KINDT, Joann, 1925-
COMPOSITIONAL FORMS IN THE LANDSCAPE GENRE AND THEIR PERSISTENCE IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY ABSTRACT PAINTING, WITH AN EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS,

The Ohio State University, Ph.D., 1966
Fine Arts

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COMPOSITIONAL FORMS IN THE LANDSCAPE GENRE AND
THEIR PERSISTENCE IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY
ABSTRACT PAINTING, WITH AN
EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS

DISSESSATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

Joann Kindt, B.F.A., M.F.A.

* * * * * * *

The Ohio State University
1966

Approved by

[Signatures]

Adviser

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This study of formal development of the landscape genre evolved from a complex of reasons. In the beginning it was based on a personal liking for and interest in nineteenth-century painting, especially the landscape of Constable, Cezanne and Van Gogh. This preference was undoubtedly reinforced by a philosophic viewpoint which had its basis in nineteenth-century Romantic poetry and literature. I had acquired a set of attitudes about nature and art, the origins of which I was scarcely aware. They were so much a part of the way I felt about the world and painting that I had difficulty reconciling my feelings and the gnawing conviction that, living in the twentieth century, I really could not continue to paint in the style of the nineteenth.

The solution to this dilemma was gradually found as a greater understanding of the formal basis of painting grew. I gradually realized that style and subject matter of a painting should neither permit or prevent my being able to appreciate it. As I more clearly understood the nature of formal structure in painting, I was aware of it as a common denominator in the representational painting that I had preferred and the abstract painting that I had not been able to "understand." I was finally able to reconcile the two and to work abstractly from a position of conviction.

Since I was committed to using subject matter in my painting at the time I started to work at Ohio State University, the first stage of this investigation was a practical one. It was suggested that I paint
the landscape, not because of the implications of the subject matter, but because the nature of the motif was such that I would be more free and arbitrary than when painting still life or the figure. It was a means of letting go of the object and confronting the formal problem more directly.

As I struggled with this problem in the studio, I became involved in a general investigation of nineteenth-century landscape painting. It was directed in part at understanding the philosophic grounds for landscape painting. More especially I wanted to find evidence in both the paintings and the writings of painters I admired for the viewpoint that was being presented in the studio as a way of learning to see and to understand the nature of form in painting. The letters of Constable, Van Gogh, Pissarro and Cezanne, and comments of other nineteenth-century painters reveal an essentially abstract approach to the formal problems of painting taken by these men. This approach is not immediately evident in their work to the naive viewer, but constant visual study of their painting tended to confirm their statements.

It was during these investigations, aimed at helping me clarify my own position as a painter and to solve the very real problems of structuring a painting, that the formal "family resemblances" of certain landscape paintings became evident. It appeared that there were certain basic types of compositional arrangements that were traditionally used by landscape painters. This observation was at the basis of an attempt to categorize these landscape compositions for the purpose of studying their persistence as forms of composition and their relationship to specific formal problems in the recent development of painting.
The relationship of landscape compositions to the emergence of the concentric pattern (evidence of a highly organized response to the visual elements of contrast according to Sherman) tended to confirm the notion that the landscape genre lent itself more easily to attaining a high degree of formal harmony. Since the realization of the concentric pattern seemed to be associated more often with some compositional arrangements than with others, it appeared that there was some definite relationship between the specific type of arrangement and the achievement of formal unity.

Formal analyses of paintings can be a most useful kind of study for a painter, since the practical aspects of both painting and criticizing painting depends on the ability to make specific judgments concerning the realization of form. The discipline of creating a consistent argument supporting the ideas and intuitions one has as he looks and paints, helps give order and clarity to one's own understanding and should help when one is faced with communicating these ideas on the verbal level.

I should like to thank my adviser, Professor Hoyt L. Sherman, for his invaluable guidance and patience as my painting critic. I am deeply indebted to him for his writings on the nature of artistic form on which the premises set forth here are based.¹ I should like to thank Dr. Franklin M. Ludden for his invaluable assistance in the writing of the dissertation. It was in his Seminar on Cezanne at The Ohio State

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¹Hoyt L. Sherman, Cezanne and Visual Form (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University, 1951) and The Visual Demonstration Manual, Part I, (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University, 1951).
University, Autumn 1964, that he pointed the way to defining the categories of landscape composition. I should also like to thank Professor Robert D. King, Professor Robert M. Gattrell, Dr. Virgil G. Hinshaw and Dr. Glenn L. Patton for their guidance and encouragement both as teachers and members of my committee.
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PART I

A STUDY OF COMPOSITIONAL FORMS IN THE LANDSCAPE GENRE

AND THEIR PERSISTENCE IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY

ABSTRACT PAINTING
INTRODUCTION

With the advent of non-objective painting in the twentieth century, the representational and literary aspects of subject matter have apparently become of secondary importance to the abstract elements of form and color as means of achieving the painters' expression. Nevertheless, in the past, the representational aspects of painting had been a very important consideration not only in terms of meaning, but as vital factors affecting the formal structure of the painting. Each subject matter genre, landscape, figure and still life, has certain formal characteristics derived from the motif.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the nature of the formal structure of landscape painting, and to clarify the role of this genre which particularly lent itself to the solution of certain formal problems leading to the development of abstract painting.

The Problem and the Method

It is proposed that the landscape genre offered certain advantages over still life and figure painting because the nature of the motif (the stimulus) permitted the painter greater freedom in restructuring forms to attain greater formal pictorial unity. This became particularly important in the late nineteenth century when painters were struggling with the formal problem of shifting from structure based on light and dark (chiaroscuro) contrast to structure based on color contrast.
It is also proposed that within the genre of landscape painting certain categories of formal compositions may be defined and that these types of composition can be arranged in a hierarchy, from the more simple to the more complex.

It appears that there has been some relationship between the order of complexity of these compositions and the sequence of their use in the development of certain landscape painters as they moved toward the use of color structure and abstraction. The more simple arrangements tended to be used in the early stages of development of the painter, the more complex to be associated with a mature stage of development. The more complex compositions tended to be the form of composition which led most directly to abstract painting.

It is further proposed that the basic compositional arrangements of landscape painting continue to persist in twentieth-century abstract painting, where it seems reference to "nature" by representation disappeared. This persistence of compositional arrangements is one reason why some nonobjective painting continues to be associated with landscape.

I shall first attempt to define the categories of landscape composition in terms of traditional representational painting, using selected works of Constable, the Barbizon painters, and the Impressionists as examples of the basic compositional types. These categories of composition shall be used as a basis for visual analysis of landscape paintings of selected painters of the nineteenth and twentieth century who were involved in making the changes in the formal structure of painting which led to color structure and abstraction.
The major method of study was that of visual analysis of paintings; when possible, statements or comments of artists and critics were used for support of the findings in these analyses. In most cases the analyses were made by means of reproductions, but I also studied original works whenever I could.

Where reasonably complete illustrated catalogs of the artists' work were available, I determined the proportion of landscape paintings in the total oeuvre of a painter in order to get some notion of his involvement in the genre. Where complete catalogs were not available, I had to generalize in terms of as many paintings as were available from a number of sources.

I also did some comparisons of selected landscape paintings with figure and still life works from the same period in an artist's development. In these cases, I was comparing the degree of integration of color into pictorial structure and the degree of distortion and abstraction.

Having determined the basic types of composition found in landscape painting of the nineteenth century, I have, in this study, analyzed selected landscapes of eight major painters. In my analyses I have attempted to find--

1. Which types of compositions appeared most often in a painter's work at a given period.

2. Whether there was a relationship between the types of composition used and the integration of color into the pictorial structure, which could be indicated by the appearance of the concentric pattern.
3. How the compositional arrangements were modified by the new formal demands of color structure.

4. What form the arrangements take when they persist in non-objective painting.

The painters selected for study were the four Post-Impressionists, Cezanne, Seurat, Van Gogh and Gauguin, the two early twentieth-century nonobjective painters, Kandinsky and Mondrian, and two recent American Abstract Expressionists, Pollock and Rothko.

I studied the work of these eight painters because either the landscape was a major category of subject matter for them, or their work (in the case of the Abstract Expressionists) has been likened to landscape. The first six men are considered key innovators in the development of twentieth-century abstract painting. I could have selected some other recent painters instead of Pollock and Rothko. However, I felt that the compositional arrangements derived from the landscape genre seemed particularly clear in their work. Their paintings also present an interesting polarity of expression which is somewhat analogous to that of Kandinsky and Mondrian and which seems to be related to the type of compositional arrangements that each preferred.
CHAPTER I

FORMAL AND HISTORICAL BASES FOR THE STUDY

Artistic Form as Organized Visual Perception

The underlying assumptions on which this investigation shall be based are grounded in Hoyt L. Sherman's doctrine of the nature of artistic form. Sherman bases his doctrine on the theories of perception of Gestalt and Transactionalist psychology.¹

According to Sherman, a painting is an abstract configuration, the form of which is based on the perceived relationships of the visual elements of contrast, shape (size and position) and brightness. By perceived relationships he implies that the relationships do not necessarily exist in the stimulus (or nature), but are perceived as a result of the interaction of the stimulus, the past experience and the purpose of the artist. A characteristic of the well-organized configuration is that of apparent unity or harmony. The term apparent unity again takes the artist or viewer into consideration. The work of art is made up of distinct parts, but through certain relationships of form, i.e., proximity, continuity of edges, closure and brightness or hue contrast, by which a viewer tends to group the parts visually, the configuration appears to be unified. Artistic form, exemplified in a painting,

¹For a more complete treatment of this doctrine see Sherman, Cezanne and Visual Form and The Visual Demonstration Manual, Part I, mentioned earlier.
sculpture or work of architecture, presents an organized visual field structure. "Nature," the stimulus, presents a complex field of visual contrasts which must be structured by the viewer.

Sherman proposes that in the development of painting and the other visual arts, sculpture and architecture, there has been a tendency for the structural basis to move from a more simple to a more complex configuration, to move from a more limited relationship of the visual cues to a more complex integration of these elements. The most basic element in structuring a work of art is shape. The earliest stages of painting, cave painting, used shape of the object as the primary mode of structuring the work. The work is thus figure oriented. Though the artist used value or color, its function was to delimit the shape or suggest volume by modeling (shading). The shading is always in from the contour (on the figure).

In the next stage, the artist tried to suggest the relationship of the object to its environment. The relationship is that of an object (figure) against a background. Egyptian painting and Byzantine mosaics are generally structured this way. Position (up or down on the format, or overlapping of shapes) suggests the orientation of the object in space. Relative size is used to suggest importance. Color and value are

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2 Figure in terms of Gestalt psychology is that shape which appears as a solid, substantial unit. It appears to be in front of the background or ground which seems "loose, empty or unshaped" by comparison. Wolfgang Kohler, *Gestalt Psychology* (New York: The Liveright Publishing Corp., 1947), p. 120.

3 It is to be understood that the historical divisions in this analysis of form are very broadly generalized.
used primarily to differentiate the object from the environment or to describe it.

In a third level of complexity, the artist integrated the object with its background by means of value or brightness contrast. Although shape is still a basic element of structure, the shape is no longer primarily determined by the object but by the perceived abstract light-dark relationship. This stage is that of its integrated figure-ground relationship which appears with the development of chiaroscuro painting in the Renaissance and Baroque periods.\(^4\) Chiaroscuro allowed for a maximum of freedom in abstract shape structure and still permitted fidelity to the object. It is at this point that the painter moved from structure based on a symbolic, conceptual stereotype to structure based on perceived visual relationships of the contrast elements.

It was at this stage of development that the concentric pattern which had been manifest in varying degrees in works of art from the Oriental and Western traditions began to appear more frequently. The concentric pattern mediated by brightness or color contrast is the form that emerges as the result of experiencing the visual field as a unified structure. One may experience the concentric pattern in looking at "nature." However, it is probably not given in nature, but seems to be

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\(^4\)Masaccio’s Expulsion of Adam and Eve (1427), a fresco from the Brancacci Chapel of Sta. Maria del Carmine, Florence, is an early example of a painting consistently organized by means of the perceived light-dark relationships. Sherman, Cezanne, p. 4.
related to the operation of the eye and brain and how this system organizes the visual field (stimulus) in terms of the given contrast elements.\(^5\)

The concentric pattern appears in chiaroscuro painting as a "target" pattern of light and dark. In Rembrandt's drawings, which are often concentric, one will generally find a dark "button" (focal point) surrounded by a light locale and then a surrounding ring of darker tone. There may be more than one concentric pattern in a painting in which case it is not uncommon for one pattern to have a dark central locale and the second to have a light center.

According to Sherman, the concentric pattern is not a preconceived form but an "emergent." It appears without the artist's volition as he draws or paints when attention is directed to the formal relationships of the contrast elements of the visual field. The concentric pattern appearing in a painting is evidence of a highly organized response to the monocular visual cues of shape, size, position and brightness (or color).\(^6\) The appearance of the concentric pattern in a painting is Sherman's "fully realized (organized) visual field structure." It was because the attention to light-dark (brightness) contrast in chiaroscuro painting was field directed that the concentric pattern tended to emerge more often.

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\(^5\)The stimulus that promotes the experience best is a distant, complex amorphous one. See the experiments with the Leaf Room in Sherman, *Cezanne*, p. 31, pp. 58-59.

\(^6\)Sherman proposes that the monocular cues for differentiating the visual field (shape, size, position, brightness and color) are more basic to aesthetic organization than binocular cues. Binocular vision increases the width of the visual field. Binocular stereopsis, the displacement of the image on each retina, gives one a cue for relative depth in space in distances under twenty feet. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
In the chiaroscuro or integrated figure-ground relationship attention to the ground (field) is in terms of value or brightness contrast. Color still remained local (figure oriented). Color shape tended to be determined by the object's boundaries, and hue was determined by the descriptive need. In the fourth level of complexity, beginning with Post-Impressionism, one sees an attempt to structure the painting by the perceived hue (color) contrast rather than value. In order to attain unity, the actual amount (size-shape) of any given hue must be determined by the total hue/tone relationship. Color shape cannot be determined by the object. The artist must shift his attention to color from the figure to the ground (field). He must be ground oriented in terms of color as well as brightness, so that in the color structured painting the attention must be all-ground directed. As a result of the total color relationship determining the amount (size-shape) of any given color area, object shapes must yield to the needs of the color shape. Since color tends to differentiate objects, it is this characteristic which leads first to apparent "distortion" of the object since size will no longer be determined by a systematic geometric diminution (linear perspective). Ultimately this tendency can lead to abstraction and non-objective painting.

In the work of the Post-Impressionists, Cezanne and Gauguin, and later abstract painters, one may find examples of the concentric pattern mediated by color contrast. In these examples the pattern may appear as a "target" with a dark center surrounded by a warmer (orange), lighter locale. This shifts to a cooler (blue) and darker periphery. Value and brightness contrast still operate because in the shift from warm to cool
there is also a shift from light to dark. However, the light-dark range in color structured paintings tends to be more limited because of the expanded range of differentiation possible through the use of hue. Thus color structured paintings tend to be of predominantly middle values.

**Continuity of the Basis of Form in Representational and Abstract Painting**

The development of Renaissance painting reflected the growing interest of man in the reality of the world around him. The ordering of painting by chiaroscuro was accompanied by a number of other developments (geometric perspective, the study of anatomy, the effects of the angle of the light source and distance on light and color), all aimed at presenting "reality" in a more convincing manner. The shift to abstraction and expressionism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has created an apparent break in the tradition from the Renaissance which emphasized description or imitation of "visual reality." Reconciling the tradition of representation with abstract painting presents a major problem.

Besides the difference of representation and abstraction between earlier traditional painting and twentieth-century painting the problem of three dimension versus two dimension has created much confusion. The factor of a difference in the apparent depth or three-dimensional spatial

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7Leonardo's notebooks are a good example of the effort to discover ways of creating illusionistic effects. He discusses such topics as how to paint objects seen at a great distance, a town seen through "thick air," the color of trees and shrubs compared to fields, the blue quality of distant objects, fuzziness of the edges of distant objects and so forth at great lengths. Leonardo da Vinci, The Art of Painting (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957), pp. 190-201.
relationship has also been considered evidence that the formal basis of
the two styles was basically different. Representational painting was
concerned with creating an illusion of three-dimensional space. Abstract
painting tends to be two dimensional or suggest multiple or ambiguous
depth relationships.

However, from Sherman's position there has not been a basic break
in the structural aspects of painting between representational and
abstract art. The expansion to include color as a structural element in
painting was a factor in shifting the emphasis from representation to
abstraction, but does not change the fact that form in painting is still
based on organized visual perception, the relationships of the perceived
elements of contrast. It is possible to resolve the apparent spatial
differences between traditional representational painting and twentieth-
century abstract painting by adopting Sherman's idea that optical space

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8 Whereas value changes suggest volume, color changes mediate
pattern. There are a number of factors in operation which tend to empha-
size the two-dimensional and abstract nature of painting in a color
structured painting. Binocular stereopsis, the focusing of both eyes to
localize an object in space, tends to cut down color perception. In
paying attention to the ground in order to see color contrast relation-
ships, one tends to suppress depth cues. One may suppress them either
by looking with one eye or deliberately letting the eyes get out of
focus. This tends to make the color differentiations of the field be
experienced as flat shapes. In painting in color, the changes from one
color passage to the next are more effective if there is an abrupt
transition rather than a gradual shift which is generally used in
chiaroscuro structure. The painter works with flat juxtaposed taches of
color. The very color touch emphasizes the plane of the canvas and makes
the viewer more aware of the two-dimensional surface.
is a "field of directions." Actually all paintings exist as a two-dimensional relationship of shapes on the surface of the canvas, but certain relationships of position and size can be interpreted by the viewer as cues for depth as he perceives them in nature. The difference between representational and abstract painting is that in the former, the field of directions is instrumental to size, whereas in the latter the field of directions is an end in itself. With twentieth-century abstract art has come the realization that a satisfactorily resolved relationship of visual forms can be enjoyed in and for itself without being dependent on descriptive or literary content.

The Genres of Subject Matter in Relation to the Level of Formal Development

In considering the traditional subject matter genres, figure, still life and landscape in light of Sherman's types of formal organization, it becomes evident that there tends to be some relationship between the type of motif in nature on which each genre is based and the types of formal organization.

When painters began to try to integrate figure and ground, and later shifted to an all-ground structure, it seems natural that they

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9Understanding the visual field as a field of directions provides a simple means for avoiding the current dilemma of treating modern art (Abstract Art) as "bi-dimensional" and Renaissance art as "tri-dimensional." This dilemma is not only unfortunate in that it falsely implies a "break" within the tradition but it also wrongly emphasizes a "dualistic" approach to bi-dimensional (painting) vs. tri-dimensional (sculpture) art forms. This dilemma is quickly resolved as soon as the viewing organism is considered, that is, as soon as the art form is treated as an element within a perceptual transaction rather than a static independent unit. Sherman, VDC Manual, Part I, pp. 34-35.
should turn their attention to a "ground" motif. The major difference between the genre of landscape painting and the genres of figure and still life is that landscape painting is based on a field or ground motif, whereas figure and still life painting is based on motifs which are primarily thought of as objects. A ground motif is one which tends to be amorphous. There is a minimum of contrast in the visual field. Forms are numerous, complex and difficult to perceive clearly. The ground motif presents a visual field of the greatest possible expanse. It is a motif concerned with environment rather than object.

The commonest elements in the landscape motif in nature are difficult to grasp as "objects." Sky, clouds, earth, grass, foliage and water can be thought of as pure "background." Because of the scale of the motif and the complexity of detail, the artist must abstract and generalize these elements to create a convincing appearance of the whole. Two qualities of the natural landscape which tend to make this operation easier are distance and the amorphous character of the elements in the motif. Since binocular stereopsis does not operate effectively beyond

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10"The sky, the things without limit attract me and give the opportunity to look with pleasure." John Rewald, Paul Cézanne: Correspondence (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1937), p. 66.

The landscape painter who does not make his skies a very material part of his composition neglects to avail himself of one of his greatest aids. . . . I have often been advised to consider my sky as "a white sheet thrown behind the objects." Certainly if the sky is as obtrusive as mine are, it is bad; but if it is evaded, as mine are not, it is worse; it must and always shall with me make an effectual part of the composition. It will be difficult to name a class of landscape in which the sky is not the key note, the standard of scale, the chief organ of sentiment.

twenty feet, the natural landscape motif can be experienced as a monocular stimulus more easily. The tendency to localize objects in space is minimized and the attention to abstract shape relationships is enhanced. The amorphous character of the shapes in the landscape (clouds, haze, leafy trees, patches of light and shade) allows the artist more easily to make the shifts and changes of relationship necessary to achieving pictorial unity. A cloud, for example, may have a characteristic quality of form, but its shape is not "fixed" conceptually to the degree that the human figure or still life object is. Vagueness and complexity present an infinity of choices; what the painting "needs" can usually be "found" in the stimulus.11

Besides the qualities of vagueness and distance inherent in the landscape motif in nature, there is a psychological factor which tends to promote freedom and abstraction in landscape painting. Both the artist and the viewer will tolerate changes in landscape that are difficult to accept in figure or still life painting. This is probably

11 Leonardo, in a discussion of what a painter ought to study, makes a clear evaluation of the amorphous quality of the landscape motif. Landscape is a "simple investigation . . . since by throwing a sponge impregnated with various colours against a wall, it leaves some spots upon it, which may appear like a landscape." Leonardo goes on to recommend this method for getting ideas about other kinds of compositions but deplores the painter who stops too soon and does not know how to finish the painting. Leonardo da Vinci, The Art of Painting, p. 207, introduction.
related in part to the amorphous character of the motif, and in part to a lack of the ego involvement that accompanies figure painting.\textsuperscript{12}

The still life is at the opposite end of the scale from landscape in the degree of ambiguity of the forms of the motif. The stimulus is also usually viewed from a close vantage point. Although still life does not present such a large, complex expanse as the landscape, the closeness of the stimulus and the character of the forms of the objects that are traditionally used in still life painting create special problems in the painting of this type of subject. Since a still life set up is usually within the range of binocular stereopsis, the problem of suppressing volumetric cues in favor of the perceived planar relations is increased. The clarity and insistent geometric shapes of bottles, fruit, furniture and the architecture of an interior make it more difficult for the artist to distort the forms without being obvious, or to structure the painting with forms that do not primarily depend on the forms of the given objects. Furthermore, the forms (often symmetrical) of many traditional still life objects lend themselves to being very easily stereotyped.

This factor tends to shift the attention from the overall relationship to

\textsuperscript{12}Ozenfant discussed the psychological difficulties of "distorting" the human figure. In landscape, the viewer and artist will accept changes in form of the object to accommodate it to the composition which they would not accept in figure painting. He speaks of Claude, Poussin, the Barbizon painters, Corot, Manet and the Impressionists as paving the way with landscape for Cezanne's treating the human figure "with extreme freedom. . . . Once such distortions of the human form were accepted, an even bolder attack could be made on inanimate object, with the result that all these new liberties went cannoning off each other in ever widening circles of influence." Subjects (objects) remained until the Cubists "pointed nature to the door." Amadee Ozenfant, \textit{Foundations of Modern Art} (New York: Dover, 1952), p. 62.
the object. Thus the forms given in the still life motif are anything but yielding in their characteristic shape quality.

In Cezanne's still lifes, for example, we see an evolution toward greater freedom and abstraction by means of shifting levels, cutting off shapes at the edge of the painting and presenting more than one viewpoint of the motif in the same painting. In late works, he often employed such amorphous forms as expanses of crumpled drapery both patterned and plain. However, we can observe that Cezanne never gets quite so free with still life objects as he does with the forms in his landscapes. The realized concentric pattern, a sign of a high degree of integration of pictorial structure, does not emerge in his still life paintings with the frequency or clarity that it does in his landscapes.

The forms in figure motifs fall somewhere between landscape and still life in their quality of yielding to the needs of pictorial structure. The very real psychological block concerning "distorting" the figure makes it resistant to being "adjusted" for reasons of composition. In the case of the portrait or single figure, the motif, like the still life, is close. Figure compositions using many figures in a landscape setting began to partake of the formal characteristics of landscape motifs. The distance, the forms of trees, shrubbery, the common use of drapery tend to create a more amorphous stimulus. In Cezanne's work, the invented figure compositions (the bathers) are more closely related in structure to the landscapes than to the still lifes. However, the problem of the figure in the landscape was not an easy one. Corot in Silenus\(^\text{13}\)

\[^{13}1838.\] Collection of Mr. Jerome Hill.
and Courbet in *The Demoiselles of the Village* produced startlingly uncomfortable paintings by apparently working outside from a landscape motif and then adding figures which were painted in the studio from models. The effect was of figures posed before a stage set or of a montage; that is, the figures seemed to be cut from another painting and glued on to the landscape background. Since both of these painters depended very much on their sensitivity to perceived visual relationships before the motif, their process of painting the landscape and figure in a sequence rather than simultaneously was probably the cause of their failure to integrate these compositions. Shifting from attention to the large relationships of the landscape (a distant, monocular stimulus) to an object centered attention on the figures (a close, binocular stimulus) created two different systems which they could not integrate. There is also a different quality to the color in the figures which were observed in the studio light from that in the landscape seen outside. Their "realist" approach logically required that they see the motif in its totality under the same light conditions in order to integrate their painting of it. Courbet and Corot resolved the problem of figures in the landscape in other paintings, but the difficulty they encountered in these examples undoubtedly springs from the same hazard of which Cezanne was so conscious in his paintings of bathers. He always longed to pose the nude figure outside in the landscape to see how it would look under natural light.

One might then propose that landscape painting has played a major role in the development of color structure and abstract painting in that

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the ground motif was more adaptable to the type of all-ground structure that was evolving in the late nineteenth-century painting. The natural landscape motif permitted freedom and abstraction to a much greater degree than the motifs of figure or still life. The very fact that one touches and handles still life objects and the human figure in a very different way than one ever experiences the sky, the clouds, the "environment" or space makes the latter more "abstract." Perceiving landscape is primarily a visual experience. Although one moves through the environment, it never has the same "concreteness," the resistance in experience of an apple held in the hand. One cannot imagine a "spaceless" world; yet "ground" or environment, like time, is so much the warp of our existence that it is taken for granted. It is boundless and vague. "Touching is believing," seems almost more basic than "Seeing is believing." One's tactile experience of objects—people, still life—interferes with perceiving them from a purely visual point of view. The essentially visual motif of landscape becomes important in the history of painting as painting became primarily concerned with the visual. It yields more easily to the tendency to organize visual perception. This difference in experience is probably at the roots of the advantages and hazards of painting the various subject matters.

In twentieth-century painting the stimulus is no longer directly observed nature, but the painting itself as it develops. Many nonobjective painters create a large field structure of an amorphous character as the tentative stages in the process of painting. For example, the preliminary drips, splotches and squiggles of paint with which Pollock starts a painting function as a stimulus of a similar character to the
landscape painters' amorphous motifs of clouds, fog and foliage. Although the amorphous quality may gradually yield to a more explicit statement, the tentative stages are absolutely necessary in the process to permit freedom and invention and to allow for the kind of adjustment necessary to achieving integration of the whole field. Thus a "landscapelike" stimulus has continued to be used in abstract painting. Whether this type of stimulus is invented by the painter or finds its sources in his memory (past experience of nature), the reasons for using it now are much the same as those of earlier landscape painters. The ground character of the stimulus is more adaptable to the type of all-ground structure that is the current way of ordering painting.

**Historical Considerations**

The notion that landscape painting was used as an important means by which changes from representation to abstraction and chiaroscuro to color structure were effected tends to be confirmed by the important position it occupied during the nineteenth century, when these changes were being made. Of course, there were other factors than the formal which stimulated the interest in landscape. One was the breaking down of the hierarchy of importance of subject matter which had put figure painting of heroic or religious subjects above the category of landscape painting. A major change of attitude which emerged from the battles

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15Landscape painting is the chief artistic contribution of the nineteenth century and without a clear understanding of the nineteenth century, no evaluation of contemporary paint is possible.

between Classicism, Romanticism and Realism was that no subject was unworthy of the artist's attention and that a "noble" subject did not necessarily insure a good painting. Another factor promoting the importance of the landscape was a changed religious and philosophical viewpoint. In the early nineteenth century, landscape painting replaced the category of historical religious painting which had, in most cases, lost the force it had had in the past. With Romanticism, contemplation of nature became itself a kind of religious experience, and a painting could serve in the place of nature as an object for meditation and contemplation. Although these factors should not be discounted in explaining the consuming interest of the nineteenth century in landscape painting, they do not directly contribute to the change in form that was developing. Rather they contributed to creating the problems of form that appeared as the painters worked with these motifs.

Similar cultural and philosophical causes have been given for the earlier interest in landscape in sixteenth-century Venetian and seventeenth-century Dutch painting. However, we again note that the increased interest in landscape coincided with a period in which important changes were being realized in the formal structure of painting. At this time artists were successfully structuring their paintings by chiaroscuro and brightness contrast. The ground type motif of landscape was

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16 "Landscape painting, like all art forms, was an act of faith and in the early nineteenth century ... faith in nature had become a form of religion." Ibid., p. 132.
particularly useful in their search to realize the integrated figure-ground relationship.¹⁷

Perhaps the factors bearing most directly on the development of color structure in the nineteenth century was the interest in a scientific investigation of nature and a strong naturalistic tendency. Constable stated the scientific viewpoint clearly when he described the art of painting as a branch of natural philosophy and individual paintings as its experiments.¹⁸ This same spirit of investigation permeates the theories of the Impressionists and Neo-Impressionists. They sought to find in scientific theories support for what they were discovering as they painted "en plein aire" trying to capture the effects of light and color.

A major difference between nineteenth-century painting and that of the previous three centuries is the intense preoccupation of the painters with the direct visual experience of nature. Constable, Corot, the Barbizon painters and the Impressionists were essentially naturalists in that they were more concerned with what they saw rather than with the creation of idealized landscape. In general, they insisted on an immediate contact with nature, and often painted directly from the motif, a method which differentiates them from earlier landscape painters. The landscapes of the seventeenth-century Dutch painters were probably more like nineteenth-century landscapes than Classical or Rococo landscapes of

¹⁷ Sherman notes the importance of landscape in both the paintings of Rembrandt and Cezanne because of their involvement with a similar formal problem. Sherman, Cezanne, p. 77.

¹⁸ Leslie, Constable, p. 430. Lecture to the Royal Academy.
the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Dutch painters certainly sketched outdoors, although in most cases they did not paint outside.\textsuperscript{19} Their love for the local landscape and interest in particular weather effects demonstrates their naturalistic tendencies.\textsuperscript{20} However, before Constable one would generally find landscape invented or "composed" and painted in the studio. In the words of the eighteenth-century collector, Deperthes, landscape was "the art of composing sites after choosing the most beautiful and noble elements offered by nature." Study of nature was secondary to the inventiveness and "purity of taste of genius" which alone can give order.\textsuperscript{21}

Constable was concerned with the expression of "lights, dews and breezes, those ephemeral beauties of nature," but more especially he

\textsuperscript{15}It is suggested that Vermeer might have painted his View of Delft from a window. Kenneth Clark notes that although Rembrandt's landscape sketches were obviously drawn from nature, his paintings were "idealized" and invented. Clark, Landscape Painting, pp. 30-31.

\textsuperscript{20}The difference between the Classical landscape as exemplified in Poussin's work and the "Romantic-realistic" tendency of the Dutch painters is pointed out by Roger de Piles, a French theoretician of the early eighteenth century who defines the two types as the "heroick" and the pastoral or rural landscape.

'The heroick style . . . . is an agreeable illusion and a sort of enchantment, when handled by a man of fine genius. . . . But if in the course of this style, the painter has not talent enough to maintain the sublime, he is often in danger of falling into a childish manner.'

'The rural style is a representation of countries, rather abandoned to the caprice of nature than cultivate: We there see nature simple without ornament, and without artifice; but with all those graces with which she adorns herself much more when left to herself than when constrained by art.' Quoted in E. H. Gombrich, Art and Illusion (Washington, D. C.: Pantheon Books, 1960), p. 378. From Roger de Piles, Principles of Painting, 1709 (London, 1743), p. 124.

\textsuperscript{21}Quoted in Gombrich, Art and Illusion, p. 379.
wanted to escape the stereotype of the classical and rococo treatment of landscape which had evolved during the eighteenth century. Cézanne also discussed the problem of stereotype compositions and techniques. Both felt that one could learn much from traditional forms of painting, but both felt that only in direct contact with nature could one achieve anything of real significance.

Pursuing these naturalistic tendencies by painting outside contributed to a new awareness of color and light in nineteenth-century painting. The working on the spot in a rapid spontaneous manner to catch the particular color and light effects encouraged the development of direct oil painting. The alla prima or impasto technique made it

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22 And however one's mind may be elevated and kept up to what is excellent by the works of the Great Masters—still nature is the fountain's head, the source from whence all originality must spring—and should an Artist continue his practice without referring to nature he must soon form a manner, and be reduced to the same deplorable situation as the French painture mentioned by Sir J. Reynolds who told him that he had long since ceased to look at nature for she only put him out. Leslie, *Constable*, pp. 20-21. Letter to Dunthorne, May 29, 1802.

23 ... (The Venetians) ... were the true pagans. There was during the Renaissance an explosion of truth that was unique, a love of painting and of form which has not been found again. Then the Jesuits came. Everything became mannered. ... One learned, one was taught everything. The revolution was necessary for nature to be rediscovered, for Delacroix to paint the beach at Etretat, Corot his hovels at Rome, Courbet his woods and wastelands. And how slowly and painfully was this recovered. Rousseau, Daubigny and Millet "arrange" a landscape. They compose a landscape like a historical scene. ... They have created a rhetoric, ... (elegant) phrases, effects. ... One spoils his canvas as soon as he invents or imagines a detail. Joachim Gasquet, *Cézanne* (Paris: Les Editions Bernheim-Jeune, 1926), pp. 139-140.
possible to use color simultaneously as the painting was structured with light, dark and drawing instead of adding color to a developed chiaroscuro underpainting. Thus the color problems that arose from trying to account for color in a naturalistic manner also generated the need to restructure painting according to a new function of color.
CHAPTER II

A CLASSIFICATION OF TYPES OF COMPOSITION
USED IN LANDSCAPE PAINTING

Besides the visual qualities of vagueness and the characteristic of amorphous forms offered by the natural landscape motif, the motif also presented the painter with broad contrasts of form from which were generalized a number of compositional arrangements. These compositional arrangements are based on the landscape motif (stimulus) as perceived from a given point of view and generalized into a positional relationship of forms by dividing the field of the canvas into several large contrasting areas. Since in customary perception the viewer tends to differentiate the visual field by the contours and local colors of the objects, the large divisions of the field of the canvas are derived from the major form and color divisions of the subject matter. In representational painting from the Renaissance on, the "size-position" relationships of the subject matter forms on the canvas tend to be ordered by geometric perspective (the projection of angular size).

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1 Cezanne aptly describes the nature of these compositional arrangements when he talks about the "geology" of the motif. By this term, he implied a kind of schematic presentation of the motif in terms of the large divisions of earth, sky, mountains and water.

2 The term "size-position" refers to the position of forms on the canvas (up, down, right or left) and the relative size of shapes. In linear perspective down on the canvas means near, up means far; large means near, small means far.
I wished to see if there were persistent categories of composition in landscape painting (the "family resemblances") which were based on contrasting modes of dividing the rectangular field of the canvas. For the purposes of this study, I identified six major categories of compositional arrangements which recur in landscape painting. I arrived at these categories by studying a large number of landscape paintings from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. One can find variations or combinations of these arrangements, yet most landscape paintings can be classified as having one of the six arrangements as the point of departure for their basic formal structure.

The Compositional Arrangements and the Concentric Pattern Differentiated

While the concentric pattern is an emergent— that is, it appears without the painter's volition—the schematic landscape compositions were preconceived forms for organizing the canvas. Whether the painter thought of them consciously as abstract forms of composition, or chose them by selecting the motif, is difficult to prove. However, there is evidence that both painters and critics did differentiate between elements of composition derived from attention to the arrangement of forms based on the objects in the motif (customary attention) and those derived by the

3 One could also define the categories either by making a series of schemas for dividing the field of the canvas and matching the paintings to them, or by investigating the possibilities of arrangement in the natural landscape motif by means of a device such as a Claude glass. My initial procedure was to select and assemble as many as one hundred slides of landscape paintings on a light box. I sorted them first according to their similar formal arrangement. Then in each category, I arranged the paintings chronologically from, for example, Constable to Pollock. With some limitations, this procedure was also used to study the work of an individual painter.
attention to abstract arrangement of light and color. Roger de Piles seems to be alluding to this difference when he differentiates between "openings and situations" (the "picturesque" motif by means of which one makes an interesting division of the field of the canvas) and "color and chiaroscuro." The latter, he suggests, is the means by which one makes an interesting painting out of "flat and regular country." He makes it clear that the artist must not "copy" the motif in respect to color and chiaroscuro, but use his "imagination" (i.e., organize it perceptually?). Cezanne also made this same kind of differentiation. The "geology" of the motif, the schematic presentation of the motif in terms of the large major divisions of the subject matter, was the skeleton which he clothed with "nuances" of color. It is this "geology" (structured by customary perception) which is "taken away by the cataclysm" during the restructuring of perception in terms of color contrast.  

The Relation of the Compositional Arrangements to the Emergence of the Concentric Pattern

In studying landscape paintings there appears to be some relationship between the specific compositional arrangements, the types of motifs associated with these arrangements and the emergence of the concentric pattern. The six types of arrangements here categorized tend to represent an increasing complexity of form in the order in which they will be described. None of these compositional arrangements either insure or

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5 Sherman, Cézanne, pp. 29-30.
preclude the emergence of the concentric pattern. However, there does seem to be a tendency for the last two more complex compositions to encourage the appearance of the concentric pattern more often. The position of the forms in these arrangements tend to approach the arrangement of form in the concentric pattern. In the first four more simple arrangements, the large divisions of the canvas are derived primarily from the relationship of the forms of the objects in nature. In these arrangements the unified concentric pattern is less likely to appear. Attention is directed more to the subject matter and less to the abstract elements of light and color. Thus in an analysis of the work of painters using the landscape, one should expect to find that there is some relationship between the choice of compositional type and motif, and the level of complexity of organizing the abstract pictorial elements. One could expect the first four arrangements to be associated with works earlier in the historical development of landscape or with the paintings of artists who are not yet able to achieve a more complex and abstract level of organization. The last two types of composition should tend to be associated with mature works demonstrating a high level of organization of very complex motifs.

One should expect to find the successful handling of the most complex type of composition, the sixth, associated with a tendency toward abstraction. The chances for the appearance of the concentric pattern in it are very high. In it, the subject matter aspect of the motif yields its dominance for structuring the painting to the perceived color relations. Although there are earlier examples that anticipate this type of composition, it is not clearly manifest in color in the history of
painting before Cezanne's landscapes of the middle 1880's. Thus, within
the categories of composition used in landscape painting there appears to
be a tendency that parallels the general development of form in painting
from the more simple to the more complex use of the pictorial elements.

Six Formal Categories of Landscape Composition

The six categories of landscape composition shall be illustrated
with examples of nineteenth-century landscapes done before Post-
Impressionism. Actually these types of compositional arrangements had
been established during the Renaissance. Almost any landscape painting
from the sixteenth century on could be used for purposes of illustrating
the basic compositional types used in representational painting. However,
I chose to use works of nineteenth-century landscapists. The examples
were selected because the "geological" basis of the structure seems
particularly obvious in them.

Since the compositional arrangements are differentiated by the
major positional relationships of the large elements in the perceived
motif, they shall be designated by directional terms. The six types of
compositions are (1) parallel horizontal bands, (2) parallel horizontal
bands with a single diagonal, (3) horizontal bands opposed by verticals,
(4) crossed diagonals, (5) diagonal spiral, and (6) concentric "all-
ground." 6

6There is no reason why one could not have a parallel vertical
division of the field, but this arrangement is very rarely seen in a
natural landscape motif. One sometimes finds the third type of arrange-
ment with verticals dominant in motifs of trees. Barnett Newman's paint-
ings use the parallel vertical arrangement, yet he compares his work to
the experience of the arctic tundra where the only differentiation is
that of the horizon dividing the earth and sky.
Although all the arrangements except the sixth type could be schematized by line alone, in the chart (Fig. 1) they are represented by a combination of line and shape differentiated by value. This form reduces the relationship to an adequately simple expression of the compositions. In all cases, there are many possibilities of variation through differences in the size of the elements, or the positioning of them on the canvas without disturbing the basic directional relationship of the forms.

The first compositional type is the simplest. In essence it is the simplest expression of a landscape, the division of the canvas into the plain of the earth and the sky by the horizon. It consists of a series of parallel horizontal bands of varying widths differentiated by either value or color changes. Often one of the areas or bands is broken up into smaller forms, while the others are more simply handled, forming the big ground of the painting.

Examples of the first type of arrangement are Courbet's *Sea at Normandy*, and Daubigny's *Coast at Villerville* (Fig. 2). Daubigny especially liked the arrangement of the horizontal bands, using it not only for views of the sea, but also in his panoramas of fields or the low lying river landscapes he loved so much. Certainly in this long horizontal canvas divided into two major sections, that of the kelp covered rocks in the tidal flats—a dark band—and the upper sky and tiny streak of water—light—he seems to use a minimum of contrasts. Although he

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81855. Cleveland Museum.
Types of Motifs

1. Horizontal Bands
   - Distant Views
   - Panoramas
   - Seascapes - Sky and clouds important

2. Horizontal Diagonal
   - Middle Distance Views
   - Screen of trees, buildings, hills, often minimum sky

3. Horizontal Vertical
   - View down road, river or mountain landscape

4. Crossed Diagonals
   - Close up views
   - Amorphous subjects
   - Woods, trees, grassy fields, angular views of buildings, often no sky

5. Diagonal Spiral
   - Almost any subject
   - Panorama or close view

6. All Ground Concentric
   - "Geology" secondary

Fig. 1
Schematic Drawings of Six Types of Compositional Arrangements - Used in Landscape Painting

Combinations of Types
1 & 4 used by Van Gogh
Fig. 2.—Daubigny. Coast at Villerville

Fig. 3.—Constable. Weymouth Bay
does utilize some contrasting directions within the forms of rocks and clouds, the horizontal direction is dominant. He gets the most possible from the subtle internal value changes within the two large areas.

The second of these motifs is a horizontal-diagonal arrangement. The major division of the canvas is into two horizontal bands; one of them, usually the lower band, is divided by a diagonal, for example a hill or a division between land and water. Here the diagonal in the schema adds to sky and earth the element of overlap or recession. On the plain of the earth, part is in front, part is behind. The diagonal may also be in the upper band in which case it may represent the slope of a mountain or a receding row of trees.

The second type of arrangement was probably used much more often than the first. A good example of it is Constable's Weymouth Bay9 (Fig. 3). This apparently rather quiet painting is much more complex in its shape structure than Daubigny's work. The strongest contrast is the diagonal which divides the lower horizontal area. It is a double line; the inner dark edge of the change of color within the land is stronger than the contour that separates land from water. The distant horizon is the most level horizontal movement, for Constable curves the forms in the earth and clouds first up and then down, yet he preserves an essentially horizontal feeling. The bands of light and dark appear within the forms, not just along the contours where earth meets sky or water.

The first two types of arrangements often used the subjects of panoramic views, views of wide vistas across the land or a distant

seascape. In the work of Constable and the Barbizon painters, the horizon is usually low. Contrasts in the sky, the amorphous cloud forms, are a very important factor for allowing the emergence of the concentric pattern. In spite of the large major divisions of these compositions which are very marked, the great distance of the motif always presents the artist with a view in which there is vague quality in the forms, again a necessary factor for permitting the emergence of the concentric pattern.

If the concentric pattern appears in these arrangements, one will often find the focal point somewhere on the horizon in the vicinity of the center of the painting. Around this focal point (sometimes it is actually located by an object, a tree or building), the pattern is arranged by means of value or hue contrast.\footnote{Although it may sound as if the concentric pattern has its focal point located by means of an object in the painting, the writer does not mean to imply this. It is a locale of light or dark, warm or cool, but the coincidence of locale and a psychologically important point in the painting is not uncommon. The tendency for the focal point to be a predetermined "center of interest" for reason of the subject matter often accompanies the cliché composition. A major difference between Cézanne's mature landscapes and the more "picturesque" work of Dupré, for example, is that where Cézanne's concentric pattern's occurrence is governed by the pictorial needs, Dupré uses a motif whose arrangement will almost insure its appearance at the point of most interest. A painting may also have more than one concentric pattern; two, even three sometimes occur.} Where the major structural elements emphasize the subject matter, earth, sky and clouds, the concentric pattern may not appear or be small or so subtle that it seems to be only implied.

The motifs associated with the third and fourth arrangements are usually middle distance subjects or sometimes a panorama framed by
foreground forms such as trees. In type three, the dominant arrangement is horizontal and vertical. The lower half of the painting is arranged in a series of horizontal bands; in the middle distance there is a screen of vertical trees or buildings, or perhaps a hill that creates a solid wall behind these objects. The sky does not play as important a role as in the first two types of arrangement. One may find a break in the screen of trees in the foreground, making an opening in the center of the painting, or a positive form of a mass of trees or buildings centered against the ground of hills or sky. The basic idea behind the third type of arrangement seems to be that of the horizontal plain of the earth and band of sky with objects standing upright on the earth, creating an opposition of direction to the major horizontal forms.

In the fourth type of composition, the major division is made by a pair of crossed diagonals, an X which may be either very flattened and close to the horizontal, or may come close to dividing the canvas in four at the corners. Since in most paintings of this type the artist avoids making too even a division of the canvas, one would almost never find the intersection of the X in the exact center of the canvas, or the diagonals cutting the edge of the canvas at the corners. The motif often represented with this schema is a view down a road or a river; trees or buildings on either side complete the diagonal movement in the upper half of the canvas. The composition is based on the single point perspective arrangement of diagonals leading to a vanishing point. In type four, the logical location of the focal point is at the crossing of the diagonals; the schema lends itself to centering the concentric pattern at this point.
In the first and third types of composition, the motif is presented "broadside" or parallel to the picture plane; in the second and fourth, the diagonal elements give the effect of seeing the motif at an angle.

Corot's View from the Farnese Gardens, Rome (Fig. 4) is one example of the third motif in which the foreground and sky are structured as horizontal areas. The trees on either side form vertical dark "brackets" and create a frame for the buildings, which structure the central area with opposed shapes positioned horizontally and vertically. Diagonals are at a minimum. Pissarro's Arbres en Fleur (Fig. 5) is structured in the same manner although the motif might be thought of almost as an inversion of Corot's. The foreground is a very narrow horizontal band; the sky above, in spite of the irregular horizon, is essentially a second strong horizontal area. The tree in the center of the painting establishes a strong single vertical element and its trunk forms an axis for a dark mass around which a middle value area of small blooming trees and buildings, stressing a horizontal-vertical opposition, are arranged.

Three examples of the fourth motif show just a few possibilities of subject matter which may be structured by this arrangement. The most obvious use is Corot's Belfry at Douai, the view down a village street using the crossed diagonals of single point perspective. The diagonal direction is stronger on the right side of the painting. Corot interrupts

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11. 1826. The Phillips Collection, Washington, D. C.
Fig. 4.—Corot. View from the Farnese Gardens

Fig. 5.—Pissarro. Arbres en Fleur
it on the left side by the tall vertical building that is cut off by the left edge of the painting. He breaks the masses of the buildings by means of color and value changes structured horizontally and vertically to keep the X from becoming too powerful. There is a bright spot structured in a dark ground at the point where the diagonals intersect.

In Daubigny's Mountain Stream, Cauterets (Fig. 6), the rushing river takes the place of the street; the trees and mountains that of the buildings. Daubigny also avoids making the intersection too powerful by having it occur down in the mass of the earth rather than at a point where sky, mountains and river might have met. He creates secondary opposing directions, diagonals close to the horizontal that cut across the major intersecting diagonals.

Courbet's Vallee D'Ornans (Fig. 7) creates the crossed diagonals by means of the steep dark mass of the foreground hill moving from the upper right to the lower left opposed by the distant side of the valley whose contour, descending from the left, is continued in the near hill's mass by the little road. The trees at the juncture of the intersection serve to mask or minimize this area which attracts the eye strongly. Courbet's painting is structured with smaller angular forms arranged around the intersection of the crossed diagonals.

The fifth type of arrangement has an underlying "geology" of a diagonal spiral. To visualize it, one may think of an "angular" spiral positioned at a ninety degree angle to the rectangle of the canvas—a

14 1873. Van der Vorm collection, Rotterdam.

15 1858. City Art Museum, St. Louis.
Fig. 6.—Daubigny. Mountain Stream, Cauterets

Fig. 7.—Courbet. Vallée d'Ornans
"blotter corner" arrangement. It is usually an interlocking form not unlike the Chinese yin-yang symbol or an angular fret motif. This arrangement is derived from a diagonally placed motif (for example, buildings set at an angle), or, as is most often the case, appears in connection with especially close, amorphous motifs such as views of woods, underbrush or grassy fields. This type of close, amorphous ground motif legislates against a broad simple "geology" for dividing the canvas. It presents a fuzzy, complex stimulus of many small forms positioned in every direction. The spiral arrangement is projected by the painter when he emphasizes the diagonal elements in the motif. The disposition of the dominant forms in the fifth arrangement is the closest to the shape of the concentric pattern of any of the compositions discussed to this point. Still it represents a conscious positioning of the "subject matter" forms because of the motif in nature. Like preceding four types of arrangements it is not necessarily accompanied by the concentric pattern which is mediated by brightness or color contrast. However, because the fifth type of arrangement is complex, closely related in form to the concentric pattern and often uses an "all-ground" motif, it seems to be the one chosen by the mature painter as a means of moving into the sixth type of arrangement.

Diaz de la Peñas's many views of woods are often structured with the spiral motif. The Forest of Fontainbleau (Fig. 8) uses the close fuzzy motif of trees and underbrush.16 A light opening in the center of the painting frames a small clump of trees in the distant landscape—the dark center of the concentric arrangement. The larger middle value band

16 1858. Collection of the Toledo Museum.
is formed by the glinting lights in the texture of the leaves, framing the opening. A spiral shape can be seen as a dark form starting in the tree branch in the upper left quarter of the painting, moving at an angle down toward the center of the left edge of the painting, then diagonally to the center of the bottom edge, up from there to surround the light opening in the center of the painting. The light on the tree trunk in the lower right corner closes the circular shape on that side of the painting.

Courbet's Paysage de Jura is another example of this type of motif. Not only did Courbet often choose the amorphous motif of woods, but his process itself made use of the quality of vagueness. A friend, Francis Wey, at whose home Courbet stayed one summer while painting landscape around Louveciennes, describes his method of working from nature. Courbet never started with a white canvas, but always daubed up the surface with an assortment of colors, and then started drawing out of the ground the forms of the motif, letting the scribbles and daubs suggest the arrangement.

Whereas the subject matter shapes are instrumental to the positioning of forms in the fifth schema, in the sixth arrangement the painting is structured by small touches of color based on the perceived color patches placed in an all-over scattered fashion. The color patches can be arranged concentrically in spite of the major "geology" of the motif.

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17 1869. Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design.

Fig. 8.—Diaz de la Peña. *The Forest of Fontainbleau*

Fig. 9.—Rousseau. *Route de la Forêt de Fontainbleau*
This manner of structuring the painting which shall be referred to as
"all-ground" may be used with just about any kind of a landscape motif
from a panorama to a close-up view. When the concentric pattern
appears, it is independent of the motif in that it does not occur because
of the positioning of the large forms of the objects (trees, mountains,
sky), because of a perspective schema which "leads the eye" to a certain
area or a psychological "center of interest" based on subject matter only.
In the fifth type of arrangement, the artist chooses a very amorphous
motif from nature which tends to allow the emergence of the unified field;
in the sixth type, the painter creates an amorphous stimulus on the
canvas by his method of painting. Although the "all-ground" composition
may be highly structured, it is structured in terms of the color modula-
tion. It generally retains the amorphous qualities of ragged edges,
"unfinished" passages, color patches bleeding beyond contour lines, and
line functioning as tone and accent rather than delimiting shape. Object
shapes tend not to be clear cut, but appear "unfinished."

Although one cannot find the sixth type, the "all-ground" struc-
ture in a pure form before Cezanne—that is to say, it does not appear
structured in color—something suggesting this approach may be found in
the works of Theodore Rousseau who uses little touches of light and shade
all over some of his canvases. He was still using the forms and textures
of the objects he was painting—clouds, grass, rocks, trees are very
important in these paintings—yet he comes close to creating an overall

19 "All-ground" refers to the fact that in this form of composi-
tion, the elements of figure and ground are given almost equal treatment
as far as emphasis and handling.
pattern of touches that coalesce into a larger pattern. He often painted a motif similar to the first type of composition, the distant panorama, but structured the painting with touches of paint so that the horizontal bands are of secondary importance in ordering the painting. Such paintings are his *Route dans le Foret de Fontainbleau, Effet d'Orage* (Fig. 9) and *Sunset Near Arbonne*. Like many of his works, these paintings tend to be busy probably because he was more concerned with texture and light effect than clear formal shape relations; also he tended to make every area equally important by emphasizing the descriptive detail too much.

These six types of compositional arrangements and the sequence in which they tend to appear proposed here shall be used as a basis to analyze the paintings of the Post-Impressionists and certain twentieth-century abstract painters. The order of appearance and the dominance of certain types of arrangement at various stages of these artists' development tend to confirm the earlier proposal that there is a relationship between the types of compositions used and a development toward color structure and abstraction.

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22. Both paintings have a concentric arrangement mediated by value. It is forced; the small elements do not have the inner cohesion they should have.
CHAPTER III

POST-IMPRESSIONISM: LANDSCAPE COMPOSITIONS

RESTRICTED

Nature and the Landscape in Post-Impressionism

The importance of the motif in landscape painting was still a major consideration for the four Post-Impressionists, Cezanne, Seurat, Van Gogh and Gauguin. Certainly one can find much in their comments about their feeling for nature and for the landscape as an expression of nature that is consistent with the current nineteenth century attitudes. However, in all, we do find a shift that marks the beginning of a new concept of the relationship of nature and art. All felt some need for the direct contact with nature. At the same time they realized that a literal representation of nature was not the problem of painting any longer. Cezanne described painting as a construction parallel to nature. Gauguin insisted on the primacy of the imagination, although he qualified it by his need to be in contact with nature, "to dream and to meditate before her." Van Gogh's poetic descriptions of the landscape are accompanied by the desire to discover color harmonies, an abstract color "gamut" expressive of the mood of a motif rather than descriptive. Even methodical Seurat painted outside each summer "to wash the studio light" out of his eyes. Each man's method of making concrete this new relationship between nature and art was very different.
The term Post-Impressionist used to designate these four men does little to suggest what were their major concerns other than that they had a common ground in Impressionism. The tremendous variety of their approach rather than a consistent style and purpose which make the Impressionists a much more closely related group makes it difficult to see the similarities between them. However, they did all share the pictorial problem of using the color discoveries of the Impressionists in a new way. Cezanne and Seurat concentrated on the formal aspects of the problem; Gauguin and Van Gogh explored the expressive aspects of color.

The Post-Impressionists all painted the whole range of traditional subjects, figure, landscape and still life. Unlike some of the Barbizon painters and Impressionists (notably Monet in his later work), they did not concentrate on a single type of subject matter. However, for Cezanne and Van Gogh, landscape subjects were a major category of their work. Seurat and Gauguin were more concerned with figure painting, although the landscape as a setting was very important. All the men except Seurat used the traditional landscape compositions extensively in their early work.¹ Since Cezanne's evolution towards greater abstraction is probably the clearest and most completely demonstrated in his landscapes, his use of the landscape compositions shall be analyzed first and used as a basis for comparison with the works of the others. The analysis of his work in terms of the sequence of the schemas presented in Chapter II tends to confirm the notion that there is a kind of hierarchy

¹ With the exception of Gauguin who started with Impressionism, Cezanne, Van Gogh and Seurat all worked in chiaroscuro in their early painting. This was followed by an Impressionist period before they finally reached the mature phase of their development.
of complexity through which the developing painter passes, and that Cezanne's development is a particularly clear and complete example of this evolution.

Cezanne

The Importance of Landscape in Cezanne's Oeuvre

In Cezanne's work landscape became increasingly important as time went on. According to Venturi's classification of Cezanne's work in his Catalog Raisonné, the early period, before 1872, shows a moderate use of landscape as a subject. In the period from about 1872 to 1888 when he


2 Venturi's catalogue arranges the paintings by subject matter, i.e., landscape, portraits and single figures, figure groups from imagination and still life. He divides the paintings into four periods according to his analysis of the development of Cezanne's work. The drawings, watercolors and prints are also grouped, although he does not divide them into so many periods. Besides those arranged in these categories, there are about 125 works photographed but not classified and 116 listed but not photographed.

Of 1634 works photographed, 609 are landscapes. A listing of the various categories and a count of landscape in comparison with the other categories shows when Cezanne did the most landscape, and what medium he preferred for certain subjects. This table is based only on those classified works.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Paintings</th>
<th>Watercolors</th>
<th>Drawings</th>
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<td>132</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(Sketchbooks)</td>
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<td>1879-1882</td>
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<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>72</td>
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was involved first in an Impressionist phase and then in his mature style, landscape became the dominant motif. In part this can be explained by the fact that during the 1870's he shifted from trying to invent large imposing figure compositions to submitting himself to the discipline of careful observation and a close study of nature. Not only did he turn his attention to the landscape by painting "en plein air" as the Impressionists were doing, but his figure paintings and still lifes were also carefully studied from life. He did not completely give up trying to paint figure compositions from his imagination, but his studies of bathers are very different in spirit than the early "Romantic" compositions which often had dramatic or moody themes. Venturi's suggestion that Cezanne used the landscape as a means of solving the problems of color in pictorial construction during the '70's and '80's, and that the finest figure and still life paintings appear after 1890 when he had mastered these problems, tends to confirm the argument presented here.

### III. Constructive Period 1878-1887

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### IV. Synthetic Period 1888-1906

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</tr>
<tr>
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Of the oil paintings accounted for here, 314 were landscapes, 488 were other subjects. Lionello Venturi, *Cezanne, Son Art-Son Œuvre* (2 vols.; Paris: Paul Rosenberg, 1936).
that painting landscape facilitated this development. Although the number of landscape paintings in relation to other subjects decreased after 1888, they still represent the largest single category of paintings.

The Role of the Landscape Compositions in Cezanne's Work

Because the compositional arrangements were associated with certain motifs in nature, and since Cezanne continued to paint from a motif all his life, how did his use of these arrangements differ from that of earlier painters. His remarks quoted earlier concerning Rousseau and Daubigny whom he described as "arranging" a landscape as if they were composing an historical scene indicates certain disapproval of the conventional means of composition. Cezanne's complaint was based on the dangers of depending on the picturesque motif (nicely arranged subject) for composition rather than utilizing the underlying abstract relations of form and color that one could perceive in nature. His preference for the "bare bones" type of motif of southern France, the lack of concern about particular effects of light and atmosphere, and the sacrifice of subject (object) to pictorial structure all point to his rejection of the picturesque in favor of the pictorial. This rejection did not prevent him from using the traditional types of compositional arrangements and the motifs associated with them as a point of departure.

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3 Ibid., Vol. I, p. 52.

4 "The lake at this point narrowed in by two promontories, seems suited for the drawing lessons of young "misses." To be sure it is real nature, but a little as we have been taught to see it in the albums of young lady travellers." A letter from Switzerland to Joachim Gasquet. Paul Cezanne's Letters, ed. John Rewald (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1946), pp. 201-202.
The problem of making a distinction between Cezanne's work and that of earlier landscape painters is discussed by Novotny. He states that Cezanne abandoned "traditional composition" which even the Impressionists were still using. Although he discusses Cezanne's lack of interest in atmosphere and light effects, and his abandoning of geometric perspective, which still underlay the fuzziest and haziest Impressionist paintings, Novotny does not explain what he means by "traditional composition." If by traditional composition he means the use of arrangements similar to the six basic types of composition defined earlier, Cezanne does not completely abandon traditional composition. However, he shifts to a new level of attention to the perceived relationships of color and form rather than primarily focusing on the subject matter aspects of the motif structured by geometric perspective. Although the basic positional relationships derived from the motif (i.e., horizontal-vertical, etc.) can remain, ordering the painting by perceived color contrast creates drastic changes in specific positioning, size and emphasis of the various particular elements in the painting. Cezanne did not distort forms or abandon geometric perspective arbitrarily; these changes evolved from his efforts to organize his paintings with color.

In tracing the evolution of Cezanne's development, one finds in the early stages a simplification of form and emphasis on the formal.

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6 Although the Impressionists used the "rainbow" palette and their pictures were in a very light or pastel key, they still structured their paintings by light and shade rather than color. Geometric perspective and the shape of the object determined size-shape in their painting. Color was still local color, though it was modified by light effect—reflections and shadows.
relationships of the big divisions of the motif as seen in nature. In his late painting the large divisions of the motif "disappear" under the color modulation; the form of the objects are even more drastically distorted than in his early work. In Cezanne's work one does not see the traditional modes of landscape composition disappear completely, but rather a gradual subordinating of their role to a secondary position in determining the composition.

1872-1882: Simpler Traditional Landscape Arrangements
Dominant but "Distorted" for Formal Needs

Before the 1870's, Cezanne's landscapes seemed to be of a rather exploratory nature. He tried out a large variety of motifs; one can find the beginnings of many of the subjects that will occupy him the rest of his life. He painted thickly, often using a palette knife to put down the pigments. Strong light and dark contrasts and usually a limited palette of dark greens, blacks and ultramarine along with white, grey and ochre recall Courbet's work.

In 1872 when Cezanne started working with Pissarro near Auvers, he settled down to a methodical investigation of landscape. He painted a series of paintings based first on one and then another of the compositional arrangements. Before this time he had occasionally used a lighter

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7 He painted close views of the woods, a view down the road in the country or through a village, the grounds at the Jas de Bouffan, Provengal farmhouses, Mont Ste. Victoire, the large panoramic view and a number of country landscapes of middle distance motifs--trees, hills and the river. Venturi, Cezanne, Vol. II, Plates 7-13.
palette, but now he banished the blacks, browns and ochers from his
palette consistently. He set out to learn about the "new" color of
Impressionism and to submit himself to nature.  

Between 1872 and 1882, Cezanne's landscapes were based most often
on the compositional arrangements one, three and four. The fifth arrange-
ment appears in the last few years of this period. He concentrated on
the middle distance motifs first, painting views of the village street
with houses on either side, houses seen through a screen of trees or a
foreground field with trees or buildings in the middle distance. The
earliest paintings from Auvers are based on the crossed diagonals, the
fourth type of arrangement. Cezanne almost always painted this motif as
if viewed from a high angle giving him more of a view of the earth and
minimizing the sky. He made shifts in position or the size of objects
from how they would appear if drawn systematically in geometric perspec-
tive; these changes, although not always fully effective, show a remark-
able consistency in their direction toward creating a more visually
unified pictorial structure. These tendencies may be observed in **A Street
in Pontoise, Winter of 1873** (Fig. 10). It is an example of the use of
diagonals to structure the painting. If we compare Cezanne's version with
one of the same subject by Pissarro (Fig. 11) a number of differences

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8See the Railway Cutting, 1868-1870, Neue Staatsgalerie, Munich.

9"Perhaps we all come from Pissarro—as early as 1865 he eliminated
black, dark brown and ochers. . . . Paint only with the three primary
colors and their immediate derivatives he told me." Cezanne, quoted by
John Rewald in the introduction to Camille Pissarro, **Letters to His Son

10Collection Bernheim Jeune, Paris.
Fig. 10. — Cezanne. Street in Pontoise, Winter

Fig. 11. — Pissarro. Street in Pontoise, Winter
between the two are observable.\textsuperscript{11} The most apparent difference is that Cezanne has taken a higher viewpoint and has moved in closer to the motif. In cutting off the left side of the motif, he has also included more on the right. Consequently the angle of the crossed diagonals is steeper, and the implied position of the intersection of the diagonals has moved in closer to the center of the canvas. The wall on the right with the dark shape along its base is drawn at a very steep angle. This dark mass is very effective in balancing the dark shape of the hedge and buildings on the left. The closure created by the edges of these dark shapes make the white shape of the road a strong curved form contrasting with the more angular forms in the buildings. In Pissarro's work, the large wedge form on the left, in spite of internal changes, remains essentially a horizontal and unbroken dark mass. Cezanne interrupts this same form vertically by a change from dark to light so that the vertical dark shape on the left edge opposes the horizontal and diagonal elements. The continuity of the horizontal edge of the top of the hedge is broken, picked up by the wall, broken again and finally continued in the color change between the ground floor and second of the building on the right side of the street. A series of strong verticals in Cezanne's painting create closures across the painting. There is a light locale with a dark center set up in the vicinity of the vanishing point. The concentric pattern is not clear, but strongly implied. Pissarro locates two figures right about at the point where the vanishing point would occur in an effort to focus the interest here. They only tend to confuse the structure

\textsuperscript{11}Pissarro, \textit{A Street in Pontoise, Winter}, 1873, Collection Sheldon Whitehouse, New York.
at this point. There is no clear contrast of locale as in Cezanne's painting, only converging lines and wedge shaped forms. The edges of the forms that create the diagonals in Cezanne's painting do not converge exactly on a single point, but on the general area, thus causing the shifts in position that contradict the geometric perspective system. The form of the locale, the logical focal area, is clear; it is structured by shapes and light-dark contrast. The focal point is not merely located by intersecting diagonals. The relationship "on plane" is much more evident in Cezanne's than in Pissarro's painting.

The third type of composition, the predominantly horizontal-vertical arrangement, appeared in many versions during the 70's. Generally one is much more aware of the dominant positional arrangement of the forms in Cezanne's paintings than those of Corot or Pissarro, which were given as the prototype. Cezanne tends to formalize and simplify the structural aspects of the painting more than his predecessors did. The clarity of the smaller shapes together with a forceful articulation of their interrelationships gives the works that characteristic quality of form which has often been described as geometric. If one uses the term only to indicate a simplification and clarification of form this term might be permissible, but Cezanne did not arrange the forms by any geometrical or mathematical system.

A View of Auvers of 1873-1874 (Fig. 12) is an early version of the horizontal-vertical arrangement. The "geology" of the motif is very evident. The canvas is divided horizontally into a series of parallel

\[12\] Collection of the Kaiser-Friederich Museum, Magdeburg.
bands of road (grey-brown), plowed field (orange), meadow (yellow-green), village with a hill behind it (green), sky (pale blue), and the foliage of the foreground trees (dark modulated green). On either side of the canvas are two trees, the nearest one on the left forming an unbroken vertical movement from top to bottom of the canvas. The trees, together with their foliage, form a frame around a central opening through which we see the village. On it, Cezanne concentrated his strongest contrasts of color (the lightest white, brightest orange and most saturated blue). The most crisp and clearly articulated forms are found in this same central area. The concentric pattern is not evident in this painting, but the arrangement of the motif suggests it. Such factors as the insistence of the clear shape relationships and continuity of edges, the apparent closures created by the horizontal bands and the vertical tree trunks bring to attention the arrangement of the forms on plane. By presenting a fuzzy periphery in contrast to the more clearly articulated forms in the central area, and by having a value structure of middle tone at the edge and a lighter area surrounding the central locale of greatest contrast, the painting is tending in its form toward the concentric arrangement.

The Hermitage, Pontoise of 1875-1877 (Fig. 13) is structured in a similar manner, basically horizontal-vertical. However, in this later painting the concentric pattern is clearly visible. The foreground, a level stretch of land, extends up to a little below the center of the canvas where the row of houses and trees establish the limits of the

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13Collection of Stadtisches Museum, Wuppertal.
Fig. 12.—Cezanne. **View of Auvers**

Fig. 13.—Cezanne. **The Hermitage, Pontoise**

Fig. 14.—Cezanne. **Landscape in Provence**
horizontal zone. The upper portion of the canvas emphasizes the vertical elements, the forms of the buildings one above the other on the steep hillside. Diagonal elements are minimized; the objects and forms are presented as if parallel to the picture's surface. A little band of sky at the top is of minimum extent, but serves to reestablish the horizontal direction at the top of the painting. The foreground is varied by color modulations predominantly green and blue-green. In the right lower corner the green becomes yellow-green; a band above this area is orange which relieves the large expanse of cool color. This orange shape closes with the warm locale of the upper part of the painting. A strong vertical orange shape, a path rising in the lower right side, breaks the horizontal foreground. The vertical direction is continued upwards in the edge between the white house and the dark tree just above the path. The vertical movement is repeated by the juncture between a house and the dark green ground of the trees in the upper left quarter of the canvas—the second strongest area of contrast. The white house, just right of center, is the lightest area in the painting and the place of greatest contrast between light-dark occurs between it and the focal point of the painting. The center of the concentric pattern is the dark green form on the base of the white house. It is the hub of a warm light locale that includes the houses on the hill, the warm orange band to the right and below the trees in the foreground. It is the grouping of similar colors and values rather than the objects that create the concentric pattern. The one bright blue spot on the rooftop of the house a little left of center is held into the warm, light locale by its intensity. The left
side and left bottom area of the painting form a middle-dark cool ground. The concentric pattern is a half dark, half light locale—the left side being warm and light, the right side being cool with the largest and darkest single mass of the painting, the blue-green trees.

In The Hermitage, Pontoise the horizontal-vertical structure is further emphasized by the manner of putting on the pastiche of color. The brush strokes in the foreground are predominantly horizontal; in the upper section they are arranged vertically. In this painting one sees the tendency to structure the smallest patch of paint for the constructive function becoming clear. In The View of Auvers the brush stroke served to describe the textures of leaves, furrows in the field to a much greater extent.

The use of the first type of arrangement, together with a panoramic view, was common in the landscapes between 1877-1883. Venturi's catalog shows eighteen paintings using the motif in this six-year period. Many of the paintings were done in the Arc Valley near the Jas de Bouffan. Occasionally there are hills or a low ridge of mountains, but usually one sees a high, almost flat horizon. If the motif is a little closer, a distant tree or steeple might break the horizon, but more often it is uninterrupted. The view is taken as if Cezanne were high up and looking down over the scene; this viewpoint makes most of the trees and buildings fall below the horizon. The subjects are distant villages or farmhouses, and stretches of open country with fields, roads and trees. Cezanne also

paints the same motif of a distant view, but frames it with trees on either side close to the viewer. The horizontal bands which structure these paintings are much more emphatic than what are seen in traditional painting; shape structure, formal relations begin to take priority over descriptive elements. The manner of painting in these motifs is consistent with his other landscapes of the same period; it is not necessary to analyze Landscape in Provence (Fig. 14) in detail, only to present it as an example of the first type of compositional arrangement. These distant views were evidently forerunners of the much more complex panoramic views of Mont Ste. Victoire and L'Estaque which Cezanne undertook in the 1880's and handled so successfully. Before the middle 1880's he rarely painted extensive panoramas which have always been tempting subjects for landscape painters and which always presented the painter with tremendous difficulty. Grasping and unifying such an "extent" of nature without becoming scenic or picturesque is a problem solved by a very few landscape painters.  


16 Constable puts his finger on the problem in a letter of November, 1824 to his painter friend, Fisher.

Panorama painting seems all the rage. There are four or five now exhibiting ... (Mr. R.) ... has taken his view favorably and it is executed with the greatest of care and fidelity. This style of painting suits his ideas of the art itself and his defects are not so apparent in it; that is, great principles are neither expected or looked for in this mode of describing (my italics) nature. He views nature minutely and cunningly but with no greatness of breadth. The defects of the picture at present are a profusion of high lights and too great a number of abrupt patches of shadow. But it is not to be considered as a whole.

Leslie, p. 175.

In an earlier letter to the same friend Constable suggests a solution to this same problem.
It is easy to see in the paintings of 1872-1882 why Novotny says that "hardly a picture by Cezanne exists which one could unhesitatingly assign to a group of real impressionistic paintings, for example a collection of landscapes by Pissarro, Monet and Sisley, as possessing fundamentally the same characteristics." Besides restructuring the major forms, Cezanne was structuring the small touches of paint in a very different manner than the Impressionists. Even though the Hermitage at Pontoise is still dominantly structured by value as were the Impressionist works, and it has not yet the clarity of formal integration that his work will have in the 1880's, the intention is clear; color structure, not light effect, is his major concern.

Cezanne's method of putting on the paint in flat juxtaposed patches, modulated from cool to warm, the basic "building blocks" of his paintings had been evolving more and more toward a structural function rather than a textural or light effect function. This tendency became clear in the period from 1879 to 1883 when he made the breakthrough to a true color structure.

During this same period, he also began to use the "transitional" fifth type of arrangement, the diagonal spiral, and the subject matter

\[ \ldots \text{it is the business of a painter not to contend with nature and put such a scene, a valley filled with imagery fifty miles long on a canvas of a few inches, but to make something out of nothing, in attempting which he must of necessity become poetical.} \]

\textit{Ibid.}, p. 173.

\textit{17} Novotny, \textit{Cezanne}, p. 18.

\textit{18} A peasant who saw Cezanne and Pissarro working side by side commented that Pissarro "piquait" (pricked, dotted) while Cezanne "plaquait" (plastered, i.e., made shapes). Venturi, Vol. I, p. 31.
often associated with it—a close view of woods or underbrush—much more frequently. The subject of woods remained a favorite one for the rest of his career; it was obviously instrumental in setting him free to structure the painting primarily by the color patch since the "geology" of the subject was very vague.

The Poplars of 1879-1882\textsuperscript{19} (Fig. 15) and the Bridge in the Forest of 1880\textsuperscript{20} are examples of the fifth type of arrangement. The Poplars is an example of the appearance of the concentric pattern in a painting in which the positioning of the objects in the motif does not set up a focal area. The central locale occurs because of a brightness and hue change rather than the configuration of the objects depicted. It is seen very clearly as a warmer brighter locale on the tree trunks just to the left and above the light form of the stone wall. The locale is heightened by a surrounding darker ring, then a broader ring of lighter modulations in the foliage of the trees, and on the earth and grass in the foreground. The large configuration is one of the darker, cooler form of the trees interlocked with a lighter, warmer ground of the sky and earth. The spiral motif is created by contrasting warm/light and cool/dark masses. Their limits may be read in the diagonal along the tops of the trees which extends from a little to the right of the top of the center margin toward the left center margin of the canvas. The movement is turned back toward the bottom edge of the canvas by the contrast between the green ground, the orange path and the warm area in the left foreground. It rises again by means of the form of light road which leads directly to the focal area.

\textsuperscript{19} The Louvre, Paris.

\textsuperscript{20} Collection of G. Bernheim de Villers, Paris.
Fig. 15.—Cezanne. *The Poplars*

Fig. 16.—Cezanne. *The Chateau Noir*

Fig. 17.—Cezanne. *The Bay of Marseilles*
1882-1890: The Appearance of the More Complex Compositions with the Integration of Form and Color

After about 1882 Cezanne was able to realize the integration of form and color in his landscapes more often and more successfully than he had done up to this point. The compositional arrangements which appeared more commonly from this time on through the rest of his career were the more complex ones of the second, fifth and sixth types of arrangements. The numerous paintings of the sea at L'Estaque are examples of the second compositional arrangement. Views of the woods or the quarry which he painted often after the mid 1880's often may be categorized as the fifth type of arrangement. The Bay of Marseilles, 1883-1885 (Fig. 17) and The Chateau Noir of 1904-1906 (Fig. 16) are examples of the second and fifth compositional arrangements.

In the paintings of the 1880's Cezanne achieved a balance between the elements of the color touch and the "geology" of the motif. Although the clarity of his form is very evident, subject matter (the motif) is not sacrificed. It is also during this period that one sees the emergence of the concentric pattern as a color phenomenon rather than as value. Mont Ste. Victoire with a Big Pine Tree (Fig. 18) is an example of the color structure at a very high level; it is a good example of the balance between the motif and the color modulation as elements for structuring the painting. The geology of the motif is extremely complex.

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21 The Louvre, Paris.
22 Formerly the collection of A. Vollard, Paris.
23 Sherman, Cezanne, pp. 170-171.
24 1885-1887, the Phillips Collection, Washington, D. C.
One might consider it a combination of the second and third types of arrangement, a panorama framed, but as one analyzes it more carefully it emerges as an example of the sixth type of arrangement, the all-ground concentric arrangement mediated by color.

The valley floor is divided by horizontals and diagonals which slope down from left to right. The strongest of these diagonals is the road that starts behind an orange building near the left edge of the painting about half way down. The orange is set against a very dark green rectangle. This is the area of greatest contrast in the painting and a focal point for a locale of strong warm and cool contrasts, predominantly orange and bright green. There is a sequence of concentric rings of warm colors around the green spot, first bright orange then a lighter orange, then red and red violet. The periphery of the painting becomes light blue, blue violet and dark green. The red ring, most fugitive, may be seen in the left foreground, faintly in the middle distance on the right; it becomes pinkish violet in the lower section of the mountains. Although there are strong greens and blues in the warm locale, it still reads predominantly warm because there are practically no warm tones in the sky, the pines, down the right edge of the painting and across in a diagonal section of the right foreground. Except for the dark focal spot, the darkest and coolest tones are in the periphery of the painting which frame the view of the valley. Thus the edge of the canvas becomes cooler and darker, and, interestingly, contains the broader more curved and baroque forms which form a ground for the essentially crisp, geometric patchwork in the central area. Articulation and interrelation of small forms are clearer in the center, the forms at the
Fig. 18.—Cezanne. Mont Ste. Victoire with a Big Pine Tree

Fig. 19.—Cezanne. Mont Ste. Victoire
periphery more bold, amorphous, broadly rhythmic repeating the curving
contour of the mountain. There is a secondary concentric pattern whose
focal point is a small green area almost in the center of the canvas. It
appears as a value phenomenon and overlaps the hue contrast pattern. The
whole canvas is arranged from its central focal area in a warm to cool
sequence in color, and a crisp to broad amorphous range in the articula-
tion of forms. This is the same kind of order and sequence that was
implied in the early View of Auvers, but now it is realized on an
infinitely more complex level.

1890-1906: The Dominance of the Sixth
Compositional Arrangement

In Cezanne's landscape paintings from 1890 on, the color or
chiaroscuro modulation becomes the primary means for structuring the work;
delineation of objects and the motif in nature are secondary. All the
other arrangements will appear in the late works, but the positioning of
the forms based on the motif in nature is secondary to the modulated
paint patch ordered perceptually. In the late version of Mont Ste.
Victoire (Fig. 19) the paint modulation is more obvious than trees,
buildings or mountain. Color contrast is rich, but an increase in the

25 Sherman, Cezanne, pp. 170-171.

26 Bend in the Road, 1900-1906 of A. Vollard, Paris (Fig. 50) is
an example of the motif based on crossed diagonals. The geology of the
motif is much less apparent than that of the early A Street in Pontoise,
Winter using the same arrangement. The concentric pattern is very large
and evident and the forms of the motif have been adjusted to the pattern
in a much more essential manner.

amount and range of the darks makes the value relationship more important than it had been in the earlier version discussed. A comparison of the painting of 1885 with that of 1904 reveals in the former the higher key and a minimum of darks (a predominantly middle tone) which is a clue to the true color dynamic of the earlier work.

In the painting of 1904, as the subject matter is minimized, the concentric pattern becomes much more apparent. Because of the clear definition of objects in the earlier version of Mont Ste. Victoire, the structure of the color modulation becomes apparent only if the viewer can suppress the detail and see the painting as a whole. Since Cezanne eliminated the detail associated with description to a large degree in the 1904 version, the viewer is presented with the essential abstract relations of color and form in a much more bare form. The concentric pattern in this painting, like many of his late landscapes, has expanded to include the whole painting. It is in the many late versions of Mont Ste. Victoire that one sees the clearest expression of the sixth type of compositional arrangement; they are very close to Cubism of the period 1911-1912 in form, though Cezanne was using more color than the Cubists did. The all-over structure of color (or value) modulations with the subject matter elements very secondary represents the stage which was necessary before the painters could move into completely non-objective painting. As will be seen in the work of the other Post-Impressionists, there is a definite relation between moving on to this level of
construction, the degree of abstraction and the success in the use of color structure. None of the other men, Gauguin, Van Gogh or Seurat, achieved this level of development to the same degree that Cezanne did.

Seurat

The Importance of Landscape Painting in Seurat's Work

Seurat was not primarily concerned with landscape painting; he was most interested in figure compositions. Yet he did a fair number of landscape drawings and paintings as well as studies of landscape which he used as settings for some of his figure compositions. In spite of his theories on color and composition which led him to execute his large finished paintings without a set up, he worked directly from models and the natural landscape motif in the preparatory stages of a work.

Seurat's early training was in the Neo-Classic tradition of the academy. Although he based his color and painting technique (Pointillism) on Impressionism, he always had a concern for composition and form that came from the Classic tradition. His landscape sketches in color were usually casual and impressionistic, but in his finished paintings he tried to organize the work according to an essentially Classic discipline. Although he was struggling to structure his paintings with color, there was a basic contradiction in the contrast element of his drawing (chiaroscuro) and his painting process (color contrast) which prevented him from realizing this end.\(^{28}\) There was also a basic contradiction in his theory

of painting which separated shape structure from color (a theory grounded in the Neo-Classicism of Ingres).

However, during Seurat's brief career, the struggle to solve the problem of form and color integration is evident in the evolution of his style. He shifted from stressing volume relations in his earlier works to the more modern tendency of emphasizing the shape relationships on plane in his late works. The importance of landscape in Seurat's oeuvre emerges as it becomes evident that in this genre his evolution toward more modern form is consistently earlier than in his figure compositions.

A comparison of a figure drawing and a landscape drawing from about 1882 gives a cue to the two tendencies in Seurat's work. A concern with space and volume is apparent in the figure drawing; the later concern for flat pattern relationships is already evident in the landscape, at this early time. Seated Boy with a Straw Hat (Fig. 20), a study for his early Bathers, is an example typical of his treatment of the figure at this period. Seurat tones the ground, using a technique of contrasting a light area on the figure with a dark ground, and a dark area on the figure with a light ground. This is an old tried and true contrast method of chiaroscuro which he has systematized and adapted to dramatize the silhouette or contour of the figure. The halo effect of light around a dark silhouette, which he often employed, he called "irradiation." It is an effect in value analogous to that which he used in his paintings when he enhanced the color along the contour by painting its complement.

in the surrounding ground. The subtle gradations used within the figure primarily function to create a sense of volume; Seurat had not escaped his academic training which emphasized contours and modeling.

His search to relate figure and ground is expressed in the toning of the background. This use of tone in *Seated Boy* is an advance over his early academic linear drawings using a white ground. They were generally very object centered. The attempt to integrate figure and ground is also indicated in the odd positioning of the figure. He cuts off the top of the hat and the feet. The unexpected angle of viewing the figure reflects his awareness of Degas, Lautrec and Japanese prints. This characteristic positioning differentiates his work from that of Millet and Rembrandt who undoubtedly influenced him at this stage.30

*Place de la Concorde, Winter* (Fig. 21), a landscape drawing of the same period, shows no concern for trying to create an effect of volume by modeling.31 The drawing can be classified as the third type of arrangement—horizontal-vertical. It is predominantly structured by a series of parallel horizontal bands. The top section is middle value, the white foreground is divided by bands varying from pure black to light grey. Opposition to the dominant direction is provided by the dark verticals of the lamp posts, the mass of the fountain on the left and a carriage on the right edge (both are cut off), and a suggestion of tree trunks. Size, position and overlap are the cues that suggest space; the

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Fig. 20.—Seurat. Seated Boy with a Straw Hat

Fig. 21.—Seurat. Place de la Concorde, Winter
vertical forms are silhouettes rather than modeled volumes. Thus the tendency to pay attention to the relationship on plane is much more apparent in the landscape drawing where the motif was distant, than in the figure drawing.

Many of Seurat's landscape drawings like this example present dusky, hazy or foggy effects for which his conte crayon medium is admirably suited. In spite of his concern for recovering a structural basis for painting, he was still involved in exploring the light effects of the Impressionists.

Preferred Compositional Arrangements

Seurat preferred the first three types of landscape compositions. A combination of types two and three, in which he painted a middle distance motif structured by horizontals and verticals with the diagonal dividing the lower horizontal band, was one of his particular favorites. Seurat rarely employed the fourth type of arrangement. The motifs he preferred do not present the problem of the crossed diagonals of single point perspective, a motif in which it is always more difficult to perceive the planar relationships. The first three types of compositions are structured primarily by overlapping planes parallel to the picture plane. The fifth type of arrangement is very difficult to find in Seurat's finished paintings. Occasionally in his little impressionistic sketches one finds something close to it in such examples as The Clearing.

32 The Grande Jatte, The Bridge at Courbevoie and The Bathers are all structured this way.

(Fig. 22) or The Canoe\textsuperscript{34} (Fig. 23) where a free spiral structure is associated with close views through the trees. I have not found an example in which Seurat structured a painting by means of the sixth type of arrangement. Since there seems to be a positive relationship between handling color structurally and the appearance of this form of composition, this lack in Seurat's work, in which true color structure is not realized, could be expected.

1884-1886: Contradictory Methods of Painting
Inhibit Realization of Color Structure

Probably Seurat's biggest stumbling block to achieving integrated color structure was his Pointillist technique which, in his finished paintings, necessitated a tonal or value gradation. Yet at the same time he was working in his studies with a method of painting that could have led to color structure. An Analysis of The Grande Jatte (Fig. 25) and its studies show how the two methods, basically contradictory, could not be integrated.\textsuperscript{35}

By the time Seurat was working on The Grande Jatte (1884-86), he had become acquainted with Paul Signac who introduced him to the Impressionist theories and methods.\textsuperscript{36} He adopted the spectrum palette and

\textsuperscript{34}1886. George Renand, Paris.

\textsuperscript{35}A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of the Grande Jatte, 1884-1886, the Art Institute of Chicago.

Fig. 22.—Seurat. The Clearing

Fig. 23.—Seurat. The Canoe
systematized the Impressionist technique so that he was able to paint
away from the motif in the studio using either natural or artificial light.

His process for working out the final version of The Grande Jatte
was one which combined the immediate sensation of the Impressionists with
the careful planning of a Classicist. He made a series of small oil
sketches outside "on location"; he called these croquetons. Some were
only of the landscape setting; others included figures alone or in groups.
These on-the-scene oil sketches have a richness and sensitivity to color
that rival some of the best Impressionist works. At the same time, in the
studio, he worked out a series of conte crayon drawings of the figures
separately or in groups, some isolated on a white field, others with a
hint of their setting.\(^37\) He started with drawings closely observed from
life, and gradually eliminated details, refining and simplifying them with
an eye to finding the right shapes to fit his final composition. He was
also searching for a simplified expression of volumes.\(^38\)

The subtle tonal gradations of these drawings were created in a
manner analogous to his Pointillist painting technique. As the crayon
moved over the textured paper, it created a series of dots. Greater

\(^37\) About twenty preparatory drawings and forty croquetons includ-
ing the Metropolitan's definitive study exist. About twenty other works
from 1884-1886 may be associated with the work. Daniel Catton Rich,
Seurat and the Evolution of the Grande Jatte (Chicago: University of

\(^38\) The first sketches contain certain "meaningless detail." Later
he eliminates chance descriptive elements. "Here the figure is more
geometrized; the head is an ovoid set on the cylindrical neck and simple
solids make the volumes of the body, the silhouette noticeably stressing
the oppositions of straight and curved edges. Within the forms, the
planes of details are suppressed and the dark and light contrast
strengthened." Ibid., p. 23.
pressure increased the size and blackness of the dots. In the dark passages, only the low spots in the paper were untouched; one gets the effect of white dots on a black field. While in some of his drawings the marks, crosshatching and circular scribbles, are still visible, in others the crayon is built up so carefully the only evident texture is that of the Michallet paper Seurat used. The effect is akin to the black and grey tones created by the dots used in the ben-day process of printing. Of course his drawings are much richer, and the somewhat irregular texture of the paper does not give the mechanical quality of ben-day.

A close look at some of the croquetons reveals basic differences between these preliminary color studies, the drawings and the final version of The Grande Jatte. One of these is the sketch of 1884-1885 (Fig. 24) from the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Leigh Block, Chicago. Seurat has made a little (6 x 9 3/4 inches) study with many figures. The format, like many of the sketches, is longer and narrower in the horizontal direction than the final painting. Although the figures are placed generally where they will eventually be, none, at this stage, have yet the exact pose or position they will have eventually. The landscape is essentially the same as it will be, except the narrower format cuts down the foreground, and the figures seem larger in proportion to the surrounding field.

There are three major differences immediately discernible. The first most obvious difference is the flatness of the color sketch compared to the volumetric quality of the drawings and the finished version of the painting. The touch in the sketch is broad, and there has been little effort to model the figures. A single stroke often serves to define a
distant figure. The foreground figures are built of many touches of color, but they are flat silhouettes in most cases, the color variations animating the surface but not creating a sense of volume. The second difference is seen in the use of the broad touch in the sketch versus the dot in the finished painting. The broad touch could be explained in terms of the scale of the painting, for the contrast in size between the sketch, 6 x 9 3/4 inches, with the large painting, 81 x 120 inches, would create an apparent difference in size even if the touch was the same. But the fact is that in the large painting, Seurat was actually using a smaller touch, often just a dot. The broad patch in the sketch is more effective in creating the juxtaposed steps by means of which color changes are perceived. The very nature of the broad patch enhances the flatness of the painting; it also has more shape character than the dot.

The third difference between the study and the final version is the much greater brilliance and richness of color in the sketch. The same difference between flatness, broad touch and color richness may be observed in a comparison of the final definitive study of the whole version39 and a "finished" version of the landscape without any of the figures.40 The landscape has the small touch, the concern for a volumetric quality in the foliage of the trees, and the bluish cast and paler colors of the

39 Final Study for the Grande Jatte, 1884, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (27 x 41)

40 Landscape Study for the Grande Jatte, 1884, collection of Ambassador and Mrs. John Hay Whitney, London. (25 1/2 x 32)
Fig. 24.—Seurat. Sketch for the Grande Jatte

Fig. 25.—Seurat. Sunday Afternoon on the Grande Jatte

Fig. 26.—Seurat. The Bridge at Courbevoie
final version. The definitive study has the broad touch, the flatness and a much greater color intensity.

The final version, like the drawings, was painted with the "dotted" Pointillist technique. Seurat's system of putting on little dots of color to create optical mixtures of color and to get the effect of brilliant and dazzling sunlight also created a light-dark value gradation. The color harmony in The Grand Jatte comes from a unifying bluish cast of the dominant cool tones, rather than the tone that results from a full color contrast relationship. Although hue contrast operates on a microscopic level (on the level of the dot), his process did not allow a true color construction relationship to emerge in the big forms. Color in The Grande Jatte is local color. The Pointillist technique also created a consistency of surface which gives an overall textural unity to the painting. The underlying value relationship in the finished version is related to the value organization of his drawings, to his concern for

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41 Rich remarks that even the final study "lacks an amazingly clarified arrangement of line, volume, space (of the painting) barely hinted at in any of the preparatory studies." His remark about line is interesting, since Seurat rarely ever used line in the Grande Jatte. However, the clear contours and edges tend to be read as line.

42 The Grande Jatte is still one of the most brilliant of Seurat's large paintings. He tended to get more and more tonal and limited in his later works. K. Clark speaks of "the melancholy green and violet" tones in The Grande Jatte as compared to the sketches. Clark, Landscape, p. 118.

43 Rich notes that in Seurat's work there is a counter pull. He wanted to respect the local color of his forms, but at the same time note the action of reflected light. He compromised. He analyzed color but "color touches draw together to suggest a single mass." Color is "organized" where one hue impinges on the other and calls up its complement. Rich, Grande Jatte, p. 21.
creating a volumetric effect and to the tiny gradations of the Pointillist technique.44

The Concentric Pattern Appears as a Value Phenomenon in Seurat's Work

The tendency for the landscape paintings to be ahead of figure painting continues to be evident in The Bridge at Courbevoie45 (Fig. 26) painted the same year that Seurat finished The Grande Jatte. Here, with the figures of minor importance, he uses little or no modeling. Space or distance is indicated by flat overlapping shapes, and stronger hue and value contrasts in the foreground as compared to the far shore.46

In spite of the difference of handling one sees between The Grande Jatte and The Bridge at Courbevoie, an interesting similarity is that in both, the whole composition is arranged concentrically. In the Grande Jatte the white dress of the little girl, heightened in brightness by the darkening of the yellow-green ground surrounding it, forms a central light focal point around which the grouped figures form a darker toned ring. (In the definitive study the light spot is even more obvious.) In The Bridge at Courbevoie, a warm orange spot on the bridge pier is heightened by a surrounding violet ground. A broad ring of light with

44 Roger Fry notes that the Pointillist technique allows for "invisible gradations," subtle variations which are essentially value gradations. Roger Fry, Transformations (New York: 1926), p. 189.


46 Two landscapes done at Grandcamp in 1885 show slightly more concern with volume and Impressionist light effects, but the tendency to work with simplified shapes and flat planes in the landscape is already evident. See The Bay of Grandcamp, Mr. and Mrs. David Rockefeller, New York and Grandcamp, Evening, Ambassador and Mrs. John Hay Whitney, London.
this focal point as the center is enclosed, near the edge of the painting by a frame of dark leaves, the tree trunk and the foreground earth. This concentric pattern is a value, not hue contrast phenomenon. Although a single light focal point can be found in a number of Seurat's drawings and in some of his paintings, the concentric arrangement is not as consistently evident as it is in Cézanne.

1888-1891: Suggestion of Volume Yields to Planar Shape Relations. Color Not Instrumental to Shape

The changes in Seurat's approach to the figure in the period from the Grande Jatte to the end of his life are quite evident. Robert Goldwater discusses the evolution of his work from The Grande Jatte in which one can see his concern with volumes in space to the figure paintings of 1888-1891 (La Parade, Le Chahut and The Circus) in which he became more and more involved with emphasizing a two-dimensional relationship. During this same time, he did a number of landscape paintings; the landscapes continue to anticipate this heightened interest in suppressing the volumetric qualities in favor of the planar relationships. They tended to be more "flat" than the figure paintings.

It was also in this period that Seurat was trying to realize in his painting a theory of formal composition to parallel his color theories. His compositional ideas were not new. His concept of modes


\[48\] The Golden Section which interested Seurier and Charles Henry was among the theories that claimed his attention; the Golden Section was primarily concerned with two-dimensional shape relations.
in painting was related to Poussin's theories. The concern with shape was not accompanied by an equivalent growth in the structuring of color. He was not using color per se to create the shapes; he still made shapes and "colored" them.

Seurat's later landscapes became more and more high in key and tonal, creating a silvery effect not unlike some of Corot's work. The curious means by which he achieved this tone demonstrates how optical mixtures can create subtle, neutral tones as easily as the brilliant color effects one often associates with Impressionism. Rather than using neutral tints as Corot did, Seurat, in Evening at Honfleur, used fully saturated oranges and blues, red-violets and yellow-greens. However, because the dots are painted on a white ground, the saturated hues are pushed into functioning as darks, and because the complements are mixed (for example, orange and blue in the same area), the hue quality is effectively toned down. Pure hues create cool and warm greys, with just overtones of their components.

\[49\] In Seurat's theory of modes, a painting with a predominant amount of cool and dark tones, with falling lines gives a feeling of sadness or melancholy. A balance of cool and warm, light and dark of horizontal lines gives a feeling of calm and peace. A high key, warm colors and rising lines predominating give a mood of cheerfulness and gaiety. Rich, Seurat, pp. 17-18.

\[50\] Compare his Low Tide at Grandcamp, 1885, Mr. and Mrs. Charles S. Payson, Manhasset, New York with Corot's Coast at Etretat, 1872, City Art Museum, St. Louis.

His late landscape sketches reflect this high key by using a white ground. He positions flat wispy touches of grey, avoids sharp edges and has a minimum of black in The Sailboat, 1890, private collection, Paris.

"Distortion" and Restructuring the Traditional Landscape Compositions

In his early landscapes, Seurat did not make the radical shifts in perspective that Cezanne did; a consistent size diminution was usually employed. This is very evident in *The Grande Jatte* where he was still concerned with a volumetric concept of pictorial space. The later works minimize this aspect. In *The Channel at Gravelines* (Fig. 27), Seurat adjusted the size of the anchors at the right and the lamp post at the left for the needs of the design.\(^{52}\) In the geometric perspective, the lamp post would have been much taller. But this change is made more as an adjustment of an object to an object for a decorative need rather than a size change determined by color amount for the general tone. Actually the most radical changes or distortions in Seurat's work are probably seen in such late figure paintings as *Le Chahut* and *The Circus*, where size diminution and position seem determined by an exaggerated perspective. Again, it is decorative pattern rather than color that primarily determines these distortions.

Seurat's treatment of the structure of the landscape was to "formalize" the geology of the motif rather than "burying" it under the new color structure as Cezanne did. He did this by emphasizing flat pattern, continuity of edges, repetition of rhythmic motifs and a simplification of shapes. He remained essentially "edgy," i.e., the edges of forms are a major means for creating closures and relationships.

\(^{52}\)1890. Mr. and Mrs. William A. M. Burden, New York.
Fig. 27.—Seurat. The Channel at Gravelines

Fig. 28.—Seurat. Les Grues et la Percée
In Les Grues et la Percée (Fig. 28), the second type of arrangement is used. The canvas is divided by the strong diagonal of the dark mass of the land against the sea and the sky. This powerful movement is opposed by horizontal bands. Near the top of the canvas the bands of clouds are scalloped. As they approach the horizon, the edges of the forms diminish in activity until the point at which sky and sea meet where the line is perfectly level. The waviness picks up again in the edge of the hill and sea; on the lower margin the scalloped band repeats the clouds in a slower broader rhythm. By creating a series of diversions in the strong diagonal, Seurat keeps it from being over-powerful and manages to relate it to the horizontal structure. The top edge starts as small jagged scallops; in two broader concave curves the contour turns out toward the horizontal creating the form of the cliff. The steep diagonal picks up again inside the mass of the land, is overlapped by a closer horizontal ridge of earth. Once again the diagonal movement is continued in the lighter form of bare earth surrounded by grass in the lower right corner. Internally the form of the hillside is divided by bands which shift from diagonal to horizontal; the value gradations function to create essentially line and pattern by forcing the edges of the forms. Volume is not important here. The shapes of the cliff and the patch of earth close either with the upper sky and sea because of the lightness, or the land because of the contour. The buoy or lighthouse near the center of the right edge, a small faint spot, has a strong power of attraction because of the halo effect around it, and its isolation in

53 1888. Mr. and Mrs. Averell Harriman, Albany, New York.
the plain light ground. The strongly interlocked surface pattern creates an integration of figure and ground, unlike the "object" against a background one experiences in The Grande Jatte.

In spite of Seurat's theories which lead him to an essentially decorative expression, his response to natural forms and sensitivity to felt tonal relationships are evident in Les Grues et la Percée. The painting has a quality of complexity and the unexpected which can never come from just the working out of a system. This sensitivity to form and tone put Seurat's paintings on a much higher level of achievement than his followers, Signac or Cross, whose work looks painted according "to formula" by comparison. 54

Seurat's Achievement

Seurat attempted to solve the problem of recovering the formal organization sacrificed by the Impressionists and to integrate color in this new structure in two different ways. In The Grande Jatte he turned back to earlier means. His concern with space and volume—he spoke of painting as hollowing out the canvas—is a return to the concept of equating pictorial form with a balancing of volumes and masses of "real" objects in space. He organized by relating object to object, emphasizing continuity of edges, repeated contours and the spotting of local color.

54 Speaking of Seurat's worry that someone might steal his style, Pissarro wisely remarked, "I recognize no secret in painting other than that of the artist's own sentiment, which is not easily swiped." Camille Pissarro, Letters to His Son Lucien (New York: Pantheon Books, 1943), p. 100.
shapes to create pattern relationships. His process of painting the empty landscape like a stage and then adding the people suggests that his orientation was that of figure on a background. Size relationships were determined by geometric perspective rather than the need of a certain amount of color in the composition. In his later work, the emphasis on pattern, line and abstract shapes independent of the shapes of objects became more important. Internal forms functioned as flat shapes in an all-over pattern rather than suggesting volume. Perspective effects were minimized in favor of flat overlapping planes. However, the contrast element was still a value dynamic, not color.

Rather than working with a great variety of landscape compositions, Seurat tended to concentrate on the first three more simple arrangements. The "geology" of the motif remains a major means for structuring the painting, although it is simplified to make its decorative and formal aspects more evident.

Seurat's late landscapes were more fully integrated than the figure paintings of the same period, even though the figure paintings shared the same tendency toward flatness and abstraction. Rich's suggestions that Seurat's "distortions" in the landscapes were more easily accepted, and that the landscapes were appreciated much sooner than his figure paintings agree with points in this argument: that distortion is

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Rich also seems to equate the "weight" of the object in nature with form in the painting. The figures "play their part in the balance of weights." Rich, Grande Jatte, p. 30. This is thinking of a relationship of object to object rather than an abstract shape. Rich and Herbert both liken Seurat's work to Egyptian, Archaic Greek art, and the Italian primitives which are structured in a similar manner to The Grande Jatte. Ibid., p. 49. Robert L. Herbert, Seurat Drawings, pp. 127-128.
more easily accepted in the landscape and that Seurat's landscape paintings were more often unified, and consequently more successful than his figure paintings.56

Where Seurat came closest to moving into full color contrast painting was in the landscape oil sketches of the first half of the 1880's, but his concern with representing volumes prevented him from realizing color structure in a large painting at that time. Whether he would have come to the realization that his later trend to flat shapes and planar relationships was the key to hue contrast painting, if he could give up the Pointillist technique is hypothetical. Pissarro, who used the Neo-Impressionist technique for four or five years, gave it up when he recognized that the dot inhibited his ability to see color relationships. Perhaps if Seurat had had more time to work out his theories and then "let go"—use his great sensitivity to color which was revealed in his sketches—he would have moved out of a value dynamic into color.

Van Gogh

Landscape Motif Predominates in
Van Gogh's Work

Van Gogh, the first of the expressionist pair of the Post-Impressionists, started out to become a peasant painter in the tradition of the Barbizon painters—especially Millet—or his Dutch contemporaries, Mauve and Israels. Consequently his early work done in Holland concentrated on figure painting. Since he was concerned with the peasants in

their setting, he could not disregard the landscape. About one-third of
the paintings done in Holland before he went to Paris were landscapes;
other subjects that he painted were still life, portraits of peasants and
genre paintings—figure compositions of peasants or weavers at work.
Actually, even at this period, landscape as a subject was very close to
Van Gogh's heart. He had the typical nineteenth-century concern for
nature as it can be experienced through the contemplation of landscape. 58

When Van Gogh went to Paris in 1886, he began to change his style
of painting from the traditional dark chiaroscuro to the high keyed and
divided colors of the impressionists. At the same time he began to
realize that the subject of peasant life treated in the traditional
manner was somehow untenable in this modern idiom. 59 In espousing the
Impressionist technique and color, Van Gogh's subject matter shifted to
include many of the motifs that they used. Of these, landscape became
the most important for him. He never became very interested in the

58 I hope there will always remain in us something of the
Brabant fields and heath, which years of city life will not
be able to wipe out, the less so as it is renewed and
strengthened by art.
Vincent Van Gogh, The Letters of Vincent Van Gogh to His Brother (2 vols.;

You will say that everybody has seen landscapes and
figures from childhood on. The question is has everybody
also been reflective as a child, has everybody who has seen
them loved also heath, fields, meadows, woods and the snow
and the rain and the storm. Not everybody has done like you
and I, it is a peculiar kind of surroundings and circumstances
that must contribute to it, it is a peculiar kind of tempera-
ment and character, too which must help to make it take root.
Ibid., II, p. 44, letter 251.

59 Meyer Schapiro, Vincent Van Gogh (New York: Harry N. Abrams,
subjects of cafe society, the theaters, or night life which interested Toulouse-Lautrec, Manet, Degas and Renoir. He painted the figure primarily as a portrait or as a part of the landscape from this time on. His portraits are in the tradition of his early studies of peasants, depictions of humble working class people painted for his own pleasure.

Eventually he would devote more than half of his energy to landscape painting. In part this was by choice, in part it reflected the difficulty he had getting sitters, for he always loved to do portraits. As much as he altered what he saw, Van Gogh always seemed to need some sort of visual stimulus in order to paint. Still life continued to interest him. However, it does not bulk so large in his production as it does in Cezanne's work. When these possibilities were exhausted because of his confinement, he painted from prints of the paintings of others—Millet and Delacroix being two of his favorites.

60 In Holland, from 1881 to 1885, of 212 paintings, 67 are landscapes. In Paris, the relationship is 76 landscapes in 175 paintings. Of those done in Arles from February 1888 to May 1889, 218 in all, 105 were landscapes. In the last two years of his life at St. Remy and Auvers, 142 of 215 paintings are landscapes.


61 When Gauguin tried to get Van Gogh to work "from memory," i.e., his imagination, Vincent writes to Theo, "I'm sure he is right," but somehow he was never able to work without a model or a motif, regardless of how much he transposed or changed what he saw. Vincent Van Gogh, Further Letters of Vincent Van Gogh to His Brother, 1886-1889 (London and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1929), pp. 241-253.
In spite of his concentration on the figure during his Dutch period, his early landscapes are generally more completely realized and more fully integrated than his figure paintings. Although the figures are often represented in landscape settings, one feels that when he painted the figure he centered his effort on it. He added the landscape as a "background," a sort of afterthought. The landscape background he often used in these early works was one of a field with a level horizon; he used it in his landscape paintings as well. It always remained a favorite motif. It seems inextricably tied to his experience of the flat Dutch landscape.62

Along with the motif of flat fields in his Dutch period landscapes of 1881-1886, Vincent used the third type of arrangement, the horizontal-vertical, and the fourth, the crossed diagonals, most often. He also used the first and second types of arrangement, but not as often as the third and fourth types. The subjects he preferred when using the third motif were middle distance views of thatched cottages, fishing sheds or the church tower at Nuenen set in the midst of a flat field. He rarely used trees to "bracket" the motif, but preferred to use a building as a dark vertical mass, usually centered against the horizontals of earth and sky. Examples of this arrangement are Cottage at Nightfall, Nuenen

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62 He always found echoes of his native land wherever he went. In Paris he painted windmills even if they were in reality a night club, as in The Moulin de la Galette, 1886, Kröller-Müller Rijksmuseum, Otterloo. The garden plots on Montmartre with the windmill topping the hill also recall Holland in Allotments on the Hill of Montmartre, 1887, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, and Montmartre Gardens in Winter, 1887, collection of V. W. Van Gogh, Laren (Fig. 35).
(Fig. 34) and The Farm (a charcoal drawing).\textsuperscript{63} With the fourth type of arrangement, he used the traditional view down a country lane with trees on either side. It appeared in a very early pencil drawing of 1880-1881, The Lane, Borinage and Brussels and a pen sketch, Avenue of Poplars of 1884.\textsuperscript{64} An example of the horizontal-diagonal, the second type of composition, is The Quay at Antwerp of late 1885.\textsuperscript{65}

In his earliest landscapes Vincent painted two variations of the traditional arrangements which reappear especially in his late works. These compositions are a source of speculation about his treatment of "space" because they are rather unique to his work. They are combinations of types one and four. The first variation is based on a view across a flat field. The major division is the horizon between earth and sky, but instead of repeating the parallel bands in the lower half of the painting, it is structured by the diagonals of single point perspective with the vanishing point on the horizon near the center of the painting. Although generally he used a low horizon in his early work, like many traditional Dutch landscape paintings, in this arrangement he put it very high in the painting so that all of the objects represented fell below the horizon. The Roofs (Fig. 29) is an early example of this type of arrangement.\textsuperscript{66}

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{63} Both are of 1885 and in the V. W. Van Gogh Collection, Laren.
\item\textsuperscript{64} Both in the Collection of V. W. Van Gogh, Laren.
\item\textsuperscript{65} Collection of V. W. Van Gogh, Laren.
\item\textsuperscript{66} Collection of G. Renand, Paris.
\end{itemize}
The second compositional variation is based on two-point perspective. The point of view is taken from a corner positioned in the bottom center of the painting from which two roads or alleys of trees diverge as if at a ninety-degree angle. In the motif of roads across a field, the diagonal elements are usually confined to the lower section of the painting, the sky being structured as a horizontal form with the horizon high in the painting. When the motif is the diverging alleys of trees, the arrangement is based on a pair of crossed diagonals side by side. Many of the canvases using this type of arrangement are long, low horizontal shapes. The charcoal drawing, Road Near Loosduinen (Fig. 30), is an early example of this variation.67

This type of arrangement is quite unique. Two-point perspective is seen more often in paintings of interiors or representations of architecture. It is rather rare to see it in landscape paintings. It is especially uncommon to see it where both vanishing points are actually within the limits of the canvas. It is this factor which makes the perspective of this arrangement seem so exaggerated. It is not, as Shapiro suggests, reversed perspective. Rather it is a compressed view representing in one view the two views which one would see if he turned his head almost ninety degrees.68 The exaggerated perspective in these two variations is not seen in any of the other Post-Impressionist painters' work. However, until 1889-1890, the exaggeration does not seem extreme. It becomes much intensified in the "baroque" distortion of the

68Shapiro, Vincent Van Gogh, p. 130. He is discussing Crows over the Wheatfield.
Fig. 29.--Van Gogh. The Roofs

Fig. 30.--Van Gogh. The Road Near Loosduinen
work done in St. Remy and Auvers. The late Crows over the Wheatfield is an excellent example of the exaggerated perspective possible in this type of arrangement.\textsuperscript{69}

1886-1888: Appearance of the Diagonal Spiral Arrangement

Although many of Van Gogh's Paris landscapes of 1886-1887 recall Dutch motifs, he sketched in the Tuileries gardens, along the Seine, and the boulevards; factories and panoramic views of the city are among the new subjects he painted. He continued to structure many of his paintings by the first four types of arrangements. However, at this time, the diagonal-spiral of the fifth type of arrangement began to appear more often. He used the subject matter so often associated with this arrangement, e.g., close views of the woods and underbrush which he had rarely painted in Holland. In his Dutch period he had been primarily concerned with the character of the object. Even his trees often had a quality of "personality" that made them more object than ground.\textsuperscript{70} From 1886 to 1888 on, although this quality remains important to him, he would paint various "ground" motifs of an amorphous nature—fields of wheat or grass, vineyards, orchards, gardens and woods, flowers and small shrubs growing. As Cezanne often painted the woods because of their amorphous quality, Van Gogh chose

\textsuperscript{69} 1890. Collection of V. W. Van Gogh, Laren.

\textsuperscript{70} The trodden grass at the roadside looks tired and dusty like people of the slums . . . I saw a group of white cabbages standing frozen and benumbed that reminded me of a group of women in their thin petticoats and old shawls which I had seen early in the morning standing near a coffee stand. Van Gogh, Letters to His Brother, Vol. II, p. 12, undated, 1882.
to paint the seas of grass or grain for this same reason. Early examples of "fuzzy" motifs, structured by the diagonal spiral arrangement, are Brush Wood\textsuperscript{71} (Fig. 31) and River Bank in Spring;\textsuperscript{72} these paintings are also as close to a true Impressionist style as Van Gogh ever gets.

Arles, 1888: More Complex Arrangements Accompany New Level of Color Structure

In the work done in Arles, Van Gogh's choice of compositional arrangements has shifted. The fifth type of arrangement, used rarely in his earlier work, has become the preferred arrangement. He also used the second arrangement quite often, whereas the third and fourth types of arrangement are used the least. The diagonal spiral type of arrangement is the basis of such diverse subjects as The Poet's Garden\textsuperscript{73} and Bushes, Arles\textsuperscript{74} (Fig. 39), examples of close views of woods, or Cornfields\textsuperscript{75} (Fig. 32) and Moored Boats,\textsuperscript{76} examples of "aerial" views. Cornfields, which has only the narrowest band of sky at the top, is an example of the type of motif that is often used as a transitional step to the sixth compositional arrangement.

It was during this period that Vincent painted The Red Vinyard (Fig. 41), which seems closest in structure to the sixth type of

\textsuperscript{71}1887. Private Collection.

\textsuperscript{72}1887. Mme. Olivier Sainsère Collection, Paris.

\textsuperscript{73}September, 1888. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterloo.

\textsuperscript{74}August, 1888. Pushkin Museum, Moscow.

\textsuperscript{75}June, 1888. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

\textsuperscript{76}August, 1888. Folkwang Museum, Essen.
Fig. 31.—Van Gogh. **Brushwood**

Fig. 32.—Van Gogh. **Cornfields**
arrangement. Thus one can see in the types of arrangements used the progression from the more simple arrangements to the more complex versions. However, the stage of the sixth arrangement, concentric structured by color, appears rarely and is not often clearly realized.

Problems of Color Structure in Vincent's Arles Period

Van Gogh's development toward integrated color structure is difficult to analyze systematically because there are a number of contradictions operating. One sees the painter trying to achieve his ends by means of a number of different methods. The results are uneven, yet in spite of the fact that he did not seem to have as clear a conception of how to achieve the integration of form and color as Cezanne did, the force of his feelings often "bring off" the painting.

Vincent's problem stems from his desire to achieve formal integration of the painting in terms of color structure without sacrificing the subject matter meaning (the object). Thus object shape and symbolic color vie with color that is instrumental to pictorial harmony. His attachment to people and things makes it impossible for him to achieve the level of detachment necessary for seeing the stimulus and the painting as a "pure" abstract color relationship. The tension created by this impasse is probably in part at the root of the excitement, the "uneasiness" and the vitality in his work.

Since Van Gogh's efforts take several different directions, it would seem useful to trace the trends in his drawings and paintings of
1888 when his use of color reaches a high level, and then to contrast these directions with the later works of 1889-1890, when he attempts to solve the problem of harmony by another method.

On the whole, the "geology" of his landscapes from the Arles period is more traditional than in Cézanne's mature paintings. What differences Van Gogh creates comes from a change of viewpoint and an unexpected positioning of the motif rather than any radical "distortion" of object shapes, or alterations of perspective or size relations. He used a very high horizon (sometimes there is no sky visible), he cut off objects at the edge of the page (trees are placed on the edge or so close to the viewer that only a segment of them appear in the foreground), and he exaggerated the diagonal elements by looking down on the motif. In many of these devices, one sees an obvious influence from Japanese prints. Whereas the unexpected angle and the odd positioning of the motif on the canvas are symptomatic of the struggle to structure the painting in terms of color, the traditional perspective, consistent angular size relationship and lack of "distortion" reflect his truth to the object.

The two divergent trends may also be noted in the drawing technique of 1888. In spite of Vincent's acceptance of the Impressionist palette and technique, he never became fully committed to structuring his drawings or paintings primarily for light effect. His devotion to objects kept him from this. One cannot imagine Van Gogh, with his impatient nature, pursuing the careful "needlepoint" technique of Seurat. However, his love of "things" led him to develop a demanding drawing technique with a reed pen in which dots, dashes and commas recreated in a kind of calligraphic shorthand the textures and surfaces of all the objects he
loved. The reed pen gives the variety of width and weight of a brush combined with the vigorous "bristly" quality of a steel pen. The mark seems related to Japanese work, the general tonal effect to pen drawings in the Western tradition. In comparing Van Gogh's drawings with Cézanne's, one can see that in the former there is this much greater concern with the object, that abstract shape relationships are not as articulated and formalized. Montmajour (Fig. 42) is an excellent example of his drawing style of this period.\(^7\) However, Van Gogh's calligraphy also created with texture and brightness contrast an equivalence of the brush strokes and color contrast in his painting. The new style of drawing paralleled the new use of color he was developing in his painting of this period. He realized that value contrast drawing would no longer serve as preliminary studies for his painting. "It's not possible to have values and be a colorist. One cannot be in two places at once."\(^7\)\(^9\)

Although the concentric pattern may be found in earlier drawings, it appears quite frequently in the landscape drawings from Arles and continues to appear in his later landscape drawings more often than in his painting. It is not only evident in the complex drawings, but also in some of the very "meager" drawings which are constructed with a few sparse touches that create a clear brightness contrast relationship by a minimum of means. It is beautifully evident in the drawings for Le Pont Anglais, especially the one from the Collection of the County Museum of

\(^7\)\(^8\) 1888. Private Collection, Amsterdam.

Los Angeles of 1888 (Fig. 33). A much more complex drawing also showing the concentric pattern is *Harvest in Provence* in which the dark cart near the center of the drawing is the locus of the focal point.  

Although Vincent recognized the difference between value and brightness contrast in his drawings, he is not so consistent in differentiating value and hue contrast in his paintings. In the spring and summer of 1888, one can see him try to make the shift to hue contrast structure. In some paintings, he achieves it; in others he slips back into value contrast. One finds several different solutions to attaining unity and color harmony in the paintings of this period. He brightened and intensified the color, but still kept the value dynamic; warm and cool colors are both modulated light and dark. He worked with a limited adjacent color range, using warm and cool, intense and neutral, but achieved most of the contrast from value changes. The harmony is insured by the fact that major color amounts are all in the same family. He also tackled the problem of a full range of color with contrasting complements. He achieved, at times, a surprising integrity in the light of his fidelity to the object, an insistence on putting the color on the object and the use of the contour line on the edge of the object.

The evolution of his use of color up to and including the period at Arles may be traced through an analysis of four landscapes representing major stages in his development to this point. Comparing *Montmartre Gardens in Winter* (Fig. 35) done in Paris with *Cottage at Nightfall, Neuen* (Fig. 34), one sees that the former has a light bluish-grey middle

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80 June, 1888. Private Collection.
Fig. 33.—Van Gogh. Le Pont Anglais

Fig. 34.—Van Gogh. Cottage at Nightfall, Neuenen

Fig. 35.—Van Gogh. Montmartre Gardens
tone as compared with the warmer and darker middle tone of the latter. Blue, green, and violet have replaced the dark brown and black as darks. The proportions of light to dark are almost reversed. In the early painting darks predominate, light is accent; in Montmartre Gardens light predominate, darks are accents. The general tone is pastel with a minimum amount of saturated hues.

In *Le Pont Anglais* 81 (Fig. 37), the middle tones have become darker and more saturated. The yellows and oranges which had served as light in Montmartre Gardens begin to function as middle tones. Van Gogh used the dark contour line as accent. This use of line also comes from his study of Japanese prints. However, a careful analysis of the color-value range of *Le Pont Anglais* reveals its position as a halfway point between Impressionism and a fully color structured painting. The major color range steps one sees are light blue (sky) which has about the same value and intensity as the grey-pink (stone abutment of the bridge) and yellow (the wooden members of the drawbridge). The horse and carriage are dark. The water is a medium blue, modulated light and dark with white and darker blue and is about the same value as the green passages of the grass. The orange bank is somewhat between these two major areas of ground in value; hue contrast differentiates it. The group of washerwomen and their surrounding ground constitute a light locale with accents of the lightest (white, pale yellow), brightest (red) and darkest (black) in the painting. Since he tends to modulate light-dark in both the cool

81 April, 1888. Kröller-Müller Rijksmuseum, Otterlo.
Fig. 36.—Van Gogh. The Drawbridge

Fig. 37.—Van Gogh. Le Pont Anglais

Fig. 38.—Van Gogh. Le Pont Anglais
and warm colors rather than cool-warm, a value dynamic rather than hue remains basic in spite of heightened color intensity.

In comparing this painting with a second version of the same motif (Fig. 38) from the Wildenstein Gallery, one sees that in the latter there is less value differentiation in the big ground areas. The sky, stone abutment, water, grass and orange bank are very close in value, the major differentiation being made by cool-warm (hue) or intense-neutral rather than value. The yellow wood framework, and carriage, the white horse are now light against the blue sky. The red touches on the women's dresses and the partly sunken rowboat now function as bright and light closing with the lemon yellow and white accents rather than as a dark closing with the black accents as it did in the other version. The bright locale on the figures of the women and the boat, the yellow drawbridge and the distant bank seen through the bridge's opening are brought into attention more by hue than by lightness. There is a real difference between the two paintings in positioning of color/value climaxes even though the basic geology is practically the same. Hue rather than value is creating the contrasts in the Wildenstein Gallery version. The series of paintings of Le Pont Anglais of April-May, 1888 alone are most revealing in a study of Vincent's color development. The Drawbridge\(^2\) (Fig. 36) is an earlier version of the same motif more closely related in color to Montmartre Gardens. The drawing and the use of perspective are also more traditional in The Drawbridge.

*Bushes, Arles* (Fig. 39) is an excellent example of the limited adjacent color scheme Vincent sometimes utilized. The color range is a

bright blue, green and yellow with the green dominating. There are some small complementary touches of reddish brown which serve as darks. The green is modulated with white and blue, a light-dark relationship. In spite of the intense color, the structure is still more dependent on value contrast rather than hue. Color harmony is achieved because the colors all belong to "one family."\(^3\)

Late summer and fall of 1888 was the time that Vincent was able to realize a number of paintings using a full range of complementary color contrasts and to structure the paintings by hue contrast rather than value. The many drawings and paintings of the same subject are a clue to his struggle for color harmony.\(^4\) Although he eliminated light and shade to a great extent, his fidelity to the object limited him to shifting the viewpoint or changing the color as his major means for attaining unity.

In The Yellow House at Arles (Fig. 40), Vincent used passages of flat unmodulated color combined with areas using a clear cool-warm

\(^3\)Sunflowers of the same month (National Gallery, London) is another excellent example of the limited adjacent color scheme. The range of yellows, high key and intense, although modulated cool to warm, does not utilize complementary contrasts and thereby insures color harmony more easily. Vincent uses bright intense yellow on the table top, the top of the vase and the ragged petals of the flowers. On the wall and the bottom of the vase is a pastel, somewhat neutral yellow with a generous admixture of white. The centers of the flowers are a darker, more neutral yellow that moves toward orange, with yellow-green hearts of about the same darkness and intensity. Stems and leaves range from yellow-green to a true bright green. He uses a bright blue line on the edge of the table and three or four touches of black in the flowers, the only notes of color that do not fall in the green-yellow-orange family.

\(^4\)He does not drastically change the "geology" of his many versions of Bedroom at Arles—he changes the color of the floor, the largest ground. The high angle of his viewpoint makes the floor the largest area in the painting and therefore a very powerful factor in the structure.
modulation. There is a maximum of hue contrast. The clarity and simplicity of the range of colors is a key to his success. It is as precise as a musical scale, with black and white as the lowest and highest notes. Bright-dark blue, dark green, vermillion, dull yellow-green, yellow and pink complete the middle tone in a rising progression. Each color functions in a double role of hue and value on the scale; the dark blue stays in the middle range because of its hue intensity and the black accent, the yellow is kept from being the highest value because of the judiciously placed whites. His use of the contour line is discreet. It functions mostly as an accent rather than enclosing forms as it does in some of his works.

Although the concentric pattern is often quite clear in his drawings, it is not so apparent or common in Van Gogh's paintings. It does appear more often in the late landscapes of 1889-1890 although usually it appears as a value phenomenon. The painting from the period at Arles that gets the closest to the sixth type of arrangement, the all-ground motif in which the concentric pattern emerges because of hue contrast is The Red Vineyard (Fig. 41). The general compositional "geography"---a

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86 The struggle to maintain this level of color harmony is revealed in a letter to Theo:

But when I come home after a spell such as that I assure you my head is so tired, that if that kind of work keeps recurring ... I shall become hopelessly absentminded and incapable of ordinary things. ... When I come back myself from the mental labor of balancing the six essential colors, red-blue-yellow-orange-lilac-green. Sheer work and calculation with one's mind utterly on the stretch, like an actor on the stage in a difficult part, with a hundred things at once to think of in a single half hour.

Fig. 39.—Van Gogh. *Bushes, Arles*

Fig. 40.—Van Gogh. *The Yellow House At Arles*

Fig. 41.—Van Gogh. *The Red Vineyard*
high horizon, implied crossed diagonals (the focal point of the concentric pattern is on a stooping figure which is located at the intersection), elements of the fourth and fifth arrangements— is secondary to the color modulation for structuring the painting. The two prints to which the writer has access are so different in color that it is difficult to feel secure about making a color analysis. The central area of the painting, modulations of red and red-orange with touches of blue, reveals the concentric pattern through hue contrast. However, the polarities of yellow (upper right corner) and blue-violet (upper and lower left corners) seem to function as light and dark, so that there is a certain ambiguity of relationship created. Since the exact intensity and value of the yellow and blue-violet passages are critical to the relationship, it is impossible to say definitely on the basis of these prints whether the painting uses a value or a color dynamic throughout.

St. Remy and Auvers, 1889-1890: Modulation via the Baroque Contour

After Vincent's first breakdown at the end of 1888, there is a gradual change in his painting. The characteristics of his last two years of work (and these qualities became progressively more apparent) were a limitation of the palette to pastel colors and adjacent or monochromatic color relationships in an increasing number of paintings, an exaggeration or distortion of form in a Baroque or curvilinear manner and a shift in the use of the mark or brush stroke. Schapiro suggests

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87 My experience with having color prints made of my own paintings substantiates this problem. Where the lighter passages come out a little lighter and less intense, the dark passages a little darker, the relationship of the whole effect is drastically altered.
that there is a "conversion" of the color energy of the Arles period into an energy of line and rhythm, and that a limit of total force makes it impossible to have both simultaneously. "Objects have lost their self sufficient stable form; they yearn and strive and struggle with forces beyond themselves or with internal forces from which they need release."\textsuperscript{88} He suggests that the curves are indicative of high excitation and strain, that the paintings are less "flattened" and the "modelling . . . is more bulky."\textsuperscript{89} Although there is a certain validity in some of these observations, Schapiro's explanation of this change (like many others) is made in terms of Vincent's mental illness. He infers that the excited and disturbed state he was in made him "see" the world in this exaggerated manner, rather than interpreting these characteristics as symptomatic of his struggle to achieve a higher level of abstraction and pictorial integration, while at the same time retaining the meaning, the expressive character of the object.

Sherman suggests that the struggle was not so much indicative of Vincent's emotional problems as an artistic dilemma, that "Van Gogh's Baroque patterns are a result of his struggle to integrate the field without suppressing the model. . . . The Baroque pattern may be accounted for by his attempts to articulate the modulation via the contour."\textsuperscript{90}

The compositional arrangements that Van Gogh used more often in his late works continued to be the more complex types. The use of a motif

\textsuperscript{89} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{90} Sherman, \textit{Cezanne}, p. 112.
with a very high horizon was common. In many paintings there is no sky visible at all. In such works as Butterflies in the Grass, \textsuperscript{91} Gardens at Auvers, \textsuperscript{92} Irises, \textsuperscript{93} Field of Poppies \textsuperscript{94} and Tree Trunks \textsuperscript{95} the motif is an amorphous, "all-ground" stimulus. Where the composition suggests one of the more simple types of arrangements, the "geology" of the motif is restructured by the Baroque pattern. As the color modulation takes over as the basic mode of structuring in Cezanne's late work, the Baroque pattern of the contour becomes the major means of structuring Van Gogh's late landscapes. In contrast to the Arles period, perspective is much more exaggerated, object shapes are distorted. Hills at St. Remy (Fig. 45) is based on the fourth arrangement, but the diagonals have become wavy.\textsuperscript{96} The many views of the fenced field which Van Gogh painted from his window of the asylum at St. Remy are derivations of either the first or second types of arrangement or his first variation. The diagonal elements of the second arrangement are so exaggerated in Au Bord des Alpines \textsuperscript{97} so that everything seems to be going downhill.\textsuperscript{98}

\textsuperscript{91} April 1890. National Gallery, London.
\textsuperscript{92} 1890. Galerie d'Art Caspari, Munich.
\textsuperscript{93} May 1889. Mrs. Charles S. Paysan Collection, New York.
\textsuperscript{94} April 1890. Kunsthalle, Breman.
\textsuperscript{95} May 1890. Kröller-Müller Rijksmuseum, Otterloo.
\textsuperscript{96} 1889. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Justin K. Thannhauser, New York.
\textsuperscript{97} 1889. John Hay Whitney Collection, New York.
\textsuperscript{98} There are at least fifteen paintings and many drawings of this field. The variety that he gets by shifting his viewpoint and basing the
The two variations on the first and fourth types of arrangement that had appeared in Van Gogh's early work became favorite compositions during the last two years of his life. The perspective effects are extremely exaggerated. In some cases, as The Plain of Auvers, there is a curvy, wavy quality to the horizontal and diagonal elements of the converging furrows because of the Baroque pattern. In The Road Near Auvers, this quality is not so pronounced because the type of brush stroke that predominates is a short, straight mark, more like one might find in the Arles period. However, in both these examples, although at first glance the painting gives an effect of one point perspective, there are actually several vanishing points within the general vicinity of the center of the painting. In early work, Vincent adhered strictly to geometric perspective. Here the system yields to the needs of pictorial integration.

Function of the Brush Stroke and Contour in Vincent's Structure

Two important factors to be considered in the evolution of this new way of structuring the later work are the function of the brush mark and the use of the contour. In Van Gogh's work up to the last two years,

compositions on different arrangements and times of day is a real credit to his power of invention. The suggestion that the late versions, more distorted than the first ones, suggest an increasing mental tension might be countered by the viewpoint that the Baroque pattern as a mode of structuring the field gradually dominated the "geology" derived from the motif.


100 June 1890. Pushkin Museum, Moscow.
one does not find a clear stage of a "systematic" arrangement of the brush strokes (for example, almost all diagonal or vertical) as one finds in both Cezanne and Gauguin. This phase seems to be an indication of a divorce from objects depicted to structuring the painting by the perceived color modulation. In Van Gogh's work the arrangement of the brush stroke is strongly determined by the texture or the surface "direction" of the object he was painting. "Arrange your brush strokes in the direction of the objects," he says. To some extent his brush strokes do function to modulate the color, but on the level of the smallest element in the painting a tactile feeling for the object is competing with the perceived color modulation for structuring the painting. Thus Van Gogh does not achieve the level of "visual abstraction" that Cezanne does. It is a matter of intent. Cezanne puts color on canvas and "trees, rocks and houses appear"; Van Gogh puts the paint on the objects.

In the earlier work, the positioning (direction) of the brush strokes tends to function to differentiate the textures of the objects. The arrangement of brush strokes is determined by essentially descriptive needs. In the late work, the brush strokes function as an abstract rhythmic pattern for structuring the field of the painting. The dependence on the object still remains in that the rhythmic pattern is derived from an exaggeration of the contours of the objects, an expression of the motor-tactile experience of things. Nevertheless, there is a shift in the direction of greater abstraction in this change. The brush stroke

101 "... it is more harmonious and pleasant to look at." Van Gogh, *Further Letters*, p. 382, No. 706, September 1889.

102 Sherman, *Cezanne*, p. 63.
has become more fundamentally functional in determining the total structure of the painting, in fact, it is more "systematic."

Since, in the late work, Van Gogh does not seem to have the same control of color that he had in Arles, the Baroque modulation points to a search for another way of attaining harmony. Actually, shape structure is more integrated in terms of the field in many of the late paintings. The concentric pattern appears quite often in these works although it is generally in terms of value. The falling off in late work might well be attributed to the kind of desperate floundering that is sometimes a stage in the development of a painter when he tries to move into a new, more complex level of integration.

A comparison of two landscape drawings reveals the differences between the periods of Arles and St. Remy even more clearly than many of the paintings. In Montmajour, of 1888 (Fig. 42), the mark is derived from the texture of the object—short vertical lines or dots equal short grass, longer lines radiating from centers, shrubs or tall grass, leaves and distant trees are circular scribbles, bricks or stone are horizontal-vertical cross hatching. Tonal changes tend to be determined by the "color" of the objects, i.e., a shift between light and dark occurs along the contour where the light rocks overlap an area of dark vegetation. In Wooded Landscape of 1890 (Fig. 43), the mark is broad, crude and much more generalized.103 There are strong slashing verticals or diagonals and curving strokes related to the wavy contours of trees, shrubs and the thatched roofs. The marks no longer describe textures, rather they

Fig. 42.—Van Gogh. Montmajour

Fig. 43.—Van Gogh. Wooded Landscape
create contrasting rhythms which modulate the field. They have a quality of abstraction in that they are determined primarily by the tonal and structural demands for unifying the drawing rather than describing the object. In *Wooded Landscape*, one can also observe the creation of abstract bright and dark locales not determined by the object or its contour. The tone of the locale "bleeds" beyond the contour of an object.

Vincent's own remark, awkwardly phrased, expresses his awareness of the need to set the shape structure free of the object. 

"... In the landscape ... I am trying to mass things by means of a drawing which tries to express the interlocking of masses" (closure of abstract shapes).\(^{104}\)

Van Gogh derived the use of the contour line, black or colored, partly from his study of Japanese prints. Right as he is about its usefulness in color structured paintings, his work and some of his remarks indicate that he was not always sure of how to use it in process.\(^{105}\) He often complained about painters who drew a contour and filled it in. However, in describing how he works, he confesses to a similar failing.

Though I always work direct on the canvas, I try first to note what is essential in the design, then the spaces enclosed by the contours and always felt, whether expressed or not. In every case I give them tones simplified to the same extent, by which I mean everything representing ground receives the same tone of violet, the whole sky a blue tone. ...\(^{106}\)

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\(^{105}\)The black contour is especially effective in creating a unifying dark ground in a painting using strong hue contrasts.

\(^{106}\)Letters to Theo, quoted in Elgar, *Van Gogh*, p. 186. (My italics.)
This sequence of process is just the opposite of Cezanne's. The latter describes the color patches as gradually expanding and finally determining the contour when they approach each other.

The contour line enclosing a color shape exactly on its edge tends to close it out or hinder its integration into a larger constellation. Determining the contour first also inhibits the painter from adjusting the shape to the color amount needs. The painter has a choice of bleeding the color shape beyond the contour, or distorting the contour to adjust the color shape. When Van Gogh used the flat areas of color and a strongly defined contour in his Arles period portraits, he rarely did the first because color and contour had object meaning differentiation for him. Thus there is not an integrated figure-ground relationship in many of the portraits but a figure against a background.¹⁰⁷ His struggle to integrate the portraits by various means are indicated by his use of distortion of the contour and color shape, an all over rhythmic pattern of brush strokes, and decorative painted pattern such as wall paper used in the background. Sometimes he resorted to using a sort of chiaroscuro. This struggle is very evident in the sequence of paintings of La Berceuse (late 1888-1889) in which he repainted the motif, about six times, adjusting the color shapes, and the pattern of the wallpaper. The use of an almost continuous heavy contour around the figure and the chair were probably one cause for his difficulty.

¹⁰⁷ An exception to the rule is L'Arlesienne done under Gauguin's tutelage in which "background" has a positive shape character, the color is bled beyond the contours and certain colors appear both as ground and figure. This is also true of Mme. Roulin and Her Baby done at about the same time.
Van Gogh did not enclose the forms with a contour so consistently in his Arles period landscapes. More often the contour is broken and functions simply as accent. In the late landscapes, however, there seems to be a positive correlation between the use of a strong, relatively unbroken contour and the degree of distortion of the Baroque pattern. In The Hills at St. Remy (Fig. 44), the bold black contour is accompanied by the most exaggerated Baroque curves and distortions of the form. This is also very evident in Landscape with Olive Trees.108

"Quiet" paintings such as The Road Near Auvers, Fields under a Stormy Sky109 and Undergrowth110 (Fig. 45) appear right up to the end of his life. In these the brush stroke is short, straight and oriented horizontally, vertically or diagonally rather than in a curved or spiral direction. Strong enclosing contours are minimized. The large forms and the "geology" are not so exaggerated. Thus the smallest element sets the whole rhythm of the painting. This is another argument for the more abstract approach that was emerging in Van Gogh's later work. The mode of the mark, curved or straight, has become an essentially abstract expressive means as well as functioning formally the smallest unit of structure.

The generalization that can be made about the use of the brush mark and contour in Vincent's work is that they function more or less successfully in relation to his involvement with the object. When he

109 July 1890. V. W. Van Gogh Collection, Laren.
110 June 1890. Mary C. Johnson Collection, Ohio.
Fig. 44.—Van Gogh. Hills at St. Remy

Fig. 45.—Van Gogh. Undergrowth
works with the human figure, especially, he has difficulty making them operate in the larger context. The mark closes on the figure, the contour tends to outline it. In the landscape where the motif is less defined, brush mark and contour move into the more abstract function of structuring the whole field. The perceived visual relations tend to overcome the motor-tactile impulse.

At the end of his life, Van Gogh had not been able to recover the use of as full a range of color that he had used in Arles, yet he was tending to "find his way back" by way of a more free, abstract and integrated drawing and configuration. This was most successful in the landscapes; his late figure painting, except for a few self portraits, are not well realized. One might suggest that the handling of color and drawing in the figure paintings of the Arles period anticipates Matisse's color and drawing. The Baroque distortion so often attributed to Vincent's disturbed state is also evident in Matisse's early work and is one of the means by which the latter was able to move into full color construction. Matisse was not faced with Vincent's dilemma of wanting both color equilibrium and object-expression. He was able to make the choice in favor of color and sacrifice the object shape to the formal and expressive needs of the painting.

In his landscape paintings, Vincent parallels the development of Cezanne in several ways. The sequence in which he used the compositional arrangements, his color development and the tendency to adjust the traditional compositional arrangements to the needs of the color construct is similar. His work differs in that he used the modulated contour rather
than the color pastiche as a means of structuring the late paintings. He was not able to sustain the stage of using the sixth arrangement, the all-ground motif, mediated by color to the degree Cezanne did, but it is evident that he was searching for this kind of structure.

Gauguin

Importance of Landscape Painting in Gauguin's Early Work

Gauguin, like Seurat, was most interested in figure painting, yet important landscape paintings had a way of occurring at very critical points in his artistic development. He started painting in an impressionistic manner without working in a traditional chiaroscuro phase as the other three men did. During the first ten years of his painting experience (1873-1883), when he was working as an amateur, a large share of his paintings were landscapes. Although they do indicate his knowledge of the growing Impressionist movement, they are generally more limited in color and similar in technique and tone to the work of Corot or the transitional painters, Jongkind and Lepine. Gauguin was to insist later that he was not a painter from nature, but at this period there was essentially a strong naturalist tendency in his work.\(^{111}\)

In 1883-1884 he worked with Pissarro at Rouen. Landscape was still his first interest. Entrance to the Village\(^{112}\) shows a strong similarity in choice of motif, handling, and color key to Cezanne's View


\(^{112}\) 1884. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
of Auvers from the Art Institute of Chicago done about ten years earlier. After a stay in Copenhagen in 1884, he returned to France where he spent time in Brittany in 1885-1886, coming in contact for the first time with Émile Bernard and that group of painters who were later to be so influential in the development of his Symbolist and Synthetist theories. At this time, his palette was still sober, his technique impressionist.

In the summer and fall of 1887, along with Charles Laval, Gauguin spent a few months in Martinique, the first of his many trips to find a more primitive, more inspiring environment. In the Martinique landscapes, one finds the beginnings of his own style, the feeling for the decorative and a brightening of the palette which foreshadows the brilliant, rich colors that he would eventually use. The rest of Gauguin's life would be involved in a constant search for the ideal primitive environment, the brilliant light and colors of the tropics which became a necessity for his being able to paint. It is significant that the same "flight" to the south is an important element in the careers of Van Gogh whose color blooms when he goes to Arles, and Cezanne who finds any landscape other than the Midi boring; that Seurat, whose work gradually became more silvery and tonal, did his landscapes on the coast of Normandy and Brittany or around the hazy environs of Paris. It is probably more accurate to say that these men sought out the setting and light conditions which helped them to realize the quality of color relations that they were seeking than to suggest that it was the environment per se that influenced the color change in their work. In each, it seemed to be an active seeking of an environment to reinforce their convictions about color.
Martinique Landscape (Fig. 46) shows the beginnings of new tendencies in Gauguin's work. He modulates color rather than modeling with it. He arranges the brush strokes systematically rather than trying to describe textures. He becomes aware of shape structure as instrumental to pattern (form-design) rather than light effect. He uses richer, more intense and darker colors than one finds in his earlier landscapes. His shapes have ragged edges. Their complexity and lack of clarity comes from his being in a state of transition between a more descriptive representation and one in which color structure begins to determine the forms. However, one can see the beginning of a working by a color locale system. In the relationships of the lower part of the painting (the major division is between the light sky and darker earth) it is cool-warm shifts and grouping by colors that articulate the close value, amorphous area. The foreground is differentiated by being primarily warm, reddish ranging from red-violet to dull orange, the middle distance cooler with bright blue, green and a little yellow-green.

Preferred Landscape Arrangements in the Transitional Period of 1888-1891

Between 1888-1891, before his first trip to Tahiti, one sees Gauguin struggling to find his own style. There are at least three tendencies perceptible in his work of this period. The first is grounded in the Impressionist style of his earlier work which gives his work a sensitivity to the complexities of nature observed. The second tendency springs from the Symbolist-Synthetic theories which were turning

113 1887. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Maitland, Edinburgh.
Gauguin's attention to simplified shapes, strong contours, arbitrary, intense colors, a flat application of paint, and the imagined rather than observed motifs. The third direction reflects his real appreciation of what Cezanne was doing in structuring color. Gauguin did not hesitate to use the ideas of others in furthering his own understanding, but in each case he transformed what he found into something of his own. These influences are apparent in the landscapes of this period. In some cases there is a mixture of them within one painting and a consequent lack of integration indicative of the difficulties he was having.

Gauguin appears to have been working alternately from nature and from his imagination at this period. His invented work does not have either the complexity or the variety he had when he worked from the motif. Nevertheless he was able to achieve a certain level of unity in such figure paintings as Jacob Wrestling with the Angel or the Yellow Christ. Conversely, when he was trying to combine observation of the motif with his Synthetist theories, the paintings were more complex but often lacked unity.

Except for a few early Impressionist paintings, Gauguin was not often concerned with distant panoramic views, so one does not find many examples of the first two types of arrangement. Probably one reason for this is his concern with the figure which led him to use a middle

115 1889. Albright Art Gallery, Buffalo.
116 The Seine at Pont d'Iena, 1875, the Louvre, Paris is an example of the second arrangement. A later one of the same motif is Seascape in Brittany, 1890, private collection, Paris.
distance or close motif. The two types of arrangement that do appear most often from 1888-1891 are the third and the fifth, which were also the ones he had preferred in his earlier landscapes.

Two landscape paintings using the third and fifth types of arrangement demonstrate the struggle to integrate the diverse currents. The Swineherd, Brittany (Fig. 47) is not a typical example of the fifth type of arrangement. While it does not use a close, amorphous stimulus, it is a very complex work with many alternate areas of flatly painted intense color and richly modulated passages. The larger ground is cool and dark (medium hues and greens in the sky and foreground, dark blackish-green in the trees and hills). Warm, bright and light tones create a locale through the center of the canvas. Its shape is roughly a spiral, flattened and extended horizontally. The boundary of the locale, although not marked by a definite contour line, suggests the curvilinear rhythm and meandering line Gaugin was beginning to utilize at this time. Although Goldwater notes that there are certain qualities reminiscent of Impressionism, the large flat areas of color, the intensity and brilliance of the color and the arabesque linear directions all indicate Gauguin's Symbolist theories in action. The painting is busy and over rich. The complexity of the forms in the motif is intensified by the luscious quality of the colors—pinks, oranges, red-violet—in the section around the cow on the left. The second area on the right

117 Other examples of number three are the Farm at Poldu, 1890, collection of Emory Reeves; The Hayricks, 1890, collection of Governor and Mrs. Averell Harriman, New York. Examples of number five are Landscape at Arles, 1888, Stockholm Museum; Cliffs in Brittany, 1889, collection of Dr. Viau.


119 Goldwater, Gauguin, p. 82.
Fig. 46.—Gauguin. Martinique Landscape

Fig. 47.—Gauguin. Swineherd, Brittany

Fig. 48.—Gauguin. Landscape Near Arles
includes the bright blue of the boy's blouse, the yellow on the pigs and the bright white spots of the houses enhanced by their dark surroundings. The central locale is split. Each side could stand alone and be much more effective.

The second painting, Landscape Near Arles (Fig. 48), done during Gauguin's stay with Van Gogh a little later in the year is much more successfully unified. Gauguin has limited himself to a smaller range of colors, predominantly blue and orange. The influence of Cezanne is very apparent in the choice of motif, the range of color and the method of structuring the painting. Gauguin uses the third type of arrangement, the horizontal-vertical. The top and bottom areas, where the contrast is subtletest, are constructed with shapes positioned horizontally. Bright (strongest orange on the haystack), dark (prussian blue and acid green in the trees and grass) and light (the creamy white on the houses and earth) are concentrated in the central area where the greatest opposition of color and value and clearest articulation of forms is located. The concentric pattern does not appear in this painting. The horizontal and vertical forms in the central area interlock to form a cool, dark ground of blue and green for the light warm locale on the house. There is not the rivalry of locales one finds in the former painting. Gauguin uses the modulated color patch with brush strokes generally arranged in a consistent vertical direction similar to what one sees in Cezanne's paintings of the early 1880's. Gauguin's brush mark is a longer stroke,

not so square as Cezanne's. The structure is clear, almost obvious; the
curved forms and strong contours of Symbolism are not evident. However,
one senses a certain self-conscious quality in this work in which Gauguin
"was doing a Cezanne" that will later disappear from his work. 121

1891: Appearance of the Sixth Type of
Arrangement Mediated by Color

The point in Gauguin's development at which he appears to be able
to integrate the diverse trends in his painting occurs about 1891 when he
made his first trip to Tahiti. The landscape which reveals this transi-
tion to his mature style most clearly is Street in Tahiti (Fig. 49) in
which Gauguin uses a motif associated with the fourth type of arrangement,
the crossed diagonals. 122

The road leading into the picture is a motif which was not common
in his œuvre. In earlier versions using this arrangement Gauguin con-
sciously attempted to compensate for the strong movement of the crossed
diagonals either by positioning the intersection of the diagonals far
over to one side, or by "distorting" the geology of the motif in a baroque
curvilinear manner. 123 In Street in Tahiti the perspective does not seem

121 Outside the realm of the landscape paintings is the Portrait
of Marie Henry, 1890, the Art Institute of Chicago. Here Gauguin was
again "doing a Cezanne" and it really "comes off."

122 1891. Toledo Art Museum.

123 A Village Street and Landscape in Brittany both of 1884 use
the road motif. In the first, Gauguin puts the vanishing point over
toward the right edge of the painting to avoid the strong crossing of the
diagonals in the center. The second painting has a spiral arrangement in
the large value shapes with a dark locale centered in the area of the
vanishing point. Arles Landscape Near the Alyscamps (1888, the Louvre,
Paris) uses the motif of the road but plays down the crossed diagonals
through the curving shapes of the path, the rounded colored patches on
to be as distorted as in earlier works. However, there are certain adjustments in size and position that contradict geometric perspective. The relationship of the size of the figures to the hut does not seem consistent, the woman in the foreground is small compared to the two further down the road, and there is a shift up and down of some of the horizontal elements in relation to the horizon line. Nevertheless, these adjustments become apparent only with considerable study.

Gauguin was using a most difficult version of the crossed diagonals. The "X" appears to be positioned very close to the center of the canvas dividing it in four almost at the corners. Since he structured the painting primarily by the modulated color patch rather than the "geology" of the crossed diagonals, it is the concentric pattern mediated by hue that unifies the strongly contrasting forms.

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the earth in the foreground, the Baroque forms in the trees. There is a concentric pattern revealed as a value phenomenon in spite of the bright colors in this painting. Its center is located on the group of three dark figures just a little to the right of the center of the canvas. The figures are surrounded with a lighter halo, modulated cool to warm. A larger dark ring exists below and to the left in the shapes of the earth, and the little hill covered with trees and topped by a building. The pattern is incomplete, describing about one-half of a circle. It is small and does not extend out to the edges of the painting.

Estienne calls the painting a "studied application of linear perspective. The vanishing point . . . is more like the painting's poetic center of gravity, the geometric point at which Gauguin enters into nature." Whatever he means by that. Charles Estienne, Gauguin (Lausanne: Skira, 1953), p. 62. The concentric pattern is so evident it can't be missed but this is a strange explanation of its significance.

Like Cézanne's A Street in Pontoise, Winter, the diagonals really are shifted so that they converge on a central locale, rather than a single point.
Fig. 49.—Gauguin.  Street in Tahiti

Fig. 50.—Cezanne.  Bend in the Road
In Street in Tahiti one clearly sees the concentric pattern appearing as a color phenomenon and a single complete pattern extending out to the periphery of the canvas.\textsuperscript{126} The center of the pattern is in the neighborhood of a bright red spot, probably a flowering bush, which occurs about at the intersection of the crossed diagonals. Bright green and blue are the predominant colors. The concentric pattern appears because of warm passages in this cool ground—the yellow-green and dull orange in the lower right foreground and on the house, the violet-pink on the mountain in the upper left, the lighter green and bright pink in the lower left corner describe an almost perfect circle around its boundaries. The warmest tones are concentrated within this area. The green is modulated with yellow or orange so that it appears warmer and lighter than the green or blue in the periphery.

In this case, Gauguin appears to have taken the step to the sixth type of arrangement via the crossed diagonals rather than the diagonal spiral arrangement. That this arrangement also remained very useful to Cezanne all through his career is shown in Bend in the Road\textsuperscript{127} (Fig. 50) which reveals the similarity in structure of the two men's work.

In Noa Noa Gauguin's remarks about his first few months in Tahiti reveal a change in how he was working. "But the landscape with its violent, pure colors dazzled and blinded me. I was always uncertain; I was seeking, seeking... In the meantime it was so simple to paint

\:\textsuperscript{126} The pattern is very apparent in a color reproduction, but most ambiguous in a black and white reproduction.

\:\textsuperscript{127} 1900. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Bareiss.
things as I saw them; to put without special calculation a red close to a blue" (my italics).\textsuperscript{128} It is this disappearance of "calculation" that marks his work from now on. This quality seems to be the earmark of the painter who has achieved the stage of being able to see the total relationship.

Function of Landscape in Gauguin's Mature Work

In Gauguin's work from 1891 on, one sees the gap between his invented work and that painted from the motif close. He can invent a very complex painting such as \textit{Ta Orana Maria} or paint from a complex motif using a full range of colors and achieve formal harmony.\textsuperscript{129} There seems to be a pair of opposite modes of expression between which he alternates. There is a flatter, more decorative mode using a broad modulation, a kind of "hard edge" painting, which is often seen in his figure works. In opposition, there is a more painterly, amorphous mode, full of subtle transitions, and smaller modulations which is often associated with the landscapes or figure-landscape compositions. The first mode is more likely to be found in a painting that was probably invented, the second in one which seems to be based on a motif from nature, often landscape. Examples of the first are \textit{Women of Tahiti},\textsuperscript{130} \textit{Ta Matete},\textsuperscript{131} and \textit{Maternity}.\textsuperscript{132}

\textsuperscript{128} Paul Gauguin, \textit{Noa Noa} (New York: Greenberg, 19--), pp. 30-31.
\textsuperscript{129} 1891. Metropolitan Museum, New York.
\textsuperscript{130} 1892. Cone Collection, Museum of Art, Baltimore.
\textsuperscript{131} 1892. Kunstmuseum, Basel.
\textsuperscript{132} 1896. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Edwin C. Vogel, New York.
Examples of the second are *The House of the Maori,* 133 *Haere No Tahiti,* 134 *Parau-Parau,* 135 and *Why Are You Angry.* 136 From this time on, Gauguin continued to structure the paintings either by the horizontal-vertical or the spiral arrangement most often. 137

Actually there is no real conflict between these two "styles." They suggest a method of search for richness, novelty and complexity, and then a clarification and simplification of this experience. Gauguin's more "decorative" paintings are never stereotyped, the pattern is fresh and has a quality of the unexpected. The vitality of it suggests the constant "replenishing" of his imagination from his experience of nature. The importance of the forms he observed in the South Seas landscape and flora, as well as the people becomes especially significant in both figure and landscape paintings. His love of the exotic countryside and plant forms seems related to the fact that these forms coincided with the way he saw the world—the world of forms of his imagination. In the Breton landscapes, for all their "primitiveness," I feel he forced the forms, that the whole tradition of French landscape painting before him, the work of the Impressionists, Corot and the Barbizon painters interfered

133 1891. Private collection, Rheinfelden, Switzerland.
134 1891. Minneapolis Institute of Art.
135 1892. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. John Hay Whitney, New York.
136 1896. The Art Institute of Chicago.
137 Goldwater comments on the two structural arrangements which dominate Gauguin's work. He calls the spiral arrangement a fluid curve and the horizontal and vertical arrangement a frieze-like arrangement. Goldwater, *Gauguin,* p. 128.
with his vision. The sober forms and subtle colors of that landscape yielded with less grace to his will to invent. Always searching for a more remote, primitive and exotic world seems related to getting back to the essential quality of his own nature, to his authentic feeling for form and color.

Although there remain certain vestiges of the old "geology" of the traditional landscape motifs in Gauguin's painting, he "lets go" of them much more than Seurat. In this particular, he is really more "modern" than either Seurat or Van Gogh. Although the exotic motif stimulated his imagination, a vital factor for invention was the structuring of the painting with the modulated color patch. Gauguin's concern with an expressive and mysterious quality in painting was also furthered by exotic subject matter. However, his color harmonies in themselves are a major factor in creating the feeling he sought. Although he

138 Gauguin did borrow from all sorts of sources in past traditions, Japanese prints, folk woodcuts, medieval stained glass, the "primitives" of the Renaissance, Javanese and Egyptian friezes, Indian and Greek art. This interest in sources other than the immediate European tradition is a "modern" characteristic where everything and anything becomes available to the artist. Naturally Gauguin chooses those that fit into his artistic theories. However, although he sometimes literally "lifts" a figure or pose from some of these sources, what he does with it in his painting is very different from the original. The identification of a figure in a painting as being taken from a piece of Javanese sculpture does little to explain the way he structures his painting or uses color.

Another modern characteristic in Gauguin's work is his unconventional use of materials, which seems particularly evident in his watercolors, drawings, woodcuts and sculpture. In these, one feels there is always a sensitivity to the characteristic of the materials and the tools used to work them. He exploits these characteristics for invention and expressive quality rather than concerning himself with traditional techniques. He was not unskilful; rather than adapting old techniques to his expression, he invented new ones utilizing potentialities of the material which had not yet been explored.
shifted between the more amorphous and a tighter construction, the amorphous quality most apparent in the landscapes was undoubtedly instrumental to his being able to make the transition to a color structure.
CHAPTER IV

KANDINSKY AND MONDRIAN: INTO NON-OBJECTIVE PAINTING VIA LANDSCAPE

In the work of the Post-Impressionists, the landscape motif had been used as a major means for moving toward abstraction in painting. Although each of the four men brought his painting along an individual path and, in varying degrees, they all approached the next logical step, that of creating a totally non-objective art, none of them took it. The two men who took this final step were Wassily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian. These pioneers of non-objective art in the early part of the twentieth century both made the transition to abstract painting while using the landscape motif almost exclusively.

Although Kandinsky and Mondrian's mature work presents a dramatic contrast in style, there were many parallels in their development as painters and their philosophical viewpoints that led them to the necessity of painting abstractly. Their earliest work was representational in the tradition of the nineteenth century before the Impressionists. As they assimilated the more contemporary trends in painting, both became concerned with investigating a more fundamental basis for painting and rejected representational painting as a superficial, materialistic expression. Generally Kandinsky is thought of representing

an expressive or Romantic tendency stemming from Van Gogh and Gauguin, whereas Mondrian represents the formal or Classical tendency related to the work of Cezanne and Seurat. One might suggest that a major factor for this difference in the feeling between the works of the two painters is in part related to the choice of contrasting modes of formal relationships as the underlying mode of structure in their paintings.

A close look at their early work reveals the parallels in their development, although at the time, they must not have been aware of each other's work.² Mondrian's early work was almost completely concerned with landscape; there are only a very few figure and still life paintings. Landscapes were also the major subject matter for Kandinsky, although he was also very interested in folk art, fairy tales, and religious subjects. With these subjects, he painted the figure in the landscape.

Kandinsky

Early Landscape Style Closely Related to Impressionism and Post-Impressionism

There is a distinct difference between the way Kandinsky treated his early landscapes and figure subjects. The figure subjects, usually done in woodcut or tempera, tend to be decorative; they are very closely related to Jugendstil and to the popular illustration of the day. Romantic subject matter—folk tales of Russia, medieval and religious subjects, North African scenes and Biedermeier figures—combined with a

²Ibid., p. 83. Kandinsky was not acquainted with Mondrian's work in 1911-12, when he published Concerning the Spiritual in Art. He was working non-objectively by this time, but Mondrian was still experimenting with Cubism.
decorative style and the graphic mediums made the relationship to illustration even more apparent. His landscapes, usually oil paintings, generally seem more closely related to the traditions of easel painting. They show, over a period of time, the influences of Impressionism (Monet), Post-Impressionism (Gauguin, Cezanne and Van Gogh), Neo-Impressionism and the Nabis. There are certain parallels to the development of the Fauve painters, although Kandinsky's concern with color is more for its expressive quality rather than its constructive nature. Munch and Böcklin, forerunners of the German Expressionists, must have also influenced Kandinsky. Although Kandinsky did use figures in the paintings that represent the transition to abstraction, his landscapes seem to be more instrumental in effecting the change. The continuity was via the landscape and the styles of painting which he associated with this genre.

Preferred Types of Arrangement in Early Landscapes

Most of Kandinsky's more traditional landscapes were done between 1901-1909 although he continued to paint such subjects even as late as 1920. The second type of arrangement (horizontal-diagonal) and the third type of arrangement (horizontal-vertical) predominate in the early years of this period. Toward the end of this phase of his development (1908-1909), especially after he went to Murnau, the fourth type of arrangement (crossed diagonals) and the fifth (diagonal spiral) became very common. With the fourth arrangement, he often used the subject of the receding

\[\text{As late as 1917, the painting on glass, With the Hobby Horse (USSR), is executed in this decorative "picture book" style. Itid., p. 405.}\]
village street; the steep diagonals and triangular or zig-zag shapes of the Bavarian Alps, Murnau's setting, also fit into this diagonal "geology." The mountain motif represented by such paintings as Winter \(^4\) and Bavarian Mountains with Village \(^5\) will appear in a much abbreviated almost shorthand treatment in the paintings of 1911-1913. Composition \(\text{IV}^6\) and Small Pleasures, \(^7\) although approaching non-objective painting, still have an echo of natural forms. Although one can find many examples of paintings in which the positional relationship is horizontal-vertical, the diagonal opposition or spiral relationship occurs most often in Kandinsky's work from this time forward whether it be the freer, more painterly work of the period of 1911-1921 or the later geometric style.

Kandinsky Formalizes the "Geology" of the Motif

Two landscape paintings of 1906 and 1908 show how the crossed diagonal arrangement becomes more formalized in Kandinsky's work. The first, The Park at St. Cloud (Fig. 51), is the traditional view down an alley of trees with the vanishing point positioned above and to the left of center on the canvas. \(^8\) The horizon is high. The foreground is of predominantly dark modulations of brown, red, and green with light patches of pale orange and yellow-green where the sun strikes the earth

\(^4\) 1909. Municipal Museum of Modern Western Art, Moscow.


\(^7\) 1913. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

\(^8\) 1906. Nina Kandinsky Collection, Paris.
or lawn. The dark green-black tree trunks and foliage stand out against a narrow ground of pale blue violet, distant trees. A pale orange band, a sunlit opening separates the foreground from the violet distance; a spot of the same color is located on the vanishing point between the alley of trees, a bright focal point. Although the technique of painting—thick bold dashes of pigment—is unconventional, the arrangement is structured with traditional geometric perspective. The color, richer and more intense than the Impressionists', is still derived from local color and the painting is structured by light and shade.

Street in Murnau (Fig. 52) of two years later shows a basic shift in viewpoint. The motif of the crossed diagonals is made very apparent by the bright yellow X shape modulated with pink which forms the road and one sunlit house. The road is viewed from above. Modulated bright blue, green, with touches of red on the houses, trees and distant sky form a cool ground for the bright yellow X. The red with which Kandinsky draws, as well as making shapes, seems to be the ultimate ground, as if the canvas itself were red. Although the color is very intense and arbitrary, the drawing flattened, emphasizing shape and the plane of the canvas, Kandinsky's color dynamics are still light-dark, the polarities being blue and yellow. Shapes, derived from objects or light and shade shapes, are delineated by a wandering decorative arabesque related to Jugendstil.

As in Seurat's paintings, the "geology" is formalized; edges of objects are a major means of creating relationships. It is evident here that meaning (descriptive or symbolic) determines form and color more than the

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Fig. 51.—Kandinsky. *Park at St. Cloud*

Fig. 52.—Kandinsky. *Street in Murnau*

Fig. 53.—Kandinsky. *First Non-objective Watercolor*
perceived formal relationships determine form and color. This tendency will always remain a major problem for Kandinsky. Nevertheless, the painting is a bold step in the direction of abstraction, subordinating the descriptive elements to expressive color and design. Kandinsky was creating a painting which is justified not by its likeness to nature, but its own existence.

Structure via the Color Modulation Accompanies the Fifth Type of Arrangement

The fifth type of arrangement, diagonal-spiral and the appearance of the concentric pattern as a value phenomenon, becomes quite evident in Kandinsky's work of 1910 in many of the semi-abstract landscapes such as View of Murnau with a Church, Autumn Study, and Church. His use of the modulated color pastiche and contour line evolved during the period from 1909 to 1911 in a sequence that recalls similar developments in the work of the Post-Impressionists. As in the work of the earlier men, both the type of compositional arrangement and the new mode of applying the color seem essential factors in making the shift to color structured, abstract painting.

Kandinsky's practice of putting on the colors in little touches was related to Impressionism and Neo-Impressionism. In Blue Mountain of 1909, for example, he modulated solid areas predetermined by a contour with warm and cool tones of the same color, but rather than trying to achieve an effect of volume, he created a rich, decorative, tapestry-like

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11 Both in Gabriel Münter Foundation, Munich.
effect of dots and short strokes.\textsuperscript{12} By 1910-1911, the majority of the strokes, larger and broader, arranged mostly in one direction, were diagonal slashes downward from right to left. Examples of this use of the paint patch may be seen in \textit{Church} and \textit{Romantic Landscape}.\textsuperscript{13} Black lines often edged the forms in the work of 1909 and early 1910, but gradually the color shapes expanded in size; they were no longer determined by the contour. Color forms the shape. Line was set free to function as independent tone and accent.

\textbf{First Non-objective Painting Is "All-Ground" Concentric}

By the time Kandinsky did his first non-objective painting, a watercolor of 1910 (Fig. 53), free color shapes spotted on a white ground are accented and accompanied by pen lines.\textsuperscript{14} Two major linear movements, one diagonal and angular rising from the lower left corner toward the right and returning, the second curving down from the upper left and turning back, create a large, slightly flattened circular shape in the right half of the canvas. Free form color shapes are ranged along these pathways as if they were filings aligned by a magnetic field. The arrangement is a double concentric pattern. The major center is a form of red and blue located below and to the right of the middle of the canvas. This is surrounded with a light area followed by an arrangement

\textsuperscript{12}Guggenheim Museum, New York.

\textsuperscript{13}1911. Stadische Galerie, Munich.

of light blue forms in a ring; beyond this the color of the forms shifts from green to yellow. At the top on the right side of the painting is a constellation of warm spots, orange and red. The secondary concentric pattern, more truly circular, is to the left and overlaps the first. Its center is formed of a light brown splotch punctuated by a center of black and surrounded by a light blue "doughnut." The center is smaller and lighter in tone than the major focal form; the forms making up its "planets" are cooler and more neutral, with browns, greys, blues and greens in ascendancy. The painting is dominantly warm on the right side and cool on the left. A concentric, double concentric or spiral arrangement appears again and again in Kandinsky's work from this time forward. Sometimes one finds the concentric pattern combined with crossed diagonals.

Perhaps one of the most complex and monumental paintings structured by the "all-ground" arrangement, and which must have had its prototype in the watercolor discussed above, is Composition VII (Fig. 57). There are a large number of studies for it--drawings, watercolors, and oil sketches. A pencil sketch (Fig. 54) indicates schematically the major directional lines of force. There is a flattened ovoid shape moving diagonally from lower left to upper right. This form serves as a path of orbit for several sketchy shapes. Opposition to the major direction is indicated by lines crossing it, a cluster of marks in the upper left corner and a concave curve in the lower right. Kandinsky

15 1913. Tretiakoff Gallery, Moscow.
16 1913. Stadtisches Galerie, Munich.
Fig. 54.—Kandinsky. Pencil Sketch for Composition VII

Fig. 55.—Kandinsky. Watercolor for Composition VII
marks the center with an X, the eventual position of the focal point. A watercolor\textsuperscript{17} (Fig. 55) and an oil sketch\textsuperscript{18} (Fig. 56) preserves the dominant diagonal movement, the secondary opposition and the focal point in the vicinity of the center of the canvas.

The final version has two large concentric patterns and a smaller third locale. The focal point of the dominant pattern is located to the left of the center of the canvas. Sharpest articulation of forms, the greatest light-dark contrast and the most intense colors occur in this area. The concentric pattern is slightly longer on its vertical axis. Forms are more amorphous, colors more neutral and the tone is of middle value on the periphery of the canvas. There is a secondary concentric pattern which overlaps the first in part. Its center is a pale blue spot in the lower right quarter of the canvas. As the major pattern has a dark center, the secondary one has a light one. Red, violet, dark blue, black and white predominate in the major concentric pattern; red spots mark its boundaries. Green, yellow, pale blue, and white are the major hues in the second pattern; pale blue occurs on its limits. This pattern is almost circular. The largest ground is a low intensity orange. The third pattern occurs in the upper left quarter of the canvas; it is only about one-half the diameter of the larger patterns and appears as dominantly light with a small dark center. Although the diagonal elements remain, they are no longer dominant but seem to be brought into balance by the circular energies. Composition VII is, in essence, structured

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17}1913. Stadtisches Galerie, Munich.
\item \textsuperscript{18}1913. Felix Klee Collection, Berne.
\end{itemize}
Fig. 56. — Kandinsky. *Oil Sketch, Composition VII*

Fig. 57. — Kandinsky. *Composition VII*
just the reverse of the first abstract watercolor with the major focal point to the left instead of the right of center.

The function of the landscape as promoting abstraction in Kandinsky's work is observed by Grohmann.

The landscapes Kandinsky calls "Improvisations" occupy a special place in his work of the transitional period 1910-1912. They come closest to the ideas developed in On the Spiritual in Art. The strict canon of the human figure is less amenable to new conceptions than the landscape which can be treated with greater freedom.

In Composition IV, for example, the forms, though vague, are suggestive of mountains, trees, horsemen, figures and a rainbow, yet "without the help of the landscape, they would be impossible to identify." In Composition VII "forms . . . take on an independent existence without reference to natural models." Although shapes have a clear form character, it would be stretching the imagination to try to identify specific objects.

In Kandinsky's later "geometric" style, one finds that symbolism of form and color tends to make him "object centered," even though there are no objects in the sense of landscape, figures or still life. In some cases geometric shapes have an almost hieroglyphic quality. One feels that the forms are often chosen because theoretically they ought to function in a certain way, but visually they don't. He changes from field structured to essentially object centered painting. It is a lack of an integrated figure-ground relationship that mars many of his later works.

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20 Ibid., p. 122.
In the free, painterly work springing out of the landscape (1910-1921), he intuitively solves the problem of unity much more often.

Mondrian

Preferred Compositional Arrangements in Mondrian’s Early Landscapes

If, in Kandinsky’s work, the fourth and fifth schemas emerge as those used most often in the final steps to the sixth arrangement and non-objective painting, in Mondrian’s case—quite in keeping with his convictions and temperament—one finds the first and third schemas his preference. Although Mondrian’s gradual narrowing down of the elements of painting to what he considered basic took a long time evolving, the predilection for a horizontal or horizontal-vertical relationship was evident even in his earliest work. Mondrian always considered himself a “realist.” His early paintings such as Landscape near Amsterdam (Fig. 58), like Van Gogh, continue the tradition of the landscape painters Mauve and Israels, the Dutch followers of the Barbizon school. At this stage he had a preference for “large outlines,” “cows resting or standing immovable on flat Dutch meadows. . . . I never painted romantically. . . .”

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21 It does not seem too far-fetched to see some positive relationship between the landscape-environment and a predilection for certain dominant relationships in the painting of both men, i.e., Mondrian’s flat Dutch landscape and this horizontal-vertical relationship and Kandinsky’s jagged Alps and the crossed diagonals.


In Mondrian's earliest paintings, one is always aware of the consistent drive to structure his paintings formally. Thus the "geology" of his early works—the large basic divisions of the picture into simple areas—is very clear. Even his most "realist" paintings make the types of arrangement very apparent. From the beginning one can see Mondrian choosing subjects which presented variations on the horizontal or horizontal-vertical relationship. Favorite subjects, usually distant motifs, which use the first type of arrangement stressing the horizontals, are flat fields, river landscapes, the dunes, and the sea. Occasionally he used the diagonal positioning of the second and fourth types of arrangement, but almost always the diagonals are low, approaching the horizontal and thus minimizing the angular relationships. Often a long, narrow horizontal format was used in these paintings. A more equal balance of horizontal and vertical elements utilizing the third type of arrangement is seen in the middle distance motifs of trees, woods, hayricks and cottages or farmhouses set in trees. Mondrian often used reflections in the water which permitted the continuation of the verticals into the foreground. A third group of subjects also uses the third type of arrangement but stresses the vertical elements. In this group Mondrian painted windmills, the lighthouse, church towers and façades. With these subjects he preferred a vertical format. However, subject matter does not always determine the dominant positional relationship. In *Mill on a River* the structure is essentially horizontal bands of light and dark; the small distant mill is a tiny dark vertical mass in the center of the canvas, but this vertical opposition is quite secondary to the major movement.  

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24 1900. S. B. Slijper Collection, Blaricum.
Fig. 58.—Mondrian. 
Landscape Near Amsterdam

Fig. 59.—Mondrian. 
Sea at Sunset

Fig. 60.—Mondrian. River Amstel in Evening
A variation of the predominantly horizontal bands appears in a work of 1907, *The River Amstel in the Evening* (Fig. 60). Here one finds the concentric pattern appearing with its focal point at the center of the canvas and the outer "bands," the horizontals at the top and bottom of the painting being curved up and down to follow the curve of the pattern. This adaption of the first type of arrangement appears more formalized and simplified in the sea and dune paintings of 1909-1910 such as *Sea at Sunset* (Fig. 59), *Beach Near Domberg*, and *Dune*. Ultimately this composition is the basis of his sketches and paintings of 1914 in which the sea or the pier and ocean motif is reduced to short lines in a horizontal-vertical position, the so-called plus and minus paintings. In the charcoal drawing, *The Sea* (Fig. 61), the major geology, horizontal bands, has disappeared. However, weight of lines together with the position of the plus and minus marks create value and brightness nuances in which one may discern the concentric pattern. The oval format, the light tone at the edges of the form enhance the pattern. The similarity of form to the structure is quite obvious. *The Sea* is Mondrian's black and white version of the all-ground, the sixth type of arrangement, in which the geology has been replaced by the color patch (black plus or minus).

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25 S. B. Slijper Collection, Blaricum.
27 1909. S. B. Slijper Collection, Blaricum.
28 1910. S. B. Slijper Collection, Blaricum.
29 1914. Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice.
Such motifs as *The Lighthouse at Westkapelle*\(^{30}\) or *Church Tower at Domberg*,\(^{31}\) the third type of arrangement in which the vertical element is dominant, undergo a similar evolution. These subjects gradually evolve into vertical panels structured by the plus and minus forms. The vertical oval format and concentric pattern is evident in *Church Façade of 1914* (Fig. 66), in which the double pointed curve just above center is the one remaining vestige of the Gothic windows in the original sketches.\(^{32}\)

**The Amorphous Motif Instrumental to the Sixth Type of Arrangement**

Before Mondrian reached the stage of the "plus and minus" paintings of 1914, one finds him using the motif of trees for his major subject matter for about two years.\(^{33}\) The amorphous motif of a close view of woods, group of trees, or a single tree had been a favorite subject for Mondrian from the beginning. These were the motifs that Mondrian used most often in the first more typically Cubist paintings of 1912-1913 which form a bridge from his "Fauve" period to that particular personal form of Cubism that one sees in his later works. An analysis of his color and structure in a series of paintings utilizing this motif

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\(^{32}\) Charcoal drawing, Harry Holtzmann Collection, New York.

\(^{33}\) From 1911-1913 he rarely used the sea-dune motif. The façade or tower motif is equally scarce in 1911-1912; he starts to use it again in 1913.
demonstrates Mondrian's consistency and clarity in solving the problems involved in structuring a painting by hue contrast.34

Mondrian began to experiment with a more brilliant palette moving out of a light-shade dynamic as early as 1904. By 1909-1911, various contemporary influences (Van Gogh, Van Dongen, the Neo-Impressionists and the Fauves) were evident in his brilliant, intense and often primary color harmonies.

The first thing to change in my painting was color. I forsook natural color for pure color. I had come to feel that the colors of nature cannot be reproduced on canvas. I felt painting had to find a new way to express the beauty of nature.35

The Red Tree36 (Fig. 62), one of a series of apple trees, and Mill in Sunlight37 are examples of his use of brilliant color. In both works one sees the use of a broad patch of paint. Mondrian makes a hue operate as both figure and ground, a powerful means for unifying the painting even though at this time he was still involved with representing the object.

In The Red Tree, the figure would logically be the tree. Mondrian, painting it broadly in the beginning, defines it by cutting back the red with the blue ground. Red, orange, and yellow as well as spots of bare white canvas show through the blue sky in such a manner that one feels there is a warm ground underlying the blue. The red on

34 From the beginning Mondrian's use of color as a constructive means was more secure than Kandinsky's. For all that Mondrian might have ascribed symbolic meaning to color, one feels that he did not let this meaning interfere with the formal harmony of his painting.

35 Mondrian, Plastic Art, p. 10.


Fig. 61.—Mondrian. The Sea

Fig. 62.—Mondrian. The Red Tree

Fig. 63.—Mondrian. Horizontal Tree
the tree functions as both figure and ground, for it is both under and on
top of the blue. There is a climax of intensity on the main trunk of the
tree; concentration of warm color in the lower left quarter of the paint-
ing, where the red trunk is positioned, creates a bright locale, enhanced
by cooler blues and violets in the remainder of the painting. Some of
the purples are almost black. Although Mondrian uses these darks for
drawing, he never encloses a form with a contour, but uses line to accent
a form freely. The amount of dark and white are a minimum. The reds and
blues are so close in value that hue difference is the most powerful
means of contrast.

The metamorphosis of Red Tree to a more abstract expression by
means of numerous drawings and paintings demonstrates Mondrian's growing
conviction that the logical outcome of Cubism was the making explicit of
the formal relationship of the elements of painting.\(^\text{38}\) Color becomes
limited and subdued, description yields increasingly to the relationship
of forms.

In Horizontal Tree (Fig. 63) the reference to the apple tree is
still specific in the sense of the general disposition of the forms, but
rather than a depiction of trunk, branches, and twigs, one sees an essen-
tially linear distillation of the size, direction and rhythmic movement
of the tree.\(^\text{39}\) Mondrian still used curved forms in the tree, but instead
of the more homogenous ground of patches of modulated color as in Red
Tree, he differentiated the grey-green ground from the tree form by

\(^{38}\) Mondrian, Plastic Art, p. 10.

\(^{39}\) 1911. Collection of Munster-Williams-Proctor Institute, New
York.
horizontal and vertical linear accents, anticipating the "plus and minus" paintings. Only occasionally do the curvilinear rhythms of the tree occur in the ground. The palette is limited to cools (greys, grey-green and black), a warm (violet-pink) and white. In the ground, the grey-green is modulated light and dark with white. Sometimes the linear accents are "on top," sometimes Mondrian paints over them with a lighter tone. He creates an interweaving on the surface of crisp accents of line over color patch or blurred accents diffused under the color. The ground has a transparent quality. The fluctuation of the figure-ground character of patch and accent is a factor promoting the formal unity of the work. The greatest contrasts of color, the clearest articulation of forms appears in the center of the canvas on the black and pink tree; the periphery fades out, anticipating the oval format. Essentially structured by a value dynamic, Horizontal Tree still has a cool-warm relationship although hue contrast is not as critical as in Red Tree. Horizontal Tree is more unified as far as the figure-ground relationship than its predecessor. The concentric pattern is very evident in it.

During 1912-1913, Mondrian continued to use the subject of trees many times. The reference to the subject becomes remote in Flowering Trees⁴⁰ (Fig. 64) and Composition 3 (Trees).⁴¹ In both, he uses a limited palette, but retains a cool-warm dynamic. The color range—pale grey-violet, blue and ochre, black and white in the first, and shades of


Fig. 64.—Mondrian. *Flowering Trees*

Fig. 65.—Mondrian. *Oval Composition*
orange-brown, grey-blue and pink in the second—for all its subdued quality, seems more hue oriented than the classical Cubist works of Picasso and Braque of the same period. Flowering Trees has three concentric locales, one each in the lower left and right quarters of the painting and a third centered above them. Oval Composition (Fig. 65) is again based on trees. Here curved and angular movements still remain, but the use of "stairs" to create angular directions and the positioning of the brush strokes in a predominantly horizontal direction again reveals Mondrian's predilection for the horizontal-vertical relationship. It was in sketches of trees in 1912-1913 that Mondrian first used the oval format after which he began using it in the façade and sea/dune motifs.

From 1913 on, Mondrian began to use a more intense palette again, although it is not until about 1920-1921 that he would finally limit his palette to the three primaries in full intensity. In Oval Composition with Bright Colors (Fig. 67), he uses bright pink, orange and blue together with black and white. Here the horizontal-vertical relationship of the black lines is dominant. The colored planes are still not firmly defined rectangles; the linear accents overlap the edges of the

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42 Both the Cubists and Mondrian evidently limited their palettes and used a value dynamic as they moved into abstraction because it simplified the formal problems in the difficult early stages.

43 1913. Dr. H. P. Bremmer Collection, The Hague.

44 The oval format appears first in the charcoal drawing for Oval Composition, mentioned above (1912, S. P. Slijper Collection, Blaricum). Trees, a charcoal drawing (1913, Sidney Janis Collection, New York) uses the oval format horizontally.

Fig. 66.--Mondrian. Church Façade

Fig. 67.--Mondrian. Oval Composition with Bright Colors
planes and are often not closed but broken. However, the forms in this work, probably based on the church façade, are more defined than the paintings of trees. Pink and orange shapes congregate around a central light area punctuated by a bright blue form. The bright blue planes predominate beyond this grouping of warm shapes. In this zone are concentrated the black accents, the planes being smaller or broken up by the lines. Forms become more amorphous, accents thin and colors are greyed near the boundaries of the oval; beyond it the canvas is a light greyed blue. The sequence of colors from center to edge of the canvas is warm to cool and can be read as the emergence of the concentric pattern as a hue contrast phenomenon.

Paintings in the same vein as Oval Composition with Bright Colors along with the "plus and minus" compositions in black and white occupied Mondrian between the years of 1913-1917. It took several stages between 1917-1921 before he evolved his mature style. He used independent colored rectangles positioned on a white ground, checkerboard grids of soft shades of red, yellow, blue, grey and white and compositions in greyed tones in which line determined the rectangles and the planes became larger. The paintings became severely rectilinear and "hard edge"; gradually the colors brightened. "... Feeling the lack of unity, I brought the rectangles together. Space became white, black or grey; forms became red, yellow or blue."  

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The Sixth Type of Arrangement in Mondrian's Mature Style

The use of the horizontal-vertical relationship is a constant leitmotif in Mondrian's work. Mondrian shifted from using large, broad, simple forms arranged in this relationship in his early landscape work, to structuring the smallest unit, the paint patch and linear accent, each a microcosmic part of his painting, horizontally and vertically. The sixth type of arrangement, "all-ground," is the mode of structuring the paintings from ca. 1911-1917 during which time the large geology of the landscape motif becomes secondary to the pastiche or the "systematized" plus-minus mark which is organized perceptually. Before 1917, the horizontal-vertical relationship is not "pure" in that Mondrian includes curves, angles, amorphous forms and references to subject matter. In the mature style he returns to the positioning of large, simple forms, broad color areas analogous to his earliest work, but without references to "visible reality." He had abstracted from the third type of arrangement its most essential positional relationship, formalized and stated it in terms of the clearest contrasts of form, color and value.

Emergence of the concentric pattern through nuances created either by value or hue contrast occurs most often in the "all-ground" paintings (1911-1917), but it can also be seen occasionally as a value phenomenon in his earlier chiaroscuro and "Fauve" periods. Although the paintings have a highly integrated figure-ground relationship, severity and simplicity generally rule against the appearance of the concentric pattern in Mondrian's mature style. Yet Mondrian's long experience with a more amorphous motif was obviously instrumental to achieving a high level of
unity with a minimum of means. Although he finished the paintings with an almost mechanical precision, he proceeded tentatively, solving the problem as he said, "plastically"—one might say "by eye"—rather than any intellectualized or measured formula. Evidence of this is the thick paint (much overpainting) and the many changes that are revealed in his unfinished works. Thus Mondrian's "hard edge" paintings still went through an amorphous stage in process.

Mondrian's evolution to abstraction shows a particularly clear, logical progression. His almost exclusive use of the traditional landscape arrangements as instrumental to this development tend to confirm that these types of arrangements and motifs had certain unique characteristics that promoted his development.
CHAPTER V

PERSISTENCE OF THE COMPOSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS OF LANDSCAPE PAINTING IN AMERICAN ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

After the early work of Kandinsky and Mondrian, it is difficult to find many of the more experimental painters of the 1920's-1930's directly involved with landscape as a subject. Generally those painters working in a style related to Cubism tended to use figure or still life most often as subject matter. Dufy and Vlaminck continued to paint landscapes in the Fauve tradition, but Matisse was most interested in the figure. The Surrealists and Paul Klee painted fantastic or dream landscapes. However, until the American Abstract Expressionist movement of the 1940's-1950's, landscape painting was not a major concern of most twentieth-century artists.

On first examination, many of the paintings of the Abstract Expressionists seem to be totally non-objective. Yet on closer examination, much of it has reference to the traditional subject matter of figure, landscape, and occasionally still life. The work of Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko especially has been likened to landscape. Neither man appears to be making explicit reference to landscape in that one finds recognizable motifs or the representation of "objects" such as trees, skies, and mountains in their paintings. The similarity between the abstractions of Pollock and Rothko and traditional landscape painting must be found in
the basic compositional arrangements, and certain characteristics of handling such as vagueness or an amorphous quality.

The work of Pollock and Rothko is not the only Abstract Expressionist work which is indirectly concerned with landscape. However, it presents an interesting pair of polar opposites in form and expression analogous to the work of Kandinsky and Mondrian. A key factor in this difference between Pollock's and Rothko's paintings is the choice of contrasting types of compositional arrangement as the basis of the paintings.

Kandinsky and Mondrian had used the motif of landscape as a means of moving into non-objective art because of the freedom it permitted. Pollock and Rothko were not faced with the same problem, since the initial shift to abstract art had been made. Although both of the men's work at first used imagery and many of their early paintings were landscapes, the problem is no longer one of tracing the course of their painting from representation to abstraction. One must examine the structural basis of their paintings to understand why these non-objective paintings have been likened to landscape.

Pollock

Sixth Type of Arrangement Dominant in Pollock's Mature Work

Pollock's very early work before 1937 was representational. The paintings are often moody and dramatic landscapes showing the influence

1Certainly both men were looking for new form and expression in painting, something going beyond "conventional" Cubism and Surrealism which were becoming clichés in the hands of the second and third generation painters.
of Thomas Hart Benton, his teacher, and Ryder, the one American painter for whom Pollock expresses admiration.

From about 1937 to 1946, Pollock's personal style was taking form. During this time he was digesting and recasting a number of contemporary influences--Picasso, Miro, the Mexicans (Orozco and Sequeiros), the automatism of the Surrealists and Indian sand painting. The subjects of figures, totems, animals, fables, myths and primitive art all were grist for his mill. It was not the literary aspects of the subject matter that primarily concerned him. At this time experiment with new techniques and exploitation of pictorial elements were the means by which he gave force and significance to his paintings.

It was in about 1946 that a new phase in Pollock's development emerged. Sam Hunter describes this as the "final commitment to abstraction." The monumental compositions of the period of 1946-1950, and those paintings in a similar vein which alternate with the ones that return to the imagery of the figure between 1951-1954 are often described as being totally non-objective. They are also the paintings that are usually likened by association to landscape. It is in these paintings, large field structure compositions, that one sees the reappearance of the sixth type of arrangement, the all-ground arrangement found in landscape painting.

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Emergent Configurations in Pollock's All-ground Structures

The ground character of his paintings is pointed out in Pollock's own remark. "My paintings do not have a center but depend upon the same amount of interest throughout." However, if this were taken as literally true—true in the sense that the paintings had an even overall texture, they would be of little interest to the viewer. Larger configurations are visible. In a sense there is a certain contradiction between the method of painting and the effect of many of Pollock's "landscapes." It is related to the size and scale of the painting. Drip, splatter, scrape and looping calligraphic line painted with great vigor and energy end up creating the subtlest of nuances. It is these nuances that create the larger configurations which emerge from the tangle of lines and splotches. These are the constellations without which his work would be a meaningless tangle.

In the emergent configurations in Pollock's "landscapes," subtle as they are, one can see vestiges of the horizontal-vertical, crossed diagonal and spiral types of compositional arrangements. Because of Pollock's rejection of "composition" and preplanning, he probably did not consciously set up his paintings with crossed diagonals or a spiral as a preliminary geology. As in late Cezanne landscapes, the big divisions of the canvas remain secondary to the smaller structural elements of the painting. These divisions must have emerged in process as an expression of a rhythmic set that the painter took to the work rather

than a predetermined, conceptualized layout. In Pollock's work, since one finds a continuity and consistency from the small elements to the large structure, it seems logical to surmise that with a very few initial marks, he could commit himself to a mode of structuring the painting which would forecast the final type of composition. A major difference between Pollock's and Kandinsky's work would be that, although Kandinsky "improvised" his lesser paintings, he preplanned his major compositions to a large extent. Pollock's approach to drawing or painting was the same spontaneous process. Yet, if Pollock made no conscious choice to adhere to a certain rhythmic motif in the small elements, there would not exist the contrasting modes of structure in his paintings which create the great variety one finds between his different works.

Pollock's landscapes also reveal the emergent concentric pattern either as a value or a hue phenomenon in many instances. Since the concentric pattern tends to appear more often in paintings using the all-ground type of structure, one could expect to find it fairly often in these large all-ground compositions.

An analysis of several of Pollock's paintings reveals the large underlying divisions of the canvas and the appearance of the concentric pattern. In Blue Poles (Fig. 68), for example, one sees the horizontal-vertical type of arrangement. Although the poles lean on slight diagonals, the dominant movement is vertical with horizontal "cross bars." If one studies the orientation of the drips and strokes, verticals and wavy horizontals emerge as the dominant elements in a fabric which

4 1953. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Ben Heller.
Fig. 68. — Pollock.  Blue Poles

Fig. 69. — Pollock.  Number 1, 1949
includes curves and diagonals. A comparison of this long horizontal panel with Vincent Van Gogh's Undergrowth (Fig. 45) is most revealing. The similarity in positioning of the large forms and structuring of the small marks is so striking it seems impossible not to see Blue Poles as suggesting the motif of "in the woods." A concentric pattern (incomplete because it is so large) appears with its center positioned just to the left of the center of the canvas on the fourth "pole" from the left. The dark "C" shape formed by the "trunk and branches" of the pole form a ground for its light center. Its limits, to the right, occur about two-thirds across the painting. Left of center the color is dominantly light-warm-yellow; right of center it is dark-cool-blue with the pole dividing the pattern vertically. This alteration of warm-cool is reversed at the periphery of the pattern. There is a smaller secondary locale with its center on a black blob on the "trunk" of the seventh pole.

Number 1, 1948⁵ (Fig. 70) and Number 6, 1949⁶ (Fig. 72) both have a single emergent concentric pattern centered in the canvas. Large crossed diagonals, an "X" extending to the corners, appear through the nuance of tone. In Lavender Mist crossed diagonals emerge, this time off center to the left.⁷ Number 12 of 1952 makes the same arrangement of crossed diagonals more explicit by means of clear, articulated color changes.⁸ Painting, 1948, from the Collection of M. Paul Fitchetti, has a

⁵The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

⁶Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Burton G. Tremaine, Jr., West Hartford, Connecticut.

⁷Collection of Alfonso Ossorio, East Hampton, Long Island.

Fig. 70.—Pollock. *Number 1, 1948*

Fig. 71.—Turner. *Snow Storm*
clearly apparent spiral arrangement. Number 1, 1949 (Fig. 69) has an almost uniform overall texture of white, black, red, blue, yellow and green line and spatter. On close examination one perceives that it is divided vertically into two unequal portions by a tone and color change. In the left and wider portion, cool and dark (blue and black) are stronger. On the right, red, yellow and white are in the ascendancy. In each portion one can discern a concentric pattern with a dark center; blue is dominant in the left; red makes the right-hand pattern appear.

Ground Character of Pollock's Paintings Suggest Landscape

The major argument for calling Pollock's large field structured abstractions landscapes has been based on the similarity in composition to traditional landscape painting. However, it is not the large structure alone, but the relatively small forms and amorphous character of the paintings that create a landscape-like feeling. Although the imagery of the figure in later paintings (1951-1954) is not so specific as the earlier figurative works, they are easily differentiated from the landscape abstractions because of the larger, bolder shapes and more abrupt light-dark contrasts; the "landscapes" are more amorphous, more purely ground.

Pollock's paintings do not suggest the conventional picturesque landscape motifs. Rather they suggest complex vague aspects, the ground motifs which appear in natural landscape—forests, stars, clouds, grass and stones, water, waves, mists and reflections. Pollock himself reveals

Fig. 72.—Pollock.  Number 6, 1949
his interest in this aspect of landscape through the titles he gives many of the works. Although he simply numbers some of them, others have names such as *Autumn Rhythms*, *Lavendar Mist*, *Ocean Greyness*, *Moon Vibrations*, *The Deep* and *Full Fathom Five*, all suggestive of ground motifs. Pollock probably named the works after he painted them. Nevertheless the titles reflect associations with landscape motifs that the paintings must have aroused in their author. These associations are not Pollock’s alone for another painter writing about his works notes,

> His work may be thought of as coming from landscape and even the movement of the stars—with which he seems almost intimate at times—yet it does not depend on representing these, but rather on creating an image as resulting from contemplation of a complex universe at work, as though to make his own world of reality and order.¹⁰

Further evidence for Pollock’s using the landscape as a basis for his abstractions may be found in his biography, his interest in landscape paintings and his own early work. He was born in Wyoming, brought up in Arizona and California where he worked out of doors. After his successes in New York, he moved out into the country again on Long Island. Goodnough remarks,

> He made long trips across the country, riding freight trains or driving a Model A Ford, developing a keen awareness of vast landscape and open sky. Pollock loves the outdoors and has carried . . . into his painting a sense of freedom experienced before endless mountains and plains.¹¹

¹⁰ Goodnough, "Pollock," p. 60. My own experience of seeing a "live" Pollock came when looking through a maze of bare tree branches on a winter morning. Color and form was so strikingly similar to some of his paintings, I could be easily convinced he almost "copied" nature.

Of all earlier American painting, the only works that Pollock expresses an admiration for are the Romantic landscapes of Ryder. In his own earliest painting, one finds echoes of Ryder. Although Hunter calls Pollock's works non-objective, he notes that "... there remains more than a casual relationship between [such works as Landscape with Rider, 1933, Seascape, 1934, and The Flame, 1934] and ... Pollock's first consistently abstract painting of 1945 ... Shimmering Substance."\(^{13}\)

**Rothko**

Rothko Uses the First Type of Arrangement in His Mature Painting

As Kandinsky and Mondrian present complementary moods which are related, in part, to the type of compositional arrangements that they utilized, Pollock's painting is complemented by that of Mark Rothko. Where in Pollock's work one most often sees the sixth type of arrangement with vestiges of the third, fourth and fifth types, in Rothko's paintings after 1949 one sees the first type of arrangement, the horizontal bands.

It would seem to be a gross oversimplification to call Rothko's paintings landscapes. Like Mondrian, he tended to eliminate from his work any reference which might interfere with the viewer's appreciation of the painting for what it was visually. His work seems demuded of all

\(^{12}\)All in the Collection of Lee Krasner Pollock, Springs, L.I.

literary associations. Nevertheless the motif of landscape concerned him during his early development, and in the comments by writers and critics about his mature paintings the analogy to landscape keeps reappearing.

Rothko's paintings in the forties did suggest landscape-like formats in which biomorphic forms or "forms which resembled waving grasses or submarine vegetal life" flourished. An example of the biomorphic forms is seen in Vessals of Magic (Fig. 73). Ragged, soft-edged, free shapes no longer suggesting any specific objects as are presented in Number 24, evoked a description that likens them to "burnt-out, scorched lava rocks" rising "from the sea when it recedes at low tide."

Rothko's shift into the broad horizontal colored bands in about 1949 represented the reduction of his paintings to an apparently simple structural relationship, which he has been able to utilize for the past sixteen years with a great variety of moods and expressions. Color is allowed to operate in a particularly pure manner in this reduced-to-its-simplest formal arrangement. Goossen has referred to Rothko's compositional format as an "omnibus image." Shape and position established,

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16 1947, owned by the artist.


18 Goossen, Rothko, p. 40.
endless variation is possible through choice of color and the adjustment of the size of the color planes.

The limitations of the format that Rothko chooses does not pre-determine in any given painting the actual size, or positioning, of the colored rectangles. He could not create these canvases by drawing the boundaries and filling in the rectangles. Probably the ultimate colored ground on which he positions the forms is a clue to the general hue range. His work must involve trial, revisions and subtle adjustments to attain a balance between the precise hues that he uses and the size of any given color plane. Thus the actual hue, size and shape relationship is emergent.

Consistency between the Small Elements of Structure (Brushwork) and the Type of Compositional Arrangement

The contrast between Pollock's and Rothko's work is not only determined by the difference in the types of compositional arrangement. The same kind of contrast is seen in the way in which the paint is put on the canvas. Where Pollock's brushwork is vital, energetic, a record of the painter's gesture as he painted, Rothko's brushwork gives the observer very few clues as to how the paint got on the canvas. The effect is "quiet." However, to describe Rothko's brushwork as "quiet" is a relative term. In relation to Pollock's, it is. In relation to Mondrian's flatly painted canvases, it is full of internal nuances, changes, ragged edges, thin hazy scumbled areas and thick dense matt passages. The underlying ground showing through and the subtle variety in the modulation of the colored rectangles unifies and creates a richness which could not be achieved by painting in a flat, mechanical manner.
Number 10 (Fig. 74) demonstrates Rothko's essentially amorphous handling of paint. The canvas is longer on the vertical axis and very large, about five by eight feet. The largest color field is a dark blue with a violet cast. The lower section of the painting is a light blue-green, the center section a slightly wider rectangle of rich yellow. Where the two meet at the "horizon," the darker ground with the reddish element of the violet more visible creates a fuzzy boundary. The reddish tone is also apparent in a narrow ill-defined band just above the yellow rectangle. It appears as if the red had bled from the blue violet, then gradually faded out to let the white of the canvas show just on the periphery of the yellow form. The greatest expanse of the blue-violet field appearing above the yellow is overpainted with a narrow band of white at the top of the canvas. There is an ambiguity created by this overpainted band of white and the white that is created by the canvas showing through at the top of the yellow form. This switch creates a shift in the relationship of the blue-violet band. It appears alternately on top (figure) and underneath (ground) as one shifts attention downwards. This same ambiguous relationship is created on the right margin where the blue-violet appears to overlap the blue-green field.

Compositional Arrangement the Basis of the Analogy to Landscape Motif

The recurring ideas of light and space as experienced before a panoramic landscape appear again and again in the literature that tries to describe the effect of Rothko's large canvases. Herbert Crehan at

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first suggests the effect is that of light coming through a cathedral window, then adds that the paintings create the "illusion of a continuous expansion into a created space no longer earthbound, but galactic in its vistas... A Rothko painting is almost a resuscitation of the ancient image of a vision... the Biblical image of the heavens opening up and revealing a celestial light." Goldwater chides Peter Selz for seeing in the paintings "the symbolic action of storm clouds gathering on an enormous horizon." Such "literary fancies relax the visual hold of these canvases, filter their immediacy." However literary these "fancies" might be, my own response on first seeing an exhibit of Rothko's paintings in the Museum of Modern Art in New York was, after a few puzzled moments, to designate them landscapes or seascapes, transformed by the different effects of light one experiences at various times of day. Rothko does not try to imitate the light effect; he evokes it through the relationships of color. Although it does not seem necessary to explain Rothko's work in these terms, the occurrence of the analogy to landscape seems difficult to escape. The general agreement that Rothko's paintings create an environment is just another argument in favor of the analogy.

The similarity in structure and mood to landscape painting of the works of Pollock, Still, Rothko and Newman has been pointed out by Robert

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22 At the time I saw the paintings, I was totally unfamiliar with Rothko's work and cannot recall that I had read anything about them.
Fig. 73—Rothko. Vessels of Magic

Fig. 74—Rothko. Number 10

Fig. 75—Rothko. White and Greens over Blue
Rosenblum in a discussion of the "abstract sublime." Rosenblum, in a reexamination of the concept of the sublime—that emotion of awe, terror, boundlessness and divinity which was a major concern of the Romantic writers and critics—Burke, Reynolds, Kant, Diderot and Delacroix—finds a similarity in the feeling one experiences before nature, the monumental nineteenth-century landscape paintings of such subjects and the work of a number of the Abstract Expressionists. That which evokes the emotion of the sublime, he suggests, are space, size, a boundless infinite quality, and vagueness (the ill-defined character of the amorphous and therefore mysterious), many of those qualities that have been associated with the landscape motif. Along with a gigantic format, he finds either "bewildering structure, a boundless void or a teeming unleashed power" attributes of both nineteenth-century Romantic landscapes and twentieth-century Abstract Expressionist paintings. In demonstrating what he means by these terms, Rosenblum compares three sets of paintings. "A boundless void" is seen in J. M. W. Turner's Evening Star, Caspar David Friedrich's Monk by the Sea (1890) and Rothko's Light, Blue and Earth. These three works use the first type of arrangement, the horizontal bands. The sixth type of arrangement, all-ground and concentric, falls into his category of "teeming, unleashed power." Here he compares Turner's Snow

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24 Scale is indicated in the nineteenth-century paintings by the inclusion of tiny figures or animals—the monk meditating by the sea in Friedrich's work. The size of Pollock's and Rothko's paintings often more than twice as big as Friedrich's already large canvases need no internal cue to scale. The viewer takes the place of the monk. Ibid., p. 40.
Storm (1848) (Fig. 71) with Pollock's Number 1, 1948 (Fig. 70). In the category of "bewildering structure" are the paintings of James Ward, Gordale Scar and Clifford Still, 1956-D. Beyond the obviously similar character of the shapes in these last two works, they both are structured by the third type of arrangement, the horizontal-vertical arrangement.\(^{25}\)

Rosenblum is making his categories in terms of meaning, but the fact that he differentiates three of the formal categories proposed in this study and traces their continuity from nineteenth-century landscape paintings into Abstract Expressionism of the twentieth century tends to confirm the writer's viewpoint that the types of arrangements traditionally used in landscape painting still do persist in contemporary abstract art.

\(^{25}\) If the Still is turned upside down, the similarity of arrangement of the light dark pattern to that in Ward's painting is even more striking. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
CONCLUSION

The major difference between the form in twentieth-century painting and that of the nineteenth century is the inclusion of color as a structural pictorial element. In order to attain a high degree of formal unity in a work in which color is an integral pictorial element, it became necessary to move from representation to abstraction, since color shape could no longer be determined by the object shape. It seems logical that painters involved in effecting these formal changes would show a preference for a motif which permitted the greatest degree of freedom in terms of shape structure, and in which a high degree of abstraction could be tolerated by both the artist and the viewer.

This study of landscape painting points to certain positive relationships between the genre and the solution to certain formal problems generated by trying to include color in pictorial structure. Landscape offered painters types of compositional arrangements together with forms of an amorphous and yielding character which more easily permitted the distortion and abstraction that was necessary to attain a formal unity in color structured paintings.

Key painters who were among the leaders in making the change to color structure used landscape as a major subject matter category. In the work of the Post-Impressionist artists, the landscape paintings generally show a greater degree of abstraction and a higher level of integration of color as a structural element than their still-life or figure paintings
of the same period. This tendency is clearest in the work of Cezanne, but is still quite evident in the work of the other three men, Seurat, Van Gogh and Gauguin. The validity of the association of greater freedom and abstraction with the landscape genre is borne out by my studies of the work of Mondrian and Kandinsky. Mondrian almost exclusively used compositions derived from landscape during the time he moved into color structured non-objective painting. Kandinsky's involvement with landscape far outstripped his concern for other subject matter at the period he was moving into non-objective painting.

Analysis of the formal structure of paintings by two recent Abstract Expressionists, Pollock and Rothko, reveals that these men are still using types of compositional arrangements that had been associated with landscape painting. The abstract basis of the compositional arrangements is more apparent in their work, and the reference to nature is more tenuous than in that of the earlier men. However, their paintings continue to suggest landscape subjects to the viewer because they use the type of field compositions that are associated with landscape. Both men are much concerned with color as a structural pictorial element. The use of compositional arrangements derived from landscape suggest that these arrangements still offer certain advantages in promoting formal unity in a color structured work.

A specific examination of landscape compositions revealed that some types of compositional arrangements tended to be more useful than others in promoting pictorial unity. After categorizing the formal arrangements traditionally used in landscape painting as six basic types and arranging them in an order from more simple to more complex, it was
possible to analyze the work of the eight painters studied on the basis of their use of these formal arrangements. This analysis revealed—

1. That, in the work of those painters studied, there was a relationship between the use of certain types of composition and their level of development in terms of using color structurally. The sequence in which they used the compositions was also critical. They used the more simple arrangements oftener in their earlier and less realized work. The more complex arrangements tended to dominate in their mature and more fully integrated work.

2. That the appearance of the concentric pattern mediated by color (a sign of a high degree of integration of color in the pictorial structure) tends to be associated with the use of the more complex compositions.

3. That the integration of color into pictorial structure and the appearance of the concentric pattern mediated by color will generally be accompanied by a greater degree of distortion and abstraction, but that the underlying formal relations of the types of composition associated with landscape continue to persist even in non-objective art.

Even within landscape painting which is primarily concerned with ground motifs and compositions, some motifs and compositions are more open, complex and amorphous. Greater complexity and vagueness in the stimulus (nature observed) and the work of art in process creates an open situation which permits the painter to reach a high level of formal unity more easily.
PART II

AN EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS

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CONCERNING MY RECENT DEVELOPMENT AS A PAINTER

At the time that I started to work at the Ohio State University, I had reached an impasse in my development as a painter. Symptomatic of this state had been my excursions into many other mediums—graphics, ceramics, jewelry, weaving and even some sculpture. Since, in my previous training, there had always been a great stress put upon materials and techniques, the development of a new technique and the manipulations of new materials could involve me in a period of experiment and discovery until I had again run up against the barrier of how to organize and design the work successfully. To some extent, my teaching also influenced this diversity of approaches, but my willingness to undertake these problems reflected the fact that I could achieve a certain level of success in these directions, while the painting seemed to stand still. Looking back, I realize that in many ways my solutions in the various crafts were less stereotyped than in my painting, because in most cases I "did it myself." I had fewer prejudices and was more willing to "design" in these media.

As for my painting, I drew much more than I painted, usually concentrating on a single object "nicely placed" on the page. The style was a kind of Post-Impressionism. I had always admired Cezanne greatly. I painted most successfully from a model, a still life set up or a "picturesque" landscape, partly because I had always done so and partly because I needed the visual stimulus. The few attempts that I had made
at a kind of Cubist style, to be "modern," had always seemed to me to be an academic exercise, since I started from the notion that to make a Cubist work one simply assembled several viewpoints of the object—more or less like a combination of elevation and ground plan representations. The result was usually mannered. To these attempts my response was, "So what. Where do I go from here?" Working from "imagination" often deteriorated into trying to recall how something looked or to construct it conceptually. Paintings done this way were most disappointing, because without a visual stimulus, I tended to describe all things equally. I tried to use color, yet had no real understanding what the difference between a Cezanne and a Rembrandt was other than Cezanne was using blue, orange and "brighter" colors, whereas Rembrandt's colors were limited, stressing black and earth colors.

The problem I was faced with incurred a complete revision of method and outlook in painting. Familiar terms were questioned as to their usefulness as concepts for action; new terminology, difficult to grasp because I had never considered some of these ideas, had to be learned, digested and made part of my experience in terms of painting. Here one approached "composition" not as an aggregation of "well drawn" objects, but a total structure from which the parts emerged. Color was a basic structural component having a much more profound function than describing the object. I had to unlearn the way I had drawn, the way I had painted. Perhaps my greatest struggle was to abandon what I could do and to be willing to literally flounder in an effort to get started in a new direction.
Underlying my early work had always been a search for form, although I had equated it with the form of the object. Thus I had no objection to an approach which stressed an understanding of pictorial structure as a basis for learning to paint. My first nine months of work yielded very little but scraped-out paintings and destroyed drawings. The earliest paintings in the show are from the Spring of 1962, when my struggles began to yield something more concrete. The paintings are arranged in a general chronological order. The comments concern approaches, problems and ideas that I had in mind as I worked on them.
CATALOG OF PAINTINGS

I. Backyards, I  Oil, 30x40  Spring, 1962

This painting represents an important breakthrough in my development. It was based on a collage sketch. I decided, arbitrarily, to make the sky orange instead of blue as it had been in the study. It pushed me out of choosing color for its descriptive meaning; the decision to be arbitrary with the color encouraged me to "loosen up" in my drawing and be less concerned about representation.

Not being provided with a model or still life set up, and still needing a point of departure, I made many landscape drawings from nature. Thus landscape became a very important motif in my paintings of 1962 and 1963.

II. Spring Landscape with a Bridge  Oil, 30x40  Spring, 1962

This work is derived from sketches from nature made with felt pen; the arbitrary color of sky and water were again a major means of escaping from descriptive color. Felt pen or colored paper aided the process, for the limited range forced one to approximate rather than to match colors. The painting still has an impressionistic quality reminiscent of my earlier work.

III. Damscape—The Pink Pond  Oil, 30x36  Spring-Fall, 1963

I tried to paint the dam more than once. Usually I got too picturesque or complicated and could not resolve the painting. The pen sketch and chalk-collage versions were very successful, but I could not see what was wrong with the painting. After letting it stand over summer, I was able to resolve it by simply enlarging the purple sky and repainting the dam. It had been a problem of color amount, not any of the details.

IV. Backyards, II  Oil  Fall, 1963

This is the same motif as the first painting. The shapes are more articulated and complex than the first version.

V. Seated Nude with Striped Drape  Oil, 36x28  Fall, 1963

This painting demonstrated how hue may function in a double role. The bright green ground closes with the lights because of its intensity, with the darks because of its value and coolness.

VI. Ophelia  Oil, 15x10  Winter, 1964

The "romantic" head is a favorite motif of mine. Sometimes the little heads are humorous, too. Often small paintings, like
drawings, were more successful than the larger works. Although I usually used sketches from nature as a point of departure for the landscapes and often drew from the model, almost all the figure paintings and "portraits" were imaginary.

VII. Moon Girl
Oil, 14x17 Winter, 1964

This is a hymn of praise to Shiva Rose, Shiva Yellow-Green and Mars Orange.

VIII. Three Men
Chalk, Ink, Soybean, 18x24 Winter, 1964

My drawing was always ahead of the painting. This handling anticipates the oil paintings of Spring and Summer.

IX. Outside
Chalk, Soybean, 18x24 Winter, 1964

Many of my drawings are black and white, some are colored. I prefer to work with "painty" mediums and a brush, so I used ink, soybean tempera, and chalk most often.

X. Miss Universe
Oil, 24x21 1/2 Spring, 1964

Although I used to paint portraits, I rarely do anymore. Sometimes, however, the invented heads remind me of someone I know or have seen with more conviction than as if I had tried to paint them. I suppose it is because there is often an element of caricature about them.

XI. Diptych with Bear's Claws
Oil, 38x46 Spring, 1964

Until I did this painting, I hadn't ever done a successful non-objective painting, in my estimation. I had tried abstractions, but they always seemed to be "cooked up," that is, stiff, intellectualized and with very little feeling. The subject matter of figure, still life or landscape was necessary to inspire me. When I did this painting, it seemed as though suddenly I became conscious of the underlying abstract nature of what I had been doing in the other paintings and that the meaning and "feeling" was as much here as in any of the subject matter that I had been using. I could cope with all the abstract elements of color, shape and size on an intuitive and felt level. It was painted very rapidly and decisively; I seemed to be able to anticipate what the next move had to be even before I came to it. As the painting got very wet, I finished with pieces of colored paper stuck into the wet paint. Later I painted these passages in, but they don't have quite the firmness of the rest of the work.

XII. Big John
Oil, 60x80 Spring-Summer, 1964

A big painting is a challenge no painter can resist. After the diptych, I felt that I could finally tackle one. My salon
machine had to be an abstraction, for I never can forget my first try (at fifteen) to paint Dido on the funeral pyre and Aeneas disappearing over the horizon on a six by eight foot canvas. What a debacle! Physical difficulties alone were a problem with Big John; if I laid it on the floor I could hardly reach the center; if I stood it up the paint ran more than I like, because I was using colors in oil instead of tube colors. Of course the most difficult problem is to see it all and not paint it in sections. It was repainted several times in some sections and had to wait for quite a while before I was able to bring it to this level of resolution.

XIII. Britannia Before the Mirror  
Oil, 40x36  
Spring, 1964

When I did this painting, I had in mind to make a painting with the same dispatch and directness that I made a drawing. I painted for one session; it seemed unresolved. Several weeks later, I painted in the large black shape in the lower left corner, which simplified an over rich area and restored the large contrasts. I think it fulfilled my original intention.

XIV. Circus  
Oil, 60x47  
Spring, 1964-1965

This painting is related to many drawings that I did of crowds of people carrying signs. The subject presented possibilities of many figures of different sizes, weird costumes, lettering, pattern and a certain disjunction in positioning creating a complicated and challenging motif. The problem of creating a new composition was helped by this complexity and by trying to escape from always visualizing the figure oriented in a kind of "normal space." Most of the paintings have not basically broken free from this orientation, although some drawings of jugglers done this spring represent conscious efforts to do what was implied here.

XV. Still Life with a Coffee Pot  
Oil, 28x30  
Summer, 1964

Here is one of my more successful efforts at getting out of my "candy color" palette. For a long time, I felt many of the paintings had a very similar color range and tone. It was as if I could only play in the key of "C." In this painting the ground of dirty ochre-green and grey-violet give the bright notes of green, magenta, vermilion, orange and yellow new intensity.

XVI. Triptych  
Oil, 11x25 1/2  
Summer, 1964

The problem of the multiple panel painting is one of creating a unity from distinct sections rather than just spreading a single composition over the total format. Each part must be complete and able to stand alone, yet at the same time be enhanced by association with the others. I thought of this work as a painted analogy of a musical modulation. It is structured warm-cool-warm and moves dark dominant-middle tone-light dominant much as one might modulate musically major-minor-major/bass-middle-treble. I thought of the
idea as the painting evolved; it is not an afterthought. However, I was lucky in that this idea was never so specific that it hindered the painting which "came easy." All the panels were developed simultaneously.

XVII. Girl, Two Men and a Rose  
Oil, 20x24  
Summer, 1964

The subject was found as the painting was made. Many of my works from imagination now evolve this way. Abstract shapes, color spots suggest the motif. Painted at about the same time as the Triptych, it has a similar feeling even though it is not non-objective.

XVIII. Big Grey Abstract  
Oil, 40x50  
Fall, 1964

Here is another painting in the search for a new color key. Like Britannia, my set was to "paint like I draw." The first areas were large vague shapes of warm greys and ochres—the sludge from the brush washing can be mixed with palette scrapings and thinned with turpentine. It is mostly the work of one session; only a few touches and the signature were added later.

XIX. The Sculptor's Studio, II  
Oil, 32x40  
Fall, 1964

The sculptor, model, and pieces of sculpture was another motif that I drew and painted many times for much the same reason as I did the crowd with signs. I also used sculpture, paintings or mirror reflections in my still lifes for the variety of sizes, shapes and odd juxtapositions of the figure one could create. This is the most successful painting of this sequence.

XX. Spanish Still Life  
Oil, 36x48  
Fall, 1964

I often draw from paintings, not trying to copy them as much as to analyze some aspect of the work or to improvise a new variation on the theme. I have not often based my paintings on other works, but in this case I started with a still life by Juan van der Hamen Y Leon; hence the title. The original has a rich sombre color tone that was probably behind my choosing it as a point of departure. My painting changed many times; objects came and went or were transposed from one area to another, yet, although it is not at all like the original, I feel that something of the same mood remains. In spite of many sessions of work, the painting retains a fresh quality which, I believe, indicates an ability to return to the work with something of the same feeling with which it was started. Some of its richness springs from the vestiges of earlier stages which still remain.
PLATE XIV
PLATE XX
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