand

1.8
Paul Cézanne, *Ginger Jar and Fruit-dish*, c.1888, oil on canvas, Neue Pinakothek, Munich.

for endurance, for known value. They too, just as much as the peasant card players, embody a form of life. The vase has come down from its corner. The cloth twists toward us invitingly. We may still be able to touch. But Picasso was right, alas. The most fully pondered and realized Cézannes — *Ginger Jar and Fruit-dish* is typical — put the idea of proximity in doubt. Vividness is one thing; availability — humanness, use-value — another. Do not do violence to ‘usages’, Cézanne’s pictures say, but be aware you stand at a distance from them. Things have changed.

All references in digital versions of *Courtauld Books Online* are hyperlinked. To navigate to a footnote, click on the reference number in the body of the text. To return back to the text, click on the number at the beginning of the footnote.

1. The best brief accounts remain Roger Fry, *Cézanne: A Study of his Development* (London: L. and V. Woolf, 1927), pp. 71-4, and Meyer Schapiro, *Paul Cézanne* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1952), pp. 16, 88. Bernard Dorival, *Cézanne* (Paris: P. Tisné, 1948), pp. 62-5, is good on colour but has reservations about composition: the Barnes and Metropolitan pictures lean heavily on ‘la pyramide qui s’accuse ... avec un insistance un peu naïve et pédantesque’. See Nancy Ireson and Barnaby Wright (eds), *Cézanne’s Card Players* (London: The Courtauld Gallery in assoc. with Paul Holberton Pub., 2010), for a book-length treatment, with essays by Ireson and Wright; Aviva Burnstock, Charlotte Hale, Caroline Campbell and Gabriella Macaro; John House; and Richard Shiff.

2. Paul Alexis to Émile Zola, February 1891, in John Rewald (ed.), *Paul Cézanne: Correspondance* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1978), p. 235.

3. See John Rewald, *The Paintings of Paul Cézanne: A Catalogue Raisonné*, vol. 1 (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1996), p. 461.

4. See e.g. Theodore Reff, ‘Cézanne’s “Card Players” and Their Sources’, *Arts Magazine* (November 1980): pp. 104-17; Rewald, *Paintings*, vol. 1, pp. 443-8; and Ireson and Wright, *Cézanne’s Card Players*, especially Burnstock, Hale, Campbell and Macaro, ‘Cézanne’s Development of the *Card Players*’, pp. 35-53 (interesting new technical evidence: still, in my view, not settling the question of which picture followed which). On the Courtauld painting, see John House’s entry in Stephanie Buck et al. (eds), *The Courtauld Cézannes* (London: The Courtauld Gallery in assoc. with Paul Holberton Pub., 2008), pp. 90-3.

5. Schapiro, *Paul Cézanne*, p. 88.

6. Fritz Novotny, *Cézanne und das Ende der wissenschaftlichen Perspektive* (Vienna: A. Schroll, 1938); extracts translated in Christopher Wood (ed.), *The Vienna School Reader* (New York: Zone Books, 2000), pp. 379-433. The brief essay by Novotny translated in *Cézanne* (London: Phaidon, 1937), pp. 7-21, is also useful.

7. Roger Fry says of *The Card Players*: ‘They are almost the only definite “genre” pieces of his that exist, if we omit the early *Two Men Playing Cards* [by which he means Alexis and Zola]’, in Fry, *Cézanne*, p. 71; but he makes nothing of the connection.

8. Cf. Roger Fry on Alexis and Zola (for him, *Two Men Playing Cards*): ‘Here the reminiscence of Pieter de Hoogh seems unmistakable’, in Fry, *Cézanne*, p. 25.

9. See William Rearick, *The Art of Paolo Veronese 1528-1588* (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art,

Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988), pp. 136-7, and Terisio Pignatti and Filippo Pedrocchi, *Veronese* (Milan: Electa, 1995), vol. 2, pp. 381-2. Rearick thinks the Edinburgh painting is also studio work (on unconvincing grounds). As usual with Veronese, discussions in the literature are brief, and essentially dismissive.

10. See Dorival, *Cézanne*, p. 63, and Ireson and Wright, *Cézanne’s Card Players*, pp. 26-7.

11. Kurt Badt, *The Art of Cézanne* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965) (orig. ed.: Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1956), pp. 92-123.

12. Or the link is rejected, see Reff, ‘Cézanne’s “Card Players”’, pp. 114-16, and John House, ‘Cézanne’s *Card Players*: Art Without Anecdote’, in Ireson and Wright, *Cézanne’s Card Players*, p. 67. I find Reff’s grounds for dismissal unpersuasive: they would certainly have made Freud smile.

13. ‘I like the expressions of people who have grown old without drastically changing their habits’. Jules Borely, ‘Cézanne à Aix’, July 1902, in Michael Doran (ed.), *Conversations avec Cézanne* (Paris: Macula, 1978), p. 21; translated in Doran (ed.), *Conversations with Cézanne* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2001), p. 23. If Athanassoglou-Kallmyer is right (she admits the fragility of the evidence) that *The Card Players* coincided with moves in the 1890s to regulate gambling and tax the production of playing cards, then the remarks to Borely seem even more apposite: see Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, *Cézanne and Provence, The Painter in His Culture* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 210-15.

14. ‘Today everything is changing, but not for me. I live in my home town, and I rediscover the past in the faces of people my age’. Doran, *Conversations*, p. 23.

15. ‘Who just go along with the laws of time’, Doran, *Conversations*, p. 23.

16. ‘Today everything is changing’, Doran, *Conversations*, p. 23.

17. Roger Fry was confident that the café surroundings were real: ‘The subject is a group of cardplayers which he evidently studied in some humble café in Aix ... He could rely no doubt on the fact that the peasants took no notice of him — he was just an “original”, an odd old man whom most people thought rather mad but harmless’, in Fry, *Cézanne*, pp. 71-2. Given the inconclusive nature of the Alexis letter, Fry’s vision of Cézanne in the cabaret cannot be dismissed (or proven). In Fry it coexists easily with the idea of Cézanne’s absolute aesthetic concentration: ‘The simplicity of disposition is such as might even have made Giotto hesitate to adopt it’.



THE CUT AND SHUFFLE: CARD PLAYING IN CÉZANNE'S CARD PLAYERS

ANDRÉ DOMBROWSKI

This reminds one of Talleyrand's *mot* respecting Whist, 'Vous ne savez pas donc le Whiste, jeune homme. Quelle triste vieillesse vous vous préparez!'

'Cavendish' [Henry Jones],
Card Essays, Clay's Decisions, and Card-Table Talk (1880)¹

INTRODUCTION

In most seventeenth and eighteenth-century genre paintings of card play (from Caravaggio to La Tour to the brothers Le Nain), or in those of houses of cards like Chardin's, the subject matter is of a special allegorical nature. Stacked into precarious constructions, cards can be a reminder of the fragility and brevity of life. Cardsharps appear in baroque painting as clever puns on the illusion that is painting itself. The viewer, in on the trick, passes judgment both on the game and the believability of its rendition in paint. Much if not most nineteenth-century genre painting (of card playing and other everyday scenes) was still occupied with such moralizing and self-referential allusions, but deadened, flattened and emptied of much their original force — until Paul Cézanne appeared, art history often has it. 'Art without anecdote' is how John House economically phrased the import of Cézanne's five principal versions of *Cardplayers*, painted roughly between 1890 and 1896, for the history of art (plates 1-5): without the usual moral lesson, extraneous realist details and gestural expressivity that Ernest Meissonier employed in his *The Card Players* of 1872 (fig. 2.1), instead condensed by Cézanne into grave and concentrated action and form.² This diagnosis of Cézanne's break with the art of his time, for a more monumental and noble version of daily life, is a persuasive proposition about his key intervention into the norms of painting: a denial of narrative toward an embrace of purer formal means, and perhaps a purer affective dimension as well.

We need not conclude, however, that Cézanne painted card playing for that reason exclusively, or that the meaning of *The Card Players* lies primarily in the negation of the current state of painting as an artistic goal in itself. Many subjects besides card play might have offered such opportunities, including almost any subject repeatedly treated by the genre painting of Cézanne's time. This essay analyzes the associations of card play in Cézanne and attempts to explain the choice of subject matter for perhaps the most ambitious paintings Cézanne had made up to the early 1890s. Why cards? Why card play? And why is card playing represented with such stoical, anti-sentimental force?

Opposite:

Detail of plate 4.
Paul Cézanne, *Cardplayers*,
c.1892-96, oil on canvas, The
Courtauld Gallery, London.



2.1
Ernest Meissonier,
The Card Players, 1872, oil
on canvas, Private collection.

When Cézanne repeatedly turned to card playing as a topic in the early to mid-1890s, he deployed the game as an analogy of his key pictorial concerns, foreshadowing the representational challenge of the card's complex being-in-space and being-in-use. Painting card playing allowed him to point, in contemporary genre form, to the heart of his dense painterly practice (and his dense pictorial spaces) which prophesied, as Fritz Novotny famously had it, the 'end of scientific perspective'.³ Card play after all is itself a form of looking at pictures and reading visual codes, bringing together image and object, eye and body. Painting card play integrates the flat playing card with the three-dimensional field of its play, all within the rigid constraints of the picture plane. It is thus a stew of signifiers for, variously, flatness and depth, an undecidable admixture that cuts to the core of Cézanne's characteristically self-referential pictorial practice. Cézanne can in fact be seen to have made card playing an allegory of his artistic process and his post-perspectival pictorial spaces. He conjoined — for the sake of comparison, and perhaps even analogy — card

playing and the act of painting, or the card and the canvas, much more powerfully, and in a more sustained fashion, than most of his predecessors or any of his Post-Impressionist contemporaries. Card play thus offered Cézanne a most extraordinary subject, locating his central pictorial problematic — the cohabitation of the two and three-dimensional — in the everyday itself. Cézanne might even be said to have favoured the topic as a special kind of artistic fantasy: a means to imagine a world always already crosscut with the properties of the three-dimensional compressed into two.

Kurt Badt emphasised the mutuality between cards and painting emblemized by the series as a whole:

For in Cézanne's lifetime the playing-card and a preoccupation with it had already acquired a symbolical value and taken on a meaning closely connected with painting ... If we accept this theory, cardplaying would be a symbol of Cézanne's for the activity of the modern painter.⁴

Given that cards thus provided such potentially exemplary Cézannian means to underscore his central formal insights, it is perhaps surprising that he turned to fashion plates and champagne bottle labels as source material for his paintings (copying them closely) before setting his sight on cards.⁵ Prints and labels are so much more fixed in their places — on a bottle, a wall, or in a magazine — and thus less imaginatively and frequently manipulated in our hands.

No scenario figuring ephemera was quite so monumentalized by Cézanne as the act of card playing, elevated to a state of grandeur and modern pathos that only large-scale ambitious painting could confer. In an early formulation of the high/low debate activated whenever everyday print culture enters painting, Cézanne sought, like Gustave Courbet and Édouard Manet before him, to compare the spaces and compositions of such ephemera to the spatial impact of his art.⁶ The famous anecdote comes to mind in which Courbet accused Manet of painting nothing but scenes as flat as playing cards, and Manet in turn reprimanded Courbet for turning all his figures into round billiard balls.⁷ In painting his five versions of *Cardplayers*, Cézanne made such gaming metaphors, and the negotiation over artistic form and pictorial space they entailed, a central and above all literal fact of early modernist painting, tested the ludic character of his means as much as of his themes.

In seeking to understand the attraction that the card (and card play) held for Cézanne at a specific time in his career, we must align art with play and playing cards, as Cézanne licensed us to do when selecting the subject for ambitious modern-life painting. The result is a series that proves to be highly self-conscious about its mechanisms of representation, about the images circulating within the image. For *The Card Players* series can be seen to test within the realm of multi-figured genre painting (as opposed to still-life and landscape) the central bind that motivated most of Cézanne's canvases if not each stroke of the

brush: the seamless melding of a ‘lived’ texture of experience and sensation with the ‘pictorial’ spaces and properties of painting. Fritz Novotny conceptualized this bind early on when, in his influential 1938 study mentioned earlier, he proposed a tense cohabitation in Cézanne’s work between the ‘Darstellungswert’ (the value/order of the ‘represented’ world) and the ‘Bildwert’ (the flattened image order inherent in the medium of painting).⁸ Card play, too, mobilizes two related kinds of space. But in card play, the depicted orders achieve a kind of mutuality and contemporaneity rare in other spheres of life. In the act of playing cards, representations function as if entirely real, and reality can be reduced to the square planarity of a picture.

To test these propositions about the interaction between painting and card play in two separate if related domains is to recognize that cards act in space and thus animate and create space. This special ‘space of play’, as I will show in what follows, was already in the late nineteenth century (by sociologists and anthropologists like Karl Groos and Moritz Lazarus) conceptualized as an autonomous sphere of human sociability not unlike the function of art in bourgeois culture itself. By creating a sovereign sphere within (and as) the world at large, play becomes one of the closer analogs to Cézanne’s early modernist ambitions. Secondly, a card is flat, the mere carrier of an image, and in that regard not so dissimilar from a canvas, despite its much smaller scale. It can itself represent an often complex pictorial space hovering between flatness and pictorial depth, taken to an extreme in so-called ‘transformation decks’ that were especially popular during the nineteenth century. Placing kings, queens and jacks into fictional yet regimented scenarios with their suits (three of hearts, five of clubs and so forth, distributed in a delimited field as to make them most legible numerically), such cards turned signs into objects while flattening its characters at the same time. Cézanne’s *Cardplayers* can be seen as exemplifications in painted form of these two mutually implicated kinds of space afforded by card play, a testing of what is often considered Cézanne’s principal achievement as a modern painter. A group of peasants playing cards is an exceptionally literal formation of this *Ur-Cézannian* problem over the implication of the two and three-dimensional in painting, and an astonishingly material metaphor for the way the optic and the haptic, far from being distinct realms, bleed together in so many of our quotidian activities, not least when we play cards.

PAINTING THE CARD PLAYERS

The series of five *Cardplayers* was accompanied by a range of preparatory works on both paper and canvas, of a kind and number unprecedented in Cézanne’s oeuvre up to this date. They are often considered of a piece with his peasant portraits of roughly the same period, testifying to the import of the subject matter of peasants engaging in everyday life for Cézanne in the 1890s. There is now some agreement, though tenuous, about the

proposition that he painted first the two larger multi-figured versions at the center of this essay — now at The Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Barnes Foundation (painted in that order) — around 1890 to 1892 (plates 1 and 2).⁹ Then, between 1892 and 1896, Cézanne seems to have reduced the scene to just two players of which he made at least three versions (plates 3–5), again prefigured by multiple preparatory studies. There is little need to emphasise further the details of the series’s completion for the purpose of this essay, except to highlight again how fragmentary our documentary evidence about the series is: Léontine Paulet’s testimony of her sitting for the Barnes version with her father in 1890; Paul Alexis’s mention in a letter to Émile Zola of 13 February 1891, of ‘a worker’ sitting for Cézanne; a brief remark on the series by Joachim Gasquet in 1898; and finally evidence that one of the double *Cardplayers* was shown at Vollard’s gallery in 1899.¹⁰

This is not much to provide any firm footing as to dating, meaning, or the general circumstance of the series. But if we cast our net wider than these direct references to the paintings, some further explanations for The Card Players’ emergence in the early 1890s becomes evident. If we agree — as Alexis’s letter would support — that Cézanne started the series in the fall or winter of 1890, then their first conception maps surprisingly well over a crucial moment in Cézanne’s career.¹¹ Starting in November 1890, Émile Zola’s *L’Argent* — that hymn to the disastrous effects of speculation and the volatility of capital — was serialized in *Gil Blas* and published in novel form in March 1891. ‘He [the engineer Georges Hamelin] attacked gambling with extreme violence; “the Universal”, he said, “had succumbed to the mania of gambling — gambling carried to the point of absolute madness”, the narrator of *L’Argent* relates towards the end of the plot.¹² It can hardly be incidental that The Card Players appeared within Cézanne’s oeuvre simultaneous to the publication of Zola’s novel, as a less didactic image of risk-taking than that depicted by Zola. In the letter so frequently cited in the literature on The Card Players (‘Les journées, il [Cézanne] peint au Jas de Bouffan, où un ouvrier lui sert de modèle’), Paul Alexis even made explicit the connection between Cézanne’s life, his current painting, and Zola’s novel.¹³ Continuing the passage in which the above quotation occurs in the midst of a rant on Cézanne’s wife (for whom Alexis adopted the rather misogynist name ‘la Boule’) and her financial demands, Alexis ends with the following remarks:

Et, maintenant, je n’ai plus à vous dire que ceci que *l’Argent* dont je me ré-gale au lit, chaque soir, me ravit et me transporte. Mon vieux coeur d’ancien joueur gobe cet héroïque Saccard et s’est serré en voyant l’effondrement de l’Universelle.

The *Cardplayers*, Alexis’s letter attests, are expressions — even if in distanced and ennobled form — of these tense debates over the meanings of money, gambling, and social belonging in both art and life. That Alexis spoke of a worker (‘un ouvrier’) as Cézanne’s

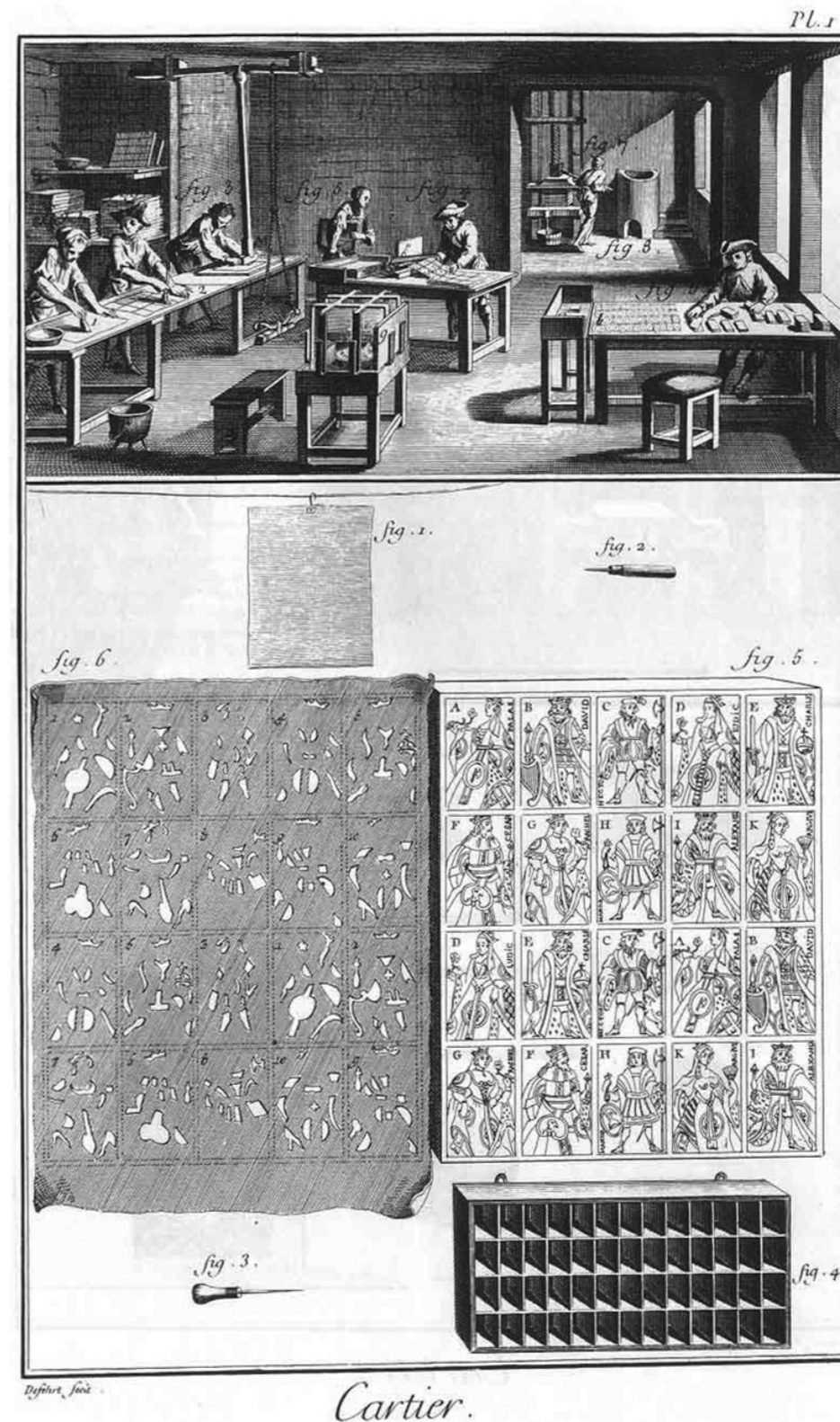
model seems crucial in this context as well, indexing the fraught nature of monetary compensation here at play, farmhand *and* sitter.

Such concrete socio-biographical motivations and circumstances for the potential emergence of *The Card Players* bolster the central import of the theme in conceptual terms.¹⁴ When Cézanne started *The Card Players* around 1890, he had just finished *Mardi Gras* (c.1888-90), another attempt at a large-scale, multi-figure genre painting. The late 1880s and early 1890s can thus be characterised as the moment in which Cézanne tried to integrate multiple figures within his complex pictorial constructions — the melding of ‘Bildwert’ and ‘Darstellungswert’ within genre painting — following a decade in which landscapes, still-lives, portraits and single-figure bathers exemplified his most ambitious art. Card play appears to have provided the ideal subject matter for such an ambitious move on a large scale that would eventually lead to *The Large Bathers*, started more or less when *The Card Players* were done. As a kind of bridge between his landscapes, still-lives and the subsequent multi-figure bathers, Cézanne’s *Cardplayers* are the first large, multi-figural compositions which treat the phenomenology of space not only as a function of the viewer’s in-situ perspective, but also as a function of the ontology of the subjects depicted. Their theme of card playing is structured around the recognition that flatness and three-dimensionality are not opposites, for flat images such as cards, in use, become volumetric.

THE SPACE OF PLAY

In the plate showing the *Cartier*, or card-maker, in Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie* (1751-72), like in all plates of the publication, we similarly have to distinguish between a ‘syntagmatic’ part of the plate and a ‘paradigmatic’ one (fig. 2.2). In the upper scene that shows the production of cards in a workshop — printing, cutting, stacking them — the card is ‘linked to other objects within a real situation’ and made ‘anecdotic ... “naturalized” by its insertion into a large-scale *tableau vivant*’, as Roland Barthes has argued in his essay, ‘The Plates of the *Encyclopédie*’.¹⁵ In the lower part, which illustrates the tools of the craft, we see (not unlike the pipes, painting and jar assembled on the back wall of the Barnes’s *Cardplayers*) cardboard hanging to dry, tools used to punch holes into the stencil sheets, as well as a stencil sheet and a finished sheet of uncut cards themselves: ‘[T]he tool or the gesture (the object of demonstration), is isolated from any real context’, Barthes said, ‘[T]his part of the plate has the role of *declining* the object, of manifesting its paradigm ... [A]t the card-maker’s, the playing cards are generated out of a void, the hole in the cardboard’.¹⁶ When Cézanne painted his *Cardplayers*, it seems that he was out to push the two orders of Diderot’s plate back together into one ambitious image, thereby confronting the anecdotic with the paradigmatic directly.

This had already been achieved in especially cogent terms by an illustration that J. J. Grandville (Jean Ignace Isidore Gérard) included in his *Un autre monde* (1844) entitled



2.2
Cartier, engraving from Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert, *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, Paris, 1751-72.

‘The Battle of the Cards’ (fig. 2.3), deservedly famous for having inspired such imaginary worlds as depicted in John Tenniel’s illustrations for *Alice in Wonderland*.¹⁷ In Grandville’s phantasmatic creation, an epic battle is under way: corpses are strewn over the ground, battle formations erected, wounds inflicted, spears flying. Two groups of spectators are watching — one in the foreground, another on top of a shaky makeshift structure in the back — and some are praying. But the scene is not exactly brutal or horrifying, in part because all actors are either cards — flat kings, queens and jacks — or suits come to life and jumping into action. Spades and diamonds attack the army of hearts in a playful ritual



2.3

J. J. Grandville (Jean Ignace Isidore Gérard), *La Bataille des cartes*, illustration from *Un autre monde*, Paris, 1844.

that is more medieval tournament than modern warfare. The army of clubs is waiting in the wings, and so are the four figures in the foreground: personifications — the most ‘real’ and ‘life-like’ the image provides — of each suit. The meanings of the image for our purposes, no matter how cryptic it might appear, lie first and foremost in several insights not so different from the ones underlying Cézanne’s repeated depictions of card playing: cards open onto imaginary worlds not that dissimilar from ours; condensed symbolic language can ‘act’, perform, and narrate in space.

Some of the visual ingenuity of Grandville’s image is carried over into Cézanne’s *Card-players* and their formal terms. Cézanne seems to welcome the many pictorial puns afforded by cards in painting, flaunting their material properties within the spatial delimitations of easel painting. The paintings give free play to cards in most every possible orientation: he shows their coloured front as well as their neutral back, or turns them at a ninety-degree angle to the picture plane, showing the card as nothing but a short thin line. The ways his various players hold a deck of cards is no less varied. He demonstrates his ability to paint decks from the front and the side, offering multiple challenges to perspectival

norms, as cards fan out and fold in, extending into space while contracting in the players’ hands. Having never quite settled on a recurring representation of, or specific place for, the cards rendered within the series, Cézanne allowed them the maximum variety of forms. In the Barnes version, the most elaborate and largest of the group, the player on the left barely seems to hold any cards at all (fig. 2.4). Cézanne has indicated them only with one or two elegant brushstrokes and blended them into the colours of the player’s skin and coat, indicating more an absence than a presence. This player seems to hold another card in his right hand that he appears to be placing on the table, but the bits of grey paint at the top of his right index finger are too indistinct. Finally, there is the white cuff of his right sleeve turned towards the viewer squarely like another card materially transfigured and suspended in mid-air, as if the cards had started to structure other elements around them.

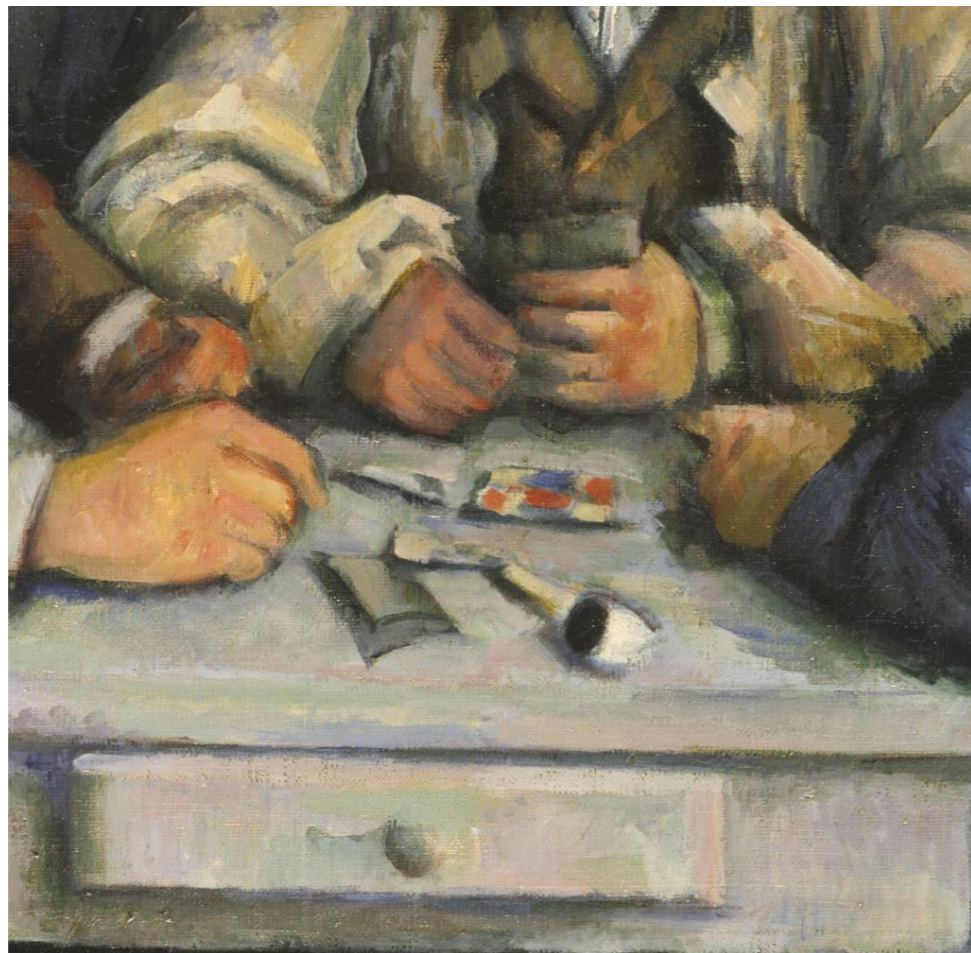
Cézanne’s pictorial play with cards does not end there. The other cards on the table (in the Barnes version) even seem to float over the gaming board with the air thick beneath them. One card is turned over — close to the central vertical axes of the canvas — to reveal a figural card, which draws attention to itself as the only colourful (blue/red) image within the image. In the Metropolitan’s version, the two players on each side do not seem to hold any cards at all (Cézanne has rendered the area of their hands blurry), and the card in the foreground next to the pipe has been oddly doubled, throwing an elongated shadow onto the table — unless these are perhaps two stacked cards instead (fig. 2.5). In the three versions showing only two players, moreover, Cézanne staged the opposition between the cards’ colourful front and neutral back respectively in each player’s deck (plates 3–5). Even the preparatory studies bear witness to strange multiplications of cards and angles of viewing, unconstrained by the laws of gravity: cards are doubling everywhere, or floating over tables, perhaps most dramatically in the painted study now in Worcester, in which a figural card floats in space towards the viewer (fig. 2.6).

All these manifestly typical Cézannian details of spatial and experiential ambiguity attest to the fact that cards offered a special relationship between the representation of a thing and the thing itself. At the same time, however, card play also proffered a more symbolic register for human existence, an unusually dense metaphor for life. Any card game manual of the period would be filled, for instance, with commentary on the proverb, ‘playing one’s cards well in life’. Open any manual and the point stares the reader in the face to the point of banality, as for instance in a booklet by Henry Jones, the English writer and expert on games, published in 1880 under the pseudonym ‘Cavendish’ and entitled *Card Essays, Clay’s Decisions, and Card-Table Talk*. In the introductory essay, Jones cites Edward Bulwer-Lytton from *Alice* (1838):

[T]he practice of Whist tends to fit the players for grappling with the affairs of life. The characteristic of Whist has been noticed by several eminent writers. Bulwer, himself an accomplished Whist player, refers to it in his novel ‘Al-



2.4
Detail of plate 2.
Paul Cézanne, *Cardplayers*,
1890-92, oil on canvas,
The Barnes Foundation.



2.5
Detail of plate 1.
Paul Cézanne, *Cardplayers*,
c.1890-2, oil on canvas, The
Metropolitan Museum of Art.

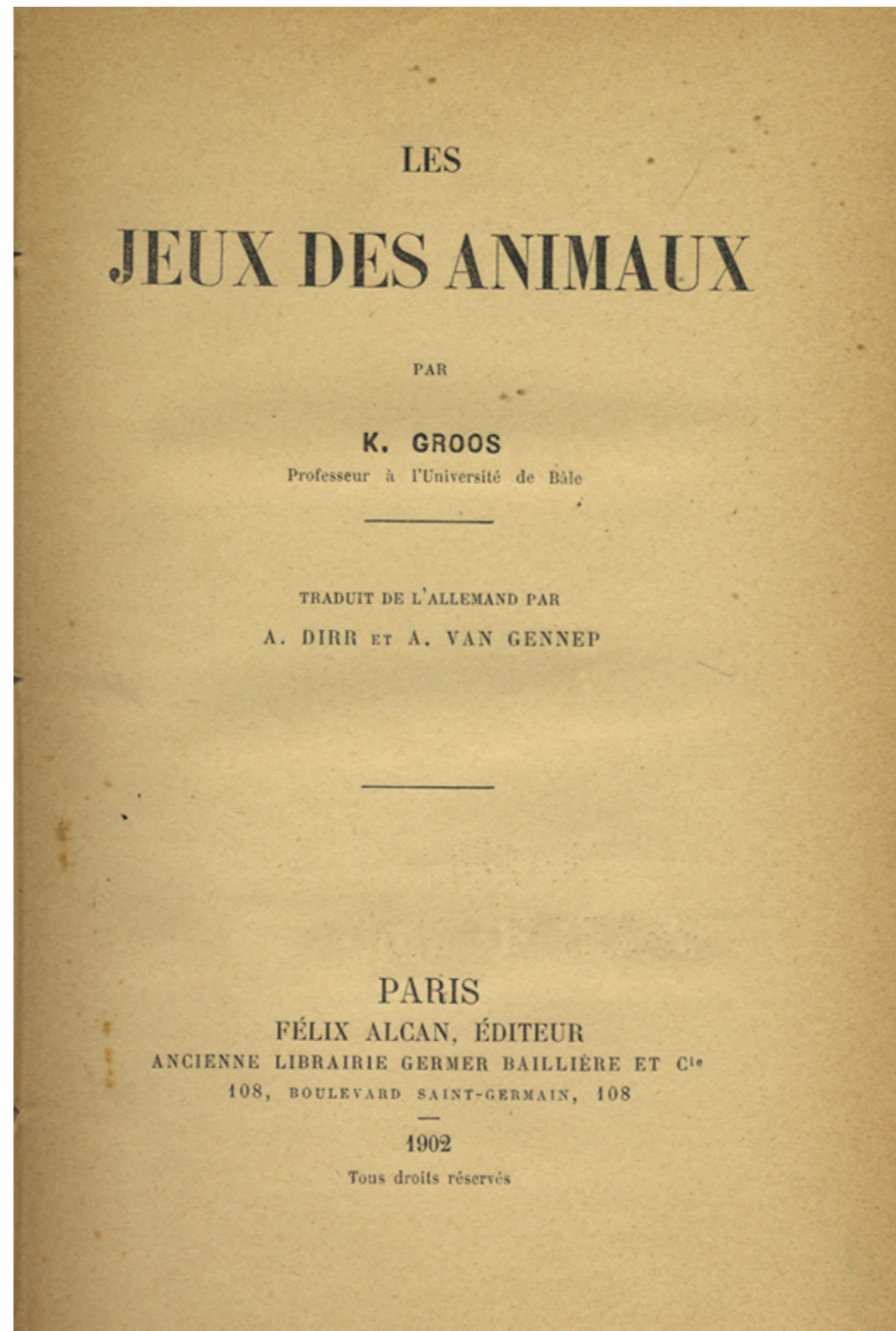


2.6
Paul Cézanne, *Study for
The Card Players*, c.1890-2,
oil on canvas, Worcester
Art Museum, Worcester,
Massachusetts.

ice'. He says — 'Fate has cut and shuffled the cards for you; the game is yours unless you revoke; — pardon my metaphor, — it is a favorite one; — I have worn it threadbare; but life is so like a rubber at Whist. Dr. [William] Pole, in illustration of this point, says: — Whist is 'a perfect microcosm—a complete miniature society in itself'.¹⁸

Part of the attraction of card play for Cézanne certainly lay in such metaphoric potentialities of the game: a system of rules and regulations utterly self-contained and separate from workaday life ('a complete miniature society in itself'), yet precisely because of that separation providing an essential metaphor for it ('life is so like a rubber at Whist').

It is crucial to note that the 1890s — when *The Card Players* series was painted — are generally considered the decade when such a metaphorical link between life and gaming took on a new range of meanings. During this decade especially, anthropology and psychology named the capacity to play a central innate tool of human sociability, redefining the nature and meaning of 'play' in the process. The influential German psychologist Karl Groos even classified what he called the 'instinct' to play in several books of the period, most notably *The Play of Animals* of 1896 (translated into French as *Les Jeux des animaux* in 1902) (fig. 2.7), followed by *The Play of Man* in 1899.¹⁹ In these texts, Groos proposed to critique the long held understanding of the so-called 'surplus energy theory of play', which contended that play occurs when the animal, or the human, has extra energy to burn and is freed from the necessities of survival. Influentially put forth in Darwinian accounts of play such as Herbert Spencer's, who in fact popularized the surplus-energy theory, the idea can be seen as a scientific corroboration of Friedrich Schiller's idea of the 'play drive' as the means to human freedom and emancipation in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794). Groos explained:



2.7
 Title page of Karl Groos,
Les Jeux des animaux,
 Paris, 1902.

The first [popular idea of play] is that the animal (or man) begins to play when he feels particularly cheerful, healthy, and strong ... The first finds its scientific basis in the theory of surplus energy, which is amplified by Herbert Spencer especially, but which was previously promulgated by Schiller.²⁰

He continued to set up his key influential proposition as follows, emphasizing the psychic need of play in youth as a means of survival and naming play a 'real instinct' as opposed to the after-burn following the realities of life:

Indeed, the conclusion seems admissible, in summing up the biological significance of play, that perhaps the very existence of youth is due in part to the necessity for play; the animal does not play because he is young, he has a period of youth because he must play. Whoever has observed the tremendous force of the play impulse in young animals will hardly fail to give this thought some hospitality.²¹

Groos thus rewrote the meaning of play for life as a 'serious business to the creature', as 'going before the intelligence and preparing the way for it', marking out 'play actions' as a special set of highly directed movements that take place to ensure survival and proper maturation, central therefore to the health of any being and larger social body.²²

Bringing forth Groos's writings is not to suggest that Cézanne knew them — we have no evidence of that, even though they may well have found their way into his circle of scientific colleagues in Aix interested in social psychology and biology.²³ Of course, they were also published just a few years after Cézanne's paintings, albeit the scientific ground had been well prepared for them. Groos cited, for instance, the influence of Julius Schaller's early anthropologies of play from the 1860s, or the writings of Moritz Lazarus (founder of national psychology or 'Völkerpsychologie') on the innate psychic 'attraction' of play (*Die Reize des Spiels*, 1883).²⁴ Rather, the existence of this body of thought underscores that the very profundity and nobility that Cézanne gave to the card game (as opposed to previous more sentimental and theatrical depictions of the genre by other painters) found a parallel expression in Groos's redefinition of play as a central and indispensable (qua 'instinctual') preoccupation in life.

The overlap does not end there, and further parallels between the world of play (including card games) and that of art were frequently drawn at the time, especially by Groos himself and his followers. Both Cézanne and Groos can be said to emphasise that play is not a mere frivolity and leisure activity, but a central tool of human consciousness, learning and association, on the same level as art. Groos says so expressly: 'The world of play, to which art belongs, stands in most important and interesting contrast with the stern realities of life.'²⁵ He goes a step further, in a chapter called 'Aesthetic Pleasure as Play' in his *Der aesthetische Genuss* of 1902, in asserting the true connections between the realm of play and that of art by calling aesthetic experience a form of play itself:

Nur einen heteronomen Zweck wird man, soviel ich sehe, ernstlich in Erwägung ziehen dürfen, nämlich den der Befreiung aus den Sorgen, Mühen und Leiden der Alltagswelt durch das Hinübertreten in die Welt der Kunst. Ich werde darauf zurückkommen. Hier genügt es, zu betonen, dass das Spiel genau demselben Zweck der Selbstbefreiung dienen kann, sich also auch in

dieser Hinsicht nicht vom ästhetischen Geniessen unterscheidet ... Weil beides, Spiel und ästhetischer Genuss, Selbstzweck ist, stimmen sie auch in dieser Schattierung des Freiheitsgefühles überein: sie erlösen von dem Alltagsleben und von dem Alltags-Ich.²⁶

According to Groos, art resembles play in two fundamental ways. On the one hand, it is part of the whole group of human activities, indispensable both to psychic and social well-being, we call 'play action'. And on the other, play, like art, is a necessary means of rewriting ourselves as autonomous, as agents of our own actions, in a separate and detached world where ordinary life is, for the agreed duration of the game, suspended, even transcended.

Some of these meanings of play established in the 1890s have survived into the most crucial definitions of play in the twentieth century. Walter Benjamin still cited Karl Groos in his 1928 essay 'Toys and Play', in which he defined play as 'the transformation of a shattering experience into habit'.²⁷ And in Roger Caillois's definition of play — taken from his influential response to Johan Huizinga's *Man, Play and Games* published in 1958 — one of the central elements that characterises play is indeed its separateness from ordinary life: 'In effect, play is essentially a separate occupation, carefully isolated from the rest of life, and generally is engaged in with precise limits of time and place'. He further defined play: 'In every case, the game's domain is therefore a restricted, closed, protected universe: a pure space ... The game has no other but an intrinsic meaning'.²⁸ Caillois insisted that art is in many ways unlike play in which nothing is actually made or materially transformed:

At the end of the game, all can and must start over again at the same point. Nothing has been harvested or manufactured, no masterpiece has been created, no capital has accrued. Play is an occasion of pure waste: waste of time, energy, ingenuity, skill, and often of money...²⁹

Yet the realm of play and the realm of art share a separateness from life as one of their central structuring features, at least since the emergence of Western easel painting, and perhaps especially with the advent of modernist picture making.

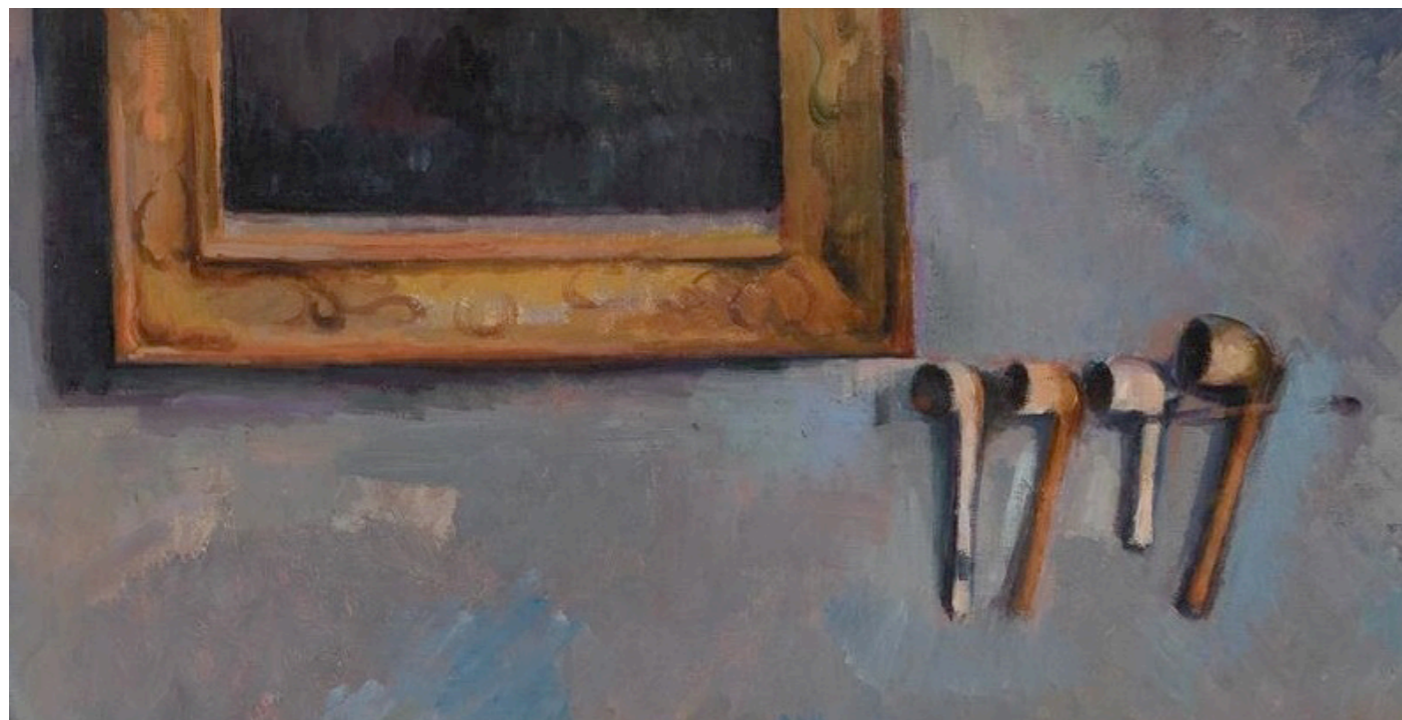
Cézanne's *Cardplayers* are shot through with similar parallels between art and such understandings of play. Indeed, part of the appeal of card play for Cézanne can be found precisely in the comparison it afforded between the realms of play and of painting. I do not mean to suggest that card play offered painting a special degree of playfulness, but rather the opposite: that the world of play had the potential to provide painting with a model for its own detachment and remoteness from life, to set one human activity with its own 'intrinsic' meanings up as a foil for the newfound concentration on the intrinsic properties of art that marked Cézanne's version of early modernist painting. Look around in the two multi-figured *Cardplayers* and the fact becomes evident quickly that a profound link between painting and card playing marks some of Cézanne's most crucial decisions about objects and spatial relations. The men themselves have left work behind to become players

and models, though they have not taken off their working garb; they have entered a world in which the usual structures and hierarchies of life have been translated into a new set of conditions, actions, and rewards. Cézanne's unusual choice of placing all players, in each version of the series, on exactly the same height within the picture frame emblemizes the newly ordered and equalized world created by play. The standing smoker on the left in the Barnes version appears cut out, placed against the wall almost like a figure would be on the ground of a card (a jack, say). Wearing a blue smock and a red scarf, he is, moreover, set into direct relation with the blue and red figure card turned over at the center of the gaming board. Since the red is quite striking in these two parts of the canvas only, the relationship between the world on the card and that of play establishes heightened formal meanings and associations.

There is also the central axis of the Barnes version where an odd array of imagery is lined up in the vertical. The card imagery in the center of the painting reaches out both above and below. For one, it is forced into direct comparison with a painting within the painting at the very top of the visual field (though it remains illegible and cut off). And below, it is given support by the rectangular 'picture' formed by the legs of the table that frames it, in which a bunch of legs, oddly detached from their bodies, fill a void in a flattened display of triangular near-symmetrical shapes. The cards thus take their place precisely in the middle between a painted representation of a work of art and a representation of the real reworked and condensed into pure form.

A closer look at that which, besides cards, animates the two large versions is instructive as well. Objects multiply in both versions: pipes hang on the wall like another deck of cards; the dark hats worn by the players (an odd choice for an interior scene) give the paintings a strangely regularized punctuation. Then there is the 'still-life' on top of the table itself, Cézanne's focal point. In the front of both the Metropolitan and the Barnes versions, the cards compete directly with other 'things'. At the front of the table — in an arrangement hardly changed from version one to version two — a card and a pipe are arrayed in close proximity above the table drawer in the area closest to the viewer. This is an object lesson in the ways the spatial properties of things can be overcome in painting: a flat card seems to have almost as much volume as a round pipe, and the drawer pull looks flatter than card or pipe taken together.

As if all that play with the material properties of cards were not enough, Cézanne changed things around quite drastically from version one to version two. It is especially striking to note all the 'stuff' that Cézanne added from the Metropolitan to the Barnes version: the gaming board on the table, the jug on the shelf, and the painting on the wall. These additions seem to test the borders between the second and the third dimensions in painting even more programmatically. The patterned gaming board complicates the flatness of the tabletop, hiding the cards' shadows while propping them up in space, and pointing in playful terms to the etymological connections between *la table* and *le tableau*. We look at the shelf in the background left so precisely from the front that it is denied any depth, which the roundness of the jug placed on top then belies. The same holds true for



2.8
Detail of plate 2.
Paul Cézanne, *Cardplayers*,
c.1890-2, oil on canvas, The
Barnes Foundation, Merion.

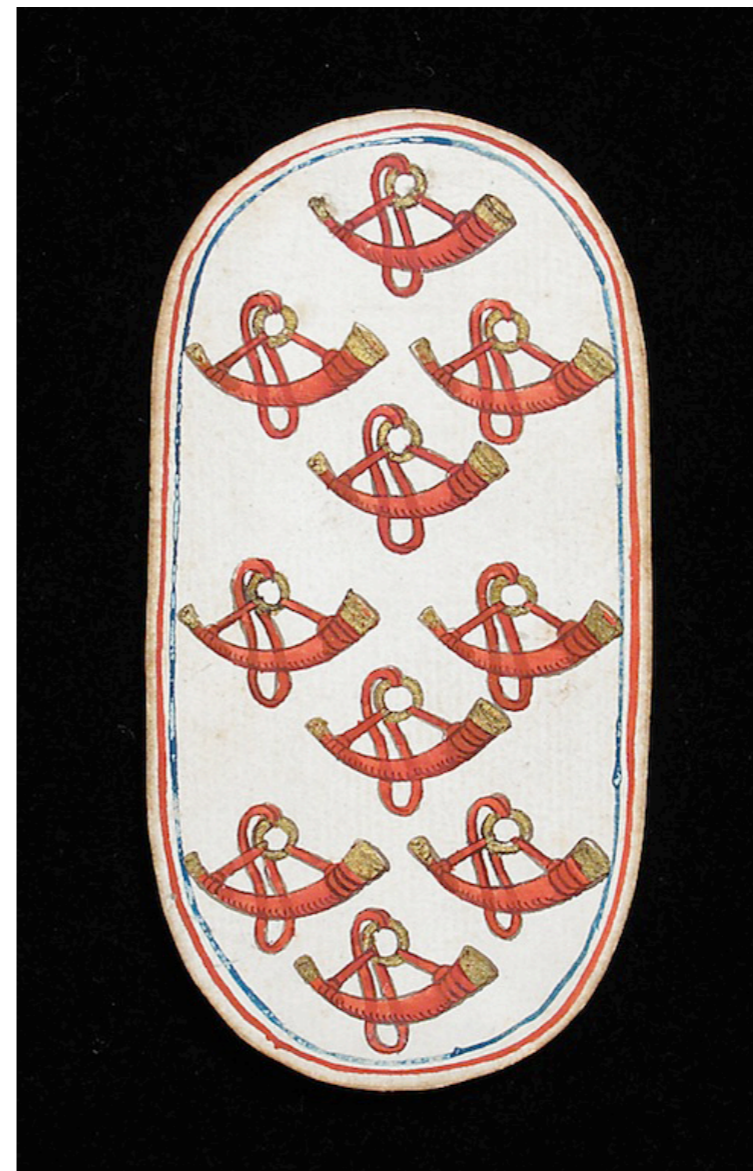
the chair on the right, another 'playing card-like' object depicted precisely on its flat side, more line than thing. Moreover, the 'flat' framed painting within the painting cut down by the upper frame owns one of the most prominent dark shadows in the whole image, as if it were the only truly three-dimensional object depicted within it, more substantial even than the figures. Finally, the pipes in the back, though they have not moved from version one to two, are now squeezed into precarious proximity to the painting-fragment — like a group of viewers who have stepped too close to a masterpiece in a museum (fig. 2.8).

This group of pipes — in a room so strangely devoid of other décor and furnishing — stands out. The fifth pipe has been taken off the wall (the right hook is empty) and has been moved into the center of the game. Cézanne thus plays with the numerology of objects within the image ('four of pipes', 'five of pipes'), in ways that evoke the numbering of the suits of cards, which are after all abstractions from real objects in Tarot and other early card games: 'ten of hunting horns', 'five of dog collars', and so forth (figs. 2.9 and 2.10).³⁰ The pipes hang in such a context-less arrangement, almost floating in space, paralleling further the world of the card in which the numerical value of objects/symbols on an empty ground supersedes their indexical value. The *Jas de Bouffan's* farmhands have thus not merely left their work for a world of play; this new world, constructed inside the paintings, and in the studio in which Cézanne imaginatively assembled everyone, is always already a playful world, which is to say a world in which objects and behaviours transcend their usual instrumentality, becoming more detached and more image-like. This is not to say that everything in the paintings has succumbed to the flatness of a card, but that all elements, including the players' bodies and bulging dress, occupy a position between object and sign, between haptic and the optic, as if their insufficiency in either system was precisely the point.

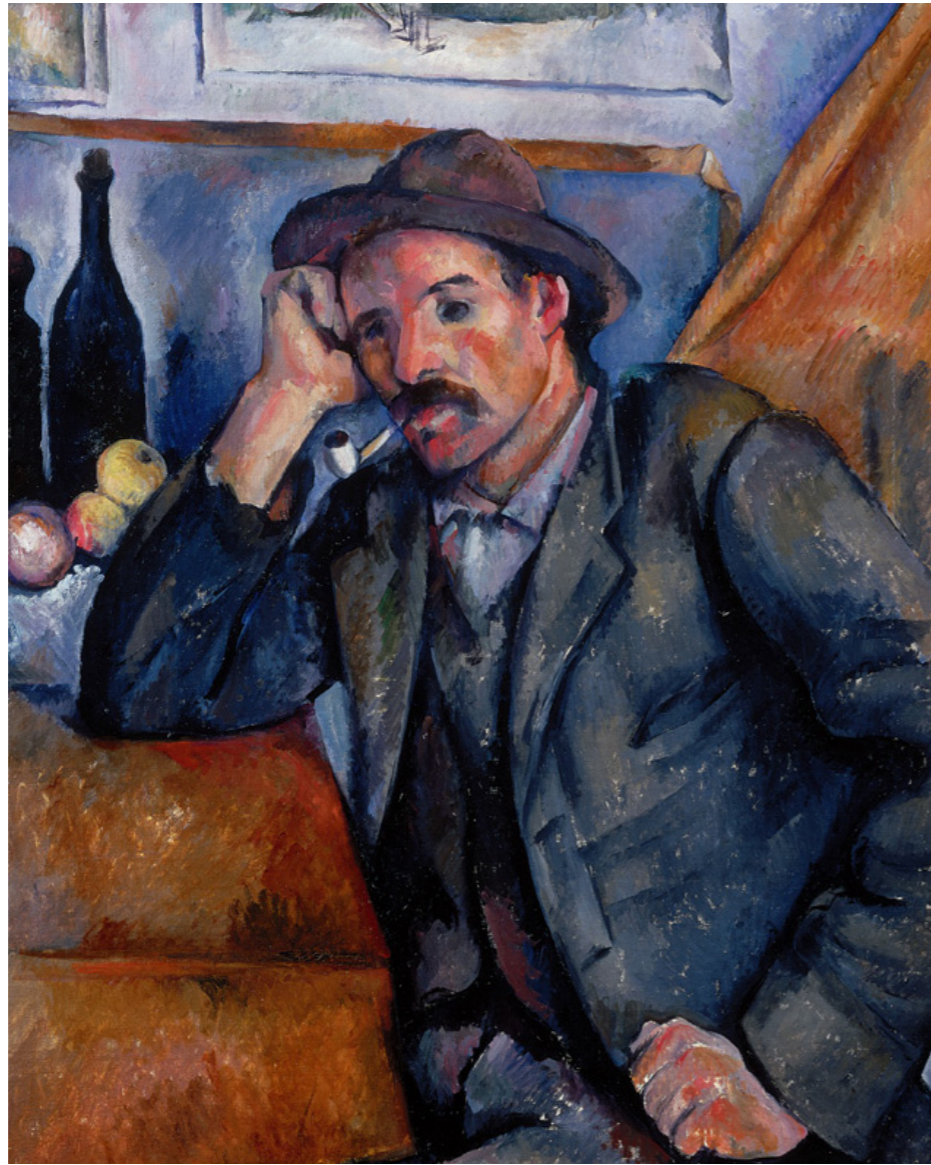
In his review of The Courtauld Gallery's *Card Players* exhibition, T. J. Clark has called these elements of the paintings (the posed pipes, the cut-up art) 'reek[ing] of forethought', and he is certainly correct in pointing to these highly plotted and 'artful' conceits within Cézanne's practice.³¹ But such devices also offered Cézanne a special kind of artistic freedom, an opportunity to play with images within the image, or to mobilize representations to the very point that their 'artfulness', their representational quality, threatens to overcome their objecthood, since a painting of a painting cut off at the top stands indeterminately between these two realms. Depicting card play served a similar function for



2.9
Samples from a set of fifty-two
playing cards, c.1470-80,
Southern Netherlands, The
Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York.



2.10
Ten of Hunting Horns, from a
set of fifty-two playing cards,
c.1470-80, Southern Neth-
erlands, The Metropolitan
Museum of Art, New York.



2.11
Paul Cézanne, *The Smoker*,
c.1890-2, oil on canvas, The
State Hermitage Museum,
St. Petersburg.

Cézanne, a vector for exploring our ordinary, everyday ways with imagery — not towards lining them up so that they hole through to another imaginative realm (their usual fate in painting), but so that they retain a quality of ‘thingly’ images of ‘imagy’ things.

In the two large *Cardplayers*, play — cutting and shuffling — is thus not confined to the activities around the table. This point can be confirmed by the fact — repeating what others have long asserted — that *The Card Players* series, and its related paintings of smokers and peasants, are the most playfully self-referential paintings Cézanne ever made. In the series, more often than not, he ‘copied’ his own paintings into his paintings, cut them up with a new framing, or turned them around. He even retroactively translated his dark and convoluted ‘*manière couillarde*’ (or ‘ballys technique’) of the early period into the more ‘constructive strokes’ of his current manner, as in *The Smoker* of around 1890-2 (fig. 2.11). In *Man Smoking a Pipe* of a few years later, a *Portrait of Madame Cézanne* hangs on the back wall without a stretcher, rolling up along the bottom edge and thus asserting its undecidable status as both an image and a thing (fig. 2.12).

In no other group of paintings did Cézanne so continuously and self-consciously insist on the material conditions and spatial properties of art as a theme for painting in itself. Card play allowed him to make this point about the materiality of the image — perhaps always nascent and at times overtly staged in his art in general — in especially poignant and self-referential ways. It has been my contention that the world of (card) play, given its



2.12
Paul Cézanne, *Man Smoking
a Pipe*, c.1893-6, oil on canvas,
The Pushkin State Museum
of Fine Arts, Moscow.

conceptual affinities to the world of art and aesthetic experience as argued in the 1890s, lent itself especially well as a metaphor for Cézanne’s nascent form of pictorial abstraction. Working, handling, and manipulating imagery — cutting and shuffling it — those are both the terms of card play and of art such as Cézanne’s *Card Players*, paintings in which object and image, touch and vision, matter and sign, are forced into playful coexistence.

TRANSFORMATION CARDS

As much as the ‘autonomous’ realm of (card) play offered Cézanne a playful arena for the nascent autonomy of his art and its spatial impact, cards also opened a profound reflection within painting about the difference between high and low. As in so much of his other paintings, in *The Card Players*, too, Cézanne counterbalanced the aesthetic with the ephemeral and quotidian, confirming the autonomy of art only as severely compromised by ‘lower’ image registers such as cards. Playing cards thus offered Cézanne an interesting object lesson vis-à-vis the status of painting. Cards are of a visual order akin to the new medium in which Cézanne forced them to operate: like painting, they are a flat, abbreviated, condensed symbolic language; singular things that operate only holistically, not to be folded or annotated by their users. Yet cards are also utterly unlike painting in the social



2.13
Charlotta Gräfin von
Jenison-Walworth, *Jeu
Jeanne d'Arc*, 1805, Musée
Français de la Carte à Jouer,
Issy-les-Moulineaux.

life they lead, for they are unframed, multiple, stacked, shuffled, repeatedly turned, and thus eventually marked by use. A card is a two-dimensional image that inhabits three-dimensional space when enlivened through the players' hands. Cards thus require constant activation through play to function and signify. Hardly antithetical to Cézanne's practice, the playing card is expressly invited into the very center of the canvas, where the viewer is licensed to directly consider the relationship between the two. In addition to the shared social life of card and painting proposed above, a comparison between the two media might also turn on the complex spatial (and symbolic) orders, which we find on the cards themselves.

In their complex negotiation between figuration and symbolism, cards both evoke and negate pictorial space, a tension neutralized within its value systems since roughly the fifteenth century. Playing cards are today thought to have been invented in ancient China perhaps in the seventh or eighth century, but can also be found early on in India, before entering Europe in the thirteenth century through the Islamic world. They encountered wider use in Western Europe in the second half of the fourteenth century, and by the sixteenth century, for instance, Venetian painters and playing card makers found themselves



2.14
D. Berger (after D.W. Soltau),
Eight of Hearts, 1801,
engraving from *Taschenbuch
für 1801*, Braunschweig.

belonging to the same guild.³² The history of playing cards is of course too long and complex to be repeated here;³³ suffice it to say that it was a topic already much debated in Cézanne's day, when many publications about the origins of playing cards were published.³⁴ By the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the point deserves stressing, the form of playing cards and their symbols — hearts, diamonds, spades and clubs — had become more and more standardized across much of Europe and the United States, in part through the advent of lithography and mass printing. A sizable card manufacturing industry had developed by the mid-nineteenth century (which was much under threat from efforts of governmental centralization in the 1890s, especially in the Midi, where it was an important local industry, as Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer has shown).³⁵

At the same time that these standardizations of the card deck were in process, however, more exceptional, more artistic cards were invented that allowed for a greater variety and playfulness in their design — so-called 'transformation cards' or 'transformation decks'.³⁶ Regarded already at the time of Cézanne's paintings by scholars and collectors of paper ephemera as demonstrating the especially complex dimensionality of the playing card, artists started to incorporate the suits of the non-face cards into artistic designs and three-dimensional scenes. The earliest examples we have of such transformation cards seem to have been made in the very first years of the nineteenth century in Germany and England (right on the heels of the invention of lithography in 1796), and quickly spread (fig. 2.13). They were still quite popular in the early twentieth century, but seem to have more or less disappeared, as did so much of nineteenth-century culture, with the advent of World War I.

Extant examples are plenty and include what is considered the first set, German in origin and dating to 1801, serving as illustrations to an edition of Samuel Butler's *Hudibras* published in a Braunschweig almanac (fig. 2.14).³⁷ The cards show the complicated scenarios and spaces that mark the transformation deck apart from other cards. The suits are clearly visible — placed into their expected positions — yet they are also pulled backwards into action and anecdote, into a more object-like existence, largely unrelated to the game and its values: a townhall-style meeting, or scenes of domestic tasks. The suits are forced to exist within such narrative scenes, while their space is forced in turn to accommodate them, clunky intruders to any setting no doubt. Neither order fully disappears in the other or annihilates the other: the two dimensions of the sign are as present as the three dimensions of the story they have invaded. Both systems — suits and scenes — are in a complex



2.15
Cover of John Grand-Carteret,
Vieux papiers, vieilles images:
Cartons d'un collectionneur,
Paris, 1896.

integrated tension. They remain separate, and need to remain separate in order to assure the operations of the game, but they are mutually implicative, each making sense only through the forms and meanings drawn from the other's representational order. Unlike Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit example of an active 'seeing as' that Paul Smith has recently applied to Cézanne's practice, or T. J. Clark's 'shoulder/butt' reversal in the Barnes's *Large Bathers*, the transformation decks offer a different kind of combinatory image, because they bind together referents that exist in different pictorial dimensions.³⁸

Such cards were very likely part of Cézanne's visual imagination.³⁹ They were frequently discussed in French playing-card manuals and histories of the period when *The Card Players* were painted. These widely disseminated books, like *Les Cartes à jouer* of 1854 by Paul Boiteau d'Ambly, or *Vieux papiers, vieilles images* of 1896 by John Grand-Carteret (fig. 2.15), offered a close look at the origins of early image production in the Renaissance, often arguing (a point that has since been challenged) that Europe's first serially-produced 'mass' imagery — engravings and woodcuts — were in fact playing cards and not reli-



Fig. 193 et 199. — Neuf et dix de pique.
Cartes d'un jeu populaire fantaisiste, moderne (second Empire).



Fig. 192. — Huit de pique.
Carte d'un jeu fantaisiste du général baron Athalin (Restauration).



2.16
Nine of Spades and Ten of Spades from *The Second Empire Pack* (1859), illustration from John Grand-Carteret, *Vieux papiers, vieilles images: Cartons d'un collectionneur*, Paris, 1896.

2.17
Baron Louis Athalin, *Eight of Spades* (1832), illustration from John Grand-Carteret, *Vieux papiers, vieilles images: Cartons d'un collectionneur*, Paris, 1896.

2.18
Double page from Paul Boiteau d'Ambly, *Cartes à jouer et la cartomanie*, Paris, 1854.

gious images, or at least that the two emerged in a more parallel manner than heretofore believed.⁴⁰ Transformation decks often figured in these same texts as later curiosities of the paper trade, establishing transformation cards as a particular species of nineteenth-century collectables.

Transformation cards were frequently illustrated in the pages of such books (figs. 2.16 and 2.17). A double page from Boiteau offers an especially instructive example (fig. 2.18). Compare the two cards placed opposite one another: on the left, figural space and card symbols stay utterly separate, and the card opens up into a more familiar narrative space only within the portrait medallion. On the right, by contrast, it is much harder to make out the six diamonds on the card (which stems from the set *Beatrice*, or *the Francas* of 1818).⁴¹

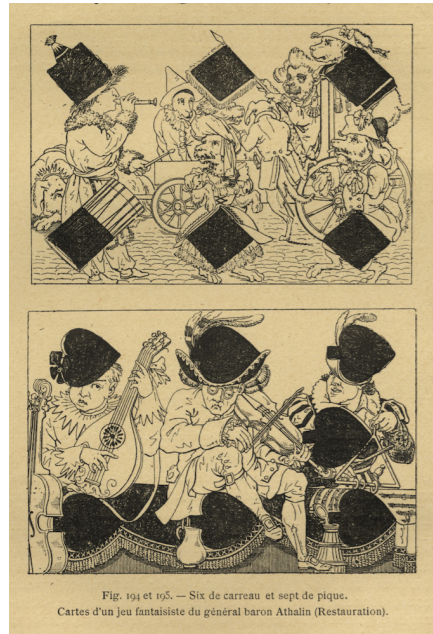


Fig. 194 et 195. — Six de carreau et sept de pique.
Cartes d'un jeu fantaisiste du général baron Athalin (Restauration).



2.19
Baron Louis Athalin, *Six of Diamonds and Seven of Spades* (1832), illustration from John Grand-Carteret, *Vieux papiers, vieilles images: Cartons d'un collectionneur*, Paris, 1896.

2.20
John Nixon, *Two of Diamonds*, from the set *Metastasis*, London, 1803.

The three figures, onto which they have been forced, need to behave in full accordance with their regulated logic: no jewel, fan, purse or ornament could exist elsewhere in the scene or the card would become illegible as card. The three figures thus appear frozen into place; the card's order would collapse if their walk continued. As Grand-Carteret explained:

Les Anglais, du reste, conservèrent de tout temps cette spécialité, trouvant partout matière à trèfles, piques, carreaux ou coeurs: châte, violon, éventail, ridicule, portefeuille, bouclier, casque, fer forgé, tout cela transformé, par eux, en points nettement indiqués, le signe distinctif de la couleur se fondant dans l'ensemble de façon à constituer des images du plus pittoresque aspect.⁴²

In transformation cards, then, the world demonstrates its own nascent propensity toward abstraction.

Despite their clear differences in size, some transformation cards bear a noticeable resemblance to the composition of the large *Cardplayers*, such as the seven of spades from a deck designed by Baron Louis Athalin dating to 1832, illustrated in Grand-Carteret (fig. 2.19), or to that of the double *Cardplayers*, like a two of diamonds from the set *Metastasis* by John Nixon of 1803 (fig. 2.20).⁴³ Above all, these cards share with *The Card Players* a pronounced frontality and symmetry; they both place their figures strictly on one level, with one figure almost directly above another; they refuse to place a figure in the very foreground that turns its back to the viewer; and they do not give their scenes much of the expected sense of conviviality. The pronounced 'triplet' of dark hats that establishes such a dramatic horizontal line in the *Metropolitan Cardplayers*, for instance, clearly evokes the rhythmic (and repetitive) organization of three musicians in a row that can be found on the card from the Athalin set. The young girl that Cézanne added in the *Barnes* version, peeking into the deck of the player at the center, seems almost a logical addendum necessary to break up that overt regularity of version one. Other period images of card play tend to compose such a multi-figured scene differently, making clear as well that the transformation card in Grand-Carteret and *The Card Players* share the above compositional preoccupations. A painting often compared with Cézanne's *Card Players*, Gustave Caillebotte's *The Besique Game* of 1881, for instance (fig. 2.21), or the frontispiece illustration to the 1878 edition of *Nouvel almanach des jeux de cartes*, or the *New Almanac of Card Playing* (perhaps one of the more normative images of card play of the period) (fig. 2.22), provide good

Opposite:

2.21
Gustave Caillebotte, *The Besique Game*, 1881, oil on canvas, Private collection.

2.22
La Partie de bouillotte, frontispiece from *Nouvel almanach des jeux de cartes*, Paris, 1878.



contrasts, both avoiding a clear symmetrical arrangement of figures in favour of a more dynamic centrifugal composition. These images favour figures leaning forward, backward and sideways, seemingly more in line with the congenial nature of such social occasions.

By bringing forth transformation cards as comparisons, I am not suggesting that Cézanne's *Cardplayers* were at all meant to emulate these cards' visual order directly, or were even painted with such cards specifically in mind. We do not know if Cézanne knew such cards any more than we actually know what card game is currently being played (*Piquet normand* is played with three players, but the information we receive in Cézanne's paintings is not specific enough to say so conclusively). My comparative exercise here is not about source hunting or claiming that Cézanne wanted to make paintings that looked like playing cards, a relation that George Mauner for instance has demonstrated for Édouard Manet's *The Fifer* of 1866 and its possible Tarot-card source, one that was already well established by the 1890s, as when Paul Mantz called Manet's painting 'a Knave of Diamonds placarded to a door' in 1884.⁴⁴ But as we continue to dissect Cézanne's complicated spatial formations in painting, *The Card Players* included, we should keep in mind the fact that there were other image systems already available to the painter, especially within the realm of the ephemeral, that condensed life into image form in ways not too dissimilar from his, binding the flatness of the 'Bildwert' in novel ways to the imagined spaces of the 'Darstellungswert', to use Novotny's terms again. Of course, transformation cards are ontologically different from painting — printed on paper, not painted on canvas — but that does not mean that a painter like Cézanne (who, as mentioned, relished copying in paint fashion plates and bottle labels) might not have been open to more cross-fertilization between high and low than is usually assumed. That Cézanne's systematization of the world seems so perfectly painterly in nature — a world ordered in and for the canvas such that the depicted realm collapses the minute it leaves the frame — should not prevent us from seeing how potentially referential to other visual practices of Cézanne's day such pictorial undertakings were. We should indeed remain open to the possibility that Cézanne's highly complex formations of pictorial space emerged in dialogue (direct or indirect) with other more popular image systems like transformation decks, which also implicated the sign's form with the sign's social and contextual dimension in a manner as dramatic and self-referential as Cézanne's. Some of Cézanne's pictorial and spatial conceits, that is to say, are perhaps *found* as much as they are *invented*. And he should be seen to have reached out into the world not just for motifs and their sensory effects, but also for structural models of his practice. '[L'Estaque] — C'est comme une carte à jouer. Des toits rouges sur la mer bleue', Cézanne opined himself in a letter to Camille Pissarro of 1876, aware of a world offering itself to the painter always already as condensed image/sign.⁴⁵

In painting *The Card Players*, Cézanne could imagine his embryonic pictorial abstractions partaking in the social life of cards, their complex spaces, and symbolic languages. This is not to say that Cézanne's early modernist formal choices look like a card, but that he brings the card into his imagery to, paradoxically, contextualize abstraction as an aspect of ordinary life. By tying his destruction of 'scientific perspective', among his other



2.23
Eva Macdonald, 'What are Trumps?', 1868-9, watercolour, ink and albumen prints, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

influential painterly devices, to the peasants' already existent play with abstracted content such as card play, Cézanne highlighted the direct commonalities between his forms of art and their form of life. Card play thus allowed Cézanne to probe a contextual engagement with abstract and flattened symbolic forms, offering him a 'practical' reflection in paint of the ways in which such an engagement is already ordinary even before he elevated it to a key feature of his art.

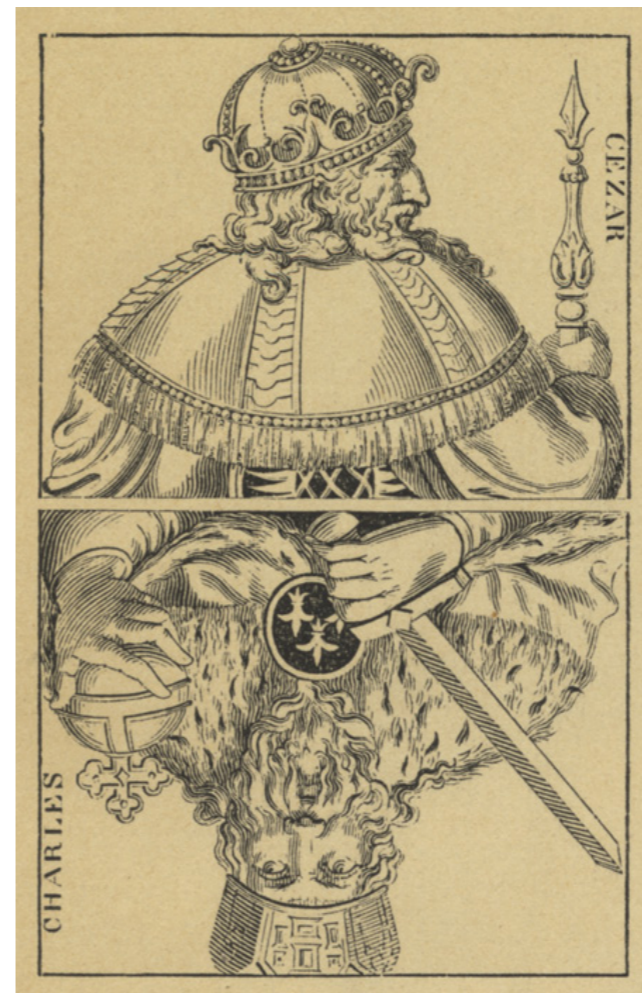
Let me test my propositions by offering some related evidence. When Cézanne adopted card play as a topic for ambitious painting, this was not the first time that the playing card took on a function of normalizing new image formats within Cézanne's own lifetime. In English and French photo-collage albums of the 1860s and 1870s (a common practice among the female members of upper-class families such as Cézanne's), the playing card was one of the central motifs of choice through which the new medium of photography was, like the playing card, creatively deployed as a mechanism addressing the particularities of classed social life (fig. 2.23).⁴⁶ Since the playing card was so similar in format to the newly



2.24
Félix Vallotton,
Nude Playing Solitaire, 1912,
oil on canvas, Kunsthaus
Zürich.

popular *cartes-de-visite*, the albums are filled with imagery that conflates photograph and playing card, showing hands that hold the images of family members like a deck of cards or that mix portrait photographs in randomly among the kings, queens, clubs, and spades. The established place of cards in everyday life thus offered an appropriate means for becoming familiar with the new ubiquity of the *carte-de-visite*. Such early photo-collages show the degree to which the playing card already structured an image vernacular, a common way with the image, as deeply ingrained a practice within common culture as the photograph has since become.

It bears stressing, too, that Cézanne was not the only painter to employ card play in such ways in avant-garde painting of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Take Félix Vallotton's *Nude Playing Solitaire* of 1912, as a case in point (fig. 2.24). Even if we disregard the switch from peasant players to a nude female player (loaded as no doubt such a change is regarding the gender and class implications of the subject matter), Vallotton used playing cards to show abstraction 'at play' in ways similar to Cézanne. *Solitaire*, too, is filled with equivalences between card and world, pressing its cards almost parallel to the picture plane. The red pillow mirrors the red hearts on the cards, and the woman's dark, stylized hair resembles the black clubs on the card at bottom. Like Cézanne, Vallotton does not paint an image to look as flat and abbreviated as a playing card itself, but rather brings the two image realms together in painting in order to give his abstracted means a clearly delineated allusion of social life.



CONCLUSION

A final point: Cézanne's investigations into the meaning of form, space and sociability in *The Card Players* turns, I want to argue, on a symbolic system of specific class connotations. His group of farmhands are after all cutting and shuffling queens and kings, either of whom can be trumped by an ace (the lowest number), thus indexing the complex reversals that beset European monarchy since the late eighteenth century. In fact, royal figures had once been completely extinguished from card decks of the French Revolution (like the Christian calendar), only to re-emerge in post-revolutionary Europe as a still fraught symbol. Clemens Brentano, for instance, upon seeing the 1810 card designs by the German Romantic painter Philipp Otto Runge, called the image of the king 'past his reign and over-played' ('verregieret und verspielt') (figs. 2.25 and 2.26).⁴⁷ The activity of card play, then, came loaded with its own internal contests over social and formal hierarchies that were both intrinsic to its rules, yet always pointing outward metaphorically to life and the world more broadly. Card play, like painting, is an act of a (at least momentary) re-ordering of the world into potentially new constellations and profound reversals of luck and status. Cézanne's repeated depictions of peasants and laborers as card players seems to invoke such lighthearted, yet potentially radical, play with power — why else go to the trouble of selecting this group over others? It is this fact of interchangeability, written indissolubly and at the same moment into the paintings' formal and social registers, that constitutes the paradoxical unity of Cézanne's art.

2.25
Philipp Otto Runge, Design
for playing cards (king),
c.1810.

2.26
Philipp Otto Runge, Design
for playing cards (jack),
c.1810.

All references in digital versions of *Courtauld Books Online* are hyperlinked. To navigate to a footnote, click on the reference number in the body of the text. To return back to the text, click on the number at the beginning of the footnote.

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1. 'Cavendish' [Henry Jones], *Card Essays, Clay's Decisions, and Card-Table Talk* (New York: John Wurtel Lovell, 1880), p. 38.
2. John House, 'Cézanne's Card Players: Art without Anecdote', in Nancy Ireson and Barnaby Wright (eds), *Cézanne's Card Players* (London: The Courtauld Gallery in assoc. with Paul Holberton Pub., 2010), pp. 55-71. See also Jean Arrouye, 'A Balance of Dissimilar Elements', in Société Paul Cézanne (ed.), *Jas de Bouffan: Cézanne* (Aix-en-Provence: Hexagone, 2004), pp. 141-7.
3. Fritz Novotny, *Cézanne und das Ende der wissenschaftlichen Perspektive* (Vienna: Anton Schroll, 1938).
4. Kurt Badt, *The Art of Cézanne* [1956] (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1965), pp. 114, 116.
5. Jean-Claude Lebensztejn, 'Une source oubliée de Cézanne', *Cahiers du Musée national de l'art moderne* 86 (Winter 2003-04): pp. 83-93, reprinted in Jean-Claude Lebensztejn, *Études cézanniennes* (Paris: Flammarion, 2006), pp. 46-59; André Dombrowski, *Cézanne, Murder, and Modern Life* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2013), pp. 189-231.

6. See Meyer Schapiro, 'Courbet and Popular Imagery: An Essay on Realism and Naïveté' [1941], in Schapiro, *Modern Art, 19th and 20th Centuries: Selected Papers* (New York: George Braziller, 1978), pp. 47-85; Thomas Crow, 'Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts', in Crow, *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1996), pp. 3-37.

7. See Badt, *Art of Cézanne*, p. 115.

8. Novotny, *Cézanne*. T. J. Clark would later term such a holding together in opposition within Cézanne's mature work, paraphrasing Paul de Man, that between 'phenomenality' (the elements in Cézanne that reach out metaphorically to a world outside painting, to the realms of nature, experience, 'peasant life' in this case, and so forth) and 'materiality' (those elements or passages of the painting that do not 'signify', do not reach outside the realm of painting and refuse such connotations completely). See T. J. Clark, 'Phenomenality and Materiality in Cézanne', in Tom Cohen (ed.), *Material Events: Paul de Man and the Afterlife of Theory* (Minneapolis and London: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp. 93-113.

9. The debates over the chronology are outlined in Aviva Burnstock, Charlotte Hale, Caroline Campbell and Gabriella Macaro, 'Cézanne's Development of the *Card Players*', in Ireson and Wright, *Cézanne's Card Players*, pp. 35-53.

10. Ireson and Wright, *Cézanne's Card Players*, pp. 35-6.

11. There are possible biographical circumstances as well that can serve as partial explanation: after spending the summer and early fall of 1890 with his wife Hortense and Paul Jr. in Émangy and Switzerland on Hortense's behest, Cézanne returned to Aix in November without his wife and son, who elected to settle in Paris instead. Rifts between the couple, and between his wife and his mother and sisters (with whom he resided at the *Jas de Bouffan* after the trip) became evident and were much discussed among his circle in these months. Then, in February 1891, Cézanne cut Hortense's allowance and forced her to move back to Aix. He set her and his son up in an apartment in the center of town, while he continued to live at the *Jas*. Hortense's new address was 9, rue de la Monnaie, which deserves mention as the most literal marker of the profound intersection between money and fractured family

life that structured these intense months of Cézanne's career. The stoic and earnest image of The Card Players can be seen to have emerged, with its emphasis on gaming to no monetary ends and a social world of 'equal players', almost as a reprieve from the financial and familial complications surrounding him. See John Rewald (ed.), Marguerite Kay (trans.), *Paul Cézanne: Letters* [1941] (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), pp. 233-5; Isabelle Cahn, 'Chronology', in Françoise Cachin (ed.), *Cézanne* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1996), pp. 548-9; and compare Maryline Assante di Panzillo, *Cézanne et l'argent: Salons, marchands et collectionneurs* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2011).

12. Émile Zola, *Money (L'Argent)* [1890-1] (London: Chatto & Windus, 1894), p. 356.

13. 'These days, [Cézanne] paints at the *Jas de Bouffan*, where a worker serves him as model ... And now I have nothing left but to tell you the following, namely that *L'Argent*, which I devour in bed, every evening, fascinates me and takes me away. This ancient player's old heart [Alexis himself had lost some money in the casino of Trouville in 1880, as he had told Zola earlier] swallowed whole this heroic Saccard and tightened when seeing the collapse of the [Banque] *Universelle*'. Paul Alexis to Émile Zola, 13 February 1891, in Paul Alexis, '*Naturalisme pas mort: Lettres inédites de Paul Alexis à Émile Zola, 1871-1900*', (ed.) B. H. Bakker (Toronto and Buffalo: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1971), pp. 400, 170. All translations are mine, unless otherwise stated.

14. Heinrich Dilly proposed yet another reason for the origins of The Card Players, by comparing the paintings to the Lumière brothers' film about card playing of the 1890s: Heinrich Dilly, *Ging Cézanne ins Kino?* (Ostfildern: Tertium, 1996).

15. Roland Barthes, 'The Plates of the *Encyclopedia*' [1964], in Susan Sontag (ed.), *A Barthes Reader* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), pp. 218-35.

16. Barthes, 'The Plates', pp. 220, 222.

17. On Grandville, see Klaus Schrenk and Hans Joachim Neyer (eds), *J. J. Grandville: Karikatur und Zeichnung: Ein Visionär der französischen Romantik*, exh. cat. (Karlsruhe: Staatliche Kunsthalle and Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2000). And on playing cards in Alice, see

Michael Hancher, 'Alice and the Queen of Spades', in *The Tenniel Illustrations to the 'Alice' Books* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 58-68. From December 2011 to March 2012, the Musée français de la carte à jouer in Issy-les-Moulineaux organized an exhibition on the subject, entitled *Alice au royaume des cartes à jouer, de Tenniel à Pat Andrea*. See also the Countess de Castiglione's infamous 1857 costume 'The Queen of Hearts' in Pierre Apraxine and Xavier Demange (eds), *La Divine Comtesse: Photography of the Countess de Castiglione*, exh. cat. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art and New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2000), pp. 108-9, 170.

18. 'Cavendish' [Jones], *Card Essays*, p. 12. See Gilbert Lascault, *Cartes à jouer et réussites: Une esthétique localisée et fictionnelle* (Paris: Bayard, 2003).

19. Karl Groos, *The Play of Animals* [1896] (New York: D. Appleton, 1898); French edition: *Les Jeux des animaux* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1902); and Karl Groos, *The Play of Man* [1899] (New York: D. Appleton, 1901).

20. Groos, *Play of Animals*, p. xix.

21. Groos, *Play of Animals*, pp. xx-xxi.

22. For a good summary of Groos's key propositions, see J. Mark Baldwin, 'Review of *Die Spiele der Tiere* [sic] by Karl Groos', *Science* 5, no. 113 (26 February 1897): pp. 347-52, from where these citations are taken.

23. Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, *Cézanne and Provence: The Painter in His Culture* (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 155-63.

24. 'Für die Entwicklung des Menschen ist das Spiel sicherlich nicht etwas Gleichgültiges, Zufälliges, Entbehrliches'. Julius Schaller, *Das Spiel und die Spiele: Ein Beitrag zur Psychologie und Pädagogik wie zum Verständnis des geselligen Lebens* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1861), p. 2; Moritz Lazarus, *Die Reize des Spiels* (Berlin: Ferdinand Dümmler, 1883).

25. Groos, *Play of Animals*, p. xviii.

26. 'As far as I can see, one could take seriously into consideration only a heteronomous goal, namely that of the escape from the sorrows, toils and pains of the

everyday in the stepping over into the world of art. I will come back to this. Suffice it for now to emphasise that play can fulfill exactly the same goal of self-liberation and is in this regard no different from aesthetic pleasure ... Because play and aesthetic pleasure are both intrinsic to their means, they also overlap in the following aspect of our sensing ourselves as free beings: they free us from our everyday existence and our everyday self'. Karl Groos, *Der aesthetische Genuss* (Giessen: J. Ricker'sche, 1902), pp. 13-24, here pp. 15, 22.

27. Walter Benjamin, 'Toys and Play: Marginal Notes on a Monumental Work', Review of Karl Gröber, *Kinderspielzeug aus alter Zeit* [1928], in Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (eds), *Selected Writings: Volume 2, 1927-1934* (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1999), pp. 117-21. On Benjamin and Groos, see Heinz Brüggemann, *Walter Benjamin über Spiel, Farbe und Phantasie* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007), pp. 73-8.

28. Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games* [1958], (trans.) Meyer Barash (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), pp. 6-7.

29. Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, pp. 5-6.

30. Compare Mary Louise Krumrine's analysis of the meanings of the number 'five' in The Card Players: 'Les Joueurs de cartes de Cézanne: Un jeu de la vie', in Françoise Cachin, Henri Loyrette and Stéphane Guégan (eds), *Cézanne aujourd'hui: Actes du colloque organisé par le musée d'Orsay, 29 et 30 novembre 1995* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1997), pp. 65-74.

31. T. J. Clark, 'At the Courtauld: Symptoms of Cézannia', *London Review of Books* 32, no. 23 (2 December 2010): p. 22.

32. See David Rosand, *Painting in Sixteenth-Century Venice: Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), p. 7. I thank Maria Loh for this reference.

33. See, among many other publications, Detlef Hoffmann, *The Playing Card: An Illustrated History* (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1973); David Parlett, *The Oxford Guide to Card Games* (Oxford and New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990). On the history of early playing cards, see especially Christiane Zangs and Hans Holländer (eds), 'Mit Glück und Verstand': *Zur Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte der Brett- und Kartenspiele, 15. bis 17. Jahrhundert*, exh. cat. (Rheydt: Museum Schloss Rheydt and Aachen: Thouet, 1994), pp. 31-6; Anne H. van Buren and Sheila Edmunds, 'Playing Cards and Manuscripts: Some Widely Disseminated Fifteenth-Century Model Sheets', *Art Bulletin* 56, no. 1 (March 1974): pp. 12-30; and Laura A. Smoller, 'Playing Cards and Popular Culture in Sixteenth-Century Nuremberg', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1986): pp. 183-214. I thank Larry Silver for these last two references.

34. See, for instance, Paul Eugène Bache, *Jacquemin Gringonneur, ou, l'invention des cartes à jouer* (Blidah: Tissot et Roche, 1846); William Andrew Chatto, *Facts and Speculations on the Origin and History of Playing Cards* (London: J. R. Smith, 1848); P. L. Jacob, *Curiosités de l'histoire des arts* (Paris: A. Delahays, 1858); and Romain Merlin, *Origine des cartes à jouer: Recherches nouvelles sur les naïbis, les tarots et sur les autres espèces de cartes* (Paris: Merlin, 1869).

35. Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer discovered that one of Cézanne's associates in Aix, Victor Leydet, was a vocal spokesperson for the local card-playing industry. See Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, *Cézanne and Provence*, pp. 210-5.

36. The most extensive publication on the history of such cards is Albert Field, *Transformation Playing Cards* (Stamford, CT: U.S. Games Systems Inc., 1987). See also Stuart R. Kaplan, *Play Your Cards! The Stuart and Marilyn R. Kaplan Playing Card Collection*, exh. cat. (Greenwich, CT: Bruce Museum, 1995-6), pp. 48-9; Catherine Perry Hargrave, *A History of Playing Cards and a Bibliography of Cards and Gaming* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1930), pp. 80, 148-51, 214-9, 338.

37. The cards were drawn by a certain 'Soltau' and engraved by 'Berger'. Friedrich Gentz, Jean Paul and Johann Heinrich Voss (eds), *Taschenbuch für 1801* (Braunschweig: F. Vieweg, 1801). A German literary newspaper reported at the time: 'Ausserdem verzierten dies Taschenbuch noch acht Kupfer zu Buttlers [sic] *Hudibras* auf Coeurkarten gezeichnet von Soltau, gestochen von Berger. Die Aufgabe, die Herzen auf den Coeurkarten in Gesichter zu verwandeln, war ein wenig schwerer, als aus einer Anzahl schwerer Boutsrimés ein Gedicht zu machen, ist aber hier mit eben so gefälliger als überraschender Kunst ausgeführt'. [Moreover, eight copper engravings of Buttlers's [sic] *Hudibras* adorn the pocket book, drawn by Soltau and engraved by Berger. The task to change the hearts of the cards into faces was a little more tricky than to turn a number of difficult *boutsrimés* into a poem, but it has here been executed with an artfulness as pleasant as it is surprising'.] *Allgemeine Literatur Zeitung* 4 (3 January 1801): column 27-8.

38. Paul Smith, '“Real Primitives”: Cézanne, Wittgenstein, and the Nature of Aesthetic Quality', in Jonathan Harris (ed.), *Value, Art, Politics: Criticism, Meaning and Interpretation after Postmodernism* (Liverpool: Liverpool Univ. Press, 2007), pp. 93-122; T. J. Clark, 'Freud's Cézanne', in Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1999), pp. 153-6.

39. The comparison between The Card Players and transformation decks was already suggested, if only briefly, by Joyce Medina, *Cézanne and Modernism: The Poetics of Painting* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1995), p. 170.

40. Paul Boiteau d'Ambly, *Cartes à jouer et la cartomanie* (Paris: L. Hachette, 1854); John Grand-Carteret, *Vieux papiers, vieilles images: Cartons d'un collectionneur* (Paris: A. Le Vasseur, 1896).

41. Field, *Transformation Playing Cards*, pp. 62-7.

42. 'The English, moreover, continued this specialty since, finding things everywhere predestined to become clubs, spades, diamonds and hearts: shawl, violin, fan, all kinds of ridiculous things, pocket books, shield, helmet, wrought iron, all of that would be transformed by them into a neatly indicated, exact order.' Grand-Carteret, *Vieux papiers*, p. 213.

43. Field, *Transformation Playing Cards*, pp. 19, 82, 88.

44. George Mauner, *Manet: The Still-Life Paintings*, exh. cat. (Baltimore: Walters Art Gallery and New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000), p. 23; and Paul Mantz, 'Les Oeuvres de Manet', *Le Temps* (16 January 1884), cited in Françoise Cachin and Charles S. Moffett (eds), *Manet, 1832-1883*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983), p. 246.

45. '[L'Estaque] — It's like a playing-card. Red roofs over the blue sea'. Paul Cézanne to Camille Pissarro, 2 July 1876, in Rewald, *Letters*, p. 146. See also Rewald (ed.), *Paul Cézanne: Correspondance* (Paris: Grasset, 1978), p. 152.

46. See Elizabeth Siegel (ed.), *Playing with Pictures: The Art of Victorian Photocollage*, exh. cat. (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago and New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2009).

47. Philipp Otto Runge, *Entwürfe zu Spielkarten, nach den wiederaufgefundenen Holzschnitten für Albert Köster, zum 7. November 1922 in Druck gegeben* (self-published by Anton Kippenberg, 1922), n.p.



GREENGROCER, BRICKLAYER OR SEER? SURREALIST CÉZANNE

GAVIN PARKINSON

Surrealism seems an obvious site for reflection on art, chance, game playing, and the sacred in the twentieth century. Unfortunately for the main theme of this collection of essays, the Surrealists' fascination with symbolist art, thought and writing, and their lesser-known favourable disposal towards the art of those labelled 'Post-Impressionists' such as Paul Gauguin, Georges Seurat, Vincent Van Gogh, and even to Pierre-Auguste Renoir — all of whom receive a favourable outing within Surrealism at some point — did not extend to the art of Cézanne. Why this was the case among Surrealist artists and writers is probably obvious but should be gone into briefly here for the historical record; more interesting is the single exception to the rule: the passage written by André Breton in 1936 for his book *L'Amour fou* (1937), which has hardly ever been commented upon. There Breton attempts to corral a number of Cézanne's paintings including *The Card Players* into a Surrealist paradigm, and since that paradigm could be partly summarised by the subthemes of this collection, it is worthwhile pondering here alongside the question: why Cézanne for Surrealism in 1936?

Surrealism's disdain for the Master of Aix is demonstrated loud and clear at two points in its long trajectory. In an essay on his friend André Derain published in the periodical *Littérature* early in 1921 whilst Dada was still functioning in Paris, Breton cautiously and sceptically (and optimistically, as it turned out) referred to Cézanne's glowing reputation as perhaps about to dim, and to his art as 'flattering like make up [la poudre de riz]'.¹ 'This man', he continued, 'who has captured the world's attention, was perhaps completely mistaken'.² As well as a pretty, quasi-Impressionist superficiality that we can read into this remark — Breton was still in the process of detaching himself from art loving mentors like Paul Valéry on whose walls were crowded '[b]eautiful Impressionist canvases'.³ whilst articulating a Dada stance that conceived of 'art only as a means of despairing' — Cézanne's mistake, it seems, was to rely too heavily on the senses, whereas 'Derain is not a subjectivist'.⁴

Breton's negative take on Cézanne had been hardened by the poet's on/off closeness in the first half of the 1920s to Francis Picabia, in the fabrication of whose *Still Lives* (1920) — complete with merrily wanking, cheerfully waving stuffed monkey — Breton apparently had a steering role (fig. 3.1).⁵ In 1922, Breton puckishly reported Picabia's remark by 'a member of the high Persian nobility' (one Surkhai Sardar) who thought Cézanne's apples, pears and lemons gave evidence of the 'mind of a greengrocer'.⁶ Also that year, in his state-of-play lecture introducing Picabia's exhibition at the Dalmau Gallery in Barcelona in November, Breton opened a parenthesis to state that the most important contemporary work — of Picabia, Pablo Picasso, Marcel Duchamp, Giorgio de Chirico, Man Ray and

Opposite:

Detail of plate 2.
Paul Cézanne, *Cardplayers*,
c.1890-2, oil on canvas,
The Barnes Foundation.



3.1
Francis Picabia, *Still Lives*,
1920, Dada object reproduced
in *Cannibale*, no. 1 (25 April
1920), original lost.

Max Ernst, which then stood between Cézanne and a not-quite evolved Surrealism — owed nothing to Cézanne himself (not even Picasso's, it seems):

it would be absurd to speak in their regard of Cézanne, about whom I personally could not care less and whose human attitudes [l'attitude humaine] and artistic ambitions, despite what his flatterers say, I have always considered imbecilic — almost as imbecilic as the current need to praise him to the skies⁷

Breton goes on to supplant the ubiquitous Cézanne, the painter's painter and arty technical master — beloved of or at least respected by the likes of Manet, Degas, Renoir and



3.2
Paul Cézanne, *House on the Hill*, 1904-6, oil on canvas,
National Gallery of Art,
Washington D.C., White
House Collection.

Pissaro (and most perceptively analysed early on, too, by the artists Émile Bernard and Maurice Denis) — with the artist's obscure nineteenth-century contemporary the Comte de Lautréamont (Isidore Ducasse). Picasso and the others had not even read Lautréamont's *Chants de Maldoror* (1869) at this stage, yet to that long-dead, little-known writer fell 'perhaps the greatest responsibility for the current state of affairs in poetry', according to Breton, who then makes a case for a visual art not of the senses but of the imagination as extrapolated from his avid reading of Lautréamont.⁸ This imagination is one of 'hallucinations and sensory disturbances in the shadows',⁹ and the Truth it seeks to uncover goes beyond the usual dualistic morality, displayed in an end product that 'no longer has a right or wrong side: good so nicely brings out evil'.¹⁰

As opposed to the art of rational construction (fig. 3.2) against which the success of Cézanne's work was endlessly gauged by its admirers and which was and is the indissociable outcome of an artistic practice borne by conscious awareness (whatever the debate that has raged since Bernard through Joachim Gasquet over whether the primary sensible substance of his practice was one of 'spontaneous finding or of controlled making'), Breton was at this stage advocating an art in which the emphasis was laid upon content at the expense of technique.¹¹ Automatism had still not been introduced into the visual arts in 1922, and at that time the work of de Chirico was thought of by the soon-to-be Surrealists as the main source of illumination for painting, as could be seen in Ernst's contemporary work. What Breton sought to inject into the visual arts as characteristic of the 'modern evolution' were those elements of modernism that, like Lautréamont's writings and those of Baudelaire and Rimbaud, would 'convey that debauchery was still the rule most applicable to the mind', and Cézanne's, of course, did nothing of the kind.¹²

Breton's early criticism might not have been honed by fully elaborated Surrealist theory (it precedes the foundational *Manifesto of Surrealism* of 1924), yet the limitation it already placed on the outwardly familiar pictorial language of Cézanne's landscapes, still-lives and nudes made a sufficiently significant prejudicial contribution to the collective idea of that

OUVREZ-VOUS ?

Puisqu'il advient que nous soyons visités en rêve par d'illustres personnages depuis longtemps disparus et qu'aussi bien une fiction persistante veut qu'un petit nombre d'autres — tels Isaac Laquedem, Nicolas Flamel, le comte de Saint-Germain — s'obstinent si bien à vivre qu'ils se montrent, par intervalles, au grand jour, ce n'est pas beaucoup forcer la pente du plausible d'imaginer que, par l'entrebâillement d'une porte, à la suite d'une sonnerie ou de coups frappés, nous nous trouvions en présence de tel « noble visiteur » (comme on dit « noble voyageur ») issu de notre imagerie. L'intérêt d'une telle spéculation est, abstraction faite de la stupeur où nous plongerait cette brusque reconnaissance — que nous identifions d'emblée l'arrivant ou qu'il lui faille se nommer — de précipiter en nous, à la seconde, les sentiments assez souvent complexes que nous pouvons lui porter. Les seules ressources sont, en effet, de faire entrer (avec plus ou moins d'enthousiasme) ou d'éconduire (avec plus ou moins de ménagements). Comme nous l'avons vérifié en commun, s'interroger à cet égard (pour avoir, il va sans dire, à se répondre sur-le-champ) introduit une nouvelle dimension dans les rapports que nous pouvons entretenir avec les figures du passé. On s'aperçoit très vite que des considérants d'ordre inhabituel tendent ici à primer tous les autres : c'est ainsi que les êtres dont la vie ne saurait être séparée de l'œuvre jouissent, sous le rapport de l'attraction, d'une manifeste supériorité sur les autres. Des remarques complémentaires s'imposeront à ceux qui tenteront l'expérience par eux-mêmes (il serait prématuré de les formuler après une confrontation jusqu'ici trop limitée et aussi trop sommaire : il eût fallu, au moins dans certains cas, préciser l'âge du visiteur au moment où il se présente, les conditions de solitude ou non-solitude qu'il se trouve affronter, l'heure du jour ou de la nuit qu'il a choisie, etc...). — A. B.

BALZAC : Oui, comme à un voisin (J.-L. B.). — Oui, eu égard à *Melmoth* (R.B.). — Non (chaos) (A.B.). — Non, assez de la vie de tous les jours (E.B.). — Non, le temps m'est trop mesuré... Je regrette (A.D.). — Oui, par ébahissement (G.G.). — Non, il n'a rien à ajouter (J.G.). — Oui, Paris et la Touraine (G.L.). — Oui, pour parler de certaines rues de Paris (W.P.). — Oui, Monseigneur (J.P.). — Oui, mais un peu à contre-cœur (B.P.). — Non, par manque d'intérêt (B.R.). — Non, en le regrettant un peu (J.S.). — Oui, avec une grande timidité (A.S.). — Oui (Parisien) (T.). — Non, je préfère ma rêverie (M.Z.).

BARBEY D'AUREVILLY : Non, pour répondre à son défi (J.-L. B.). — Oui, par curiosité (R.B.). — Oui, mais parce que difficile de faire autrement (A.B.). — Non (embarrassant) (E.B.). — Oui, pour sortir un peu de cette époque d'épiciers (A.D.). — Oui, par libéralité (G.G.). — Non, trop volumineux dans un couloir (J.G.). — Non, par provocation (G.L.). — Oui, pour le prier de lire les *Diaboliques* à haute voix (W.P.). — Non, à cause du choix entre la bouche du pistolet et le pied de la croix (B.P.). — Oui, mais l'épée au poing (J.P.). — Oui, sans joie (B.R.). — Oui (le scabreux) (J.S.). — Non, il me cacherait Hauteclair (A.S.). — Oui, les *Diaboliques* (T.). — Oui, sans grande curiosité (M.Z.).

BAUDELAIRE : Oui, avec passion (J.-L. B.). — Oui, non sans quelque trac (R.B.). — Oui, ému aux larmes (A.B.). — Oui, et de tout cœur ! (A.D.). — Oui, bouleversée (E.B.). — Oui, en vénération (G.G.). — Oui, sans hésitation (J.G.). — Oui, avec une immense attente inépuisée (G.L.). — Oui, pour l'examiner de près (S.H.). — Oui, en le saluant profondément (W.P.). — Oui, avec une intense satisfaction (B.P.). — Oui, que la porte vole en

éclats ! (J.P.). — Oui, au delà de l'émotion (B.R.). — Oui, en essayant de dissimuler mon émotion (J.S.). — Oui, tout à fait éblouie (A.S.). — Oui, avec affection (T.). — Oui, que je voie enfin le prisme de toutes les passions ! (M.Z.).

BETTINA : Oui, par faiblesse (J.-L. B.). — Non, la barbe ! (R.B.). — Non (crampon) (A.B.). — Non, trop habile pour moi (E.B.). — Oui, avec grand plaisir (A.D.). — Non (bel esprit) (G.G.). — Oui, avec enthousiasme (J.G.). — Oui, pour la corriger (G.L.). — Non, je crains qu'elle ne laisse rien à deviner (W.P.). — Non, bas-bleu (B.P.). — Non, merci (J.P.). — Oui (la femme-enfant) (J.S.). — Oui, c'est une curiosité (A.S.).

BRISSET : Oui, m'attendant au pire (J.-L. B.). — Oui, (Suite page 11.)

SIMON HANTAI

A mi-chemin entre le fossile sorti de sa gangue et l'oiseau de feu qu'il poursuit, Simon Hantai a retracé, pour sa propre édification, toute la démarche surréaliste en art. Avec lui, les matériaux les plus indignes (un os, une arête de poisson, un fragment de journal) acquièrent un éclat qui les révèle à eux-mêmes et à nos yeux. La métamorphose s'opère soudain sur chaque élément et dans ses parties les plus infimes. Un os devient une aile battante, un fragment de journal un oeil qui interroge ou vous menace : « Que viens-tu faire ici ? Es-tu des miens ? Un ami ? Sinon, passe ton chemin avant que, des couleurs qui te composent, je peigne sur ton os iliaque la vie que tu aurais dû mener. »

Simon Hantai est né en 1922, à Bica (Hongrie). Il a suivi pendant six ans les cours de l'école des Beaux-Arts de Budapest. Arrivé à Paris en 1949, il a exposé pour la première fois à L'Étoile scellée, en février 1953.

HASARD ET TRADITION

Il y a, au Musée Carnavalet, un portrait de René Crevel. Si l'on prend un certain recul et que l'on gravit les quelques marches de l'escalier qui lui fait face, le coup d'œil embrasse à la fois le tableau et les deux bustes de l'étage supérieur situés à égale distance de part et d'autre, l'un de Lepelletier de Saint-Fargeau, l'autre de Marat.

LES LOUPS ENTRE EUX

Engagez-vous, rengagez-vous dans l'objection de conscience. C'est ce à quoi nous invite l'éditorialiste anonyme du Figaro (30 septembre). Le sous-entendu menaçant de cette proposition est à peine dissimulé : si l'adhésion à une secte de crétinisés du genre « témoins de Jéhovah » n'est pas tout à fait obligatoire, il va de soi qu'aux termes du statut qui devrait « assouplir » l'actuelle législation militaire, l'objeteur de conscience figurera dans un service civil aussi long et aussi dangereux que l'autre. « Infirmer-parachutiste » en cas de conflit, il aura la satisfaction de mourir entre les feux croisés, l'âme sans tache, et les curés pacifistes des armées adverses béniront du même goupillon son cadavre d'imbécile, roulé dans les plis confondus des torchons nationaux. — G. L.

artist in Surrealism that he could subsequently be dismissed by those in Surrealist circles with little more than an eye-rolling groan, which would, moreover, be immediately understood by all.

That attitude can be visited over thirty years later, when Cézanne received such a reception on the threshold of Surrealism. Introduced in 1953 in the first number of their journal *Médium*, the Surrealist 'precursor' game 'Ouvrez-vous?' asks participants if and why they would open the door when visited in a dream by this or that deceased 'illustrious individual' (fig. 3.3).¹³ As a potential guest among a party of thirty-four that leans towards writers, artists and revolutionaries more or less established in the pre-Surrealist canon such as Baudelaire, Freud, Gauguin, Goethe, Lenin, Nietzsche, Poe, Robespierre and Van Gogh, the odds already looked stacked against Cézanne, and not surprisingly the illustrious artist was left standing on the doorstep more often than any other figure (receiving fifteen 'Nons' and only two reluctant 'Ouis', even fewer than Balzac, bottom with Verlaine).¹⁴ As corollaries in a game demanding speed and brevity (and, because of that, pith), the Surrealists' reasons for cold-shouldering the artist are often casually and amusingly reprehensible (Jean Schuster: 'No, because I hate apples'; Anne Seghers: 'No, because I like apples'), demonstrating an ingrained predisposition fortified over the previous thirty years as much as anything else.¹⁵

This longstanding bias was only confirmed in the pages of the major survey *L'Art magique*, on which Breton was beginning preparation at that time, though it would only be completed in 1957. Whilst that book fully heralds the arrival of Gauguin into the pantheon of pre-Surrealists, Cézanne is mentioned only in passing alongside a restatement of the dismissive 1922 'greengrocer' phrase, neatly doubling Surrealism's attitude in this later stage back onto that held in its earliest days, leaving no room for the Master of Aix in the fold.¹⁶

As perhaps shown in Breton's dismissal of the artist in the 1920s, which is robust yet lightly shaded with a youthful hesitation, Cézanne had long since reached a pre-eminent position among painters and writers on art by the time Surrealism started to bud in the period after the First World War, for reasons that would in no way correspond with the movement's own idea of what painting should aspire towards. The young Surrealists' impatience would have been compounded by the fact that Cézanne's reputation must have seemed set in stone to their generation: Breton was born a few weeks after Cézanne achieved major recognition with his first solo exhibition at Ambroise Vollard's in 1895 at the age of fifty-six, and Surrealism's future leader would have suffered into early adulthood the prodigious reverberations of Bernard's 1904 article on Cézanne's artistic methods and technical procedures, especially celebrated after it was revised and extended in 1907 for the *Mercure de France* (where Breton's mentor Apollinaire also published) in the month following the publication of Maurice Denis's equally laudatory piece in *L'Occident*, and known of the artist's rise to unquestioned greatness with the two Cézanne retrospectives at the Salon d'Automne in those years.¹⁷ By the time Breton began to look at art with a critical eye in 1913, Cézanne must have seemed as colossal and enduring as Mont Sainte

Opposite:

3.3
Page from *Médium: Communication Surréaliste*, no. 1, November 1953.

Victoire itself, with the publication of the memoirs of Bernard and Vollard on either side of that year doing their best to bring the deceased artist back to life.¹⁸

If Cézanne had by then taken posthumous paternal ownership of the keys of painting to the generation of Matisse, Picasso and Braque that preceded Surrealism, his attitude towards his craft as ‘painting for its own sake’ (as Bernard had understood it in his earliest reflections on the artist) would never find any advocates among the Surrealists.¹⁹ As Breton had set it out early on in his 1920 essay on Lautréamont’s *Maldoror*, they believed that painting as much as poetry could not be reduced to a frisson that ended at the senses but ‘must lead somewhere’, preferably all the way down to the unconscious:

It would ... be a mistake to consider art an end in itself. The doctrine of ‘art for art’s sake’ is as reasonable as a doctrine of ‘life for art’s sake’ is, to my mind, insane. We now know that poetry must lead somewhere. On this certainty rests, for example, our passionate interest in Rimbaud.²⁰

In spite of its temporary, emphatic, more commercial and populist turn towards the visual arts in the 1930s and 1940s — with its big international art exhibitions, Breton’s gallery Gradiva, and the high-quality periodical *Minotaure* — Surrealism held to this idea of art’s purpose as a means of sounding the self and its others in the 1950s at the time that Roger Fry’s and Clive Bell’s austere 1920s formalist interpretation of Cézanne as reducer and designer was extending into Clement Greenberg’s 1950s reading of the artist. As we know, Cézanne was combatively confirmed by Greenberg at the beginning of that decade as the artist of ‘sensation’, ‘surface pattern’, and ‘two-dimensional solidity’, ‘[c]ommitted ... to the motif in nature in all its givenness’, and said from the late 1870s to have ‘cover[ed] his canvases with a mosaic of brushstrokes whose net effect was to call attention to the physical picture plane’, as though he were already laying the paving stones of the flat and even path leading to abstract expressionism.²¹

It has been stated that the Surrealists scorned Cézanne as a wealthy, Catholic, conservative bourgeois, which could be true, and it might be argued that Cézanne’s frequently touted ‘classicism’ would also have turned them off.²² Yet they had their pick of many versions of the artist towards which they would have been more conducive: the ‘romantic’ early Cézanne, almost as enigmatic as Lautréamont; the symbolist Cézanne of the ‘rétines malades’ admired briefly and presciently by the exemplary pre-Surrealist Joris-Karl Huysmans, whose word they revered on Gustave Moreau;²³ the rustic regionalist or Baudelairean ‘primitive’, described by Julius Meier-Graefe as drawing with ‘the hands of a child’;²⁴ or the Cézanne in possession of ‘l’âme ardente et naïve des artistes du Moyen Age’, proposed by Georges Rivière at the very time Breton was holding forth on the artist’s ‘overestimation’.²⁵ However, it was, in fact, fundamentally the emphasis laid by the artist on his *motif* out in nature and that further stress placed by his admirers and critics on what Greenberg

in his other essay on the artist called Cézanne’s ‘need to enhance the unity and decorative force of the surface design [so] that he let himself sacrifice the realism of the illusion to it’ that caused them to reject his art in these two periods.²⁶ Crucial to Surrealism, content in Cézanne’s art had been denied by generations of commentary on the artist and it was only as the Surrealists closed the door on him one more time in the early fifties that were heard the first murmurings of what would in the next decade be the full-blown psychoanalytic art writing of Meyer Schapiro, in that critic’s detection in Cézanne’s art of ‘the burden of repressed emotion in this shy and anguished, powerful spirit’.²⁷

In 1936, at the midway point of this thirty-year gap between Breton’s youthful vilification of Cézanne and the confirmation it received from the participants of ‘Ouvrez-vous?’ in 1953, a flurry of Cézanne-based activity took place within Surrealism. This can be explained partly by Surrealism’s greater closeness to the world of art museums and exhibitions in that decade, which I touched on above, and partly because this thirtieth anniversary of his death coincided with an important period of research and curatorship on Cézanne. In that year, the Cézanne industry moved up a notch with the publication of Lionello Venturi’s catalogue raisonné, *Cézanne: son art — son oeuvre*, the most thorough study to date of the artist’s paintings and the first sustained attempt to rationalize the development of his art using the language of art history.²⁸ To accompany this, Venturi contributed an essay on Cézanne’s last years to the Surrealist-dominated *Minotaure* later that year;²⁹ since Vollard’s ‘Souvenirs sur Cézanne’ had appeared in *Minotaure* in the previous year, we can assume that these essays were accepted by the review over the complaints of most of the Surrealists on the editorial board, or that their attitude towards the artist was undergoing a temporary thaw.³⁰ This was also the year of the first of John Rewald’s many contributions to the scholarship on Cézanne, which would have a transformative effect on the understanding of the artist, even as Rewald himself wrote at the time that Venturi’s book would inaugurate ‘une nouvelle ère des recherches cézanniennes’ and would be ‘à la base de toutes les publications sur Cézanne’.³¹

In 1935, the recently disaffected Surrealist Roger Caillois had attempted to delineate two recent traditions in painting, one of which ran from Cézanne to Picasso, which he thought was an ‘effort de transformation d’un objet donné’, whilst the other went from Gustave Moreau to Salvador Dalí, viewed by Caillois as ‘peinture réaliste d’un sujet imaginaire’.³² In saying this, Caillois ignored the Surrealist lineage long since given to Picasso by Breton whilst acknowledging the by-then well-established importance given the imagination by Surrealism, its claim to a tradition, and the main exponent of Surrealist ‘realism’, Dalí. In the following year, Herbert Read offered an alternative, making a half-hearted attempt to draw Cézanne into a broad Surrealist paradigm by acknowledging ‘the imaginative range of his genius’, whilst complaining that ‘such an art is deceptive if it does not extend our sensibility on more than a sensational level’. ‘Cézanne himself seemed to realize this’, he continued, ‘and was not satisfied with his apples’.³³

If Read went easy on Cézanne, merely patronising him on the basis that he got the wrong balance between the senses and the imagination, other Surrealists saw no saving grace in his work. Dalí himself had already pitched in, suggesting in a 1933 letter to Breton the idea of a catalogue preface to his forthcoming exhibition that began with the question: '[d]o you remember a very filthy painter who called himself Cézanne?'³⁴ As part of an increasingly active programme to extend Surrealism historically and geographically beyond the boundaries of the Paris group, Dalí returned to the theme in 1936 in the course of an essay on Pre-Raphaelite women carried by the previous number of *Minotaure* to the one in which Venturi's essay appeared, in which he ridiculed Cézanne's contemplative 'Platonic' apple.³⁵ Arguing for the superiority of the harder-edged 'realist' art of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his friends over the so-called 'distortion' of Cézanne's art that had been lauded by Bell the previous decade, the crab-like, analogical movement of Dalí's essay travelling back and forth between the two artists gathers in a polemic that transforms Cézanne from a greengrocer into a builder:

If we succinctly consider Pre-Raphaelitism from the viewpoint of 'general morphology', taking into account Édouard Monod-Herzen's amazing study, we will see that its aspirations are diametrically opposed to those of Cézanne ... From the morphological viewpoint, Cézanne appears to us as a kind of Platonic bricklayer who is satisfied with a programme consisting of the straight line, circle, and regular forms in general, and who disregards the geodesic curve, which, as we know, constitutes in some respects the shortest distance from one point to another. Cézanne's apple tends to have the same fundamental structure as that of the skeleton of siliceous sponges, which on the whole is none other than the rectilinear and orthogonal scaffolding of our bricklayers, in which one discovers with amazement numerous spicules that materially realize the 'trirectangular dihedron' that is so familiar to geometers. I am saying that Cézanne's apple tends to the orthogonal structure, because in reality, in the case of the apple, this structure is dented, deformed and denatured by the kind of 'impatience' that led Cézanne to so many unhappy results.³⁶

Dalí's paranoiac-critical mode of interpretation demanded the annexation of spontaneous, irrational associations experienced by the viewer into the reading of the phenomena under observation — here, Cézanne's apples. By means of this method, his sideways recollection of the image that accompanied Monod-Herzen's discussion of the internal structure of sponges and amoeboid protozoa (fig. 3.4), where they are compared to 'un échafaudage de nos maçons, rectiligne et orthogonale', was allowed space in his appraisal of Cézanne, as was Monod-Herzen's text, which he decanted more or less completely into his own.³⁷ In doing this, Dalí's text accidentally aligned with the earlier language of some of Cézanne

Opposite:

3.4
Page from Édouard
Monod-Herzen, *Principes
de Morphologie Générale*,
Paris, 1927.

FORMES DÉFINIES.

3

La disposition trirectangle, ou cubique, associée ou non avec une sphère, se retrouve dans le squelette de quantité de Radiolaires⁽¹⁾. Dans la figure 2 (*Nassellaria*), nous avons une sphère à trois grands cercles orthogonaux; dans la figure 3 (*Spumellaria*), une sphère à

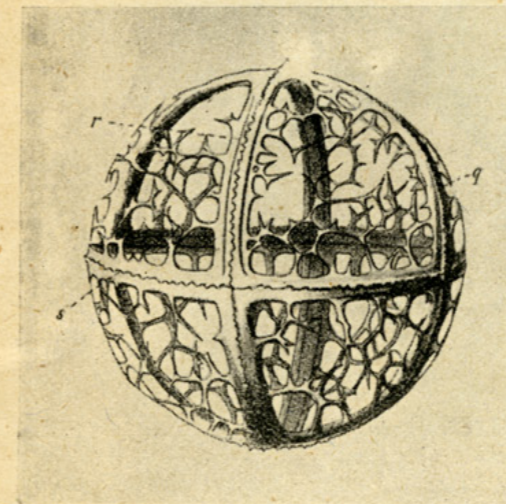


Fig. 2. — Squelette de radiolaire
(*Trissocylus sphaeridium*)
(Haeckel).

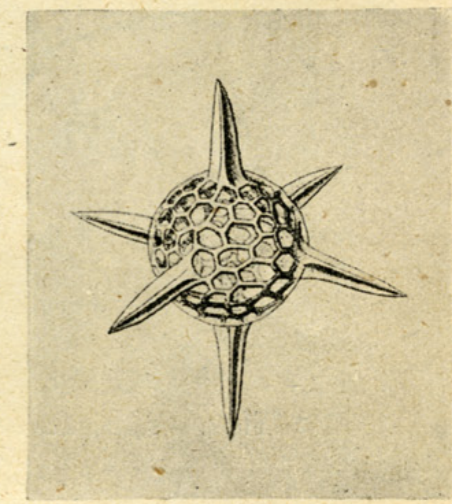


Fig. 3. — Squelette de radiolaire
(*Hexastylus triaxonius*)
(Haeckel).

trois axes rectangulaires; et dans la figure 4 (*Phæodaria*), un octaèdre régulier, avec ses axes: 8 faces égales, triangles équilatéraux.

Ce dernier *Phæodarié* appartient à la famille des *Circoporides*, dont le corps principal, c'est-à-dire moins les prolongements axiaux, est un polyèdre inscriptible dans une sphère.

Ce polyèdre peut être régulier, circonstance intéressante, car elle ne se présente pas souvent dans la nature.

Sont rares surtout: le dodécaèdre régulier, 12 faces égales, pentagones réguliers; et l'icosaèdre régulier, 20 faces égales, triangles équilatéraux. Le premier est donné par la *Circorrhagma dodecahedra* (fig. 5); et le second par la *Circogonia icosahedra* (fig. 6).

(1) Cf. les beaux travaux de HAECKEL: *Monographie der Radiolarien*; *Generelle Morphologie*; etc.



3.5
Dante Gabriel Rossetti,
Lady Lilith, 1863, oil on
canvas, Delaware
Art Museum.

admirers, such as that of Théodore Duret thirty years before (recently retold by Richard Shiff), which reluctantly used the same metaphor: '[o]n peut aller jusqu'à dire que, dans certain cas, il maçonait son tableau',³⁸ whilst the double metaphor allowed by the mosaic appearance of Cézanne's pictures, on the one hand, and the thick paint applied to the canvas (like cement troweled onto bricks) on the other, led to the assessment in Julius Meier-Graefe's equally favourable publication in which the artist is celebrated as a 'barbaric mason', whose paintings 'looked like walls rather than pictures'.³⁹

But it was not only the painterly pattern-making of Cézanne's cerebral geometricity that bothered Dalí (though like a clumsy, overworked bricklayer, he even messed that up), and which the Surrealist contrasted with the sharply contoured, smoothly painted (more 'Dalinian', in short) art of the Pre-Raphaelites, redolent, for him, of the geodesic curve described by Monod-Herzen's book.⁴⁰ He also objected to the lack of volume in his painting, dictated by Cézanne's 'accidental' ambition, in the later words of Greenberg, to 'give the picture surface its due as a physical entity'.⁴¹ Dalí drew a distinction between that and the corporeal presence and sensuous heft of the massy, tightly clothed Pre-Raphaelite women (appreciating them beyond any mere narrative), which he spoke of thrillingly as 'terrifying', giving onto an erotics that he situated on 'the Adam's apples of Rossetti's luminous beauties' (fig. 3.5).⁴²

This was the period of Surrealism's and, specifically, Dalí's most intense attack on abstract art, demonstrating that Dalí's and Greenberg's remarks emerge from competing attitudes towards abstraction, but a shared idea of the causal role played in its rise by Cézanne.⁴³ And even if we go only some way (not all the way) along with Greenberg's later observation that '[l]oyalty to his sensations' led Cézanne into 'disregarding the texture, the smoothness and roughness, hardness and softness, the tactile feel of objects, and seeing colour exclusively as a determinant of spatial position',⁴⁴ we can still easily comprehend Dalí's 'hypermaterialist' contrast of that artist's 'inedible' apples with the too-real 'carnal concretions of excessively ideal women, these feverish and panting materializations', producing 'the same effect of terror and unequivocal alluring repugnance [sic] as that of the soft belly of a butterfly seen between the luminescences of its wings'.⁴⁵

We can also take in just how opposed in its preference such psychoanalytically inflected, Surrealist pictorial analysis was to the high modernism to come and why Greenberg, perfectly aware of Dalí's one-of-a-kind contributions to art criticism, would himself make a comparison between Pre-Raphaelitism and Surrealism in which neither came out well, in an essay written a few years later that refused to take Dalí seriously.⁴⁶ Fascinated by the often curvaceous structures of art nouveau, Dalí had already declared himself first artist of the *époque de mou* in *Minotaure* in 1934, so what he saw as the erasure of the supple erotic body at the expense of the physicality of medium in Cézanne's painting did little to recommend itself to his innovative interpretations, which were as heavily directed by psychoanalytic theory in their form as in their content.⁴⁷ Indeed, the point is that here are two different methods of writing on art — not two different kinds of art — that turn on interpretation by means of the psychoanalytic body, on the one hand, and visual sensation on the other. Therefore, the question Dalí inadvertently raised was: might the interpretation of Cézanne, too, be turned from visual sensation and go all the way down to the unconscious?

Still in the year 1936, Breton was pulling together the texts that would soon be published as his third major book *L'Amour fou*. The main purpose of Breton's poetic, theoretical tract is to give a Surrealist account of the ways in which love, as the most powerful concrete representative of unconscious desire, can be the luminous guide by which people can comprehend the partly conscious and partly unconscious motivations that lie behind everyday events, relationships, behaviour, acts, decisions, and coincidences. It maintains that this is love felt in its most vibrant state, exceeding the common, socially and psychologically delimited version of love, and if the signposts this love creates are followed, it can give the same remarkable access to ways of understanding the world and the mind as dreams. The two best-known anecdotes in *L'Amour fou* are meant to illustrate this.

In the third section of the book, Breton details a visit he made with Alberto Giacometti to the flea market at Saint-Ouen in the north of Paris, where both men buy objects to which they are powerfully attracted: a large wooden spoon with a small shoe at the end of the handle in Breton's case; a metal, slatted mask for the eyes and nose in Giacometti's. Breton

interprets them in the way Freud had treated dreams, as condensed, manifest material, the latencies of which bespoke, in both cases, inner erotic necessity. The discovery of the two objects was determined, he maintained, by unconscious wishes on the part of the poet and the sculptor to address and overcome obstacles related to love.⁴⁸ The second, equally well-known anecdote appears in the fourth section of *L'Amour fou* and is that of Breton's first encounter, and euphoric, nocturnal stroll in Paris with his future wife Jacqueline Lamba on 29 May 1934, which was followed a few days later by his rediscovery of his 1923 poem 'Sunflower', which he re-read as a point-by-point precognitive account of the events of that evening.⁴⁹

Breton drew attention to these two incidents in *L'Amour fou* to argue that the strength of feeling associated with love heightens the events, relationships, and so on that surround it, making them perfect analytical material for fathoming the capricious orbits of the mind. Like much of Breton's work, the whole book is in an attempt to salvage predestination as a material possibility that can be understood as the province of poetry not mere superstition, and corroborated through events heightened by love by means of methods and a language developed from psychoanalysis.

The book was brought together from a set of essays written (and some of them published) over a four-year period. It was some way into the publication process when Breton decided to add a further anecdote relating a recent event as section six, which has been barely discussed in the scholarship on Surrealism.⁵⁰ Concerned with temporary discord in love, 'a banal theme of popular songs' as he puts it, this section of *L'Amour fou* is set in Lorient in Brittany where Breton's parent's lived, and where Breton is holidaying as usual in the summer of 1936. On the afternoon of 20 July, a bus sets him and his wife Jacqueline Lamba down at the beach location of Le Fort-Bloqué on the outskirts of the town. The weather is poor, the landscape is uninteresting, the married pair are bored, and when they set off walking in search of some signs of life they are directed towards Le Pouldu, ten kilometres away, made famous by Gauguin's time there in the late 1889 (but not enough for Breton to mention the artist). As they skirt the monotonous shoreline, Breton's boredom turns to irritation and he begins uncharacteristically pelting seagulls with stones. The stilted conversation of the fed up couple turns to sullen silence as they approach a building:

Would this day never end! The presence of an apparently uninhabited house a hundred metres along on the right added to the absurd and unjustifiable nature of our walking along in a setting like this. This house, recently built, had nothing to compensate the watching eye for its isolation. It opened out on a rather large enclosure stretching down to the sea and bordered, it seemed to me, by a metallic trellis, which, given the prodigious avarice of the land in such a place, had a lugubrious effect on me, without my stopping to analyze it.⁵¹

Some minor squabbling with Lamba takes place as their grim promenade progresses — so dissimilar to the euphoric stroll of the 'Night of the Sunflower' recorded in the earlier

section of *L'Amour fou*, to which it is meant to run parallel as the coarse underside of the harmonious aspect of love. Breton feels a 'panicked desire to turn back on my steps' as he crosses a stream in that terrain, believing it is getting too late to reach their destination; then the holiday reaches its nadir as the unhappy couple separate to walk around either side of a small fort, also abandoned.⁵² Soon after, the barren, deserted landscape recedes, they reach an attractive area of beach, and good contact is resumed. Refusing to accept anything so banal as ordinary discord between individuals, Breton insists of those moments, 'we could only have been under the sway of some delirium'.⁵³

That hypothesis is verified as far as he is concerned when Breton recounts the last few miserable hours to his parents back at their house, at which point his father intervenes to remind him that the empty house they passed had been that of Michel Henriot, which lay at the centre of the notorious 'drame du loch' ('affair of the loch') (fig. 3.6).⁵⁴ Breton instantly recalls the affair because the trial had been headline news in the local papers the previous summer:

the whole criminal case reconstituted itself under my eyes, one of the most singular, the most picturesque cases imaginable. It had indeed in its time occasioned much discussion ... the exterior appearance of this house, even with the halo I had found myself attributing to it, is so everyday that you could not possibly recognize it from the pictures published in the papers.⁵⁵

The crime and trial of Michel Henriot were indeed reported in detail in the newspapers (fig. 3.7). He was the son of the local public prosecutor and initially suggested to the police that the murder of his wife, Georgette Deglave, on 8 May 1934 by shots from a hunting rifle, had been carried out in his absence by a homeless drifter. Suspicion fell upon Henriot when it was discovered that he had taken out a life insurance on her to the tune of 800,000 francs should she die before him. Following his confession (in which he claimed the motivation for the murder was not greed but his wife consistently refusing him sex), it came out at the trial of 27 June – 1 July 1935 that the marriage of the two was not founded on love but was the outcome of the parents' desire to bring together two fortunes. Letters were read out in court that had been sent by the unfortunate Deglave to her sister Marie, recording Henriot's physical abuse of her and cruelty towards the silver foxes he reared, though these had no effect whatsoever on her relatives and failed to save Georgette's life: '[a] lovely testimony in honour of the bourgeois family', concludes Breton.⁵⁶

All of this sets up Breton's argument that the temporary disenchantment between himself and Lamba was caused by the geographical locale in which these events took place. Henriot's habit of shooting at seagulls for pleasure, reported in the press, was revisited in Breton's own impatient behaviour of that day; the funeral procession of Georgette attended by most of the townspeople of Lorient (fig. 3.8) had at first followed the same lugubrious path as that taken by Breton and Lamba where they first fell into frustrated silence; the acrimonious, blighted liaison in that isolated house built by Henriot after his marriage de-

Following page, left to right:

3.6
L'Ouest-Éclair, report of the 'affair of the loch', 28 June 1935.

3.7
Dans La Région, report of the 'affair of the loch', 29 June 1935.

3.8
L'Ouest-Éclair, report of the 'affair of the loch', 12 May 1934.

LE DRAME DU LOCH
Michel Henriot
l'assassin de sa femme
devant les Assises



MICHEL HENRIOT, DEBOUT, ECOULE L'ACTE D'ACCUSATION...

PARIS, 28 juin. — Comme suite au vote de la proposition de résolution de M. Bracke l'invitant à rapporter un projet de représentation proportionnelle, la Commission du suffrage universel s'est réunie, ce matin, pour désigner un rapporteur. M. Bracke a défendu sa proposition qui a été également soutenue par M. Bédouin.

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La Commission de la Chambre tente à nouveau d'escamoter la R. P.

M. Mistler, candidat des adversaires de la réforme, est élu rapporteur par 17 voix contre 8 à M. Bracke

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LE PROCÈS DE VANNES

Michel Henriot n'est pas un dément dit l'expert psychiâtre

MAIS SA RESPONSABILITÉ EST ATTÉNUÉE. AJOUTE-T-IL



MICHEL HENRIOT à son banc

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l'Ouest-Eclair

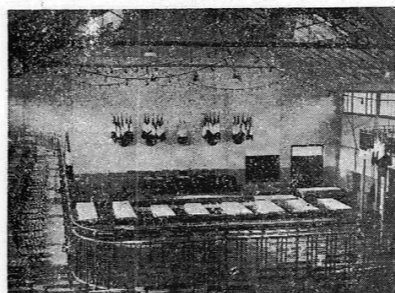
DIRECTEUR POLITIQUE FONDATEUR 1899-1931 Emmanuel DESGREES DU LOU JOURNAL REPUBLICAIN DU MATIN 30e Année. - N° 13.701

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Le congrès radical-socialiste s'est ouvert à Clermont-Ferrand

Un premier incident met aux prises M. Herriot et le clan des « jeunes radicaux » qui protestent contre l'Union nationale

« Que ceux qui veulent m'attaquer m'attaquent en face », déclare le président du parti qui promet de s'expliquer



LA SALLE DU CONGRÈS A LA MAISON DU PEUPLE

CLERMONT-FERRAND, 11 mai. — Dès 9 heures, une grande animation règne aux abords de la Maison du Peuple où doit se tenir le congrès radical.

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PROFESSEURS DE VERTU

PARIS, 11 mai. — La déconfiture de la Banque des Coopératives, d'inspiration et de direction socialisées, devant inciter à un peu de modération les professeurs de vertu qui siègent à la S.F.I.O.

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LA TRAGÉDIE DU LOCH

MICHEL HENRIOT AVOUE avoir assassiné sa femme



LES OBSEQUES DE Mlle HENRIOT A L'ÉGLISE DE GUIDEL

LOCH, 11 mai. — Jamais, sans doute, dans les tragédies modernes de la rubrique, si fréquente malheureusement, des assassinats, des meurtres et des crimes dus à la passion, à la cupidité ou à la vengeance, on ne s'est trouvé devant un événement aussi terrible. Un mort est sur toutes les lèvres.

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graded Breton and Lamba's loving relationship when they drew near to it; and the ground between the 'villa of the Loch' and the small fort, where it was reported the Henriots had set up temporary home until building on the villa was completed, was for Breton 'that afternoon such an exceptional place of disgrace'.⁵⁷ Although Breton reserves judgement as to whether the bleak atmosphere of the area was determined by the murder carried out by Henriot, or whether that fatal incident was itself the outcome of a locale previously saturated for some reason and in some way with malevolence, he is in no doubt that the disturbance that entered into the love between himself and his wife was caused by a malicious frequency generated by the history of that part of Lorient, which the couple had innocently and accidentally tuned into that unhappy day, no matter, he writes, 'how medieval such a way of seeing, in the eyes of certain positivistic minds, may seem'.⁵⁸

Now, in between Breton's first mention of the Henriot affair in *L'Amour fou* and his subsequent detailed report of the crime and its aftermath in the book, comes a sudden and perplexing digression given over to a sympathetic assessment of the painting of Cézanne, an artist usually thought of as reviled by the Surrealists for reasons to do with craft, as we have seen, to which Breton alludes at the outset of his aside:

Here I open a parenthesis to declare that contrary to the current interpretation, I think Cézanne is not above all a painter of apples, but the painter of *The House of the Hanged Man* (*La Maison du pendu*). I insist that the technical preoccupations, which everyone starts to talk about as soon as it is a question of Cézanne, make us too systematically forget the concern he showed, on several occasions, to treat those subjects having a *halo* [ces sujets à halo] from *Murder of 1870*, which bears witness to this concern with evidence, up to the *Players of 1892*, around which there floats a half-tragic, half-guignolesque menace in every point resembling the one pictured in the card game of Chaplin's film *A Dog's Life*, without forgetting the *Young Man before a Skull of 1890*, in its apparent conception of an ultra-conventional romanticism, but in its execution extending far beyond this romanticism: the metaphysical unease falls on the painting *through the pleats of the curtain*.⁵⁹

Breton joins the exactly contemporary reinterpretation of Cézanne close to the Surrealist group here and although he does not mention it, he must have had in mind Dalí's recent broadside against Cézanne's architectural apples because it had appeared only two months earlier in *Minotaure*. Still active in Surrealism, Dalí had been pushed to the outer circle of the group over the preceding two years due to his fascination with Hitler and somewhat ill-judged rendering of Lenin in his paintings (as far as Breton and his friends were concerned), all of which no doubt helped spur Breton's alternative reading in this digression. And by reminding him of the painting by Cézanne in which, apparently, another death had



taken place, what Breton saw as the 'halo' surrounding the former home of Michel Henriot and his wife and the source of his recent tense and uncanny experience, filtered through reflections on violence and chance in a rural setting, nudged him further into rethinking Cézanne within the larger concerns of the Surrealists, and inserting these thoughts self-consciously into his book in the most abrupt manner as a kind of textual *aperçu*.⁶⁰ But in Breton's compressed reading (covering only just over a page) these are implied rather than stated outright, and we can draw these out here in relation to the main concerns of *L'Amour fou*, and view them in the ways in which they connect to the experience in Lorient that he describes.

In fact, as Marguerite Bonnet pointed out, the painting by Cézanne that Breton reproduces in *L'Amour fou* is not commonly known under the title *The House of the Hanged Man* but as the less evocative (though not much less relevant to his anecdote) *The Abandoned House* (fig. 3.9).⁶¹ Although it is not one of Cézanne's best known paintings, it is certain that *The Abandoned House*, reproduced in all subsequent editions of *L'Amour fou*, is the painting Breton had in mind, because this is the work he describes slightly further along:

The House of the Hanged Man, in particular, has always seemed to me very singularly placed on the canvas of 1885 [sic], placed so as to render an ac-

3.9 Paul Cézanne, *The Abandoned House*, 1878-9, oil on canvas, Private collection.

count of something else entirely than its exterior aspect as a house, at least to present it under its most suspect angle: the horizontal black patch above the window, the crumbling, towards the left, of the wall on the first level. It is not a matter of anecdote, here: it is a question, within painting for example, of the necessity of expressing the relationship which cannot fail to exist between the fall of a human body, a cord strung around its neck, into emptiness, and the place itself where this drama has come to pass, a place which it is, moreover, human nature to come and inspect. Consciousness of this relation for Cézanne suffices to explain to me why he pushed back the building on the right in such a way as to hide it in part and, consequently, to make it appear *higher*. I willingly admit that, because of his particular aptitude to perceive these halos and to concentrate his attention on them, Cézanne was led to study them in their immediacy, considering them in their most elementary structure.⁶²

The much better-known, entirely dissimilar painting by Cézanne bearing the title *The House of the Hanged Man*, in Auvers-sur-Oise (fig. 3.10) is dated c.1873 by John Rewald, whilst *The Abandoned House* reproduced in *L'Amour fou* is dated by Rewald 1878–9. Right painting, wrong title, wrong date; the house in this canvas prioritised by Breton to demonstrate his thesis that Cézanne had the sensitivity and insight of a seer, a property long claimed by Surrealist poets and painters such as Breton himself, Victor Brauner, Max Ernst, and André Masson, supposedly finely tuned to the disjointed language of the unconscious (or ‘mouth of shadows’ as Breton termed it after Victor Hugo), had nothing to do with hanged men and might have had no sinister aspect at all for all we know: the ‘halo’ reading is Breton’s of this painting, not Cézanne’s of his *motif*.⁶³

What is more perplexing about Breton’s slip on the title and its extension into his interpretation of the painting — even if it does not reach the same proportions as Freud’s considerably more repercussive gaffe in his essay on Leonardo da Vinci⁶⁴ — is that he must have known the heavily textured *House of the Hanged Man* because in the 1930s it usually hung in the Louvre (it is now in the Musée d’Orsay); more so, because at the moment he was in Lorient with Lamba and as he wrote up their ‘villa of the Loch’ experience for inclusion in *L'Amour fou* (between 28 August and 1 September), the painting was on display under its own correct title at the Orangerie in the large 1936 Cézanne retrospective that ran from May till October (correctly dated there 1873).⁶⁵ The summer exhibition began before he went to Lorient and ended after his return and could have been a third prompt — alongside the ‘delirious’ episode at Le Fort-Bloqué and the general debate on Cézanne in Surrealist circles — for the peculiar note on the artist slipped into the book in the midst of the Henriot section (the *avant-propos* in the exhibition booklet by Jacques-Emile Blanche



titled ‘Les Techniques de Cézanne’ covers exactly the ground on the artist that Breton thought was most overworked).⁶⁶

Marguerite Bonnet has given a reason for Breton’s lapse: *The Abandoned House* appeared under the title *Das Haus des Gehängten* when reproduced in the 1918 book by Julius Meier-Graefe, *Cézanne und sein Kreis*, dated ‘gegen 1885’.⁶⁷ This is the same incorrect year used and title translated by Breton, and since the other three paintings he mentions in his Cézanne sidebar in *L'Amour fou* are all reproduced by Meier-Graefe with the titles and dates he gives, we can assume with Bonnet that this was the reference source he had to hand; either that or its 1927 English-language equivalent.⁶⁸ Meier-Graefe’s is a far more passionate and sensual Cézanne than is commonplace in the literature on the artist, and he is delivered in an elevated prose style that would have been agreeable to the ‘Romantic’ ear of Breton who as well as having an extremely high regard for the art and writing of Germany had a good understanding of the language, even if Roger Fry found its ‘rather breathless and involved phrasing’, which had been conscientiously translated, a little too coarse for the English ear:⁶⁹

One day he considered himself as the chosen, and the next he grovelled on the floor contemplating suicide. A man in search of God whom he does not find, capable of smashing the world if he does not find Him, a Gothic creature. At times one could have taken him for one of the zealous partisans of the

3.10
Paul Cézanne, *The House of the Hanged Man*, c.1873, oil on canvas, Musée d’Orsay, Paris.

Huguenot period. He was possessed by an absolutism of ideas for which no sacrifice was too great; he was dangerously overwrought, naïve to the point of being ludicrous and withal incalculable. What he really wanted remained vague, and his picture did not contribute to supply enlightenment; awkward deformations painted from memory on principle, directed against nature, in opposition to every form of tradition. All that was evident was the intention to give something different from what had hitherto been considered as art. Nothing was less Gothic than the savage form of these pictures. Only his spirit was Gothic, his incorruptible Protestantism, the refusal to learn from others anything which one must find out for oneself, the determination to begin at the beginning and to build the road to heaven with his own hands.⁷⁰

As well as showing through in such passages, Meier-Graefe's day job as a novelist and playwright is evident in the total absence of visual analysis in his writing; in fact, he rarely refers to actual paintings in the book. Meanwhile, his Romantic leanings come through in his use of the term 'Romanticism' for certain of Cézanne's 'black idylls around 1870',⁷¹ and 'Baroque' for some of the works of that period such as *Murder* (fig. 3.11),⁷² as well as in the unexpected attribution of a 'Gothic nature' to Cézanne.⁷³ This is as close as the Provençal artist ever came to a German makeover; Breton would have loved it.

As demonstrated by its inclusion within the discussion of the goings-on in Lorient, underlying the near-anthropomorphic metaphor of a hanged man erroneously projected by Breton onto certain details of *The Abandoned House* — in the decaying wall to the left as we look at the painting and in the air of suspension and semi-concealment carried by the house itself to the right (an argument that might have been strengthened had Breton not limply rendered the beam sticking out of the front of the house, used for drawing hay up into the opening below it, as a 'horizontal black patch') — is Breton's inquiry into the epistemology of chance: his proposition that unacknowledged feelings might be the causal template for what are thought of as chance events, which tilt an individual's life one way or another, and their till-now unfathomable relation with place. Inherited from Dada though rooted in Symbolism, the hand played by chance in matters of love, death and violence had long preoccupied Breton, who argued in *L'Amour fou* in the language of clairvoyance that the apparently arbitrary cards dealt by life to an individual were in fact susceptible to interpretation: '[e]very life contains these homogeneous patterns of facts, whose surface is cracked or cloudy', he wrote, '[e]ach person has only to stare at them fixedly in order to read his own future'.⁷⁴ As Breton wrote, the idea of 'objective chance' within Surrealism lies in incidents recounted in his *Nadja* (1928), and its first extension into a theory is in *Communicating Vessels* (1932), where it is closely associated with a statement credited by

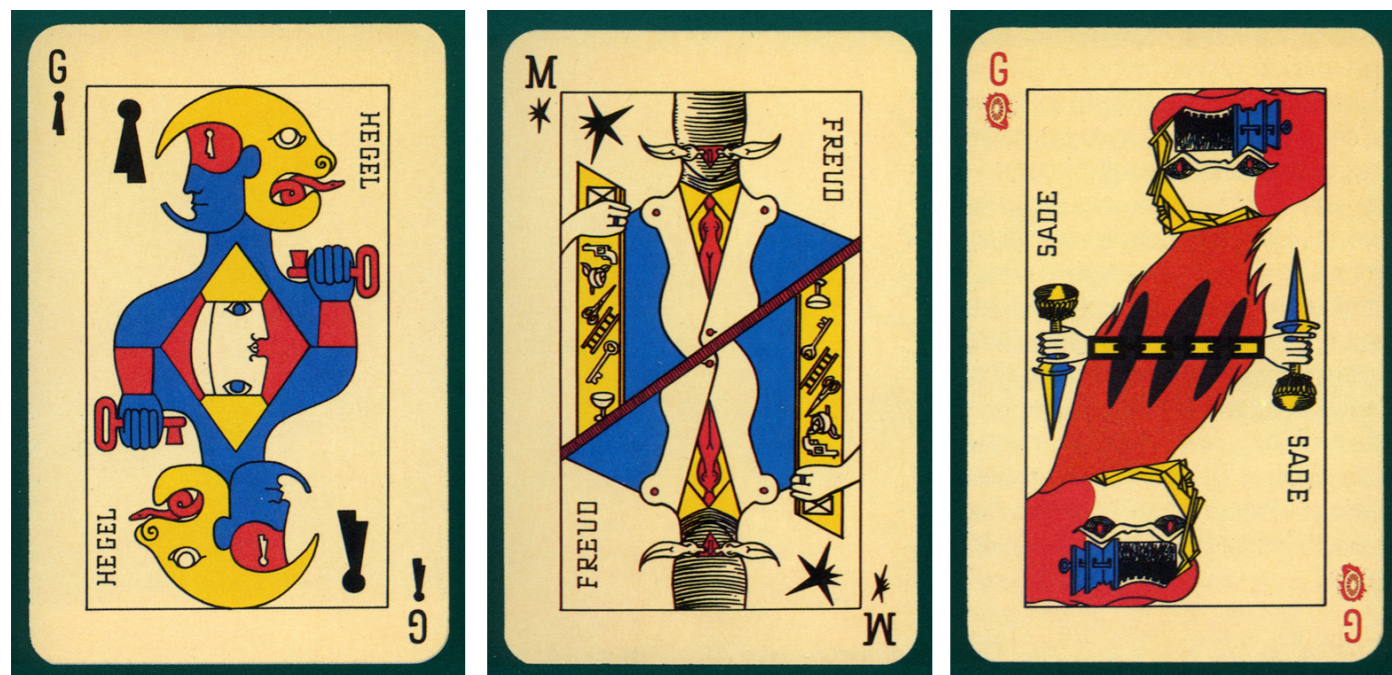


Breton to Friedrich Engels: 'Causality cannot be understood except as it is linked with the category of objective chance, a form of the manifestation of necessity',⁷⁵ leading to his own definition of chance in *L'Amour fou* as 'the encounter of an external causality and an internal finality'.⁷⁶

The experience of coincidence and exploration of chance took place within Surrealist art and writing from their beginnings and meant that cards, card games and cartomancy held a particular, ritualistic place of significance among the individual and collective activities that focussed the life of Surrealist groups. In *L'Amour fou*, Breton describes whimsically how some days he sought to fathom the wishes, intentions and movements of women in his life by rearranging objects in his apartment and selecting sentences from books opened at random. 'Other days', he continues, 'I used to consult my cards, interrogating them far beyond the rules of the game, although according to an invariable personal code, precise enough, trying to obtain from them for now and the future a clear view of my fortune and my misfortune'.⁷⁷ Sometimes, Breton sought 'better results' by including personal items among the configuration of cards, including a small statuette in raw rubber oozing a black liquid with its hand to its ear as though listening: 'nothing prevents my declaring', he writes, 'that this last object, mediated by my cards, has never told me about anything other than myself, bringing me back always to the living centre of my life'.⁷⁸

Breton and the Surrealists carried out research on playing cards whilst in Marseille awaiting transport out of Vichy France between 1939 and 1942.⁷⁹ The design of their own

3.11
Paul Cézanne, *Murder*, 1867,
oil on canvas, Walker Art
Gallery, Liverpool.



3.12
Cards from the Surrealist
'Marseilles Pack', 1940-1.

1940-1 Marseille pack (fig. 3.12) displays a coalition of the traditional pack and the tarot (it was partly modelled on the frequently copied, late fifteenth-century *Tarot de Marseille*); on the one hand, it retained the structure of the first by replacing the four familiar suits with Love, Dream, Revolution and Knowledge, and the Kings, Queens and Jacks with Geniuses, Sirens and Magi; and on the other, it was accompanied by a symbolic language resonant of magic and the occult.⁸⁰ Their enthusiasm for the poetic properties and divinatory reputation of the Tarot had been advertised on the cover of the joint third and fourth number of *Minotaure* in December 1933 when Breton's former friend André Derain, who was familiar with such practices and had read the cards to Breton during their acquaintance (at some point between 1919 and 1921, probably), created a cover that included four Tarot cards.⁸¹ Later, the Surrealist artist Kurt Seligmann devoted a lengthy section of his 1948 *History of Magic* to the Tarot in which he wrote of the seer-like properties of those who read the cards and of the role of the appearance of the Tarot in stimulating foresight:

Who has not, even if only once in his life, had that sensation called foreknowledge? Some future event is witnessed so clearly, so plastically, that its beholder knows immediately and with absolute certainty this will happen. And it does! ... There are people specially gifted with such prescience or premonition, the born diviners. They stimulate their abnormal sensibility in many ways. Gazing at the crystal produces an autohypnotic condition; in fact, any glistening or colourful object when stared at for a time, may become equally stimulating to the imagination ... The primary function of the Tarot cards seems to be such stimulation. In scrutinizing the vividly coloured images, the diviner will provoke a kind of autohypnosis, or if he is less gifted, a concentration of the mind resulting in a profound mental absorption. The Tarot's virtue is thus to induce that psychic or mental state favourable to divination ... The striking Tarot figures, specially the trumps or major arcana, appeal mysteriously and waken in us the images of our subconscious.⁸²

As Simone Perks has suggested, by 'associating the visions received by the diviner with images of the subconscious, Seligmann gives a Surrealist inflection to divination'.⁸³ Seligmann would state that their power of stimulation made them 'the "poetry made by all" of



3.13
Victor Brauner, *The Surrealist*, 1947, oil on canvas, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice.

the Surrealist postulate',⁸⁴ and, indeed, the identification between Surrealism and the Tarot was so close at that time that Victor Brauner based his painting *The Surrealist* of 1947 (fig. 3.13) on The Magician, Magus, or Juggler, the first card of the major arcana (to which Seligmann gave over a subsection of his book), and would paint a symbolic portrait of Breton that year combining that card with the one of The Popess, titling it after the sixth card of the major arcana, *The Lovers*.⁸⁵

Because Breton had long been interested in divination and the Tarot by the time he wrote *L'Amour fou*, it is no great leap to the conclusion that his attraction to and interpretation of the painting he called *The House of the Hanged Man* was determined not just by an atmosphere evoked by that title but the enhancement it underwent through its rhyme with *The Hanged Man*, the twelfth card of the major arcana of the tarot pack, which adds metaphorical layers of gaming and destiny to the painting brought to mind by the *Henriot* house.⁸⁶ This is confirmed by Breton's decision to place the reproduction of that painting

in *L'Amour fou* back-to-back with the postcard of a building he directly associates with hermeticism, the star-shaped edifice a few kilometres outside Prague that he had visited in 1935, captioned here, 'A FLANC D'ABIME, CONSTRUIT EN PIERRE PHILOSOPHALE ...'.⁸⁷ The Hanged Man is the most enigmatic card of the tarot ('in some packs', writes one specialist, 'his head is surrounded by a halo'⁸⁸) and was reproduced in 1957 in Breton's *L'Art magique*, on the facing page to some examples from the *Tarot de Marseille*. There, Breton demonstrates his reading of the scholarship on the Tarot by mentioning the eighteenth-century 'correction' of The Hanged Man as Prudence or Man with a Raised Foot (*pede suspenso*) in the famous essay of Antoine Court de Gébelin.⁸⁹

The themes of chance and fate with which *L'Amour fou* is largely taken up, and Surrealism's long-standing meditation on card playing as emblematic of these, no doubt informed Breton's characterisation of Cézanne's *Cardplayers* (plate 4) as one of the paintings among those that were the outcome of a subject with a 'halo'. Breton could have seen one of two paintings, each from The Card Players series, at the 1936 Cézanne show at the Orangerie. One was the 1890-2 Metropolitan Museum group of three players watched over by a fourth male, dated 1890 in the Orangerie booklet (plate 1), and the other was one of the three compositions with two figures of 1892-6, then in the Paris collection of Auguste Pellerin (now in a private collection in Qatar) and dated by Rewald 1892-3 (plate 5). Well before the Orangerie exhibition, Breton had access to the 1892-3 version of the two figure *Cardplayers* that hung in the Louvre (now in the Musée d'Orsay) (plate 3). Although he does not go into detail (beyond the 1892 date he gives, which we are assuming was taken from Meier-Graefe) as to which *Cardplayers* represents the 'haloed' subject perceived by Cézanne, Marguerite Bonnet argues that it was one of the two figure compositions, 'en raison de leur fond plus sombre et plus complexe que celui des deux autres toiles [of three players] où les personnages se détachent sur un mur plutôt clair, ce qui place difficilement ces œuvres dans la catégorie des "sujets à halo."⁹⁰

This conjecture gains some credence from Breton's estimation that around The Card Players 'floats a half-tragic, half-guignolesque menace in every point resembling the one pictured in the card game of Chaplin's film *A Dog's Life ...*'.⁹¹ As Bonnet notes, this is another error on Breton's part because although there is indeed a scene in the 1918 film of that title where two men in hats and jackets, one with a moustache, sit opposite each other at a table comparable with the one in The Card Players, upon which, for a short time, is a bottle between them pushed back towards its farther edge as we look, there is no card game (fig. 3.14). This is the scene in which Chaplin gets back the wallet that two thieves have stolen from him by knocking one of them out and performing his gestures to his partner from behind by shoving his arms beneath those of the unconscious thief whilst concealed by a curtain (fig. 3.15). Given Breton's frequently expressed fascination with the curtain as a metaphor, we might assume that his remark about the other painting with a 'halo' subject by Cézanne, the *Young Man before a Skull*, in which 'metaphysical unease falls on the painting through the pleats of the curtain', was the memory trigger that brought that not very menacing scene from *A Dog's Life* inaccurately back to his mind.⁹²

Opposite:

3.14
Screen capture of scene from
Charlie Chaplin, *A Dog's Life*
(1918).

3.15
Screen capture of scene from
Charlie Chaplin, *A Dog's Life*
(1918).





3.16
Jean-François Millet, *The Angelus*, 1857-9, oil on canvas, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Therefore, if we accept that Breton is thinking of one of the two figure *Cardplayers* in his discussion of the 'menace' that surrounds the 'halo' paintings, and if we can say further that his main reference source was the German version of Meier-Graefe's book, then we can add that it was probably the Courtauld *Cardplayers* that Breton found disquieting, for that is the version reproduced there (oddly, the English-language version reproduces a different *Cardplayers*, the one then in the Pellerin collection, which was also shown at the Orangerie that year and reproduced in the exhibition booklet).⁹³

However, this does not matter much because I want to argue in conclusion that it is the two figure composition and 'innocent' rurality of the *Cardplayers*, whichever one we choose, that is relevant to Breton's interpretation of the picture. Earlier, I said that his temporary rethinking of Cézanne in the thirties responded to Dalí's recent pronouncements on that artist's apples in his essay on the Pre-Raphaelites, which appeared in the same number of *Minotaure* as Breton's own article on desire and love (framed by his visit the previous year to Tenerife, soon to become part five of his *L'Amour fou*).⁹⁴ But there was another source for Breton's volte-face: Dalí was concurrently poking around in the supposed depths of Jean-François Millet's pious, sentimental image of rural labour, *The Angelus* (1857-9) (fig. 3.16), and coming up with plenty to talk about. Attracted to the 'bad taste' of *The Angelus* and its endless reproduction on postcards, tea sets, cushion covers, ink wells and so on, which obscured the original painting behind a screen of over-familiarity, Dalí aimed his Oedipal reading of *The Angelus* at the simpering admirers who crowded around it, exposing the lurid reverse of the painting's manifest drama as though he were turning a stone over with his foot. Freely layering interpretations across *The Angelus* through associations that accrued to his own anxieties and childhood memories, dipped in the developing fluid of Freudian psychoanalysis, Dalí reached the extravagant conclusion (heavily abbreviated here) that the two figures are praying over the corpse of their buried son; moreover, that the female figure to the right of *The Angelus* is a cannibalistic maternal variant of Saturn, Abraham, William Tell, and others, who, in the manner of the praying

mantis, is about to devour her son to the left, who anticipates this in a state of arousal that is concealed, in Dalí's reading, by the hat he holds.⁹⁵

Most importantly, however, in his quest to show that an offensively inoffensive painting could be taken by the Surrealists and turned to their own purposes — carried out in his writing about *The Angelus*, in the ten or so oil paintings he completed between 1929 and 1935 that refer to it, and in his 1934 etchings illustrating *Les Chants de Maldoror* — Dalí blended Millet and Lautréamont:

No image seems to be capable of illustrating more 'literally', in a more delirious way, Lautréamont and, in particular, *Les Chants de Maldoror*, than the one done about 70 years ago by the painter of tragic cannibalistic atavisms ... It is precisely Millet's *Angelus*, a painting famous all over, which in my opinion would be tantamount in painting to the well-known and sublime 'fortuitous encounter on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella'. Nothing seems to me, indeed, to be able to illustrate this encounter as literally, in as horrifying and ultraobvious a way, as the obsessive image on *The Angelus*.⁹⁶

Breton read those words in the booklet that accompanied the exhibition of Dalí's celebrated *Maldoror* illustrations in 1934 at the Galerie Quatre Chemins, and no doubt he had stayed abreast of the artist's outlandish findings on *The Angelus* up to then, which were first aired in *Minotaure* in 1933 (some of Dalí's etchings were reproduced in number 3/4 of the review at the end of that year and others appeared when the collection was advertised for sale in *Minotaure* in 1934).⁹⁷

A profound, violent tension undercut the seemingly modest, becalmed attitudes of the peasants in *The Angelus* in Dalí's interpretation, and it was this just-hidden menace that impressed itself on Breton in the emaciated, caricatural features of the *Cardplayers*, against the background of his recent memory of the murder near Lorient, as though one were about to eviscerate the other. Breton had no intention of following Dalí in seeking a narrative, psychoanalytic or otherwise, of the relations between Cézanne's peasant card players or in other paintings by the artist; he states clearly enough that his interest in *The Abandoned House/The House of the Hanged Man* 'is not a matter of anecdote'.⁹⁸ Yet Dalí's discovery that even Millet's paintings might harbour 'hallucinations and sensory disturbances in the shadows'⁹⁹ and that 'good so nicely brings out evil'¹⁰⁰ — the terms that we saw the younger Breton use to privilege Lautréamont's writing over modernist art like Cézanne's — must have made him realize in the midst of his later discussion of chance and divination in *L'Amour fou*, just for a brief moment in 1936, that a Surrealist interpretation of Cézanne was possible beyond that of greengrocer or bricklayer, and could go all the way down to the unconscious.

All references in digital versions of *Courtauld Books Online* are hyperlinked. To navigate to a footnote, click on the reference number in the body of the text. To return back to the text, click on the number at the beginning of the footnote.

1. André Breton, 'Ideas of a Painter' [1921], in Mark Polizzotti (trans.), *The Lost Steps* [1924] (Lincoln and London: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1996), pp. 62-6, 64 (translation slightly modified). All translations are mine, unless otherwise stated. Whether Cézanne's 'reputation' dimmed or not depends on whether we take Breton to mean by this his fame or his influence, for as late as 1946, he could speak of the artist as 'le mieux connu de tous les peintres modernes', whilst reporting 'l'influence de Cézanne a été très largement prépondérante en France de 1906 à 1918'. See André Breton, 'Conférences d'Haïti, III' [1946], in André Breton, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), pp. 233-51, 237, 238.
2. Breton, 'Ideas', *Lost Steps*, p. 64.
3. André Breton, *Conversations: The Autobiography of Surrealism* [1952], (trans.) Mark Polizzotti (New York: Paragon House, 1993), p. 10.
4. Breton, 'Ideas', *Lost Steps*, p. 64.
5. The precedent can be found in February 1919 on the cover of the eighth number of Picabia's review *391*, which carried the legend 'j'ai horreur de la peinture/de Cézanne/elle m'embête' in tiny script over the editor's name.
6. André Breton, 'Francis Picabia' [1922], in *Lost Steps*, pp. 96-9, 97. Breton is quoting Picabia from a letter of 15 October 1922, (trans.) Sharmila Ganguly, reproduced in Michel Sanouillet, *Dada in Paris* [1965] (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT, 2009), p. 444.
7. André Breton, 'Characteristics of the Modern Evolution and What it Consists Of' [1922-4], in *Lost Steps*, pp. 107-25, 117 (translation modified).
8. Breton, 'Characteristics', *Lost Steps*, p. 117.
9. Breton, 'Characteristics', *Lost Steps*, p. 117.
10. Breton, 'Characteristics', *Lost Steps*, pp. 117-18.
11. Richard Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism: A Study of the Theory, Technique, and Critical Evaluation of Modern Art* (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 132.
12. Breton, 'Characteristics', *Lost Steps*, p. 118.
13. The Surrealist Group, 'Ouvrez-vous?', *Médium: Communication Surréaliste*, no. 1 (Nov. 1953): pp. 1, 11-13.
14. Breton's response sounds tired: 'Non, rien à se dire', Surrealist Group, 'Ouvrez-vous?', p. 11.
15. Surrealist Group, 'Ouvrez-vous?', p. 11.
16. André Breton, *L'Art magique* [1957] (Paris: Éditions Phébus, 1991), p. 237.
17. See Émile Bernard, 'Souvenirs sur Paul Cézanne et Lettres inédites (I-III)', *Mercure de France* 69, no. 247 (1 Oct. 1907): pp. 385-404; Émile Bernard, 'Souvenirs sur Paul Cézanne et Lettres inédites (IV-V, fin)', *Mercure de France* 69, no. 248 (16 Oct. 1907): pp. 606-27. Denis's own 1907 essay was republished in Maurice Denis, *Théories, 1890-1910: Du symbolisme et de Gauguin vers un nouvel ordre classique* [1913] (Paris: L. Rouart et J. Watelin, 1920), pp. 245-61.
18. Émile Bernard, *Souvenirs sur Paul Cézanne* (Paris: Société des Trente, 1912); Ambroise Vollard, *Paul Cézanne* (Paris: Galerie A. Vollard, 1914). Breton marks his maturity at 1913 at the beginning of Breton, *Conversations*, p. 3. Also see his remarks about his 'first encounter with Picasso's work' in 1913 in André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting* [1965], (trans.) Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 116.
19. Bernard in 1891, quoted in Françoise Cachin, *Cézanne* (London: Tate Gallery, 1996), p. 29.
20. André Breton, 'Les Chants de Maldoror by the Comte de Lautréamont' [1920], in *Lost Steps*, pp. 47-50, 47 (translation slightly amended).
21. Clement Greenberg, 'Cézanne and the Unity of Modern Art' [1951], in John O'Brian (ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 3 (Chicago and London: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 82-91, 87, 86, 87, 84, 85.
22. This view of the Surrealists (which sounds perfectly plausible and compares with their prejudice against Henri Bergson) is stated without evidence by Françoise Cachin, 'A Century of Cézanne Criticism I: From 1865 to 1906', in Cachin, *Cézanne*, pp. 24-43, 43.
23. Joris-Karl Huysmans, 'Cézanne', *Certains* [1889] (Paris: Tresse & Stock, 1894), pp. 41-3, 43.
24. Julius Meier-Graefe, *Cézanne*, (trans.) J. Holroyd-Reece (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1927), p. 59.
25. 'The ardent and naïve soul of the artists of the Middle Ages'. Georges Rivière, *Le Maître Paul Cézanne* (Paris: Henri Floury, 1923), p. 130.
26. Clement Greenberg, 'Cézanne: Gateway to Contemporary Painting' [1952], *Collected Essays*, vol. 3, pp. 113-118, 118.
27. Meyer Schapiro, *Cézanne* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1952), p. 2. For his later view, that 'one may suppose that in Cézanne's habitual representation of the apples as a theme by itself there is a latent erotic sense, an unconscious symbolizing of a repressed desire', see Meyer Schapiro, 'The Apples of Cézanne: An Essay on the Meaning of Still-Life' [1968], in Schapiro, *Modern Art: 19th & 20th Centuries*, Selected Papers, vol. 2 (London: Chatto & Windus, 1978), pp. 1-38, 12.
28. Lionello Venturi, *Cézanne: son art – son œuvre*, 2 vols. (Paris: Paul Rosenberg, 1936).
29. Lionello Venturi, 'Sur les dernières années de Cézanne', *Minotaure*, no. 9 (Oct. 1936): pp. 33-9.
30. Ambroise Vollard, 'Souvenirs sur Cézanne', *Minotaure*, no. 6 (Winter 1935): pp. 13-16.
31. 'A new era of Cézannean research' and 'at the base of all publications on Cézanne'. John Rewald, *Cézanne et Zola* (Paris: Éditions A. Sedrowski, 1936); John Rewald, 'A propos du catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre de Paul Cézanne et de la chronologie de cette œuvre', *La Renaissance* 20, no. 3/4 (March-April 1937): pp. 53-56, 53.
32. 'Effort of transformation of a given subject' and 'realist painting of an imaginary subject'. Roger Caillois, *Procès intellectuel de l'art* (Marseille: Les Cahiers du Sud, 1935), p. 22, n. 1.
33. Herbert Read (ed.), *Surrealism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), p. 62.
34. Dalí quoted in Marcel Jean with Arpad Mezei, *The History of Surrealist Painting* [1959], (trans.) Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Grove Press, 1960), p. 219.
35. Salvador Dalí, 'Le Surréalisme spectrale de l'Éternel Féminin préraphaélite', *Minotaure*, no. 8 (June 1936): pp. 46-9.
36. Salvador Dalí, 'The Spectral Surrealism of the Pre-Raphaelite Eternal Feminine' [1936], in Haim Finkelstein (ed. and trans.), *The Collected Writings of Salvador Dalí* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), pp. 310-14, 312 (translation slightly amended).
37. 'The scaffolding of our builders, rectilinear and orthogonal'. Édouard Monod-Herzen, *Principes de Morphologie Générale*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gautier-Villars et Cie., 1927), pp. 2-3.
38. 'One could go so far as to say, in certain cases, he "builds up" his painting'. Théodore Duret, *Histoire des peintres impressionnistes* (Paris: H. Floury, 1906), p. 178. See remarks by Richard Shiff, 'He Painted', in Nancy Ireson and Barnaby Wright (eds), *Cézanne's Card Players* (London: The Courtauld Gallery in assoc. with Paul Holberton Pub., 2010), pp. 73-91, 73.
39. Meier-Graefe, *Cézanne*, pp. 21, 21-2. Also see the extended metaphor in which Cézanne is described painting 'with the blows of a stonemason' and that of him building 'like a child with cubes and bricks' on pp. 40, 59.
40. Monod-Herzen, *Principes*, vol. 1, pp. 89-99.
41. Greenberg, 'Cézanne and the Unity of Modern Art', in *Collected Essays*, vol. 3, p. 86.
42. Dalí, *Collected Writings*, p. 312.
43. Friction between Surrealism and the Association Abstraction-Création, set up in 1931, is most evident in the attack upon the 'model of mental debility called abstract art, abstraction-création, non-figurative art, etc.' under the subheading 'Abjection et Misère de l'Abstraction-Création' in Salvador Dalí, *La Conquête de l'Irrationnel* (Paris: Éditions Surréalistes, 1935), p. 19.
44. Greenberg, 'Cézanne', *Collected Essays*, vol. 3, pp. 86-7.
45. Dalí, *Collected Writings*, pp. 310, 312.
46. Clement Greenberg, 'Surrealist Painting' [1944], in John O'Brian (ed.), *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 1 (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 225-31.
47. Salvador Dalí, 'Aerodynamic Apparitions of "Beings-Objects"', in *Collected Writings*, pp. 207-11, 209; 'Apparitions aérodynamique des "Être-Objets"', *Minotaure*, no. 6 (Winter 1934-5): pp. 33-4, 34. For a discussion of the scientific and psychoanalytic components of this text, see my *Surrealism, Art and Modern Science: Relativity, Quantum Mechanics, Epistemology* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2008), pp. 185-7. There is an alternative view of modernist writing on Cézanne that inserts it into 'traditional criticism of Cézanne's art, with its awkward mix of metaphors of touch and vision', which means 'his painting never accommodated a straightforward "visual" interpretation', but this argument reduces Greenberg to a footnote and has nothing to say about Fry or Bell. See Richard Shiff, 'Cézanne's Physicality: The Politics of Touch', in Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell (eds), *The Language of Art History* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), pp. 129-80, 166.
48. André Breton, *Mad Love* [1937], (trans.) Mary Ann Caws (Lincoln and London: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1987), pp. 25-38.
49. Breton, *Mad Love*, pp. 39-67.
50. For more details on the publication of the book, see André Breton, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), p. 1693.
51. Breton, *Mad Love*, pp. 102-3.
52. Breton, *Mad Love*, p. 103.
53. Breton, *Mad Love*, p. 104.
54. See the note on the manuscript in Breton, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, p. 1732.
55. Breton, *Mad Love*, p. 104 (translation slightly modified).

56. Breton, *Mad Love*, p. 108.

57. Breton, *Mad Love*, p. 109.

58. Breton, *Mad Love*, p. 110. For more details of Henriot's background, life, and trial (narrated, coincidentally, immediately after the cases of the Papin sisters and Violette Nozières, to which the Surrealists also responded), see Maurice Garçon, *Histoire de la Justice sous la III^e République*, vol. 3 (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1957), pp. 87-93.

59. Breton, *Mad Love*, p. 106 (translation slightly modified).

60. In her translation, Mary Ann Caws renders halo as 'aura', which perhaps gives an English-speaking audience a stronger sense of Breton's meaning and also helps to distance the term from any religious connotation unintended by Breton, but I am preferring the correct dictionary translation 'halo' here to avoid any confusion with Benjaminian readings of Surrealism through that term, which is clearly used in a different manner in the well-known essay, Walter Benjamin, 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia' [1929], in Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (trans), *One Way Street and Other Writings* (London and New York: Verso, 1997), pp. 225-39.

61. Breton, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, p. 1932.

62. Breton, *Mad Love*, p. 106 (translation slightly modified).

63. André Breton, 'Le La' ['The Tone Setting', 1961], in Jean-Pierre Cauvin and Mary Ann Caws (eds and trans), *Poems of André Breton: A Bilingual Anthology* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1982), pp. 228-9. Breton is referring in this phrase to the long poem 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre' of the 1850s that gave its title to the collection he owned by Victor Hugo, *La bouche d'ombre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943).

64. Sigmund Freud, 'Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood' [1910], in Albert Dickson (ed.), *Art and Literature* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1990), pp. 151-231. Ironically, Breton had mentioned this 'admirable piece by Freud' a few pages earlier in the course of a deliberation on the interpretation of arbitrary phenomena in Breton, *Mad Love*, p. 86.

65. The dates on which he wrote of the incident with Lamba are marked on the manuscript and given by Bonnet in Breton, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, p. 1693.

66. Jacques-Emile Blanche, *Cézanne* (Paris: Musée de l'Orangerie, 1936), pp. 9-16.

67. Julius Meier-Graefe, *Cézanne und sein Kreis* (Munich: R. Piper and Co., 1918), p. 145.

68. Although Vollard reproduced a little-known work titled *Le Meurtre* in his *Minotaure* essay on Cézanne, Breton must have meant the oil painting of that title now in the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool dated c. 1868, which was shown at the Orangerie dated c. 1874-5 and is reproduced dated c. 1870 in Meier-Graefe, *Cézanne*, p. 92.

69. Roger Fry, 'In Praise of Cézanne', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 52, no. 299 (February 1928): pp. 98-9, 99.

70. Meier-Graefe, *Cézanne*, pp. 20-21.

71. Meier-Graefe, *Cézanne*, p. 23.

72. Meier-Graefe, *Cézanne*, p. 23.

73. Meier-Graefe, *Cézanne*, p. 35.

74. Breton, *Mad Love*, p. 87.

75. Quoted in André Breton, *Communicating Vessels* [1932], (trans) Mary Ann Caws and Geoffrey T. Harris (Lincoln and London: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1990), pp. 91-2.

76. Breton, *Mad Love*, p. 21.

77. Breton, *Mad Love*, pp. 15-16.

78. Breton, *Mad Love*, p. 16.

79. Mark Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton*, revised and updated (Boston: Black Widow Press, 2009), p. 444.

80. See André Breton, 'The Marseilles Deck' [1943], in *Free Rein* [1953], (trans) Michel Parmentier and Jacqueline d'Amboise (Lincoln and London: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1995), pp. 48-50; Georges Raillard, 'Marseille: Passage du surréalisme' in *La planète affolée: Surréalisme, Dispersion et Influences, 1938-1947* (Marseille: Centre de la Vieille Charité, 1986), pp. 47-65; Bernard Noël, *Marseille - New York: 1940-1945. Une Liaison surréaliste* (Marseille: André Dimanche, 1985); Danièle Giraudy, *Le jeu de Marseille: Autour d'André Breton et des Surréalistes à Marseille en 1940-1941* (Marseille: Musées de Marseille, 2003).

81. The cover illustrated his reading inside based on the four aces of the Tarot: Andre Derain, 'Critérium des As', *Minotaure*, no. 3/4 (December 1933), p. 8. For his recollection of Derain's card reading sandwiched between 'deux superbes soliloques sur l'art et la pensée médiévale', see André Breton, "'C'EST A VOUS DE PARLER, JEUNE VOYANT DES CHOSES ...'" [1952], in *Perspective cavalière* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), pp. 13-20, 18.

82. Kurt Seligmann, *The History of Magic* (New York: Pantheon, 1948), p. 409.

83. Simone Perks, 'Fatum and Fortuna: André Masson, Surrealism and the Divinatory Arts', *Papers of Surrealism*, no. 3 (Spring 2005): n.p.

84. Seligmann, *History of Magic*, p. 416. The famous phrase '[p]oetry must be made by all. Not by one', is from the *Poésies* (1870) of the pre-Surrealist Comte de Lautréamont, *Maldoror and Poems* [1869 and 1870], (trans.) Paul Knight (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988), p. 279.

85. For more on Surrealism and the tarot and a comparison between Masson's *Man with an Orange* (1923) and *The Magician*, see Perks, 'Fatum and Fortuna'. This period of the late 1940s was the high point of Surrealism's fascination with magic and the occult, reflected in the International Exhibition of Surrealism in Paris in 1947, which was dedicated to the theme.

86. This connection has been suggested by C. Rousseau, quoted in James C. Harris, 'The House of the Hanged Man at Auvers', *Archives of General Psychiatry* 63, no. 1 (Jan. 2006): pp. 125-6.

87. For details, see Bonnet in Breton, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, pp. 1730-1.

88. Alfred Douglas, *The Tarot: The Origins, Meaning and Uses of the Cards* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 80.

89. Breton, *L'Art magique*, p. 164.

90. 'Owing to their more somber and complex backgrounds than those of the two other canvases [of three players] where the figures are freed up against a rather light-coloured wall, which makes it difficult to place these works in the category of "subjects having a halo"'. Breton, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, p. 1732.

91. Breton, *Mad Love*, p. 106.

92. Breton, *Mad Love*, p. 106. For evidence that Breton viewed the curtain as a powerful metaphor, see the 1941 interview with *View* magazine in which he discussed the curtain and its presence in paintings by Edward Hopper, Morris Hirschfeld, and Giorgio de Chirico, reprinted in André Breton, *What is Surrealism? Selected Writings*, (ed.) Franklin Rosemont (London: Pluto Press, 1978), pp. 199-206, 201-2. Bonnet's further suggestion that Breton got confused by the 1917 Chaplin film *The Immigrant*, which, as she says, contains 'une partie de dés et une partie de cartes célèbres' in the second scene, is also worth taking on as it contains four characters including Chaplin himself (like the four man New York Metropolitan painting) and might mean that Breton's memory was subject to a condensation of the two films. Breton, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, p. 1733.

93. For an unconvincing attempt a few years later to turn Cézanne into a fully fledged precursor by extending

Breton's briefly held idea of the artist to other paintings, particularly those featuring the Harlequin, see Jean, Mezei, *History of Surrealist Painting* [1959], pp. 12-13.

94. André Breton, 'Le Château Étoilé', *Minotaure*, no. 8 (June 1936): pp. 25-39.

95. Salvador Dalí, *Le Mythe tragique de l'Angelus de Millet* (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1963). For commentary, see Dawn Ades, *Dalí* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), pp. 140-9; James Elkins, *Why Are Our Pictures Puzzles? On the Modern Origins of Pictorial Complexity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 231-45; Steven Harris, *Surrealist Thought in the 1930s: Art, Politics, and the Psyche* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), pp. 125-7; Dawn Ades, *Dalí* (Venice: Palazzo Grassi, 2005), pp. 190-4; Jordana Mendelson, *Documenting Spain: Artists, Exhibition Culture, and the Modern Nation, 1929-1939* (University Park, PA: Penn State, 2005), pp. 185-219.

96. Salvador Dalí, 'Millet's Angelus' [1934], in Finkelshtein, *Collected Writings*, pp. 279-82, 280 (translation slightly amended).

97. Salvador Dalí, 'Interprétation Paranoïaque-critique de l'Image obsédante "L'Angelus" de Millet', *Minotaure*, no. 1/2 (February 1933): pp. 65-7. His own fascination with Millet's *Angelus* took up much space in his paintings and writings in the mid-thirties, yet the final version of the book only appeared in the 1960s because he lost the manuscript in France at the time of the German invasion and only came across it again in 1962.

98. Breton, *Mad Love*, p. 106 (translation slightly modified).

99. Breton, 'Characteristics', *Lost Steps*, p. 117.

100. Breton, 'Characteristics', *Lost Steps*, pp. 117-18.



IMPROVISATIONS ON THE THEME OF CÉZANNE

CHARLOTTE DE MILLE

'Interpretation should not be a reflection distinct from the act of seeing'.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Cézanne's Doubt' (1945)¹

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's statement in 'Cézanne's Doubt' (1945) returns us to the basis of art history, to the question of disciplinary boundaries, reminding us of our fundamental responsibilities to the objects of our enquiry. It is ironic that this assessment comes from outside the discipline, and I invoke it as a caution before I too depart from much that constitutes art history. Far from the scopic prioritisation above, Merleau-Ponty's analysis of Cézanne's intention argues convincingly for a haptic, tactile understanding of his canvases. In returning the viewer to a 'primordial perception where distinctions between sight and touch are unknown', Cézanne is the archetypal painter for Merleau-Ponty: it could even be said his work 'illustrates' Merleau-Ponty's model of perception; as the philosopher contended, 'Cézanne paints perception itself through the chaos of sensation'.² Cézanne is the archetypal painter for Merleau-Ponty: it could even be said his work 'illustrates' Merleau-Ponty's model of perception; as the philosopher contended, 'Cézanne paints perception itself through the chaos of sensation'. A mixture of sensation and interpretation through which we come to comprehend the world, Merleau-Ponty's model of perception offers the possibility for Cézanne's painting to be regarded as metaphysical, where metaphysics is the revelation of an experiential phenomenology — the process of the act of perception in the real world — rather than some transcendental other.³ Connected to the human subject, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is concerned with directly describing human experience. This seems at odds with his designation of the 'inhuman character of Cézanne': how can Cézanne be concerned with painting perception, and yet negate his individual experience? The answer comes from a passage in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), where Merleau-Ponty designates to humanity the capacity for a disinterested, non-self-serving vision. Cézanne's painting 'suspends' pragmatic interests and 'reveals the base of inhuman nature upon which man has installed himself'. Merleau-Ponty contends that Cézanne images the 'root of things beneath the imposed order of humanity';⁴ that his painterly 'expression is the language of the thing itself and springs from its configuration'.⁵ The 'lived object is not rediscovered or constructed on the basis of the contributions of the senses; rather, it presents itself to us from the start as the centre from which these contributions radiate'.⁶ The thing in itself is no fixed entity but immanent and continuously becoming, which is why 'expressing what exists is an endless task'. Cézanne's 'inhuman' painting actualizes the thing in itself in unmediated intuition: Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception offers a means through which to enter into reciprocal engagement with the thing in itself, thereby shifting the Kantian phraseology he employed.

Opposite:

Detail of plate 2.
Paul Cézanne, *Cardplayers*,
c.1890-2, oil on canvas,
The Barnes Foundation.

Merleau-Ponty's interpretation is fundamentally multi-sensory, and it is with this in mind that I intend to 'play' Cézanne. The Card Players is here only a point of departure, where the focus on the game is symbolic of a provisional and alternative means of communication. Playing cards, playing music and playing in theatre form an interwoven seam, which, I shall argue, is fundamental to Cézanne's overall aesthetic. Through a consideration of what it is to play in its many forms, this chapter invokes modes of experience that demand attention to a developing process in the moment of its unfolding. I trace a certain perception of life through art: through painting and music, music and theatre, theatre and painting.

I

Like play, painting and music are modes of communication that are before or beyond language. This un-sayability means that, just as we are in play translating between interior and exterior, fantasy and reality, so too in art the creator (and receiver) is mediating between the inexpressible (or not yet expressed) and the need to forge a new means of communication, which is the work. This is helpful to reading Cézanne, whose ostensible surface of canvas, board and paint, and incidental down-beat subjects, belie the affect they have. Like Merleau-Ponty, we often suspect that there is something more than meets the eye, but can never be sure if we have grasped it.⁷ For British psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott, play is 'transitional space'; 'an intermediate area of *experiencing* to which inner reality and external life both contribute ... a resting place for the individual engaged in the perpetual task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet inter-related'.⁸ Hanna Segal concurs. In 'Imagination, Play and Art' (1991), she contends that the artist 'finds a way back to reality in his artistic creation'. Freud, she continues, contrasted play 'not with the serious ... but with the real'.⁹ Concomitantly, the artist creates a 'phantasy world which he knows is not real, or ... that is real only in a certain sense. It does have a reality of its own, different from what we commonly call real'. This alternative reality, which synthesizes the objective and subjective in a realization of self, is something Cézanne spoke of. Suspending, 'silencing' his pragmatic and known self, the painter deciphers 'two parallel texts: nature seen and nature felt ... both of which must unite in order to endure ... It seems to me I'll be the subjective conscience of this landscape just as my painting will be the objective conscience'.¹⁰

II

In this sense, unity of mind can be achieved only if combined with unity of body: the vision or intention and the physical sensation in working to achieve it must combine in



the creation of the work. For instrumentalists, as cellist and writer Richard Sennett has written, the 'sense of touch defines our physical experience of art'. A violinist or a 'pianist ... has constantly to explore resistance, either in the instrument or in the musician's own body'.¹¹ Tension of nervous energy has real physical effects in music making, but paradoxically, this 'resistance often heightens the musician's awareness of the music itself'.¹² Similarly, musicologist and cultural historian Richard Leppert has qualified the impact of music as 'emotional, embodied and physical — but *not* separate from cognition'.¹³ This synthesis of mind and body, or rather mind-body as Leppert more accurately combines them, clarifies the totalizing qualities of music. 'Music's performance is *in and of* the body, but the *whole* body, an *interpreting* body. To make music is a cognitive-physical act, in which the separation of mind from body momentarily disappears'.¹⁴

III

What then, do we read in the body-language of Cézanne's sister and mother, in *Girl at the Piano (Overture to Tannhäuser)* (fig. 4.1)? Describing the scene as one of 'domestic duties', Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer notes how emotionally disengaged both figures are from Wagner's score.¹⁵ I find the relationship less ambiguous; although neither the blank impassive features nor the tense wooden frame of Cézanne's sister exude pleasure. Disconnected from one another, each is engaged in a private occupation, their emotional distance far greater than the cramped drawing-room in which piano stool rubs against sofa. I would argue that this actually befits Wagner's score: the everyday world outside the experience of listening to it is small in comparison. Compositionally, Cézanne's canvas renders the magnitude of the Overture, placing figures as steady theme against the whirling orchestration of clashing patterns. The opening sequence of the Overture is grave, Cézanne's hues dark, and the contrasting red and green complement the increasing conflict of horns and strings

4.1
Paul Cézanne, *Girl at the Piano (Overture to Tannhäuser)*, c.1869, oil on canvas, The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.

in the final minutes of the Overture. Playing the score is deadly serious: acting as unifier of fragments that may be transposed into reality by subliminally putting daily anxieties into perspective, making sense of them, or releasing tension associated with them. It plays out conflict to find resolution, holding possible conflict at bay. Art, like play, is an 'assertion against ... senselessness'.¹⁶ In pianist Glen Gould's words, music is 'hewn from negation ... but very small security against the void of negation that surrounds it'.¹⁷ Maximising the contrasts of green and red, black and white — where treated on the same plane, hard skirts sculpt soft wood — Cézanne distorts our expectation in painting of presence and absence, reality and illusion: the conceit of a 'window on the world', in which the viewer wholly believes whilst in the act of looking, is complicated. Cézanne's 'window' we look through is an opaque one, where what is revealed on first (or casual) glance is not the subject of his work. Player and instrument are one, united in the making of an environment other to that in which they sit: the musical experience stretches the contours of the cramped space left behind in the act of playing. What is superficially angular, jarring, ugly (one might even use the loaded term 'unsuccessful') in fact articulates a temporary transformation. All is far from what it seems.

IV

Athanassoglou-Kallmyer records Cézanne's visits to concerts of Wagner in both Paris and Marseille.¹⁸ A Wagnerian connection is furthered by the painter's acquaintance with composer Emmanuel Chabrier, who owned the mythologizing *Harvesters* (fig. 4.2). Chabrier, at the time Cézanne knew him, was engaged in copying out the score of *Tannhäuser*.¹⁹ Depicting a group of farm hands resting from their labours, the canvas shares its genre subject with the artist's later rural figure works: the seated, be-hatted figure in particular anticipates the monumental gravity so often commented upon in Cézanne's *Card Players*. Set in a landscape rather than interior, these figures exude permanence comparable to the mountain range behind them. To this extent, Cézanne's figures invite comparison with the solidity of the mythic characters in Wagner's operas. Being Wagnerian was aesthetically controversial in the 1860s. The composer had revised *Tannhäuser* for the Paris Opera in 1861, but the production had closed following a scandalous run of just three performances. Critic Francois-Joseph Fétis launched an acerbic attack against Wagner's psychologically charged scores, and whilst Charles Baudelaire leapt to the composer's defence in an 1861 article 'Richard Wagner and Tannhäuser in Paris', he marked the music for its suggestiveness, since it was incapable of 'translating anything with precision as words and painting do': surely a barbed comment. Moreover, amid growing national tension leading up to the Franco-Prussian war in 1871, to be enamoured of a German composer had political implications. For a young artist with a reputation to make, Wagner provided a remarkable



opportunity, particularly since the short run of *Tannhäuser* only fuelled the Wagner myth, leaving both supporters and detractors with a critical freedom born of not experiencing the production. Wagner was still a provisional composer in Paris, his most talked of work barely actualized as it was intended for the stage, largely known instead through concert performances and piano reductions such as the one that Cézanne's sister played.

4.2
Paul Cézanne, *Harvesters*,
1877, oil on canvas, Private
collection.

V

Tannhäuser tells of the tragic consequences for its eponymous protagonist, a minnesinger who is lured into the mountain of Venusberg. Tannhäuser's dilemma stages a Nietzschean conflict between the sensual and the spiritual, the hedonistic goddess in whose lair he languished, and the purity of the Landgrave's daughter Elisabeth, whose hand the opera makes clear he could win through the singing competition should he choose. As recent scholarship has demonstrated, Tannhäuser's song to Venus instead of Elisabeth in the competition defers its outcome. Far from marriage, the competition sets in train the tragic completion of the Apollonian and Dionysian conflict in Elisabeth's death.²⁰ Sent on pilgrimage to Rome by the Landgrave, Tannhäuser is not immediately absolved by the Pope,

and it is only on seeing Elisabeth's funeral bier that his heartfelt prayer for forgiveness is answered, redeeming him from the thrall of sensuality alone. But Tannhäuser's song to sensuality rather than chastity recognizes the inseparability of body and mind, and it is this opposition of the call to the sensual symbolised by the forbidden mountain together with the purely formal order of the singing competition that comprises the moral fulcrum of the opera. Can then, the mountain of Sainte-Victoire, obsessively renewed in each painting of the motif, be regarded as analogous in sentiment for Cézanne? Does this 'Venusberg' best unite the painter's mind with the physical-sensual act of painting? Working on Sainte-Victoire, Cézanne commented: 'A sharp nuance works on me. I feel myself coloured by all the nuances of infinity. At that moment, I am as one with my painting. We are an iridescent chaos'.²¹ Athanassoglou-Kallmyer suggests that Cézanne 'implicitly positioned himself, in painting, as a parallel to Wagner'.²²

VI

In this context it is rewarding to evoke W.J.T. Mitchell's concept of playing on an idol, as, arguably, Cézanne played on the idol of the late nineteenth century, Wagner. Mitchell animates what he sees as a 'double consciousness' on the part of the viewer — often ready to discuss painting as if it had a life of its own, yet aware of the need for critical distance.²³ In acknowledging the 'varieties of animation or vitality that are attributed to images ... as living things', Mitchell's concern is how to make this acceptable.²⁴ One solution might have been evidential support through recourse to artists such as Cézanne who contended that the organic matter of a landscape somehow 'lives', perhaps through the vitality and change that one can watch by close observation of the environment, and through the seasons. Mitchell's strategy however, is to return to the etymology of 'person': to *per-sonare*: to *sound through*, forming a new critical method which balances eulogy and 'critical iconoclasm' by adopting Nietzsche's method of 'sounding the idols' with a 'tuning fork'.²⁵ The idea is to set them resonating but not to break them. This method Mitchell describes as 'playing upon' the idol, 'breaking its silence... and transforming its hollowness into an echo chamber for human thought'.²⁶ His whole critical endeavour then, is explicitly performative — and musical.

VII

The Nietzschean metaphor is of course particularly apposite for late nineteenth-century aesthetics and Wagner in particular. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have situated Cézanne's organicism between Nietzsche and Claude Debussy, a composer for whom Wagner was especially provocative. In a key passage, they wrote:

Perhaps it is not until Cézanne that rocks began to exist uniquely through the forces of folding they harness, landscapes through thermal and magnetic forces, and apples through forces of germination: nonvisual forces that nevertheless have been rendered visible. When forces become necessarily cosmic, material becomes necessarily molecular, with enormous force operating in an infinitesimal space. The problem is no longer that of beginning, any more than it is that of a foundation-ground. It is now a problem of consistency or consolidation: how to consolidate the material, make it consistent, so that it can harness unthinkable, invisible, nonsonorous forces. Debussy ... Music molecularizes sound matter and in so doing becomes capable of harnessing nonsonorous forces such as Duration and Intensity. *Render Duration sonorous*. Let us recall Nietzsche's idea of the eternal return as a little ditty, a refrain, but which captures the mute and unthinkable forces of the Cosmos.²⁷

I shall return to Debussy later in the chapter (Improvisations sections, X-XI), but for now I wish to consider the relevance of the musicality of Nietzsche's eternal return as a 'refrain', or to translate back to Wagnerian language, a *leitmotif*. Deleuze and Guattari clearly found synonymity in the affects of music and painting, united by their acknowledgement of that which is beyond verbal articulation or ordinary comprehension. For them, both arts achieve this by working temporally: through the condensation or relaxation of elements that appear to breathe to the rhythm of our perceptive consciousness. To read musical and visual material is to follow a linear and narrative development, which I would qualify as the canvas surface or cognitive listening, yet contrary to this form of understanding, pieces which stretch the time of looking and the space of experiencing (such as works by Wagner or Debussy) affect in a fundamentally structural mode. Alain Badiou in his recent book *Five Lessons on Wagner* qualifies the dual function of the *leitmotif* in just this way: the *leitmotif* 'has a theatrical articulation that can be regarded as mythical, or narrative, but it also functions as a non-descriptive, internal musical development with no dramatic or narrative connotations whatsoever'.²⁸ Reading Cézanne's *Mont Sainte-Victoire* paintings as a series, we discover a painter deeply indebted to the surface-depth duality of the *leitmotif*, one moreover, whose effort was tuned to set off the multi-sensory melt-down of Mitchell-Nietzsche's 'resonating chamber'.

VIII

One way of adopting Mitchell's provocative method might be to 'play' upon the idol imaginatively, making, after psychoanalytic theory, a 'symbolic connection between phantasy and reality'.²⁹ Play has a healthy dose of the provisional. It is pretend, liberating irresponsibility. It can free the critic from duty, diplomacy and devotion to any cause beyond the



^{4.3}
Paul Cézanne, *Mont Sainte-Victoire with Large Pine*, c.1887, oil on canvas, The Courtauld Gallery, London.

written text. Returning to Segal, play 'is a way both of exploring reality and mastering it; it is a way of learning the potential of the material played with, and of its limitations'.³⁰ It seems to me that this exploration of material is just what Cézanne does technically. Comparable to the musician's experience of 'resistance' in a score, this technical playing is best seen in the *Mont Sainte-Victoire* series. And contemporaneously at least, critics accounted for Cézanne's method by musical analogy, mastering a multi-sensory reality by stretching the boundaries of visual perception. Joachim Gasquet, first owner of the Courtauld *Mont Sainte-Victoire* (fig. 4.3), found an 'interior music' in Cézanne's painting.³¹ Émile Bernard also discussed metaphorically the 'instinctive and sentimental perception of relationships and harmonies [which]... touch on music'.³² And Roger Fry followed suit:

The transposition of all the data of nature into values of plastic colour is ... complete. The result is as far from the scene it describes as music. There is no inducement to the mind to retrace the steps the artist has taken and to reconstruct from his image ... We remain too completely held in the enchantment of this deep harmony. Though all comes by the interpretation of actual visual sensations.³³

It is curious that critics invoked a musical language just as music itself was breaking the conventions upon which they relied. Nineteenth-century innovation, with Wagner at its head, introduced 'chromatic harmonic perspectives', expanding chromatic relations to achieve greater sonority — for instance, through the use of a whole tone scale. Composers emphasised texture, which, although apparent since the earliest use of counterpoint,

revoked the clarity of line developed by its seventeenth and eighteenth-century masters. Counterpoint proper entails the 'coherent combination of distinct melodic lines ... unity in diversity', but its tonality is governed by chordal and harmonic relations.³⁴ It is therefore both horizontal and vertical. Just as melodic line was increasingly expressed through harmonic texture, so Cézanne's forms appear through colour and broken line.³⁵ In 1906 Théodore Duret remarked on how Cézanne built up his canvases, first placing 'strokes next to one another, then on top of one another ... repetitive strokes juxtaposed or superimposed'.³⁶ Seated before *Mont Sainte-Victoire*, Cézanne spoke synaesthetically:

the totally blue odor of pines which is harsh in the sun, must marry with the green odor of the fields which freshen there each morning, with the odor of the stones, and the perfume of marble from Sainte-Victoire... when sensation is at its fullest it is in harmony with all existence.³⁷

Later he continued, 'I hear all the green woody odors of the fields in Weber'.³⁸ Surface planes melt from one to the next; we are ever aware of how they enmesh, yet this goes little way toward describing their affect. Perhaps this is why Duret contended that this style of painting was 'inaccessible'.

'Look at *Sainte-Victoire*. What animation, what overpowering thirst for sun! These boulders were on fire. There is still fire in them ... Up there is Plato's cave'.³⁹ During repeated painting of *Mont Sainte-Victoire*, the mountain moves from distance to domination of the canvas, just as, in *The Card Players* series, the figures are reduced in number, the composition simplified. In an aphorism to Bernard, Cézanne claimed 'one should not say modelling, one should say modulation'.⁴⁰ To Gasquet, he insisted his work participated in the 'modality and drama of ideas'.⁴¹ Cézanne's own descriptive language evokes a musical reading of his technique. Modulation defines progression from one key to the next. For Cézanne, it accounts for sudden turns; parallel bars of colour sculpt form, yet their continual change — modulation — renders everything off centre, with the effect of a modernist score where home keys can be hard to discern. Jonathan Crary reads 'disintegration and loss' in the fractured surface which opens up new relations.⁴² Yet it is necessarily a broken perception that is multi-sensory, and only through this that the artist can render a world of 'transitions, events, becoming'.⁴³

IX

In enacting the broken multi-sensory perception of a constellation of interpretation, this chapter has adopted its structure from a model of musical composition put forward by Theodor Adorno in *Negative Dialectics* (1966). The model of constellation seeks the

ungraspable and plural in opposition to a unifying vision: as far as possible, this chapter is intended to perform its subject through the structure of its writing.⁴⁴ We have been subjecting Cézanne's painting to a particular and concentrated looking, or 'listening', comparable perhaps to Meyer Schapiro's estimation that Cézanne's work 'demands of us a long concentrated vision, it is like music as a mode of experience'.⁴⁵ So far in this confusion of the senses, the specific modality has been Wagnerian, a composer whose shadow looms large in Adorno's philosophy. In keeping with the centripetal movement of scattered constellations, I would like to instigate a 'modulation' to a new set of relations. Whilst filtered through Wagner, these relations have an independent existence that is equally enriching for Cézanne. Where in Adorno's thinking, the constellation is that which is different from thought, and that which is not solidified into definite form, here I turn to the ambiguity of Cézanne, building on discussion of his structural disintegration, and continued through an estimation of the staging of his sitters in *The Card Players* and *Harlequins*.⁴⁶

X

From the context of late nineteenth-century French music and painting it is possible to forge connections between Cézanne and Debussy through the formal means through which they responded to Wagner. If Cézanne is implicitly the French Wagner of painting, then Debussy in *Pelleas et Mélisande* (started in 1893, first performed 1902) consciously produced an antidote to the 'Wagnerism' of his day. As Lydia Goehr has extrapolated, Debussy's reaction was complex, playing Wagner at his own game.⁴⁷ In *Pelleas et Mélisande* French myth matches German: the siren Mélisune is evoked in *Mélisande*; but structurally, where Wagner aims for maximum effect, Debussy's scoring is so melodically sparse that the composer wrote, 'I've spent days trying to capture that "nothing" that *Mélisande* is made of'.⁴⁸

Mélisande becomes a symbolic identity onto whom the male protagonists graft their aspirations. For the audience this accumulates a multi-point perspective where she assumes different roles for each member, seen through many eyes, but never from within. Her elusive nature complements Maeterlinck's suggestive writing, and it was this interpretative scope in the playwright's script which first attracted Debussy to him. Yet Debussy set himself a paradox in adopting this libretto, for his composition was driven by his text: 'nothing should impede the progress of the drama: all musical development not called for in the words is a mistake'.⁴⁹ Essentially his desire was reductive — to portray fullness of character economically — even when the prevailing identity was one of concealment. Painting a character resistant to interpretation is far harder in cameo than one eager to communicate. Cézanne's *Card Players* series shows just this fact. Bristling with resistance to the painter's

attempts to characterise them, we can never be sure of their identities.

Where critics disliked the 'monotonous' style of Debussy's vocal lines, the composer explained that 'the feelings of a character cannot always be expressed melodically'.⁵⁰ Wagner has often been described as the composer of 'endless melody'. Debussy counters Wagner's method, yet his opera aspired to a synthesis of text and music that privileges psychological force over linear narrative: the psychological force on which Wagner himself relied.⁵¹ The psychological motivation was understood contemporaneously by British music critic Rollo Myers: 'the characters speak in a kind of psalmodic declaration expressed in melodic curves, and thus their personalities and actions stand out more poignantly against the shimmering, pulsing harmonic background'.⁵² Myers is clear that Debussy's melodic line is constructed inversely, that 'the melodic impulse expresses itself in harmonic colouring and combinations'.⁵³ It grows from within the overall texture and is immanent to it. Distributing the notes of a chord to 'secure the greatest sonority', Debussy employed non-relational colours in a manner that in painting would be regarded as thoroughly abstract.

Non-linear melodic construction and fragmentary counterpoint resonate with the innovations in Cézanne's technique. Richard Shiff has developed this analysis specifically in relation to painting, describing how Cézanne would 'warp' his two-dimensional canvas surface without furthering the representation of his subject. Details of the wall and table of The Metropolitan Museum of Art's *Cardplayers* for instance, work to 'violate the integrity of the depicted subject'.⁵⁴ Shiff continues, 'all becomes equally animated and similarly volumetric, whether rounded or flat in reality': whether, one could add, the subject is a truly animate living being or the inanimate objects of their environment.⁵⁵ Comparing this to the unusual sequences and remote keys of Debussy is instructive. Overall Debussy is a master of atmosphere, and Cézanne's painting coherent, rendering a totalizing sense of place in spite of the fragmented parts.

Beyond form, what analogies can be drawn between Cézanne's ambiguous characterisation and the economy of Debussy? In technique, the parallel is surely in the composer's attempt to capture the emptiness of *Mélisande* and the physically bare patches of canvas that Cézanne leaves. Hans Sedlmayr quipped that the *Cardplayers* paintings depicted 'stillness without life'.⁵⁶ Whilst this might account for the monumentality of the figures, Shiff is correct to follow Meyer Schapiro in paying close attention to the affects of animation in the brushwork, warm tones, and light across the surface of these works.⁵⁷ They breathe organically, exuding life just as much as that life is suspended action. United in spite of broken technique, their ambiguity is born of a richness indicative of more than can be easily assimilated at once. These archetypes of spatial painting in fact have temporal resonance, arresting and distilling attention for longer than is expected. And in confounding expectation, they insistently, quietly demonstrate their avant-garde credentials. They are not so much at the forefront of their time, but out of time. Correspondingly, one can argue for

the spatial qualities in Debussy's music, of which his ground-breaking opera is an excellent example. Those 'psalmodic declarations' and suspended harmonies seem at times not to move at all, instead expressive of psychological depth far from the temporal action of consciousness in everyday life.

XI

Both Cézanne and Debussy are concerned with portraying characters who defy categorisation, who are beyond human experience but who inform us of some quality in humanity only appreciable from this position of distance. Cézanne's canvases *The Harvesters* and *Girl at the Piano* suggest this skill, as does Debussy's *Pelleas and Mélisande*. Cézanne's *Cardplayers* paintings are at the same time monumental and incidental; interested in purely formal values and the subjects depicted. The sitters have an honesty and realness about them, and yet for T.J. Clark, the curtains in the *Moscow Man Smoking a Pipe* or *The Barnes Foundation* or *The Metropolitan Museum Card Players* (plates 1 and 2) mark a 'threshold of the visible world' that is seen.⁵⁸ The same could be said for the curtain in *Mardi Gras* (fig. 4.4). But just as the *Cardplayers* are irresolvably enigmatic, so is *Mardi Gras* an unequivocally modern carnival. This Pierrot seems to push into the frame a reluctant and disconcertingly observant Harlequin, whose raked-back posture defies his inevitable progress forward — that slightly alarming right eye whose gaze slips backwards and sideways, as if attached to the left leg; the mouth that follows the contour of the raised brow above; the echoes of the contours transforming an organ of outward expression to one of observation and insight. *Mardi Gras* can be considered in relation to the 'cleverness' of *The Card Players* which Clark has recently found in 'the business of capturing a form of life — precisely at its moment of disintegration'.⁵⁹

In the double existence of life and art, either one must be subservient to the other at any given time. When life dissolves into art, the transposition is to a greater or lesser extent theatrical. The drama of the landscape of Mont Sainte-Victoire, the expressiveness of musical performance and the tensions of a card game may be subtle ways of negotiating the dichotomy of art and life. Given Cézanne's and Debussy's overriding interest in the potential of what art can create, their resistance to selecting one possibility over another, and the ensuing unresolved ambiguity we perceive in their work, it is not surprising that both painter and composer extended these interests through the medium of the commedia dell'arte: a genre that is explicitly theatrical. From the order of a game of cards, where chance occurs only through the restrictions imposed by the rules of the game, we move to the equally formal play of symbolic theatre, where improvisation occurs within the confined space of working within the conventions of an ancient narrative. The commedia dell'arte players draw attention to their artfulness; they rely on their viewer always knowing where life is



4.4
Paul Cézanne, *Mardi Gras*,
1888, oil on canvas, Pushkin
Museum, Moscow.

laid aside and art assumed. Arguably, this is a more explicit mode of what Cézanne went on to explore in *The Card Players*, where the game indicates a similar suspension of ordinary life and its relationships. The men become absorbed in their activity, withdrawing inward, so that it is appropriate that like the sets and clothing in the *Harlequin* series, the walls, curtains and table cloths — the environment of *The Card Players* — take on a lively presence of movement and animation. The card game is itself in this sense a work of art, although it is easier to see the implications that this interpretation might have by studying the less abstract example of the commedia dell'arte.

The limited tonalities of Cézanne's blank, psychologically distant *Harlequin* (fig. 4.5) alert us to this division between everyday life and art. This hieratic single-figure study has been taken as a later work than the more exuberant Pierrot and Harlequin of *Mardi Gras*.⁶⁰ Undoubtedly there is a shift from the vigilance of the harlequin in *Mardi Gras* to the (in-)human condition of harlequin in the abstract: from the harlequin that uncannily 'watches' us to one consumed by presenting the harlequin 'type' at the expense of any particular identity. In the later work, Cézanne's attention is all on the sheen, fold and details of the



costume; the expressionless wooden face accords with the pulsing melancholy of the blue-green-grey wall behind. Both Harlequin the performer and the self beneath seem silenced by the demands of being consistently one or the other. Cézanne's sentiment finds parallel in the characterisation of one of Debussy's students of *Masques* (from his second book of *Preludes*, 1912-13):

a tragedy for piano one might call it – a sort of transparency of Debussy's character ... He was torn with poignant feelings which he preferred to mask with irony. The title *Masques* represents an ambiguity which the composer protested with all his might: 'It is not the Italian comedy, it is the tragic expression of existence'.⁶¹

Perhaps Cézanne's harlequin and Debussy's commedia dell'arte subjects are closer than the viewer or listener think, using a symbolic theatrical genre full of incidental moments and seeming light fun to critique the banality of everyday life, its comfort, uninspiring toil, and selfishness. But are not these also the concerns of *The Card Players*? We watch the game from outside the frame, at a distance. Unbiased as to its outcome, the sequential movement of the play of cards is mesmerising, perhaps even hypnotic in its otherworldliness; but it should have very little impact beyond its meaning for the players involved. The troubling nature of Cézanne's depictions of this pastime is precisely that these images do cause the viewer to pause, to look repeatedly, to reflect, perhaps, on the nature of existence.

Muted, the first of Debussy's settings of Verlaine's commedia dell'arte poems *Fêtes Galantes* (1869), concerns, as its title suggests, precisely this no-man's land.⁶² For a composer, however, its twilight calm — literally 'demi-jour', half-day, half-night — and 'deep silence' poses a significant challenge. Achieved by pacing, the repeated G# of the piano introduction chimes a call to listen, before opening a descending motif with suspended crotchets across bar lines. In general, the emphasis of the opening beat in each bar expected in 3/4 rhythm is denied by Debussy's treatment of both vocal and piano lines. The song has a circularity, which means that the development section at 'Ferme tes yeux' and the temporary shift into G major at 'Lassons-nous persuader' grows and recedes within an overall frame of waiting; those G# return to haunt the falling night of the closing bars, remaining unresolved fragments, as silent as music could be.

The second setting for *Fêtes Galantes*, *Marionettes* concerns four of the stock characters from commedia dell'arte: Scaramouche (or Pantaloon), the vulgar Pulcinella, the prosaic Dr. Graziana, and his disobedient and wilful daughter. Verlaine's poem thrives on exaggeration to enliven these ridiculous caricatures. Describing their actions rather than their intentions, the scene is observed from a distance, and as Bernard Wenck has noted, it presents not so much a dramatic scenario as 'stage directions' for the troupe. The audience awaits with anticipation an event that never occurs, and the whole is reduced to the banal-

Opposite:

4.5
Paul Cézanne, *Harlequin*,
1888-90, oil on canvas,
National Gallery of Art,
Washington. Collection of
Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon.

ity of inconsequence. This characterization without character, or plotless pantomime, is wonderfully mimicked by Debussy in his musical setting of *Marionettes*. The piano resembles the stock pre-scene music typical of nineteenth-century theatre, stirring the audience into attentiveness for the coming action. As the poem has only one narrator, this indication of the coming character does not change, or not beyond a slightly Spanish inflexion in the music to evoke the daughter's pirate lover (a character invented by Verlaine in his rendition of the commedia dell'arte). Dividing each stanza, the piano prelude repeatedly attempts to imbue the coming gossip with an inflated sense of importance. Repeatedly, not only is this denied, but also is the traditional function of the interlude to faithfully represent the characters, since here the voice darts willfully into its own line against the rhythms of the accompaniment. Finally, the song closes with an introduction for a stanza which never materializes, wittily taunting the audience to exasperation. No more of this non-event is given. Debussy's bathos is supreme in negating development of narrative or musical structure.

The last of this set of *Fêtes Galantes*, *Moonlight* speculates on the afterlife of the characters once the formal pantomime is over. Structurally, Debussy indicates the shift in action by returning to the key signature of the first of the songs, which addressed the demands of being a player, the silencing of one self to assume another. Making use of the sort of harmonic innovations I have already discussed in relation to *Pelleas and Mélisande*, Debussy introduces chordal upper partials towards the end of the final verse to accentuate the moonlight, 'which brings dreams to the birds in the trees'. I do not think it an accident that Debussy employs abstracted non-relational colours at these words, for it is here that the ethereal subjects of mask and bergamask are recognized for what they are: visions which we may perceive but not participate in. Debussy does not provide a narrative but summons fleeting experiences to be watched as much as to be listened to. Debussy defers expectation; stretches structure to disconcert his audience; writes 'silent' music, music that critiques the subject he takes on; writes in the illusion even at the moment of deception. Again, the parallel to Cézanne's *Harlequins*, and through them, to *The Card Players*, is worthy of reflection: silent, stretching, and mask-like.

XII

Both Cézanne and Debussy use their medium to negotiate what *cannot* be made visible, but both do so figuratively. Society forever requires a mode for its self-reflection, and comedy, or specifically the commedia dell'arte, is just one outlet; play, with which I began, another. Theatricality is a metaphor, whether it is merely indicated by physical costume or used as a compositional form, from the most basic 'let's pretend' to the sophisticated structures of professional performance. It simultaneously enacts the impossibility of unveiling and the potential for that unveiling. It is both revelation and concealment; authentic and

equivalent; liberty and legislation. That is to say, it is a double bind that performs the shifting multiplicity of media: visual art and music, music and text, text and visual art. The bind however is not at its foundation a formal endeavour but one that seeks to retrieve meaning beyond the games and chances of making.

Cézanne might have set out for some primordial essence, but he discovered that this very root is itself growing, and evolving. His sequential canvases, *Mont Sainte-Victoire*, *Harlequins* and *The Card Players*, express this evolution by their seriality. Far from a monumentalizing painter, subtle changes in timbre, colour, or composition indicate both what is present and what is absent: the current perception and the potential for one that is different. It is for this reason that there are so many descriptions of instability and provisionality in his work. The historiographical trajectory of this reading is a long one stemming from Julius Meier-Graefe's *Paul Cézanne* (1910), in whose words Cézanne's canvases exude 'extraordinary probable existence'.⁶³ It was in just this spirit that Leibniz in *Theodicy* (1710) suggested an 'ideal game' in which singularities (or events) have many possible courses for their actualisation: there are many possible worlds which might exist.⁶⁴ This chapter has turned scholarship into an ideal game. To return to Merleau-Ponty, he found that 'human life "understands" not only a certain definite environment, but an infinite number of possible environments'.⁶⁵ Similarly, Cézanne's painting 'suspends' pragmatic interests and reveals the 'root of things beneath the imposed order of humanity'.⁶⁶ In the continuity of becoming, the non-verbal game of art is a 'lasting reparation', continuously translating phantasy into reality.⁶⁷

All references in digital versions of *Courtauld Books Online* are hyperlinked. To navigate to a footnote, click on the reference number in the body of the text. To return back to the text, click on the number at the beginning of the footnote.

1. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Cézanne's Doubt' [1945], in *Sense and Nonsense* (Evanston: North Western Univ. Press, 1964), p. 15.
2. Merleau-Ponty, 'Cézanne's Doubt', p. 15.
3. This definition of metaphysics stems from Henri Bergson, which I have discussed in "'Sudden gleams of (f)light": "Intuition as Method"?' , *Art History* 34, no. 2 (2011): pp. 370-86, reprinted in Catherine Grant & Patricia Rubin (eds), *Creative Writing and Art History* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).
4. Merleau-Ponty, 'Cézanne's Doubt', p. 16.
5. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* [1945] (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 376.
6. Merleau-Ponty, 'Cézanne's Doubt', p. 15.
7. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 119.
8. Adam Phillips, *Winnicott* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 119.
9. Hanna Segal, *Dream, Phantasy and Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 77.
10. Cézanne to Gasquet in P. Michael Doran (ed), *Conversations with Cézanne* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: Univ. of California Press, 2001), p. 111. As Gasquet himself emphasised, he reconstructed his conversations with Cézanne from memory, and although he felt that his portrayal was accurate, Doran, Reff and others demonstrate that this Cézanne is a very personal one. According to Gasquet's wife, Gasquet collected letters and conversations into his book in 1912-3, around six years after Cézanne's death, but this history makes many of the reported conversations impossible to date with assurance. For more on the problems of Gasquet's account, see Doran, pp.107-8.
11. Richard Sennett, 'Resistance', *Granta* 76: *Music* (Winter 2001): p. 31.
12. Sennett, 'Resistance', p. 35.
13. Richard Leppert, *The Sight of Sound, Music, Representation and, the History of the Body* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: Univ. of California Press, 1993), p. 214. This is specifically in relation to Mendelssohn's famous discussion of his *Songs without Words*: 'People usually complain that music is so ambiguous ... whereas everyone understands words. For me it is just the reverse ... To me the music I love does not express thoughts too indefinite to be put into words, but too definite'.
14. Leppert, *Sight of Sound*, p. 215. Leppert invokes Mark Johnson's *The Body in the Mind* [1987], and Barthes's *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews* [1972].
15. Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, *Cézanne and Provence: The Painter in his Culture* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 41.
16. Edward Said, 'Glen Gould, the Virtuoso as Intellectual', in Said, *Music and the Limits* (London: Bloombury, 2008), pp. 270-1.
17. Glen Gould, 'Address to Graduates at the University of Toronto' [Nov. 1963], in Said, 'Glen Gould', p. 270.
18. Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, *Cézanne and Provence*, p. 42.
19. Chabrier is particularly significant for his acquaintanceship with Cézanne, a fellow guest at Nina de Villard's salons at 17 rue Chaptal. Although at the heart of the Parisian cultural life Cézanne increasingly loathed (he was an attendee of Manet's famous Thursday gatherings), Chabrier wrote several sophisticated renditions of folk themes such as 'Paysage' and 'Danse Villageoise' in *Pièce Pittoresque* (1880). These light cameos capture a Southern warmth similarly reflected in the canvas by Cézanne which the composer owned. See N. Simeone, *Paris, a musical gazetteer* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2000), esp. pp. 243-4.
20. Heike Harmgart, Steffen Huck and Wieland Müller, 'Tannhäuser's Dilemma: A Study in Rational Choice Hermeneutics', ESRC Centre for Economic Learning and Social Evolution (ELSE) papers (Nov. 2006): <http://else.econ.ucl.ac.uk/papers/uploaded/237.pdf>
21. Gasquet recalled this conversation with Cézanne in Doran, *Conversations*, p. 114. Cézanne continued to describe how he strived 'to become reality itself ... want[ing] to draw religion from it [the reality of the landscape]', pp. 114-5.
22. Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, *Cézanne and Provence*, p. 42.
23. W.J.T. Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want?* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 7.
24. Cézanne: '[E]verything, more or less, beings and things, we are only ... a bit of phosphorous burning in the membranes of the world ... I'd rather free this essence', in Doran, *Conversations*, p. 113.
25. Mitchell, *Pictures*, p. 8; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* [1889] (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 31-2.
26. Mitchell, *Pictures*, p. 27.
27. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* [1980] (New York: Continuum, 2007), p. 378. Deleuze and Guattari's italics and ellipsis.
28. Alain Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner* (London and New York: Verso, 2010), p. 20.
29. Hanna Segal, 'Imagination, Play, and Art', in Segal, *Dream, Phantasy, and Art*, p. 103. Segal continues: 'thought is a "trial action". Between desire and satisfaction there is a gap', p. 108.
30. Segal, 'Imagination, Play, and Art', p. 101.
31. Doran, *Conversations*, p. 125.
32. Doran, *Conversations*, p. 41.
33. Roger Fry, *Cézanne: A Study of his Development* (London: Hogarth Press, 1932), p. 69.
34. 'Counterpoint', in A. Latham (ed.), *Oxford Companion to Music* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), pp. 315-9.
35. As Émile Bernard identified, Cézanne's technique consisted of layering, so 'screens' of paint constructed space.
36. Théodore Duret, in Richard Shiff, 'He Painted', in Nancy Ireson and Barnaby Wright (eds), *Cézanne's Card Players* (London: The Courtauld Gallery in assoc. with Paul Holberton Pub., 2010), p. 73.
37. Doran, *Conversations*, p. 112.
38. Cézanne recalled by Gasquet, Doran, *Conversations*, p. 112. Cézanne referred to the composer Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826).
39. Doran, *Conversations*, p. 113.
40. Doran, *Conversations*, p. 190.
41. Doran, *Conversations*, p. 111.
42. Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2001), pp. 288, 340, 343. Yve-Alain Bois also remarks on this quality of instability in Cézanne's work. Yve-Alain Bois, 'Cézanne. Words and Deeds', *October* 84 (Spring 1988): p. 39.
43. Crary, *Suspensions of Perception*, p. 289.
44. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* [1966] (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 1990); recently discussed in Badiou, *Five Lessons*, p. 37.
45. Meyer Schapiro, *Paul Cézanne* [1952] (New York: Abrams, 1988), p. 9.
46. Badiou qualifies that that which is different from thought presents itself as affect, or body — hence we can situate this modulation in the mind-body relation outlined earlier.
47. Lydia Goehr, 'Radical Modernism and the Failure of Style: Philosophical Reflections on Debussy-Maeterlinck's *Pélieas et Mélisande*', *Representations* 74 (Spring 2001).
48. Debussy quoted in David Grayson, 'Debussy on Stage', in S. Tresize (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), p. 78.
49. Debussy quoted in Robert Orledge, *Debussy and the Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982), p. 50.
50. Orledge, *Debussy and the Theatre*, p. 51.
51. Debussy's synthesis of text and music has been described by Robert Orledge as 'cinematographic movement form', thereby drawing attention to a processual development. See Orledge, *Debussy and the Theatre*, p. 88. More recently, Alain Badiou has argued against the conventional reading of Wagner as a composer of 'endless melody', finding instead 'underlying discontinuity' through listening to Pierre Boulez's 1979-80 Bayreuth interpretation of his scores in particular. If Debussy had also realized this, then the structural games outlined above bear greater debt to Wagner. Badiou, *Five Lessons*, pp. 17, 6.
52. Rollo H. Myers, *Debussy* (London: Duckworth, 1948), p. 33.
53. Myers, *Debussy*, p. 33.
54. Shiff, 'He Painted', p. 79. Again the metaphor of warping originates in Merleau-Ponty's seminal essay 'Cézanne's Doubt', p. 14.
55. Shiff, 'He Painted', p. 79.
56. Hans Sedlmayr in Kurt Badt, *The Art of Cézanne* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1965), p. 180.
57. Shiff, 'He Painted', p. 78.
58. See Clark's chapter, 'A House of Cards', in this publication, p. 30.
59. T.J. Clark, 'At the Courtauld: Symptoms of Cézannia', *London Review of Books* 32, no. 23 (2 December 2010): p. 22.
60. Most recently by the Art Institute of Chicago's focused exhibition, *Harlequin*, from 26 February until 30 May 2011.
61. Marguerite Long, *At the Piano with Debussy*, (trans.) Olive Senior-Ellis (London: Dent, 1972), p. 92. I am most grateful to Roy Howat for sourcing this reference.
62. I have previously presented analyses of two of the *Fêtes Galantes* in parallel with what I have taken to be Debussy and Matisse's shared concern with the non-

representational qualities of experience. Transposing the analysis to Cézanne is no blasé piece of scholarship on my part, however, for as I hope to have demonstrated, Cézanne was concerned fundamentally with these subjects too. Reading Cézanne and Matisse together in this way is an on-going project, but the preliminary work on Matisse is forthcoming as 'Grafting a Dream: Henri Bergson, Claude Debussy and Henri Matisse', in James H. Rubin and Olivia Mattis (eds), *Rival Sisters: Art and Music at the Birth of Modernism* (London: Ashgate, 2013).

63. Julius Meier-Graefe, *Paul Cézanne* [1910], (trans.) J. Holroyd Reece (London: Ernest Benn, 1927), quoted in Beverly Twitchell, *Cézanne and Formalism in Bloomsbury* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Series, 1987), p. 58.

64. For Leibniz, the presence of God prevented this; instead, the 'best' course was chosen in a 'divine game'.

65. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 381.

66. Merleau-Ponty, 'Cézanne's Doubt', p. 16.

67. Segal, *Dream, Phantasy and Art*, pp. 93, 109. But this is a reality which is in Winnicott's view, 'creative by virtue of always being inconclusive'. See Adam Phillips's summary in Winnicott, p. 144. Winnicott's papers referred to by Phillips are 'Morals and Education' (1963) and 'On Communicating and not Communicating' (1963).



BUILDING A WORLD BETWEEN MEN (OR CÉZANNE WITH ARENDT)

SATISH PADIYAR

World alienation, and not self-alienation as Marx thought, has been the hallmark of the modern age.

Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958)

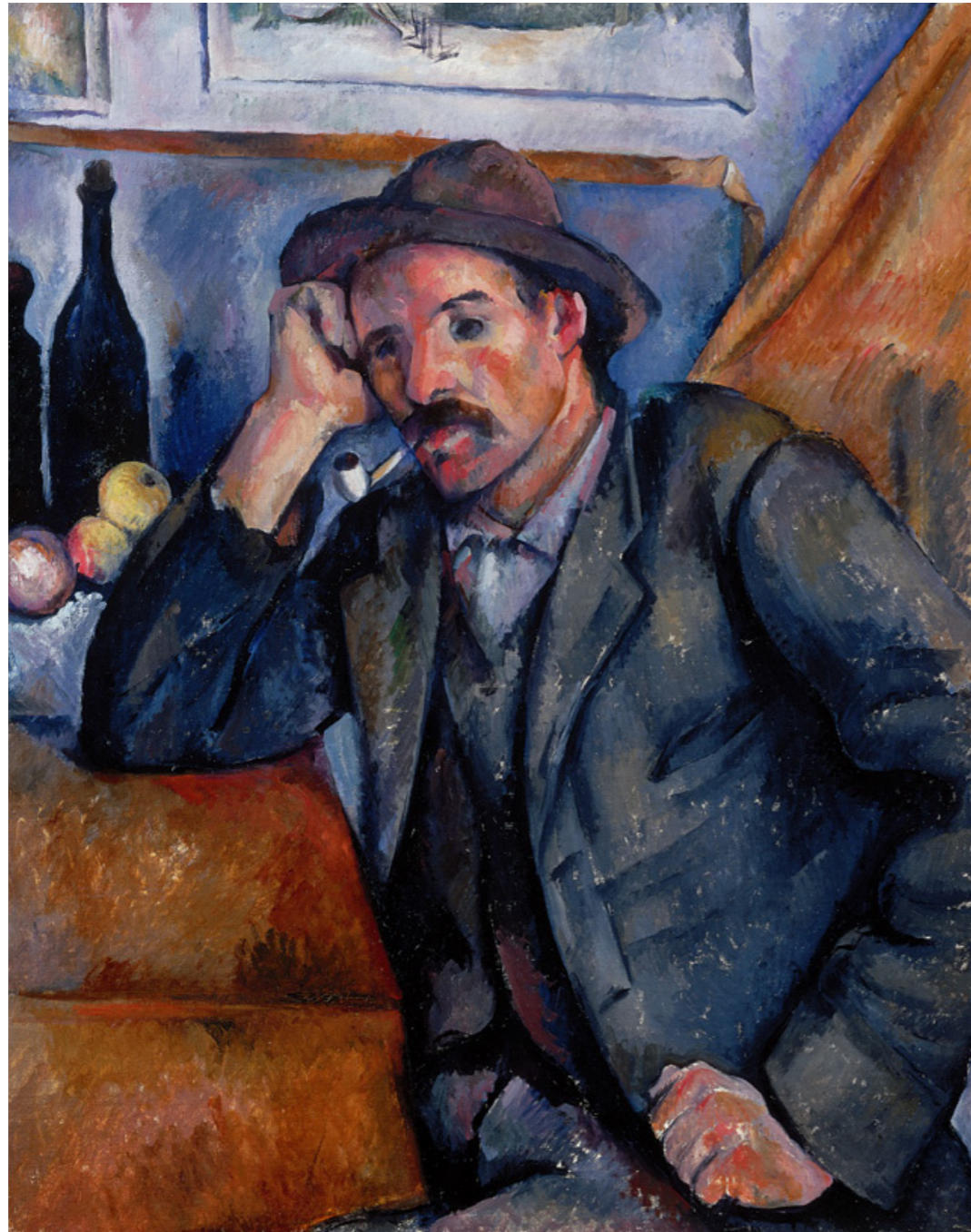
Cézanne's *The Smoker*, of about 1890 (fig. 5.1), depicts an un-named farm worker posed at the corner of a table. The ruddy-faced figure appears in all five painted versions of *Cardplayers*. In *The Smoker* the pensive head is framed by a canvas pinned to the wall behind, one of Cézanne's earlier still-life paintings. The dark blue clad right arm rests upon the table, grazing two bright green apples set against an upright bottle. There is a brilliant painterly passage between the farm worker's elbow and that canvas, a series of overlapping luminous strokes that effectively pulls this smoker's body into the still life, and into an identification with 'Cézanne', the painter 'tugging at his sleeve'. In Cézanne's art, such indeterminate skeins of paint — freely fusional, space disorienting, and ontologically questionable — bring into a state of play the signs for the things of this world.¹

Smoking, as an act, could shift the late-nineteenth-century European male subject into a state of induced reverie. No smoke is to be seen rising from this pipe, yet our eyes drift upwards, as directly above the powerful absent-minded head another of Cézanne's works appears. Within the higher picture, bodies are touching. We barely glimpse the back view of the lower legs and feet of a standing figure, the left foot stroked by the advancing leg and foot of another body, whose curvaceous buttock rests on a verdant ground. This 'picture within the picture' has plausibly been identified as a version of the *Bathers* of about 1888.² If we now introduce a related small drawing that has been tentatively dated c.1890 and titled *Seated Man: Legs of a Bather* (fig. 5.2), we can see that the link between seated man and striding male bather also involves the figure of the card player. This strange synonymy of a vertical chain of associations prompts me to question: what is the relation between Smokers, Bathers, and The Card Players? How should we understand the free play and slippage of signs from the one project to the other? If in his oneiric isolation, the Cézannian figure of the smoker appears to be daydreaming of the pleasures of inter-male touch, what does this say about the *sexuality* of Cézanne's *The Card Players*?

It was while he was working on many images of male bathers in the early 1890s that Cézanne turned to a studied engagement with the figure of the male labourer, seated at a table, smoking, or playing cards, singly or in groups of two or more. Of *The Card Players* it has been observed that their 'exclusive focus on male figures was ... most unusual in contemporary peasant painting'.³ This focus was made refreshingly clear at the 2010

Opposite:

Detail of plate 4.
Paul Cézanne, *Cardplayers*,
c.1892-96, oil on canvas, The
Courtauld Gallery, London.



5.1
Paul Cézanne, *The Smoker*,
c.1890-2, oil on canvas, The
State Hermitage Museum,
St. Petersburg.

Courtauld Gallery exhibition, where *The Card Players* paintings and a group of drawn and painted studies for them could be seen to consist fundamentally of a collection of images of a tight and exclusively male enclave. *The Card Players* was in this sense less a radical departure onto new territory than a project which momentarily *interrupted* that of *Bathers*: it was a new vehicle for Cézanne to continue an experiment in realizing a tangible world of male solidarity. What links *Smokers*, *Bathers* and *The Card Players* is a certain libidinal economy of desire, the insistent but largely unacknowledged homosocial and homoerotic dimension of Cézanne's lifelong project of capturing and realizing sensation.

This sexual politics of *The Card Players* is not however straightforward. Cézanne's art coincides with the European emergence of a transgressive sexuality and a distinctively modern queer culture, the era of Wilde and Gide, not to speak of Rimbaud and Verlaine.⁴ If not exactly queer, with Cézanne we are dealing with an artist who inhabited the barely tenable position of outcast from normative patriarchal relations; one whose relation to the authoritarian male art institutions of late nineteenth-century Paris, to conjugal hetero-



5.2
Paul Cézanne, *Seated
Man: Legs of a Bather*,
c.1890, graphite on paper,
Philadelphia Museum of Art.

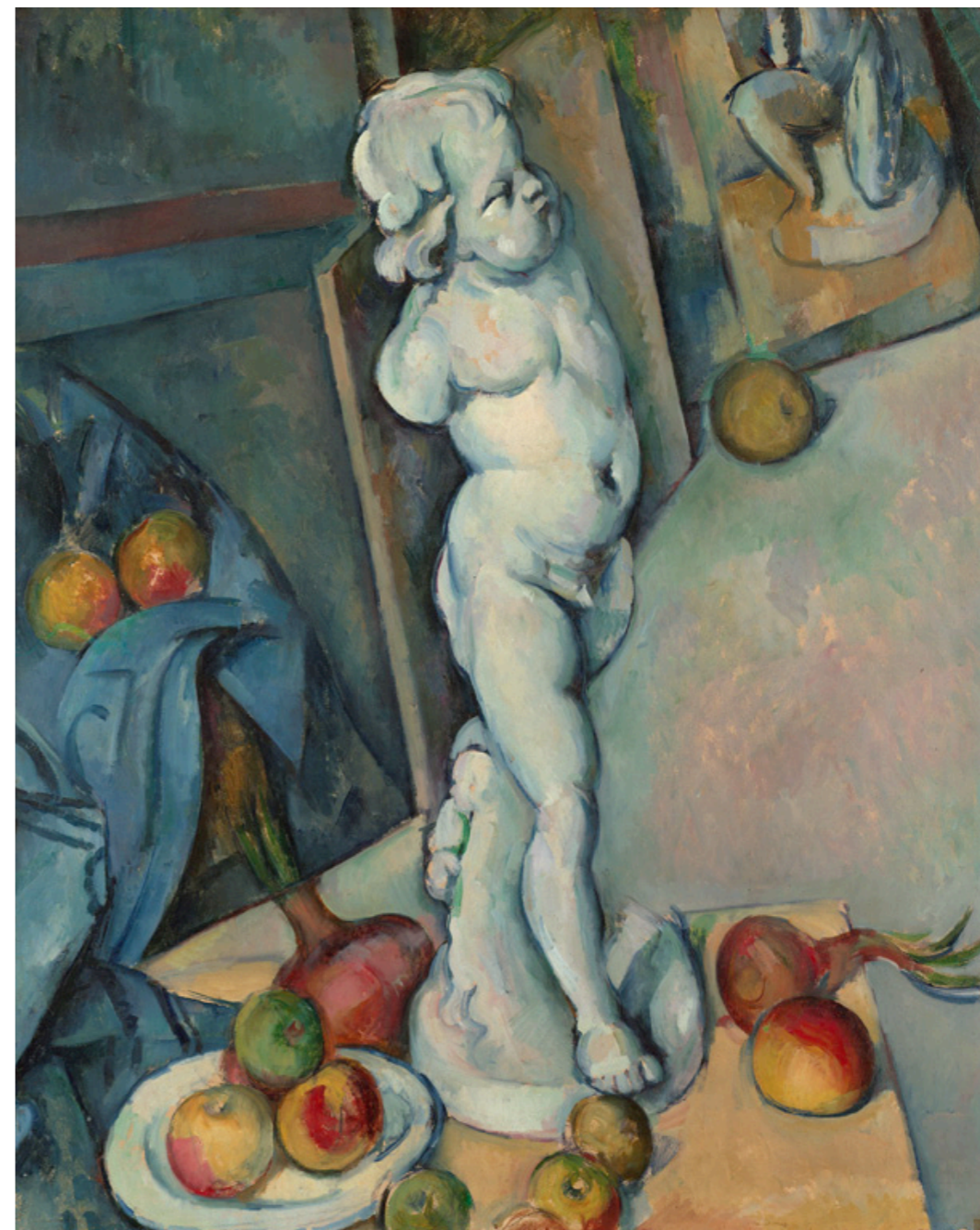
sexuality, and to his own paternal and capitalist inheritance was tortuous, tendentious, and difficult.⁵

Cézanne's sexual anxiety before the female body has been a staple of Cézanne criticism, at least since Roger Fry, and rightly we have come to view it as key to understanding not only his often specifically violent and misogynistic depictions of the female body, but also the recurrent erotic motifs in his art, and the tortuous expressivity of the work in general.⁶ His life-long fascination with the male body, by contrast, remains only vaguely understood; and while any overview of his oeuvre — the numerous drawings after sculptural male bodies, the male portrait subjects, the *Bathers* project itself — confirms that male embodiment is privileged material for his modern experiment of 'realizing' 'sensation' and is constitutive of that experiment, it has received cursory attention in Cézanne criticism. Cézanne, it has been argued, repeatedly de-sexed, disembodied, and controverted the figures of female flesh that continued to haunt and trouble him to the very end of his career — subjecting them to fantastical material distortions.⁷ But it is not clear that he subjected male flesh, its

seductive eroticism and sexual plenitude, to corresponding acts, of panicky ‘displacement’ or destructive castration.

We can say that instead, as an unconscious homoerotic desiring subject, Cézanne circled round the unattainable cause of desire that was the male body in representation. Let us recall, first, that for this artist the male figure of Eros, this classic object-cause of desire, inhabited his studio — a fragmented plaster cast of a marble amorino which still resides there — and infiltrated his representational practice: it assumed for him the status of a talisman. The Courtauld Gallery’s *Still Life with Plaster Cupid* (fig. 5.3), painted about four years after the Hermitage’s *The Smoker*, is only the most resolved articulation of numerous drawings, watercolours, and oils of the plastic embodiment of libido produced from the mid-1890s onwards.⁸ Here, Eros presides erect, as paramount within the vertiginous space of the studio that for Cézanne could be a locus of unconscious homoerotic desire (two male bodies define the axis of this studio; from the genital area of Cupid a continuous line leads upwards to the lower half of a splayed Michelangelesque *écorché*).⁹ Cézanne’s multiple reprises of this bulbous, swelling, straining phallic motif seek to capture the fleshy plaster in the round; seek to master, as it were, the small dumb demon Eros that figuratively presided over his studio and psychically engendered his sexually stormy art. *Still Life with Plaster Cupid* captures the extended leg of the deity as its foot touches and generates, metonymically, a train of droplets of ‘apple’ that leak out at the bottom of the canvas towards the viewer; captures the bulbous, inflated torso, and the quivering profile of its cherubic physiognomy. Other drawn and painted versions attempt to seize it from a different aspect, to capture the actively forward stride, or the slightly swollen pulled-out hip, or the compact rounded buttocks. There is a certain tension here: one between the Eros that freely generates form — in *Still Life with Plaster Cupid* mere touch or proximity to Cupid produces around its base an array of sprouting onions and apples, while its corporeal upper half begins to embed itself within the space of the skewed empty canvas behind it and arises there as an emerging work of art — and the Eros that frustratingly eludes satisfactory cognitive grasp; that denies mastery to its subject, the painter Cézanne. It is in this sense that Cézanne’s plaster Eros is a perfect plastic representation of the *agalma* (a little hidden statue of a god), which, in his Seminar of 1960–1 on transference, Jacques Lacan began to associate with the structure of unconscious desire, the *objet (petit) a*, symbolizing the finally unattainable and hidden cause of desire.¹⁰

For Meyer Schapiro, in his brilliant 1968 essay ‘The Apples of Cézanne: An Essay on the Meaning of Still-Life’, it is Cézanne’s still-life where we discover an expression of displaced erotic desire as well as an articulation of sexual difference, with its array of ‘freely associated objects tied to the male self’. Through psychoanalysis, Schapiro restored the libidinal dimension to these domestic canvases.¹¹ But libidinal in what direction? Schapiro deduced that the abiding association in Cézanne’s art between the motif of the apple and erotic desire had its affective origins in the artist’s early libidinally charged friendship with



5.3
Paul Cézanne, *Still Life with Plaster Cupid*, c.1895, oil on canvas, The Courtauld Gallery, London.

Émile Zola, mediated through a shared pastoral Virgilian homoerotics that was subjected by Cézanne, though not by Zola, to embarrassed self-censorship.¹² Schapiro recounts that it was Zola who had first given Cézanne a gift of apples, received as a sign of love, and in so doing begins to open up the question of Cézanne’s sexuality. But he goes on then to narrate that Cézanne ‘naturally’ overcame the libidinal attachment, and transmuted it, in the manner of a decorous translation, into heterosexual eroticism (and heterosexual painting and imagery, apple-filled).¹³ Yet reviewing Cézanne’s still-life, the simple conversion of the ‘original’ object of desire into a heterosexual one is less clear. Schapiro’s interpretation left no room to explain the more queer expressions of Cézanne’s production in the genre. If, for Schapiro, in *Still Life with Plaster Cupid*, ‘the apples are grouped with onions, contrasted forms as well as savors, that suggest the polarity of the sexes’, what are we to make of a late — and contemporaneous with *The Card Players* — exercise such as *Still Life with Onions and Bottles* (fig. 5.4), ‘one of C’s most remarkable compositions’?¹⁴ Are we not confronted in this canvas with a profuse and savory array of one term of that polarity, the onion — combined with the bottle — everywhere multiplied and occasionally interrupted by the



globular yellow forms of a queerly non-identifiable interceptor? With its excited ‘bursting exuberant plumes’, one of which is partially and coyly — seductively? — draped with the folds of a white tablecloth, *Still Life with Onions and Bottles* is a veritable all-male orgy of a still-life.¹⁵

As unpredictable in its formalist outcome as it is in its sexual politics, the *Bathers* too admitted of queer potential through its insistent and wayward reiterations of an imaginaire of male-male erotic fleshiness. From the mid-1880s to the mid-1890s, the decade he began to work on *The Card Players* and *Smoker* paintings, Cézanne virtually turned away from the *Female Bathers* to the subject of groups of male nudes in a landscape; the definitive and very public d’Orsay version of *Bathers* coinciding neatly with *The Card Players* (he would return to the *Female Bathers* as he approached death).¹⁶ As the artist resumed work on the groups of male bathers, there is a striking and wayward development of the project. Rather than incessantly inscribing a return to the same (be that the phallic patriarchal, the frustrated neurotic, or boyhood memory), in its reiterability the *Bathers* became freely transformational.¹⁷ Take the Bridgestone Museum of Art’s condensed version of about 1890 (watercolour on paper) (fig. 5.5). Here, Cézanne hits the rare mark of visible unconstrained libidinal and aesthetic freedom, as his brush excitedly licks the contours of the counterpoised animated male bodies that he reinvents in a newfound and late state of independence from paternal authority and the encumbrances of enforced wedlock.¹⁸ What is striking is the increasing *freedom* of Cézanne’s brush in this late *Bathers* — they were always less constrained and compacted than the *Female Bathers* — as the male nudes multiply, shame is surpassed, the graphic mark is liberated from the identity of medium itself (oils come to look like watercolour, drawing takes on a beguiling liquidity), and in this spontaneous and energized watercolour, finally ‘someone has had an erection’.¹⁹

The *Card Players* was Cézanne’s complementary attempt to consolidate a male enclave, and in many ways it is both more publicly ambitious and more resolved than the incessantly experimental *Bathers*: in its studied meditateness it sublimates their more wayward eroticism. The five-figure Barnes version, in its deliberate museum-scale monumentality, consummate orchestration of individual figures and motifs, and unusual overall textural unity, is one of Cézanne’s least provisional works. It is this quasi-publicness of the object that prompts me to take it as the artist’s definitive statement on the poetics of affective fraternity, even as he continued to develop and expose its fantasy of intimacy between men in the two-figure *Cardplayers* paintings of the following years.²⁰

In the great Barnes version (plate 2), it is the table that establishes the object and its illusionistic view as minimally stable.²¹ Around its edges are grouped three male peasants, absorbed in the manipulative action of card playing. A fourth figure stands apart, arms folded, a gnomish smoker who does not participate. The head and shoulders of a diminutive child are uncomfortably wedged in between the two peasants on the right: of ambiguous

Opposite:

5.4
Paul Cézanne, *Still Life with Onions*, 1896-8, oil on canvas, Musée d’Orsay, Paris.

5.5
Paul Cézanne, *Bathers*, c.1890, watercolour on paper, Bridgestone Museum of Art, Tokyo.

gender in this adult scene of masculine diversion, this is the picture's most alien and puzzling presence, yet one whose funereal aspect tinges the scene of play with a character of deadly seriousness (this spectral presence is, once inserted, omitted from every succeeding and the prior version). On the table are a few cards, one of which is turned upwards, and the black and white form of a clay pipe, its abyssal hollowed-out bowl addressing the viewer. This deep sign 'pipe' is repeated in the mouth of the standing peasant; it is then multiplied by four, released into a relatively empty upper part of the canvas to his side, its varied rectilinear erect form suggesting there a metaphoric link to the differentiated four male bodies. My basic description does not exhaust the cluster of signs in this picture — there is the swathe of curtain, the chair, the distinctive timeworn garb of the figures, the pot on the shelf — each of which taken together make up the *Cardplayers'* object world. Within this world it is two particular objects — the table and the pipe — that force my attention (and seduce me from reflecting on the action of the game and what is occurring on the game table). And this is because taken together table and pipe construe a certain tangible world of male homosociality. The one, solid, rebuilds its social foundation; the other, evanescent, poeticizes it as an alternative — and somewhat queer — fantasized realm of deep affective male intimacy.

Let us begin with the table, this least expressive of objects in European art. Within the tableau *Cardplayers*, it is the table that fundamentally establishes the solidarity of a male community experienced as on the edge of loss. The importance of the table consisted in the forms of communal life that it historically performed, and *Cardplayers*, I want to suggest, was an effort both to secure this drastically compromised sign and to put it into play; to attempt to return to the verities of the table, but also to release 'game table' or 'play table' (*table de jeu*) and subject it to the work of a critical reiteration, a set of deformations, and radical replenishment.²² Just look at how in the Barnes *Cardplayers* its shimmering opalescence belies the prosaic function of the object.

In all five versions of the *Cardplayers* the table is ubiquitous — as it is in many of the preparatory works for it. Insistently it is present too in the three monumental portraits of *The Smoker*, which the 2010 Courtauld Gallery exhibition brought together, the peasant in each anchored to the form of the table (the Moscow *The Smoker* has it pulled out to view to disclose it at its most luminously expansive). The metaphor that Meyer Schapiro grasped at meaningfully to link *The Card Players's* theme of the card game with the isolated condition of this modernist painter was 'solitaire'. In this way, Schapiro presented a Cézanne turned away from life and world towards his canvas in order to build up a perfectly autonomous world, a Kantian type of 'free' playful self-creation but now tragically devoid of Kantian 'sensus communis', or a shared common sense.²³ Yet it is possible to argue that the insistence of the table in *The Card Players* points to a structural need to re-establish — to build — a world of reciprocal intimacy. Its world is less the new world of the modernist canvas, that of 'pure' modernist painting — the table, that is to say will not represent here

the mythic *tabula rasa* of modernism — but rather the lost worldliness of nineteenth-century 'human' relations, and relatedness, to which Cézanne's technique and poetics bears a critical and reflective relation.

To stay with Schapiro, it was in his 1936 essay 'Nature of Abstract Art' that he analysed the moment of the 1880s and 1890s as that of a bourgeois crisis.²⁴ His characterization of the Post-Impressionist moment cannot be bettered as a socio-historical explanation of what was at stake in Cézanne's major project in the 1890s, *The Card Players*:

The French artists of the 1880s and 1890s who attacked Impressionism for its lack of structure often expressed demands for salvation, for order and fixed objects of belief, foreign to the Impressionists as a group. The title of Gauguin's picture — 'Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?' — with its interrogative form, is typical of this state of mind. But since artists did not know the underlying economic and social causes of their own disorder and moral insecurity, they could envisage new stabilizing forms only as quasi-religious beliefs or as a revival of some primitive or highly ordered traditional society with organs for a collective spiritual life. This is reflected in their taste for medieval and primitive art, their conversions to Catholicism and later to 'integral nationalism'. The colonies of artists formed at this period, Van Gogh's project of a communal life for artists, are examples of this groping to reconstitute the pervasive human sociability that capitalism had destroyed. Even their theories of 'composition' — a traditional concept abandoned by the Impressionists — are related to their social views, for they conceive of composition as an assembly of objects bound together by a principle of order emanating, on the one hand, from the eternal nature of art, on the other, from the state of mind of the artist, but in both instances requiring a 'deformation' of the objects. Some of them wanted a canvas to be like a church, to possess a hierarchy of forms, stationed objects, a prescribed harmony, preordained paths of vision, all issuing, however, from the artist's feeling. In recreating the elements of community in their art they usually selected inert objects, or active objects without meaningful interaction except as colors and lines.²⁵

To further elucidate the complex political dimension of *The Card Players*, and the specific ensemble of objects we see there 'tied to the male self', I want to turn to the voice of a twentieth-century thinker — invoked in my title — a political philosopher who thought profoundly about the human condition in European modern mass society, and in doing so touched upon the significance of the kinds of simple manufactured objects which make up the nineteenth-century genre of still life. This is the mid-twentieth-century Jewish intel-

lectual, Hannah Arendt, who half a century after the death of Cézanne published her most definitive book *The Human Condition* (1958). Two passages of Arendt's *The Human Condition* resonate with what is occurring on the canvases of *The Card Players*, and help us to disclose the urgency of the collocation of particular objects there, as involved integrally in the paintings' homosocial fantasy. But before turning to the political philosopher's words, how can we justify this strange and heretofore unforeseen conjunction, Cézanne/Arendt?

Coming fourteen years after a signal event in Cézanne criticism — the publication of post-war French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty's essay 'Cézanne's Doubt' — *The Human Condition* is a work in which the German émigré phenomenologist hardly mentions painting, let alone Cézanne whose philosophical relevance was beginning to be grasped by her early teacher and mentor Martin Heidegger.²⁶ Yet her silence about Cézanne hardly matters, for in turning to Arendt rather than to Merleau-Ponty we can forge an unthought affinity between her post-war political philosophy, her distinctive type of phenomenology, and Cézanne's painting.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological disclosure of Cézanne's working processes revealed a painter corporeally engaged with the world of *sens* (sense).²⁷ Following Husserl and Heidegger, Arendt's account of *The Human Condition* is partly an attempt to trace, historically and linguistically, abstract political categories back to the concrete and the tangible. In this way, she discloses the inherent — if sometimes lost or fragile — political functions of manipulated objects and our crucial phenomenal (bodily and tangible) relations with them, as worldly political beings. This begins to suggest a slightly different phenomenological account of Cézanne's practice to that of Merleau-Ponty — one which exposes objects' phenomenal and constitutive power to make a world.²⁸ If Arendt's utopian world was quickly deplored by a certain feminist critique for its studied ignorance of the real asymmetry of gendered power relations, later her thought began to be embraced by all sorts of political constituencies in need of a model of world-making that, like hers, is both profoundly historicized and radically performative, including feminist and queer ones.²⁹

Let us attend to Arendt's words, first, in a chapter called 'The Public and the Private Realm'. She is clarifying what happens in modernity to the relation between people and things, the objects that surround us all:

What the public realm considers irrelevant can have such an extraordinary and infectious charm that a whole people may adopt it as their way of life, without for that reason changing its essentially private character. Modern enchantment with 'small things', though preached by early twentieth-century poetry in almost all European tongues, has found its classical presentation in the *petit bonheur* of the French people. Since the decay of their once great and glorious public realm, the French have become masters in the art of being

happy among 'small things' within the space of their own four walls, between chest and bed, table and chair, dog and cat and flowerpot, extending to these things a care and tenderness which, in a world where rapid industrialization constantly kills off the things of yesterday to produce today's objects, may even appear to be the world's last, purely humane corner.³⁰

'The world's last, purely humane corner'. It is a good description, I think, of Cézanne's attempted corners of intimacy in the *Cardplayers*, between chair and table, picture frame, curtain, and pot. Yet ultimately Cézanne renounces the 'charm' of 'small things': he renders the objects with a certain dislocated fragility and in this way captures their quality of having been 'killed off' and of temporary resurrection.³¹ This is what painting in the face of the withered public realm looks like — painting that squarely faces up to that withering. Now it is clear that for Arendt any residual pleasure derived from it would remain a derisory sort of compensation for the disaster of mass society, *small* happiness indeed, which anyway is based on charms and illusions. Her obvious disapproval of the 'charm' of small things may derive from one of her major philosophical exemplars Immanuel Kant's distinction between beauty and charm in his *Critique of Judgement* of 1790: for Kant, only the experience of the former can be the foundation of a genuine politics. And so placed at the centre of his collocation of precarious little things is the object that somehow would work against their very 'smallness' (Arendt ultimately disposes them into the realm of the 'irrelevant'): this is the table. In our second passage from Arendt, she comes fast to the subject of the table, and begins to expose its criticality:

[T]he term 'public' signifies the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it. This world ... is related (rather) to the human artifact, the fabrication of human hands, as well as to affairs which go on among those who inhabit the man-made world together. *To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it*; the world, like every in-between relates and separates men at the same time ... What makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved, or at least not primarily, but the fact that the world between them has lost its power to gather them together, to relate and separate them. The weirdness of the situation resembles a spiritualistic séance where a number of people gathered around the table might suddenly, through some magic trick, see the table vanish from their midst, so that two persons sitting opposite each other were no longer separated but also would be entirely unrelated to each other by anything tangible.³²

Across painting and writing, Cézanne and Arendt can be linked in their agreement on the power of objects to produce a world of human relatedness and in their recognition that the preeminent modern problem in the face of modern mass society (promoted meditatively as such in *Cardplayers* and *The Human Condition* some sixty years apart) is precisely to 'live together in the world'. In 1958, it was the ancient Greek Athenian demos that for Arendt held out an exemplar of communal 'speaking and acting'. Some sixty years earlier, artist Cézanne in his significant choice of subject pulled the demotic labouring peasant into the arena of a high art in order to revitalize art through this link to a fundamentally working community.³³ One of the major and seminal distinctions proposed in *The Human Condition* is that between work and labour. 'Labor' (such as agriculture) emerges there as an activity that 'merely' sustains the natural, biological life of species being; whereas 'work', commencing with the fabrication and use of tools and artefacts, begins to produce a humanly artificial 'world', and begins to engender what can become a mature variety of perspectives ('plurality'), which will amount to 'politics'. In *The Card Players* the self-identified worker Cézanne — here is an artist who especially valued 'work' — reiterates the subject of the peasant in order to allow it to emerge as a subject of a world of work rather than of the *fatum* of labour. The workers are relieved from their function as merely sustaining the life of the species, and become plural, differentiated and individualized actors in the world consolidated by the table. The seriousness — that naïve monumental pyramidal composition, unusual grandiosity of scale, and completion — that the Barnes version of *Cardplayers* confers on the peasant derives from the world-making vitality that the peasant as *homo fabricator* (man the maker of tangible things) bestows upon a deprived and trivialized nineteenth-century art.

If the table is not merely another of those 'small things' that procures a modicum of pleasure, but rather the critical space of communality around which the nineteenth-century individual *homo fabricator* moves, and the erasure of which would entail worldlessness, how does Cézanne re-build it?³⁴ If, within the confines of the private interior of the later nineteenth century, the table is the sole remnant of the withered and unrepresentable outside — by definition an object not of small private happiness (*le petit bonheur*) but of a secreted political and public virtue — how does that work of rebuilding simultaneously repair and consolidate affective male bonds destroyed by capitalism and mass technological society?

To construe a 'world between them', Western art has repeatedly made subjects coalesce around the table as humanly related. From Veronese to the brothers Le Nain to Chardin, Cézanne's pictorial sources for *The Card Players* amount to no more than a series of culturally exemplary 'tabled' subjects (children, women, and men) brought into a relation with one another; even as the scenes of biblical supper or game playing that Cézanne may have reworked are the more often stagings of human *miscommunication*, betrayal, deception, or

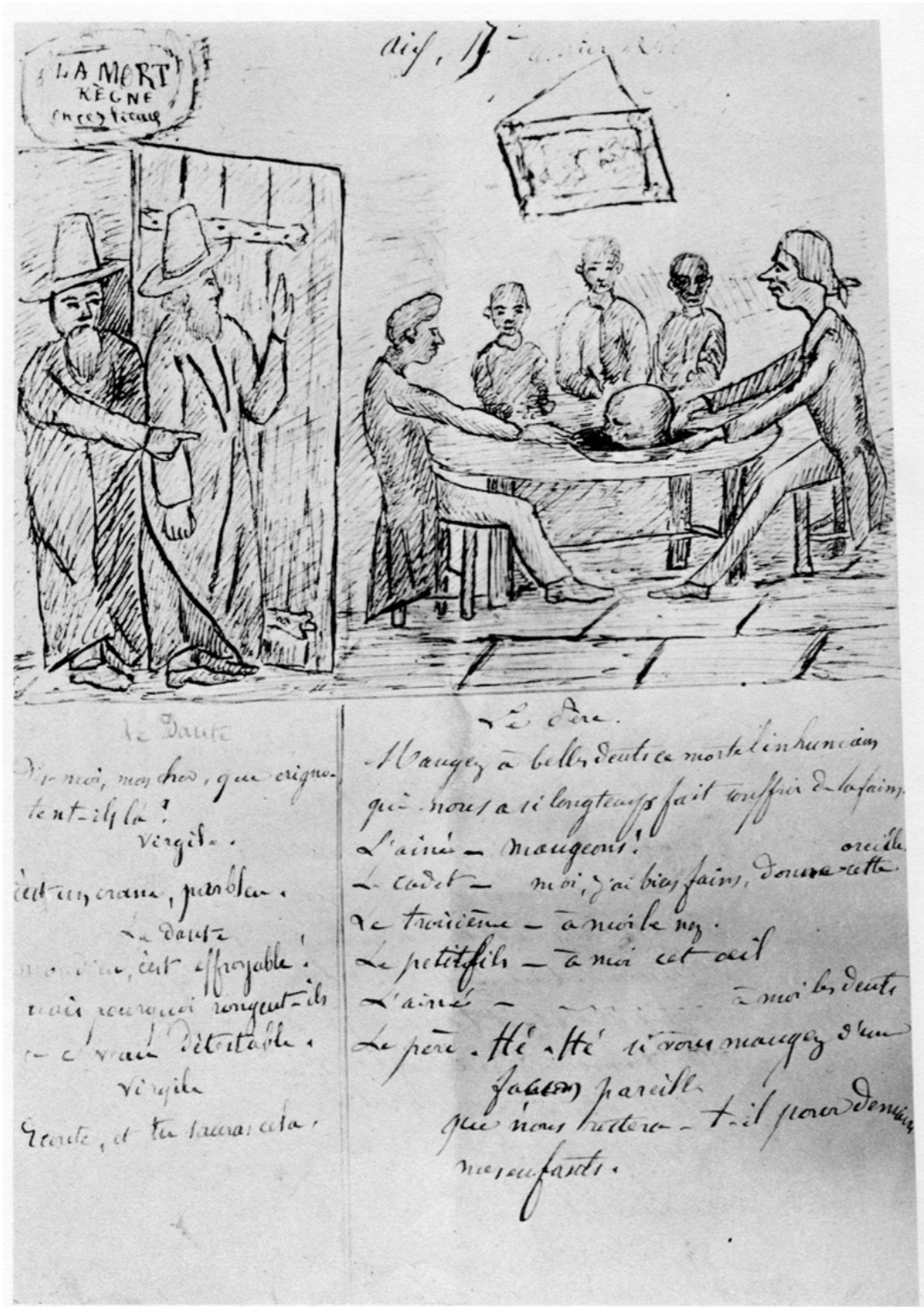


absentminded distraction than intensely focussed rapt unison. Theodor Reff's 1980 article on the sources of *The Card Players* provides us with some of the more pertinent exemplars for the motif of the table in *The Card Players* — these include Caillebotte's *Besique Game* (1881) and prints and illustrations by Daumier and Raffaëlli.³⁵ Here we might add that there is a certain rhythm of appearances of the table from *within* Cézanne's body of work, emerging in an autonomous and self-referential way across his oeuvre; and that the reiteration of the vitally connective tissue that is the table in drawings, watercolours and paintings begins to suggest that it had a certain satisfying significance in Cézanne's 'interior' object world.

In his analysis of *The Card Players*, Kurt Badt noticed that 'throughout all these pictures, from the earliest drawings onwards, this table is given great prominence — in contrast to the treatment of similar subjects by other painters'.³⁶ But this is not solely the case for *The Card Players*. The 1867 *The Feast* (fig. 5.6), also known as *The Orgy*, is an early fevered poetic invocation of a table, now vertically immense and luminous; an elongated orgasmic tissue of white, it extends deep into the canvas, human flesh coagulating around it to enact savage penetrative and merging fantasies. At the foreground of *The Feast*, the table commences with two proximate openings, constituting an open invitation to penetration that is possibly male-male: the buttocks of a muscular michelangelesque (and hence ambiguous in gender) nude, and the open head of a large vessel, or pot. Cézanne would never again produce the table in such a frenzied and uninhibitedly ecstatic manner, but its charismatic power to unite was to be activated more soberly — yet entirely undiminished — in a c.1890 drawing entitled *The Dinner* (fig. 5.7), a late reprise of the youthful

5.6
Paul Cézanne, *The Feast* (also known as *The Orgy*), c.1867-72, oil on canvas, Private Collection.

fig. 5.7
Paul Cézanne, *The Dinner*, c.1890, pencil on paper, Private Collection.



5.8
Paul Cézanne, 'Ugolino
drawing', 1859, pen on paper,
Private Collection.

'Ugolino drawing' that Badt argued haunted *The Card Players* (fig. 5.8).³⁷ In *The Dinner*, the page is dominated by the powerful circular form of the table, affirmatively repeated in the round face of the rococo clock above; the lines of the floorboards aspire and reach up to this draped object which itself is highly suggestive of the *table ronde* as both image of the world and the transcendent holding place of an archaic and mythically chivalrous male community.³⁸

Returning to the Barnes *Cardplayers*, the glowing fleshiness of the hands, card playing but suggestively posed as if praying — the resurrection of the *Sainte table* in c.1890 is a matter of 'faith' — is matched by the luminosity of the table top that secures the flesh's proximate intimacy through a common manipulation, their hands hovering over the surface of the world table.³⁹ The figures are grouped around the table in an undulating dance-



5.9
Paul Cézanne, *A Card Player*,
c.1892-6, graphite on
paper, The Pierpont
Morgan Library, New York.

like, circular pattern; while the simple four-square form of the table itself is doubled and decorated, 'burnished' in the gilt frame of the blackened 'Bathers' painting aligned on the wall above.

The making of a world table was for Cézanne no easy matter, for it struggles against a floating mass of meanings that in its freeplay of signification bears an essentially psychotic structure. Working studies for *The Card Players* appear to show a specific concern of this artist to shape the interconnectedness of the dual figure of human-and-table. One of the most highly worked drawings (fig. 5.9), for example, captures the model's attentiveness and his total corporeal stance of weighing up the cards in his hands, yet the labour of the drawing can be said to be, fundamentally, the stitching of the sinuous form of the body to the rectilinear opening of the frame of the table.⁴⁰ For Jacques Lacan, what prevents the (normally neurotic) subject from a fatal slipping into psychosis, and the loss of stable meaning altogether, are privileged 'knots' or 'stiches' by which signifier and signified are contracted into a necessary illusion of enduring fixture; where the threat of an ungoverned play (or

‘psychosis’) is contingently halted. In his 1956 Seminar, he termed these, in an analogy with nineteenth-century ‘soft’ furniture, the *points de capiton* (literally, ‘deep buttoning’, that keeps matter from slipping).⁴¹ It is in this sense that *being at the table* is the focal subject here, not card playing. Almost at its centre the peasant’s sleeve grazes the edge of the table; here an emphatic vertical line that designates the furthest table leg drops to come to meet a horizontal series of strokes that describes the peasant’s thigh, leading sinuously to his upper erect body. This technical graphic encounter between the angular and the sinuous (table and body) demarcates a negative space (or hole), one that is completed above by the drooping lines of the peasant’s sleeve. Effectively formed here is a central empty ‘patch’ that, at the navel of this drawing, quilts and stitches together the body and the table in the manner of a Lacanian *point de capiton*, Cézanne attempting here to knit the potentially unhinged nineteenth-century subject, through its determined action of ‘play’, into the durability of furniture.

In the Barnes *Cardplayers* (plate 2) the suturing of body and table, the interfusion of organic and inorganic, is resolved in a different manner. Here, the right arm of the seated peasant on the left purposely succumbs to the inorganic nature of the table in its emphatic and sharply defined angularity; the artificial painted lines that describe the elbow and its extension — or, more precisely, generate a *second*, now inorganic, elbow — constructively pivot on the table’s edge with perfect balance and equilibrium. Concomitantly, the bodily area that is most proximate to the table, beneath the peasant’s artificial elbow, has been obscured and blackened out to allow the full and striking emergence of the luminous rectilinear edge of the table, in all its ravishing constructed beauty.

This resulting gradual isomorphism between male body and table — and their individual deforming adjustments towards this — is yet more subtly encountered at the space of the legs in the lower part of the painting. Here, as Badt noted, the table’s perpendicular legs and the two diagonal human legs of the seated figure in the middle form a V and ‘become an independent artistic creation’; human and table legs form something like an autonomous design.⁴² For Badt, the repetition of this design attests to the persistence of memory in The Card Players project, for the V shape can be traced way back to the psychologically fraught oedipal ‘Ugolino drawing’ of 1859 (see fig. 5.8). We could observe here that the graphic V actively becomes transformed in the Barnes *Cardplayers* into an interlaced but legible M: M for MOI, the artist as a subject at the table. Could we not also say that produced here incessantly, beneath the public platform of the table, at the underside of the tableau, is an autonomous synecdoche of world-making, and specifically one where a publicly repressed male-male intimacy is at last desublimated? Certainly, this space of the legs within the

legs, human within table, appears to become a particular concern in many of the working drawings for The Card Players in which Cézanne takes a certain distance from the motif (and yet specifically without re-invoking a Badt-ian V).⁴³ In these drawings Cézanne can be seen to be negotiating the entrance of the organic body into the inorganic carapace which now becomes its homely dwelling, opening into a space of the private within the public picture. For even as eventually a coherent design is produced amongst and between legs, Cézanne draws back from the logic of isomorphism visited upon the bodies of table/human in order subtly to distinguish the fragile materiality of human legs as encased flesh from the solidity of the enduring inorganic table — as if to suggest that he is probing for a durable home for an intimacy of the flesh — at the ‘underside of the tableau’ and beneath the public platform of the game table.

The column-like table legs support the wide entablature that stabilizes them and forms a protective roof.⁴⁴ The table becomes here the solid structure within which the flesh — and specifically these are the mobile extremities that bear Cézanne the landscape painter across earthly terrain — finds asylum and abode. It is in the later Courtauld Gallery’s two-figure version of *Cardplayers* (plate 4) that there is a remarkable insistence on as well as a transformation of this, as the space beneath the table becomes indeed an autonomous home world. The male world now reduced to two (finally condensed here is The Card Players’ drastic problem of the survival of male intimacy), the near-isomorphism of human and table legs in the Barnes version is rejected as the legs of the men contract and condense — they ripen into all bulbous knee — and the distinctive organic fleshy protuberances come to dwell ‘happily’ within the four walls of the interior of the rebuilt husk, of ‘entablature’ and ‘columns’, that is the permanent table.

Take the table away, as Arendt prompts us to imagine, and there would be infinite loneliness, world alienation.⁴⁵ If the Herculean labour of The Card Players is to abolish the fugitive charm of little things — *le petit bonheur* — and to erect an enduring new sensus communis, the building blocks of this world are not easily erected; for as Philippe Sollers has written of Cézanne, this is a painter ‘in a time of distress’.⁴⁶

That difficulty, distress, is apparent — the tables are turned, the ‘hand’ revealed (the erection of the table was a magnificent gambit, a leap of faith) — in the three great late Smoker paintings, where alienation floods into the picture surface and tensions become manifest in the vision of a common dwelling. There we find a fundamental preoccupation in the work of this artist with the space of corner-ness as such, as if the frail individual human subject is now permanently *cornered* within the fragilely surviving ‘world’s last,



5.10
Paul Cézanne, *Man Smoking a Pipe*, c.1893-6,
oil on canvas, The Pushkin
State Museum of Fine Arts,
Moscow.

purely humane corner'. The *Man Smoking a Pipe*, now in the Pushkin Museum (fig. 5.10), is the most disturbing of all. In it, Cézanne is still and incessantly struggling to work out the crucial join between the table and the human subject located at its corner, yet the conjoin becomes fatally disorientated. The vulnerable open faced figure's upper body is structurally buttressed against the solidity of the table top: on this auratic surface the range of colour attains an excited pinnacle of vibrating brilliance and intensity, a gleaming, dying glow. Yet the figure is cordially unhinged and excised from the embers of this table, as it is from the revenant figure of Madame Cézanne, whose peel-away portrait is rendered here as drastically lacking in depth (Cézanne retrieving here an 1886 portrait of Hortense Cézanne that has been described as already exceptionally 'obdurate', 'impenetrable as a wall') — and he is therefore rendered melancholy.⁴⁷ The once-dual open and bare forms no longer interwoven, the legs of the man and those of the table are starkly differentiated as materially incompatible, presenting a tragic opposition of life and death, fleshy hand grasping thigh and inorganic dead wood. This is a marginally tabled subject, yet one erected as if the dream of the table and the vision of a common dwelling were predicted — tragically, cor-

rectly — as swiftly removed, a world rent apart and alienated. Arendt's words come back to us here: 'The eclipse of a common public world ... began with the much more tangible loss of a privately owned share in the world'.⁴⁸

But rather than allowing all his dreams of fraternal happiness to go up in smoke, Cézanne was determined to solidify them, and to create something enduring; to metamorphose them into a durable 'art of the museums'. It is paradoxical that the visions of endurance were fuelled by the evanescent; which leads me to characterise them — without a hint of dismissal — as Cézanne's lifelong *pipe-dreams*. What I mean to be an issue here is the curious and lasting significance of the pipe and the act of pipe smoking within a passionately imaginative oeuvre that was intended to be anything but vaporous and burnt out.

'Mes grands plaisirs maintenant sont la pipe et le rêve' (Zola to Cézanne, 5 February 1861); 'T'avoir auprès de moi, babiller tous deux, comme autrefois, la pipe aux dents ...' (Z to C, 3 March 1860); 'j'allume ma bouffarde, je respire, je vis' (Z to C, 16 April 1860); 'J'ai vu Paul!!! ... nous sommes allés déjeuner ensemble, fume une foule de pipes ... Cézanne et moi' (Zola to Baille, 22 April 1861).⁴⁹ Cézanne and I. This pseudo-Baudelairian object 'tied to the male self', *La Pipe*, evidently represented less a tool of narcissistic satisfaction auto-erotically enjoyed by the reflective solitary subject, than a specific affective and phenomenal relation between men.⁵⁰ Apples were not the only gift that the painter had enjoyed from Zola.⁵¹ Now the significance of the pipe is symbolic, for 'tobacco symbolizes the symbolic'; the pact, alliance, or obligation between men into which the desire for tobacco early seduced and habituated Cézanne.⁵² Badt argued that the gnomic figure of the standing smoker in the Barnes *Cardplayers* represents Zola himself, which would make of Cézanne's *The Card Players* a deeply felt homoerotic love letter to his first passionate love, Zola presiding over the tabled subjects and continuing to assert the power of their — 'Cézanne and I' — ancient and never forgotten libidinal bond across the table that the painter's brush fabricates and strivingly reaches towards. The striving here for attachment, through the table, embraces the now estranged 'Zola' (between the Metropolitan and Barnes versions, Cézanne took the measure of their increasing distance), materializing a continuing haunting of Cézanne by his earliest homosexual desire and attachment — Zola for whom he would withdraw into his room and weep inconsolably for an entire day on learning of his death in 1902.⁵³

Traceless smoke might have been the only available way for Cézanne to speak of the 'love that dare not speak its name', to speak of a radically alternative life amongst men to the professional and patriarchal one he early covered under and despised. Tobacco symbolizes the symbolic: within a nineteenth-century bourgeois patriarchal regimen it facilitates an exchange between men that, ultimately, transmogrifies a world without women.⁵⁴ Yet in its consumption — in its incineration and strange rhythmic exhalation of wayward and aleatory forms — tobacco too destabilizes the regime of signs, undoes the order of things, and may wreak a subtle dissemination. From the *Pastorals* and *Idylls* of the 1870s to *The*



5.11
Paul Cézanne, *Idyll (Pastoral)*, 1870, oil on canvas, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Card Players of the 1890s (where the pipe is systematically reasserted), Cézanne's paintings are, in this manner, 'pipe dreams' not in any derogatory sense; for smoking is the real and inescapable — the freed — condition of the sign in modernity as aleatory.

Smoke entered this painter's work sometime in 1870. The Musée d'Orsay *Idyll* (fig. 5.11) of that year depicts a white-shirted male seated on a boat at a shore's edge, smoking and emanating oily, ash-coloured fumes. A darkly clad male, his 'double', is posed on the bank, surrounded by an amorous couple in the foreground and two gigantic ashen grey female bodies. It has been suggested that *Idyll* is a literal response to contemporary Parisian staged performances of Wagner's opera *Tannhäuser*, yet there remains no conclusive evidence for that, and finally no sense can be made of this queer oneiric scene. Which is precisely the point; for the male activity that is memorialized within this painting — smoking — renders the signs of the world hallucinatory, disordered and unhinged from any normal or normative chain of associations: smoking, for Cézanne's generation, derealizes the world, including the contemporary contentious and highly sexed one of Wagner performance.⁵⁵ And it eroticizes it in strange uncertain directions. A slightly later drawing, dating from 1872–4 (fig. 5.12), graphically links two motifs in an erotic train of associations produced by a smoker. The pipe with its smoke is here apparently in the process of forming the signature 'Cézanne', while on the other side of the unidentified central smoker are the wispy forms of a languorous and passive male nude.⁵⁶ Cézanne's painting and world are, in this sense, fuelled by the pipe. Whether it is depicted or not, the pipe, tobacco and its smoke, and this reiterated incinerating process that combines a deep ingestion through the body



5.12
Paul Cézanne, *Portrait of Dr. Gachet, and Erotic Scene*, c. 1872–4, graphite on paper, Private Collection.

of the male painter and a wayward exhalation of vaporous images, disturb the norms of rational sense and definitive form, keep delivering the sign back into play.

It is in the 1890s *Cardplayers* that the pipe reasserts itself as fundamental, and comes to take the work over. Through his repeated return in these works to 'yesterday's object', the pipe, the 'moi' of the painter is asserted, still ever linked with all his imaginary and unattainable male lovers; it becomes there a tangible object of exchange and mutual breathing — 'I breathe, I live' — which, insisting through the canvases of *The Card Players*, will endure as solidly as the permanent and precious table that comes enduringly to support it.

In the Barnes version of *Cardplayers* the pipes on the pipe rack on the wall form a little community — 'milles pipes', Cézanne had once playfully signed off to Zola — that are aligned with the picture within the picture that is raised above the world table.⁵⁷ Positioned somewhat at the level of the signature, 'Cézanne' here becomes a body of fond vibrating relations, the pipes 'dwelling' on the pipe rack in perfect sonorous synchronicity. Later, the two-figure versions of *Cardplayers* are materially steeped in the pleasurable residue of smoking. Are they not so many late material remnants — colouristically stained and charred, tobacco-like ashes — of phenomenal male pleasures liberated through the once-radical disseminating force of 'yesterday's object', the pipe?

Contra Schapiro, Cézanne did not simply leave behind his early erotic and affective intimate desire for men; rather it haunts the work and the artist as a transgressive and queer potentiality. I have argued that the projects of *Smokers*, *Bathers* and *The Card Players* harbour queer possibilities of expression, tentatively realized through the process of their insistent and wayward reiterations. Something is working through Cézanne, insists through him, the tenaciously held and disappearing world of undisturbed male intimacy, destroyed by mass technological society. On the one hand Arendt's political phenomenology allows us to recognize the arresting assertion of the table as the sole and precious remnant of a ruined collectivity, to which the male body must now be 'stitched', materializing something like a politics and political subjectivity for Cézanne, who subscribed to no available political nomination. On the other hand, yesterday's object the pipe is reminiscent of a singular



5.13
Pablo Picasso,
Boy with a Pipe, 1905, oil on
canvas, Private Collection.

gift from Zola lovingly received by Cézanne, which drew the artist into a homosocial pact that was infused with homoerotic desire, free from conjugal heterosexuality, from urban professionalism and the market; and in its activation producing forms free from the normative structures and strictures of signs. To expose Cézanne to Arendt is to have grasped that a homosocial world is constituted by the objects – more or less fugitive – that secure it.

As a metaphor for the sign in modernity as aleatory, modernism would play with the pipe. In 1905, impressed by the sight of Cézanne's disenchanted (psychotically structured) *Man Smoking a Pipe* (see fig. 5.10) exhibited at Vollard's, Picasso revealed another card. In his beautiful *Boy with a Pipe* (fig. 5.13), which recklessly dispenses with the table, all of Cézanne's circuitous and tentative homoeroticism is shed, as the seductive, open-crotched laurel-wreathed Parisian boy twists and turns it in his hand, offering to us its shaft: here the 'straight' Picasso replays the Cezannian pipe queerly.

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1. For 'jeu' (freeplay) as radically preceding any stable mark — sign or signature — in language, and the work necessary to release this, see Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', in Derrida, *Writing and Difference* [1967], (trans.) Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978), pp. 278-94.

2. Theodore Reff, 'The Pictures within Cézanne's Pictures', *Arts Magazine* 53, no. 10 (June 1979): p. 98; and Mary Louise Krumrine, *Paul Cézanne. The Bathers* (London and Basel: Thames and Hudson, 1989), p. 226, n. 43. This *Bathers* is now in the Hermitage, St Petersburg.

3. John House, 'Cézanne's Card Players: Art without Anecdote', in Nancy Ireson and Barnaby Wright (eds), *Cézanne's Card Players* (London: The Courtauld Gallery in assoc. with Paul Holberton Pub., 2010), p. 55. Pissarro essayed ambitious single-figure paintings of male rural workers at the end of the 1870s, but their presence was short-lived, as he moved on in the 1880s to the grand series of pictures of female rural workers. See Richard R. Brettell, 'Rural Workers', in Brettell, *Pissarro's People* (Munich, London and New York: Prestel, 2011), pp. 165-70.

4. Jonathon Dollimore, 'Wilde and Gide in Algiers', in Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence. Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 3-18.

5. On the artist's 'exotamy' (a term derived from Bakhtin), his alienation from the Paris art world, see Joachim Pissarro, *Pioneering Modern Painting: Cézanne and Pissarro 1865-1885* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2005), pp. 19, 27. Symptoms of a fractious relation to bourgeois patriarchy are evident in Cézanne's injurious family relationships — beginning with his anxious, conflicted and duplicitous relationship with his banker father and continuing with an ultimately estranged and physically distant one from Hortense Fiquet, who, through imperatives of family honour and bourgeois respectability, he was forced to marry in 1886. On attempts in the Third Republic to regulate and police real and imagined sexual perversions through the promotion of conjugal heterosexuality in its citizens, see Judith Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen. Morality and Masculinity in France, 1870-1920* (Cornell: Cornell Univ. Press, 2006).

6. Recently, the point is succinctly made, and critically interrogated, in Aruna D'Souza, *Cézanne's Bathers. Biography and the Erotics of Paint* (Univ. Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 2008), esp. p. 14.

7. For a subtle interrogation of Cézanne's insecurely sexed bodies and the operation of Freudian dream-work and displacement in The Barnes Foundation's *Large Female Bathers*, see T.J. Clark, 'Freud's Cézanne', *Representations* 52 (Fall 1995): pp. 94-122. Tamar Garb has argued for a 'displacement' of signs of sexual difference from the female body to gendered compositional structure: Garb, 'Cézanne's Late Bathers: Modernism and Sexual Difference', in Garb, *Bodies of Modernity. Figure and Flesh in Fin-de-Siècle France* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), pp. 196-218.

8. See Françoise Cachin (ed.), *Cézanne* (London: Tate Publishing, 1996), pp. 388-96.

9. The studio *écorché* was another 'found' male body to which, in his drawing practice, Cézanne would repeatedly return — at least seventeen times. Cachin, *Cézanne*, p. 292.

10. Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire. Livre VIII. Le transfert, 1960-61*, (ed.) Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1991), p. 177.

11. Meyer Schapiro, 'The Apples of Cézanne: An Essay on the Meaning of Still-Life' [1968], in Schapiro, *Modern Art 19th and 20th Centuries. Selected Papers* (New York: George Braziller, 1978), p. 11.

12. Schapiro, 'The Apples', p. 4.

13. 'As Propertius converted the theme of the offering of apples in Virgil's third eclogue to one of heterosexual love, so one may regard Cézanne's picture as a transposition of that boyhood episode with Zola to his own dream of love'. Schapiro, 'The Apples', pp. 4-5. The painting Schapiro refers to is *The Amorous Shepherd*, of 1883-5; the Virgil eclogue, recounting Corydon's love for the boy Alexis, that poem Cézanne could not quite bring himself to translate for Zola.

14. Meyer Schapiro, *Paul Cézanne* [1952] (New York: Abrams, 1965), p.114.

15. The work, now in the Musée d'Orsay, remained in Cézanne's studio and was never publicly exhibited during his lifetime. See Isabelle Cahn's cat. entry in Cachin, *Cézanne*, cat. 166, pp. 397-9.

16. See Krumrine, *The Bathers*, p. 167.

17. On the Bathers understood in the critical reception and art histories of Cézanne as eternally reinscribing the artist's early (pre-pubertal) boyhood memories, see the discussion in Aruna D'Souza, 'Baigneurs: Memory and Realism', in D'Souza, *Cézanne's Bathers*, pp. 95-103. On their notionally rigid, 'impenetrable' masculine structure, see Garb, 'Cézanne's Late Bathers', p. 211.

18. In a letter to Zola of February 1891 which has become a crucial document for The Card Players as amongst the meagre evidence for work on it ('During the day he paints in the Jas de Bouffan, where a workman serves him as a model ...'), Paul Alexis conveys a strikingly liberated Cézanne of this time: 'Lui, au moins, vibre, est expansif et vivant ... Vive le beau soleil et la liberté! crie-t-il' ('He at least vibrates, is expansive and lively ... Long live the beautiful sun and freedom!', he exclaims.) Within a few lines of this Alexis describes Cézanne's orchestrated physical separation from his wife Hortense Fiquet, with whom he is 'furious'; his newfound freedom from financial worry; and his late mature acceptance of — and thus independence from — his father 'qu'il vénère aujourd'hui' ('whom today he holds in great esteem'). See John Rewald (ed.), *Paul Cézanne: Correspondance* (Paris: Grasset, 1978), pp. 234-5; John Rewald (ed.), Marguerite Kay (trans.), *Paul Cézanne: Letters* [1941] (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), p. 234.

19. Sidney Geist, *Interpreting Cézanne* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988), p. 243 (see entire Ch. 4, 'The Boys'). On this small 'private' work, see John Rewald, *Paul Cézanne. The Watercolors. A Catalogue Raisonné* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1983), cat. 134; Joseph J. Rishel in Cachin, *Cézanne*, p. 353. Rewald simply comments, 'A somewhat confused work'; while Rishel ultimately finds it 'disquieting', positioning it as an episode within a narrative towards the public 'gravity and august terror that was perhaps only possible for him through a female vehicle'.

20. On the sequence of these versions see Aviva Burnstock, Charlotte Hale, Caroline Campbell and Gabriella Macaro, 'Cézanne's Development of the Card Players', in Ireson and Wright, *Cézanne's Card Players*, pp. 35-54. This helpfully debunks the older reigning idea in Cézanne criticism that the artist worked systematically towards condensation and reduction in this series.

21. As Joseph Rishel observes in his catalogue entry for the Barnes *Cardplayers*, the table establishes the perimeters of the large canvas in a very deliberate way, its perspective 'unadjusted', 'the vertical line of its top exactly paralleling the canvas edges, the knob of its drawer falling precisely in the right/left center of the picture'. See

Joseph J. Rishel, *Great French Paintings from the Barnes Foundation: Impressionist, Post-Impressionist and Early Modern* (New York: Knopf in assoc. with Lincoln Univ. Press, 1993), p. 123.

22. 'Compromised', because the nineteenth-century capitalist bourgeoisie shakes off and ephemeralizes it — and its materiality — in the very act of falsely monumentalizing it. 'Throughout Marx's century, every table and chair in a bourgeois interior resembled a monument', and yet all that is solid is pulverized for the sake of turnover and profits. See Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air. The Experience of Modernity* [1982] (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), p. 99. For a nineteenth-century unpacking of the etymology and historical derivatives of 'la Table' (from Latin 'tabula'), which, we will see, includes everything having to do with establishment (*établir*), pictorial tableau, religious alters (*Sainte table*), gaming (*table de jeu*), and architectural entablature (*entablement*), see article 'Table', in Pierre Larousse, *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle: français, historique, géographique, mythologique, bibliographique, littéraire, artistique, scientifique, etc.* (Paris: Administration du Grand dictionnaire universel, 1866-90). The article details the forms of communal life (spiritual, spiritualist, convivial and chivalrous) that the object table once realized.

23. Meyer Schapiro contrasts the 'conviviality' of all previous visual representations of card players to this 'collective solitaire'. See Schapiro, *Paul Cézanne*, p. 16. On Cézanne as pseudo-Kantian (this painter's post-Copernican epistemological radical questioning of the conditions of knowledge), see Schapiro, 'Cézanne and the Philosophers' (first presented as a lecture in October 1977 at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), in Schapiro, *Worldview in Painting — Art and Society. Selected Papers* (New York: George Braziller, 1999), pp. 75-105, esp. pp. 81, 83-4.

24. Meyer Schapiro, 'Nature of Abstract Art' [1936], in Schapiro, *Modern Art*, p. 193.

25. Schapiro, *Modern Art*, pp. 193-4.

26. If it hardly mentions painters or painting, *The Human Condition* does contain several scattered and highly suggestive passages on the distinctive value of 'Art'. For Arendt, 'Art' is an especially permanent and enduring object. It is putatively free from careworn use (it is not a handled tool) and substitutable exchangeability (unlike paper money); this also makes it a distinctive and privileged human activity in processes of home and world making. See 'The Permanence of the World and the Work of Art', in Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* [1958] (Chicago and London: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 167-74. On Heidegger's fascination and identification with Cézanne as an exemplary seeker after the truth, or the 'thingness' of things in an age of technology, see Christopher Janne, 'The Loss of Things: Cézanne — Rilke — Heidegger', *Kunst & Museumjournal* 2, no.1 (1990): pp. 33-44. Janne dates Heidegger's initial awareness of

the painter, encountered via Rilke's 'Letters on Cézanne' [1907], to 1947; and traces the philosopher's growing esteem through the 1950s culminating in the 1970 *Gedachtes*, which includes the poem (or 'thought thing') 'Cézanne', which Arendt would surely have known.

27. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Cézanne's Doubt' [1945], in Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Nonsense* (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1964). For a sophisticated account of Merleau-Ponty's Cézanne, and the spaces of painting (not only Cézanne's), see Brendan Prendeville, 'Merleau-Ponty, Realism and Painting: Psychophysical Space and the Space of Exchange', *Art History* 22, no. 3 (Sept. 1999): pp. 364-88.

28. On Arendt's distinctive phenomenology — anthropological and political — which was geared to a restitutive liberal politics after the 'failure' of left mass movements, and the Holocaust, see now the synthesizing article, Veronica Vasterling, 'Hannah Arendt', in Sebastian Luft and Soren Overgaard (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Phenomenology* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 82-91.

29. On the debate see Bonnie Honig (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt* (Univ. Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1995). For emerging queer and feminist appreciations of Arendt see, for example, Bonnie Honig, 'Towards an Agonistic Feminism: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Identity', in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (eds), *Feminists Theorize the Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) pp. 215-35; and Michael Warner, *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. xxvii.

30. Arendt, *Human Condition*, p. 52.

31. See Fritz Novotny, 'Passages from Cézanne and the End of Scientific Perspective' [1938], in Christopher S. Wood (ed.), *The Vienna School Reader. Politics and Art Historical Method in the 1930s* (New York: Zone Books, 2000), p. 414.

32. Arendt, *Human Condition*, pp. 52-3 (emphasis mine).

33. It is in this sense that Cézanne's grandiose ambition in The Card Players of making a new world not just of individualistic sensation but of participatory publicness, in the very charmed space of a corner of intimacy, can be thought of less as a nostalgic grasping of a lost world — the threatened world of the nineteenth-century Provençal peasant — than as a proleptic vision directed towards a collective and unknown future. After Cézanne, of course, there are all the quizzical tables of twentieth-century modernist art which, if frequently and symptomatically emptied of a community of persons (one thinks, for example, of Matisse's *Harmony in Red*, 1908), invite at least the viewer, as participant, to begin a common world.

34. Why precisely the table? It might be thought that the stream functions in a similar way in the Bathers, phenomenally building around it a community of men. Yet, nature is indifferent to the welfare of the 'human condition', and, unlike the constructed table, the stream cannot have been artificially fabricated by the hands of humans for the sake of their continuity. In general, persons in Cézanne do not cohere around the natural elements: his landscape is virtually devoid of cohabitating humans.

35. Theodore Reff, 'Cézanne's "Cardplayers" and Their Sources', *Arts Magazine* 55, no. 3 (Nov. 1980): pp. 104-17.

36. Kurt Badt, *The Art of Cézanne* [first published in 1956 as *Die Kunst Cézannes*], (trans.) Sheila Ann Ogilvie (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1965), p. 96. Although he perceptively hits on it, Badt makes nothing of the significance of this prominence of the table in The Card Players, merely noting its transformation from an oval form in the early 1859 so-called 'Ugolino drawing' (see fig. 5.8) to a rectangular one in subsequent related studies. Badt's stray remark on the table predates by two years the publication of *The Human Condition*. Probably Arendt was unaware of Badt's book, but it is certain that Heidegger was aware of it, and through the 1950s he was in communication with Badt. See Janne, 'The Loss of Things', p. 40.

37. On 'The Dinner', see Adrien Chappuis, *The Drawings of Paul Cézanne. A Catalogue Raisonné*, 2 vols. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), cat. 1192.

38. On the literary table ronde, 'signe d'égalité', see 'Table Ronde' in Larousse, *Grand dictionnaire*, p. 1371. Between the early and the late practice the motif of men around the table is pervasive throughout the oeuvre. See, just for its graphic instances, Chappuis, *Drawings*, entries 15, 36, 37 (Badt's 'Ugolino drawing'), 59, 149 (a billiard table), 220 (Reading at Zola's), 220, 222, 223, 224, 224b (six men around a table in a garden).

39. On *Sainte Table*, see above note 22.

40. This figure 'could present a reversed version of the seated man on the left of The Barnes Foundation and Metropolitan Museum canvases'. See Nancy Ireson's cat. entry in Ireson and Wright, *Cézanne's Card Players*, pp. 110-11.

41. Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire. Livre III. Les psychoses, 1955-56*, (ed.) Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1981), pp. 268-9.

42. Badt, *Art of Cézanne*, p. 93.

43. See, for example, cat. 6, 7, and 9, and fig. 59, in Ireson and Wright, *Cézanne's Card Players*.

44. On 'entablature', see note 22.

45. See my epigraph. Arendt, *Human Condition*, p. 254.

46. Philippe Sollers, *Le paradis de Cézanne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995).

47. Susan Sidlauskas, *Cézanne's Other. The Portraits of Hortense* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: Univ. of California Press, 2009), p. 14. It is the *Portrait of Madame Cézanne*, 1886, now in the Detroit Institute of Arts.

48. Arendt, *Human Condition*, p. 257.

49. Émile Zola, *Correspondance. Lettres de Jeunesse* (Paris: Charpentier, 1907), pp. 257, 198, 208, 159-60. 'My greatest pleasures now are the pipe and my dreams'; 'to have you with me, to chat with you as of old — a pipe between our teeth ...'; 'I light and puff at my pipe, I breathe, I live'; 'I have seen Paul! ... we lunched together, smoked a lot of pipes ... Cézanne and I'. Rewald, Kay, *Letters*, pp. 79, 50, 57, 83.

50. I refer here to Baudelaire's sonnet 'La Pipe', in *Les Fleurs du Mal* [first ed. 1857, revised 1861], which Cézanne was thoroughly familiar with. In the four stanzas of 'La Pipe', Baudelaire gives the object voice ('Je suis la pipe d'un auteur': 'I am the pipe of an author'), agency and consoling power; like the table, it provides a sort of dwelling place for the wearisome lives of toiling men in the fragmented alienating hell (*Mal*) of modern mass society ('Quand il est comblé de douleur, / Je fume comme la chaumine / Où se prépare la cuisine / Pour le retour du laboureur': 'When he is overcome by sorrow, / I smoke like the thatched cottage / Where food is prepared / For the labourer's return'.) On Cézanne's adored *Les Fleurs du Mal*, as an 'allegory of exile and alienation set in modern Paris', see Nathaniel Wing, 'Exile from Within, Exile from Without', in Denis Hollier (ed.), *A New History of French Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1989), pp. 737-43.

51. See the youthful letter from Cézanne to Zola, 20 June 1859: 'Par ma foi, mon vieux, tes cigars sont excellents, j'en jume un en t'écrivant ...'. ('My word, old man, your cigars are excellent; I am smoking one while writing to you ...'), in Rewald, Kay, *Letters*, p. 39; Rewald, *Correspondance*, p. 49. In this letter, Cézanne recounts his youthful passion for 'a certain Justine' and describes his 'infinite joy' in thinking of clasping the hand of Zola (who was in Paris). 'On the back of the last sheet there is a drawing of a group of bathers', Rewald notes.

52. On 'tobacco as a symbol of the symbolic itself', see Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, (trans.) Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 112 and 114.

53. Badt, *Art of Cézanne*, p. 113. The 'Zola' figure is also recognizably the subject of a separate single-figure oil study now in the Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. See Ireson and Wright, *Cézanne's Card Players*, pp. 146-7; and the Kimbell Art Museum's *Peasant in a Blue Smock*

(1892 or 1897): he thus reverberates beyond the Barnes canvas. In 1923, Georges Rivière identified the Barnes's figure as a farm worker from the Jas de Bouffan, one père Alexandre who may indeed have been the *modèle*. Supporting the case for a projective identification with Zola (the beloved Zola kept warm within Cézanne and remembered) is the background in *Peasant in a Blue Smock*, a painted screen decoration of a woman holding a parasol. It was an object Zola had assisted Cézanne in painting in 1859-60 for the Jas de Bouffan, so precisely harks back to this 'Cézanne and I'. On *Peasant in a Blue Smock* as implicating Zola, see Cachin, *Cézanne*, p. 345.

54. Or, which effectively is the same thing, produces a masturbatory male fantasy of yielding female flesh within the spaces of male patriarchy. See the discussion of Jean Beraud's 1894 *Portrait of Armand Silvestre* in Garb, 'Cézanne's Late Bathers', p. 201.

55. On *Idyll*, see Mary Anne Stevens (ed.), *Cézanne. The Early Years 1859-1872* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1988), cat. 52, p. 147, and pp. 38-9; and Cachin, *Cézanne*, cat. 23, p. 122.

56. On this drawing see Chappuis, *Drawings*, cat. 291, where it is described as 'Portrait of Dr. Gachet, and Erotic Scene'. The nude is a working drawing for the erotic fantasy *Afternoon in Naples* (1875-7), where 'the sex of the reclining figures is indeterminate'. See Henri Loyrette in Cachin, *Cézanne*, cat. 39, p. 154.

57. See 'mille pipes' in Letter to Zola, 30 June 1866, in Rewald, *Correspondance*, p. 121.



CHANCE AND CHOICE IN CÉZANNE

MARGARET IVERSEN

The Impressionists claimed to look upon the world with fresh eyes and to paint in a way free of the academic convention. While we have become deeply sceptical about the validity of such claims, it is none the less important to understand the meaning or aim of the doctrine of the painterly innocent eye. Even an assiduous student of the techniques of the Old Masters like Cézanne spoke of painting only ‘what we see, forgetting everything that existed before us’.¹ In this paper, I argue that this refrain, repeated so often in the late nineteenth century, signals a desire to cut through all mannerism and cliché, and that this involves a partial relinquishing of artistic agency in order to harness chance. Impressionist and some Post-Impressionist painters, I want to argue, cultivate the accident. For them pre-meditation and calculation, perfect control, are no longer considered the pre-eminent artistic values. Rather, what is valued is the unforeseen motif that emerges in the process of painting, so that the finished work cannot truly be said to have been intended or, indeed, finished. I approach this subject indirectly by considering Mallarmé’s views on poetry and his remarks on Impressionist painting.²

I. MALLARMÉ ON POETRY AND IMPRESSIONISM

It strikes me that the doctrine of the painter’s innocent eye chimes with a very similar view of photography. The camera lens is often imagined as an eye wide open, without the buffer against shock that we call consciousness. Salvador Dalí, for example, indicated this openness and lack of sentimentality when he praised ‘the anaesthetic gaze of the naked, lashless eye of Zeiss’ — imagining the camera lens as incapable of censorship.³ André Breton conjured up this defenceless quality by referring to the ‘blindness’ of the camera that gives it access to unconscious material normally accessible only in automatism and dream.⁴ Walter Benjamin wrote about how reality ‘sears’ the photographic image and how this new technology reveals to us a hitherto inaccessible optical unconscious.⁵ Roland Barthes stressed the importance of the light-sensitivity of the medium and went so far as to claim that the most interesting detail in a photograph is unintended by its maker: you can’t plan or stage a punctum.⁶ These must have been the kind of connotations that have long been attached to photography that Cézanne had in mind when, in conversation with Joachim Gasquet, he compared himself to a ‘recording machine’ and a ‘sensitive plate’. The relevant passage reads:

The artist is nothing more than a receptacle of sensation, a brain, a recording machine ... He must silence all the voices of prejudice within him, he must

Opposite:

Detail of plate 4.
Paul Cézanne, *Cardplayers*,
c.1892-96, oil on canvas, The
Courtauld Gallery, London.

forget, forget, be silent, become a perfect echo. And then the entire landscape will engrave itself on the sensitive plate (*plaque sensible*) of his being.⁷

The allusion to the 'photographic' in this context clearly has nothing to do with the sort of verisimilitude of some academic painting of the late nineteenth century. Rather, it proclaims an ideal of receptivity to all the contingencies of nature. On this alternative, chance-inflected, view of photography, the mechanism of the camera and the indexicality of the medium both contrive to short circuit convention and habit and so have a revelatory power.

Mallarmé thought that the Impressionists' manner of painting had a similar revelatory power. In his essay, 'The Impressionists and Edouard Manet' (1876), the poet claimed:

The eye should forget all else it has seen, and learn anew from the lesson before it. It should abstract itself from memory, seeing only that which it looks upon, and that as for the first time; and the hand should become an impersonal abstraction guided only by the will, oblivious of all previous cunning. As for the artist himself, his personal feeling, his peculiar tastes, are for the time being absorbed, ignored...⁸

I maintain that both doctrines of the painterly innocent eye and photographic automaticity should be understood, not as factual statements, but rather as strategies for evading the given, the preconceived, the formulaic. They are above all responses to the sense that our perception of the world has become so incrustated with cultural codes that it has ceased to be truly visible. Paradoxically, elaborate strategies and sophisticated technologies must be deployed to enable one to see in a more 'primitive' way.

But what is the painter's equivalent to the camera? Mallarmé's discussion of poetry is particularly helpful in answering this question. He devised a way of using language that involved, as he said, 'the disappearance of the poet speaking'. Rather, the poet 'yields the initiative to words, through the clash of their ordered inequalities; they light each other up with reciprocal reflections like a virtual swooping of fire across precious stones'.⁹ Mallarmé's figurative language immediately puts the scintillating effect of poetry in touch with the same effect in painting. In this connection, it is worth noting that Cézanne also uses the metaphor of fire in remarks he made on his vision of Mont Sainte-Victoire, as reported by Gasquet: 'Those blocks were made with fire and there is still fire in them ... Notice how the shadow falling from them quivers on the rock as if it were being burnt up, instantly consumed by a fiery mouth'.¹⁰ The mountain, far from being a solid mass of limestone, is here imagined as a giant conflagration.

For Mallarmé, a true work of literature depends, not on the poet's voice, but on the nature of language considered in itself. The idea must appear to arise solely from the juxtaposition of words as they reflect off each other. One can see this realized in the 'disjointed

syntax' and 'scattered distribution in space' of Mallarmé's poem, 'Un Coup de dés' ('A Dice-Throw') (1897). Malcolm Bowie, whose descriptions of the poem these are, interprets the poem as 'a complex picture of contingency and risk, and of those activities of will by which humans seek to discover pattern and purpose within their experience'.¹¹ For Bowie, Mallarmé succeeded in 'realising a poetic structure which will allow chance its weight and its omnipresence while allowing the fragile ordering impulse of the human being its proper dialectical edge'. Like a ship in a stormy sea, we are tossed by chaos and contingency. Mallarmé's ingenuity, however, lies in his 'representing this chaos not as nonsense but as a realm of indefinitely multiple and replenishable significance'.¹² In other words, there is in Mallarmé no simple confrontation of an ordering mind and a chaotic universe. That is evidently why Mallarmé emphasised the importance of painters' attention to what is seen: scrupulous attention to the visible world in all its complexity is also a means of short-circuiting the burden of convention and the capriciousness of taste.

Despite this medium specific difference, it is nevertheless obvious that Mallarmé sees Impressionist painting as the visual equivalent of his poetic strategy where composition or style is determined largely by effects of the medium. The *plein air* effect of Impressionism, he wrote, was accomplished by the use of 'simple colour, fresh, or lightly laid on ...'. The picture, 'being composed of a harmony of reflected and ever-changing lights, cannot be supposed always to look the same, but palpitates with movement, light and life'.¹³ He also discussed the function of the frame that arbitrarily crops and isolates one portion of reality, 'such as that which is embraced at one glance of a scene framed by the hands'.¹⁴

This last point, of course, recalls the fortuitous cropping of the camera. In fact, one begins to suspect that Mallarmé's thought was profoundly influenced by photography. This case has been persuasively argued by the poet Yves Bonnefoy in an essay called 'Igitur and the Photographer' in which he suggests that Mallarmé's 'pure poetry' has a parallel in photography's presentation of a world without projections of the self. One doesn't know if the poet actually did reflect on the wider significance of photography, but Bonnefoy says that he himself 'cannot fail to notice in [Mallarmé's] great moments of reflection the parallelism between his project as a poet and the invention of two or three decades before'. Mallarmé wanted to look as a camera looks — that is, he wanted to strip away meaning, ideality, religion. The photographic effect is the effect of nothingness, yet out of the ashes, Bonnefoy concludes, is born the effect of being.¹⁵

Before leaving Mallarmé, I want to turn to the end of 'The Impressionists and Edouard Manet', where the social significance of the new painting is considered. What is surprising to me is how closely it anticipates Benjamin's reflections on the social significance of photography. Benjamin, we know, was indebted to Mallarmé, but he probably didn't know this particular essay since it was published in English. Like Benjamin, Mallarmé sets up an opposition in terms of the new art's attunement to modern times and the emerging classes. He claims that the 'transition from the old imaginative artist and dreamer to the energetic

modern worker is found in Impressionism'. He calls the former type 'recluses to whom were given the genius of a dominion over an ignorant multitude'. They appear as 'kings and gods'. 'But today the multitude demands to see with its own eyes; and if our latter-day art is less glorious, intense and rich, it is not without the compensation of truth, simplicity and child-like charm'. The new painting 'cannot isolate itself from the equally characteristic politics and industry'. The hour has come, he declares, for 'new and impersonal men placed directly in communion with the sentiment of their time ...'. Only they can 'loose the restraint of education' and allow nature to reveal herself. These artists, he concludes, place in people's power 'a newer and more succinct' means of observing nature. Clearly, Mallarmé regarded Impressionism as a revivifying modern primitivism — an art that retraces its steps in order to find a new beginning: 'painting shall be steeped again in its cause, in its relation to nature'. Not in order to imitate her, he cautions, but for 'the delight of having recreated nature touch by touch'.¹⁶ It hardly needs spelling out the very similar way in which Benjamin stressed the effects of modernity and industry on vision, and praised new cultural forms — in his case, photography and cinema — for being anti-auratic, truthful and adapted to the needs of masses. No doubt the two men's admiration for Baudelaire is at work in this convergence of views.

As we have seen, Mallarmé's conception of Impressionist painting and Benjamin's understanding of photography bring together authorial abnegation, indexicality, openness to chance, and social and perceptual transformation. I stress this point because photography is standardly thought of as *differing* from painting in that the latter is considered to be through and through permeable to the artist's intention while the automaticity of the camera renders photographic intentionality problematic by widening the gap between agency and outcome. My argument suggests that a broadly Impressionist technique, such as Cézanne's, which involves laying down patches or discrete stokes of pigment that don't have immediate mimetic effects, should be regarded as one way of opening up such a gap in painting. The job of demonstrating my point is made easier by the fact that the Museum of Modern Art in New York has recently allowed visitors to take close-up photographs in the galleries. On my last visit, I became particularly interested in the lower left hand corner of Cézanne's *Large Bather* (c.1885). This area caught my eye, because it looked like someone had left the painting out in the rain. On closer inspection, it became apparent that these strange marks were made by dragging white paint across a textured surface of dry paint (in the same way that water-colourists use the texture of paper) (fig. 6.1). The technique leaves an impersonal mark that harnesses the automaticity afforded by lightly applying paint to a textured ground in the manner of a wet *frottage*; the result is rather different from the freehand scribble forming the clouds above.¹⁷ In the neighbouring gallery at MoMA, I found that Monet had practiced this kind of mark-making on an industrial scale in his late panels of water lilies. All this has no doubt been observed before, but the significance of this kind of mark for later painting is perhaps not felt so keenly by special-



6.1 Detail of Paul Cézanne, *Large Bather*, c.1885, oil on canvas, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

ists of nineteenth-century art, for my interest was piqued by its resemblance to Gerhard Richter's abstract paintings made by pulling a plank of squeegee across wet paint. The title of one series he made in this way, *Cage* (2006), is an *homage* to the master of aleatory art practices, John Cage.

Cézanne's *Card Players* might at first sight seem the least favourable series of paintings to support my argument. For a start, there is the sturdy architecture of the composition — two symmetrically seated men propping their arms on a table top as if holding it in place. There are also, unusually, numerous careful studies. These works seem to have little of the instability that D. H. Lawrence so powerfully evoked when he wrote that in Cézanne's paintings: 'walls twitch and slide, chairs bend or rear up a little, cloths curl like burning paper'.¹⁸ Yet the architecture, the 'stubborn geometry' of the series, is the armature on which, at close range, a blizzard of brightly coloured marks struggle to resolve into a recognizable image. Richard Shiff's catalogue essay for *Cézanne's Card Players* is helpful in trying to pin down the effect of these marks. He cites Meyer Schapiro's observation that 'the inherent rigidity of the theme is overcome by the remarkable life of the surface. There is a beautiful flicker and play of small contrasts'.¹⁹ Focusing on how Cézanne rendered the edge of a table and knob of a drawer, Shiff demonstrates Cézanne's method of animating the canvas with contrasting shades of pink and green and a free-play of non-referential marks.²⁰ Also pertinent are Matthew Simms' remarks about Cézanne's 'unfinished'. Faced with the task of making an image out of the complexity of the visible world, argues Simms, he left areas of white as signs of unknowing, 'traces of uncertainty', 'areas of reserve' — leaving things tentative, suspended.²¹ Yet Mallarmé came closest, I think, to articulating the point of this

technique: it is, he wrote, to make us as spectators ‘understand when looking at the most accustomed objects the delight we would experience could we but see them for the first time’.²² Mallarmé enjoins both poets and painters to pursue the accident in order to break through the limits of their own conscious understanding. Understood in these terms, the innocent eye opens onto the wonders of the optical unconscious rather than an unmediated grasp of ‘objective’ reality.

II. WHY DO PEOPLE PLAY CARDS?

In those artists who value chance we recognize ‘the replacement of the desire to do something with the desire to see what will happen’. I take this phrase from a chapter in a book by Walter Benn Michaels called *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism* (1987). The chapter, called ‘Action and Accident: Photography and Writing’, contains some of the most interesting reflections on chance I’ve found.²³ Much of the discussion turns on Lily Bart’s passion for bridge and gambling in Edith Wharton’s *House of Mirth*, a novel published in 1905, but set in the stifling atmosphere of 1890s New York high society. The tragic heroine is distinguished by her seeming desire to court chance; she takes risks and relishes unpredictable outcomes.²⁴

Games of chance, cards or dice, involve making a curious sort of action. As Michaels observes, it is the fact that ‘you cannot know exactly what you are doing until it is done — that makes the act interesting’. In such actions, and I include taking photographs and making certain kinds of painting among them, there is an epistemological gap or veil between intention and action.²⁵ Prompted by Wharton’s novel, Michaels wonders what it would be like actually to live in a utopian republic ‘free of accident where all events are actions and all consequences intended’. He asks, ‘Is it not a more attractive prospect to inhabit a world where not only the consequences of one’s actions but the very identity of those actions may be unpredictable and unstable?’²⁶ Wharton’s novel also calls into question the ethics of living a life of calculated outcomes and premeditated effects.

This seems to have been a widely held view at the time. For example, Michaels cites Charles Sanders Peirce’s contention that the mere carrying out of predetermined purposes is mechanical. By eliminating ‘arbitrary spontaneity’, men are transformed into machines.²⁷ What is wanted is some ‘interference’ (his term) capable of breaking the chain of cause and effect — some interference that, paradoxically, will make freedom (and agency) possible. The camera is able to provide just such interference. As Michaels says, ‘the camera saves photography by coming between the photographer and his “predeterminate” ends’. Although sophisticated cameras are designed to produce predictable pictures in the hands of skilled photographers, the automaticity of the process lends itself to unintended happy (or unhappy) accidents and many artists are drawn to this possibility. As Walker Evans

so eloquently put it, the camera excels at ‘reflecting swift chance, disarray, wonder, and experiment’.²⁸ What I am suggesting is that the Impressionists and Cézanne developed a way of working with paint that transformed it into just this sort of interference, that is, into a means of resisting the mechanism of predetermined ends. My view is supported by Shiff, an avid reader of Peirce, who actually describes Cézanne’s paintings as characterised by ‘material, indexical interference’.²⁹ On this view, chance and agency converge at those moments when a link in the chain of cause and effect is broken by some apparatus or medium of interference.

Of course, it would be unbearable if our intentions were regularly frustrated. Yet there is something terribly arid, not to say mechanistic, in the idea of a world where all our purposes result in expected outcomes. It would be dreadful if we were completely transparent to ourselves and predictable to others. We value the degree of interference in human intentional activity offered by the intrusion of the unconscious, the slippages of language, the apparatus of the camera, or the activity of painting in patches of pigment. In short, we *desire to see what will happen*. What is fundamentally at stake in my argument is whether the late nineteenth century witnessed the moment when art as a model of consummate control gave way to a practice that encourages the intrusion of chance and welcomes the contingencies of everyday life.

III. HOUSE OF CARDS

So far I have focused my attention exclusively on the role that chance played in Cézanne’s painterly technique, but of course the subject matter of *The Card Players* series bears closely on the issue of chance. Did Cézanne conceive of this motif as crucially a game of chance? Did he, perhaps, think of the game as analogous to his risky painterly technique? One might plausibly maintain that, since the game involves a mixture of chance and choice, accident and skill, it models perfectly Cézanne’s manner of painting. One could even surmise that the cards are held in the players’ hands like palettes bearing a limited number of pure, bright pigments.³⁰ However intriguing these suggestions may be, they return us to the issue of technique and do not touch on the very particular way Cézanne treats the figures of the card players. I will confine my remarks in what follows to the version of the theme with two facing players, and in particular, the one that hangs in *The Courtauld Gallery*.

Many critics have commented on how stripped down the card players theme is in Cézanne’s treatment of it compared to its boisterous, anecdotal, moralizing precedents. For example, John House remarks, rightly, that the tone is closer to Chardin’s series of children building card castles, but he then claims that there is no trace in Cézanne’s paintings of the philosophical dimension present in Chardin’s canvases.³¹ Of course, it is true that Chardin’s

card castles and soap bubbles are more explicit *vanitas* images. Yet, there is in both painters' work a sense of the fragility of the human ordering impulse, even in intimate interior environments. There is in Cézanne's depiction of serious, sustained concentration focused on a mere card game a recognition of the disparity between the enduring and the ephemeral, the solid and the precarious. And this disparity is part of what gives the painting its hint of humour.³² In emphasizing the distance between traditional treatments of the card players theme and Cézanne's, critics have stressed their gravity, seriousness, and monumentality. Yet the facing card players, to my eye anyway, could be ancestors of all those great comedy double acts — Laurel and Hardy, Abbott and Costello, Vladimir and Estragon. The two men assume identical poses, seeming to mirror each other across the table, except, of course, that they are very different physical types — a fact accentuated by their contrasting hats — on one head, a tall felt hat with a broad brim curving downward, and on the other, a soft cap with up-turned brim. They sit together in the café, sunk in a comfortable, companionable silence that creates a temporary bulwark against chaos and contingency, all the while acknowledging the precariousness and fatality of life in the game they play. These reflections lead me to conclude that the stability of the painting's compositional architecture is a house of cards erected in the face of a flickering perceptual reality, the contingencies of life, and the perennial doubt about the value of one's life and work.

In *Farewell to an Idea* (1999), T. J. Clark writes that 'modernity means contingency', and contingency, for him, has an ominous, meaningless aspect.³³ For Clark, contingency is a fate to be suffered, but as we've seen, to be absolute master of contingency might turn out to be an even worse fate. In line with his view of contingency, Clark understands Cézanne's project as creating something solid out of the flux of visual particles. I would want to inflect this thought somewhat by suggesting that the solid armature of *The Card Players* constitute the rules of the game within which the productive potential of chance is given free play.

All references in digital versions of *Courtauld Books Online* are hyperlinked. To navigate to a footnote, click on the reference number in the body of the text. To return back to the text, click on the number at the beginning of the footnote.

1. Letter to Émile Bernard, 23 October 1905, in John Rewald (ed.), *Paul Cézanne: Letters* (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1976), p. 316.

2. Although the concept of chance plays no role in his paper, I have profited from reading Joel Isaacson's 'Constable, Duranty, Mallarmé, Impressionism, Plein Air, and Forgetting', *Art Bulletin* 86, no. 2 (Sept. 1994): pp. 427-450.

3. Salvador Dalí, 'Photography: Pure Creation of the Mind' [1927], in Robert Descharnes (ed.), *Oui: the Paranoid-Critical Revolution* (Boston: Exact Change, 1998), p. 13.

4. André Breton, 'Max Ernst' [1920], in Franklin Rosemont (ed.), *What is Surrealism?: Selected Writings* (London: Pluto Press, 1978), p. 7.

5. Walter Benjamin, 'A Little History of Photography' [1931], in Michael Jennings (ed.), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings (1927-1934), vol. 2* (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1999), p. 510.

6. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* [1980], (trans.) Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).

7. Joachim Gasquet, *Joachim Gasquet's Cézanne: A Memoir with Conversations*, (trans.) Christopher Pemberton (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), p. 150. It is acknowledged that Cézanne occasionally used photographic images as the basis for paintings. See, for example, his *Melting Snow, Fountainbleau* (1879-80), The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

8. Stéphane Mallarmé, 'The Impressionists and Edouard Manet', first published in the *Art Monthly Review* [Sept. 1876], reprinted in Penny Florence, *Mallarmé, Manet and Redon: Visual and Aural Signs and the Generation of Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986), p. 12.

9. Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Crisis of Verse' [1886], in Barbara Johnson (trans.), *Divagations* (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2007), p. 208.

10. Gasquet, *Gasquet's Cézanne*, p. 153.

11. Malcolm Bowie, *Mallarmé and the Art of Being Difficult* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1978), p. 128.

12. Bowie, *Mallarmé*, p. 143.

13. Mallarmé, 'The Impressionists', p. 15.

14. Mallarmé, 'The Impressionists', p. 15.

15. Yves Bonnefoy, 'Igitur and the Photographer', *PMLA* 114, no. 3 (May 1999): p. 335.

16. Mallarmé, 'The Impressionists', p. 17.

17. Richard Shiff refers to Cézanne's 'method of applying rather anonymous strokes', that is, non-expressive and relatively uninflected. See Shiff, 'Cézanne in the Wild', *The Burlington Magazine* 148, no. 1242 (Sept. 2006): p. 611.

18. D. H. Lawrence, *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers*, (ed.) Edward D. McDonald (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 580.

19. Meyer Schapiro, *Paul Cézanne [1952]* (New York: Abrams, 1988), pp. 16-17.

20. Richard Shiff, 'He Painted', in Nancy Ireson and Barnaby Wright (eds), *Cézanne's Card Players* (London: The Courtauld Gallery in assoc. with Paul Holberton Pub., 2010), p. 79.

21. Matthew Simms, 'Cézanne's Unfinish', *RES* 36 (Autumn 1999): pp. 229, 234. Simms compares Cézanne's unfinish to the active role played by the blank canvas surface in Matisse and the blank margins of the page in Mallarmé's poems which the poet described as areas of 'significant silence'.

22. Mallarmé, 'The Impressionists', p. 17.

23. Walter Benn Michaels, 'Action and Accident: Photography and Writing', in *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1988), p. 223. See my edited anthology of texts and introduction to *Chance, Documents of Contemporary*

Art Series (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press and London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2010). Also relevant is Iversen, 'Automaticity: Ruscha and Performative Photography', *Photography after Conceptual Art*, special issue edited with Diarmuid Costello, *Art History* 32.5 (Dec. 2009): pp. 836-51.

24. Even to the very end it is undecidable if Lily Bart's eventual demise is suicide or an accidental overdose of a sleeping draft. The action of the drug, wrote Wharton, was 'incalculable'.

25. Benn Michaels, 'Action and Accident', p. 233.

26. Benn Michaels, 'Action and Accident', p. 232.

27. Charles Sanders Peirce, 'The Law of the Mind', in Peirce, *Chance, Love, and Logic: Philosophical Essays* (New York: George Braziller, 1956). Originally published in *The Monist* (July 1892): pp. 230-1.

28. Walker Evans, 'The Reappearance of Photography [1931]', in Alan Trachtenberg (ed.), *Classic Essays in Photography* (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980), p. 185.

29. Richard Shiff, 'Index and Counterfeit', in Shinichiro Osaki (ed.), *Traces: Body and Idea in Contemporary Art* (Kyoto: National Museum of Modern Art, 2004).

30. In 1876, Cézanne described the area around L'Estaque: 'It's like a playing card. Red roofs against the blue sea'. Letter to Camille Pissarro, 2 July 1876, in Rewald, *Letters*, p. 146.

31. John House, 'Cézanne's Card Players: Art without Anecdote', in Ireson and Wright, *Cézanne's Card Players*, p. 64.

32. As far as I can make out, the literature on Cézanne and humour is non-existent. I did find some helpful material in Renée Riese Hubert, 'The Fleeting World of Humor from Watteau to Fragonard', *Yale French Studies* 23 (1959): pp. 85-91.

33. T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1999), p. 7.

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PLATES

PLATE 1

Paul Cézanne, *Cardplayers*, c. 1890-2, oil on canvas, 65.4 x 81.9 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

PLATE 2

Paul Cézanne, *Cardplayers*, c. 1890-2, oil on canvas, 135.3 x 181.9 cm, The Barnes Foundation, Merion.

PLATE 3

Paul Cézanne, *Cardplayers*, c. 1892-6, oil on canvas, 47.5 x 57 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

PLATE 4

Paul Cézanne, *Cardplayers*, c. 1892-6, oil on canvas, 60 x 73 cm, The Courtauld Gallery, London.

PLATE 5

Paul Cézanne, *Cardplayers*, c. 1892-6, oil on canvas, 97 x 130 cm, Private collection.

PLATE I

Paul Cézanne, *Cardplayers*,
c.1890-2, oil on canvas, 65.4
x 81.9 cm, The Metropolitan
Museum of Art, New York.



PLATE 2

Paul Cézanne, *Cardplayers*,
c.1890-2, oil on canvas,
135.3 x 181.9 cm,
The Barnes Foundation.



PLATE 3

Paul Cézanne, *Cardplayers*,
c. 1892-6, oil on canvas,
47.5 x 57 cm,
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PLATE 4

Paul Cézanne, *Cardplayers*,
c. 1892-6, oil on canvas,
60 x 73 cm, The Courtauld
Gallery, London.



PLATE 5

Paul Cézanne, *Cardplayers*,
c.1892-6, oil on canvas, 97 x
130 cm, Private collection.



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