

THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF PAINTING

NIGEL WENTWORTH



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1

The Materials of Painting and the Painter's Use of Them

A PAINTER USES CERTAIN MATERIALS TO PAINT. THIS IS ONE OF THE most obvious facts about painting, relating as it does to one of the more apparently superficial aspects of the practice of painting: In painting, a painter marks the flat surface he is working on with paint. It is, therefore, a good place to start in the attempt to understand this practice. My aim is to describe the relationship between the painter who engages in painting and the materials is engaged with. To this end I shall attempt to answer two main questions: what is the right way to understand the nature of the materials the painter uses, and how should we understand the way that he uses them? The answer to the second question requires an understanding of the nature of the activity of painting, but a complete account of this will only be possible once the other aspects of the perspective of the painter have been described. Here I shall attempt no more than a partial answer, seeking only to account for the nature of the gesture that is involved in the use of the materials.

Amongst the materials of painting are the paint and the brushes. Obviously there are other materials, but no final list of them is possible because the materials of painting change continually. For instance, painters in the twentieth century have used newspaper in their work, a material that did

not even exist several hundred years ago. Paint and brushes, however, exemplify the two kinds of materials to be discussed in this chapter. Brushes are a kind of tool, while paint is a kind of substance, each playing a different role in the practice of painting as it is engaged in by a painter. Not all the materials of painting fall neatly into one of these categories; charcoal, for instance, could be understood as both. The phenomenology of its use will differ correspondingly.

A brush is a tool. Generally, it consists of a wooden stick with bristles held on at one end by a metal collar. The painter dips the bristles into paint and then applies it to the surface he is working on. Different brushes have been developed for a variety of uses. At one end of the spectrum are large flat-headed brushes used for blocking in areas of colour. These tend to have relatively coarse bristles. At the other end are small brushes with finely pointed heads made up of finer, softer bristles which are generally used for detailing. These different kinds of brushes might be defined by their uses and only comprehensible in terms of them. This notion is rejected by traditional Western philosophers from Descartes to Husserl.¹ According to this tradition some thing like a brush cannot be understood properly in terms of its use because it could have different uses. The same brush that is used by a painter for detailing could also be used to unblock a sink, or to dust inaccessible corners of a cupboard, or as an instrument for writing, or to tickle someone. The fact that the same thing can have different uses shows that the kind of thing it is 'in itself' is independent of all these uses. The only features of it that can be said to belong to it as it is in itself are those it possesses in all contexts, whatever its use. These are its purely physical features, or as they have traditionally been called, its physical properties. The brush as an object is merely the sum of its properties. Far from the nature of the brush being revealed by its use, it is given to us by detaching our experience of it from any use at all, by

¹ "Theoretical interest is concerned with what is; and that, everywhere, is what is identical through variation of subjects and their practical interests. . . . Anybody can verify (if he takes a theoretical attitude) that this thing here counts for subject A as such and such a piece of equipment, for B as quite a different one, that anything can be woven into equipmental nexus of many kinds, both of the same and for different subjects. . . . Whatever is cognized, it is a being that is cognized; and a being is something identical, something identifiable again and again." Husserl. Quoted by H.L. Dreyfus in *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division 1*, MIT Press, 1994, pp. 65–6.

observing it in detached contemplation. This is the method of traditional epistemological philosophers and scientists. A mere physical description of this kind obviously will not account for the use of the brush as it is defined independently of any such use. To grasp the nature of its use – and a full account of the kind of thing that a *paint* brush is clearly requires that its use is grasped – this merely physical description needs to be supplanted. This is not a problem for objective thought. Insofar as there are painters who paint pictures with paintbrushes, they will all be doing so in the same way, by putting paint on canvas. There might be different shaped brushes and so on, but this does not obscure the basic point that painters are doing the same thing with them. This single use of brushes can, therefore, be captured by a use-description. This description can be made as subtle or complicated as the actual use of the brush. It can, therefore, account for the fact that a paintbrush is something essentially used. A paintbrush can then be understood as a physical object plus a use-description.

This argument, though it sounds plausible, does not accord with the actual phenomena. First, as Heidegger noted,² a single tool like a paintbrush does not exist alone or simply in relation to its own particular use. Rather it is given in terms of the other tools and pieces of equipment involved in the practice in which it is used, the totality of which he called an equipmental whole, or ensemble. For example, a chisel exists only in terms of a larger ensemble of tools for working with wood; including hammers, nails, saws, planes, files, workbenches and workshops. This is true of the materials of painting as well, for there are no simple *paint* brushes, rather there are brushes for oil painting, watercolour brushes, ink wash brushes and so on. Each one exists within a different ensemble of materials. That of oil painting includes such things as canvas, stretchers, rabbitskin glue, turpentine, linseed oil, oil paint, vertical easels and flat palettes, while that of watercolour painting includes water, watercolour paper and paint, horizontal easels and bowl-shaped palettes. None of the items that occur in each ensemble can be properly understood without reference to the other items in the ensemble and its relationship to them. What this means is that the basic locus of significance, so far from being the individual thing as ordinary experience

² Heidegger, M. *Sein und Zeit*, Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1957. Translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson as *Being and Time*, SCM Press Ltd., 1962, p. 97.

and objective thought would have us believe, is the ensemble within which any individual material exists. The attempt to identify the nature of a paintbrush in terms of its physical nature plus a use-description is thus deeply misconceived for it presupposes that we can understand each item individually. It starts by trying to define each of the individual things that are involved in a practice one after another, and then to build from there an understanding of the totality of materials that are involved in the overall practice, when what is actually required is that we start with the totality, or rather what is more correctly called the ensemble,³ and understand each of the things that is found within it in terms of its place within the whole.

The objectivist can reply that the use-description can be broadened to encompass all the materials constitutive of the ensemble in which a particular material belongs. For example, to understand the nature of an oil painting brush, we need a use-description of all the materials involved in oil painting taken together, of how they are related together and how all the materials and relations are involved in their use. The simple fact that the materials of painting can only be understood in relation to one another does not mean that a use-description cannot capture their use, but only that such a use-description will be much longer and more complicated than it would be if there were only one material to account for. This reply, however, misses the point.⁴ That all the materials in oil painting can only be understood in relation to one another is not a mere arbitrary fact, something that merely happens to be the case, without intrinsic significance. Rather it reflects the critical fact that all these different tools are involved in the single practice of oil painting. The ensemble of materials listed earlier is one aspect of this practice and can only be understood in relation to all the others which shall be described throughout this book. For instance, there is the visual dimension to the practice, the activity of painting, the phenomenon of trying to make a painting work, the way painting is learnt through apprenticeships and courses, the institutions involved in these, the viewers and consumers of paintings, the social contexts such as galleries, competitions, museums, studios and commissions within which painters and viewers operate. Then

³ By an ensemble I mean a whole that is more than the sum of its parts, in contrast to a totality that is a mere sum of parts, existing *partes extra partes*.

⁴ The following arguments follow the interpretation of Heidegger in H.L. Dreyfus's *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division 1*, op. cit., ch. 3–6.

these aspects of the practice of painting, and indeed the whole practice itself, can only be understood against a background of other practices which will eventually take in the whole of life. No single part can be cut off and understood in isolation. This means, not that the use-description will end up being rather long, but rather that a wrong turn has been taken. So far from the whole being a mere sum of parts, each element within the whole can only be grasped through its place within that whole.

The second problem with the objectivist account indicates why this is the case. The objectivist account begins by trying to strip away the significance of the brush to get at the thing itself. The addition of use-descriptions is the attempt to recover this significance whilst remaining within objectivist categories. To perform the very work they are supposed to do, however, to provide an account of the use of a paintbrush in a way that is cognitively comprehensible by a person independent of that person engaging in the activity of painting, they would need to be devoid of the very significance they are meant to account for. In other words, the parts of the use-description have to remain individually meaningless. Yet, together they are intended to account for a whole that is intrinsically meaningful. However, no mere accumulation of meaningless parts will ever amount to a significant whole. If they appear to do so, it will only be because they trade on a prior understanding of a brush and its use, one that is gained through lived-activity.⁵

Finally, the nature of the precise situations a painter finds himself in while painting are open. If a painter realises that a representational item like a bottle is too far to the left in a composition and needs to be moved to the right, there is nothing to tell him exactly where he needs to move it. The precise place the bottle ends up and the way it relates to the other representational items around it depend in part on which brush the painter uses and the way he uses it, as well as a dialectic between these and other factors involved which shall be discussed later. The actual use of the brush then can only be understood as a disposition to respond in an open number of ways to an endlessly different range of situations. It is not, therefore, susceptible to definition in terms of the kind of rules that would be required to form part of the use-description of the brush, for these would again need to be understandable in themselves, and would,

⁵ For an excellent treatment of these issues see Dreyfus, *op. cit.*, chapters 4–6.

therefore, need to be contextually independent. The use of a paintbrush within the activity of painting is not, therefore, something extraneous to its nature, but rather intrinsic to it. If we are to understand the nature of the brush, then, we need to come to an understanding of, or see, its place within the lived-process that is the practice of painting.

In the introduction it was stated that as the end-product of a process, individual paintings reveal the nature of the process that gave rise to them. If we look at different paintings, then, we may be able to read off from them the place of brushes in the process of painting. I shall compare the brush in Baugin's *Le Dessert de Gaufrettes* (Plate I) and de Kooning's *Two Women* (Plate II). In the Baugin we have a paintbrush which does not show itself in the work or which, being conspicuous by its invisibility, shows itself as not showing itself. It is a paintbrush engaged in the artifice of pretending that it is not a paintbrush because it is a piece of work that wants to pretend in some sense that it is not a piece of work, and so hides the tool with which it was done. This is so only 'in some sense' because it is not an exercise in *trompe l'oeil* and so does not actually seek to deceive the viewer. The painter has striven to use the brush in such a way that it can pass by on the canvas and leave a mark without it being visible as the mark of a brush. It is intended to drop out of the picture and so is experienced as such. The paintbrush becomes not an active player in the activity of painting but instead a mere cypher for the happening of the work which seemingly passes directly from the hand to the canvas. As a result, the paintbrush becomes something that is denuded of intrinsic character, or rather something that has the somewhat magical character of being without character. It becomes almost more like a wand than a tool.

Compare this with the brush in de Kooning's *Two Women*. Here the brush takes centre stage and, if not *the* subject of the painting, is at least one of them. The very activity of putting paint onto the canvas with a brush has concretised itself on the canvas and, pushing out virtually everything else, has become the painting. The painting is not, as in the Baugin, made up of invisible brush strokes; rather it *is* the brush strokes, though not in a merely physical way. The marks of the hairs of the brush through the paint or the marks of the paint through the hairs of the brush, and the way this allows other colours and tones to show through, as well as to form themselves through an intermingling of the different paints, is central to the whole

working of the painting. The brush is so present that it is not so much the brushstrokes that are visible through the colour as the colour that is visible through the brushstrokes. The de Kooning requires to be seen as work in order to be seen properly at all, in contrast to the Baugin which achieves its affect precisely through not seeming to be work at all. In the de Kooning the paintbrush seems to transcend its role as a tool to become part of the finished product. Far from being a mere cypher or tool, for the achievement of something that appears to have nothing to do with it, it forms part of the actual thing passed on. The happening of the work does not take place despite it, rather it is a central actor in this happening. The dialectic of the work passes through the brush, involves the brush, but it does not bypass it.

The way a paintbrush is actually used in the act of painting then is not the same from one painter to the next, but varies considerably. We have already seen that far from being comprehensible as an isolated object with properties plus a use-description, the brush is only what it is as a brush and can only be understood as such within the lived-activity of painting. The nature of the brush, given only in relation to the overall practice of painting, is therefore given in relation to the way it is used by the painter. The different ways it is employed by different painters affect the kind of thing it is in the context of its use, that is to say, its nature as an experiential object. The lived-experience of the brush is not, therefore, of an object used in different ways, but rather of a thing the very nature of which is bound up with the form of its use. The used brush of de Kooning is, therefore, different from the used brush of Baugin; they are different experiential, or phenomenal, objects. The terms 'experiential' and 'phenomenal' here do not pick out those things that form the content of subjective experience such as sense data, qualia or mental images. Just as the thing called a brush cannot be defined objectively, so the experiential brush cannot be defined subjectively. Rather, the terms 'experiential' and 'phenomenal' are used for those things that occur on the pre-reflective level of experience, and can only be understood in terms of their meaning. A phenomenal object is an object that is given in relation to the lived, or meaning, structures involved in man's being-in-the-world. It is an object as it is actually experienced in practical activity, prior to the positing by thought of an objective object, the formalized version of the object of common sense, as much an abstraction as the subjective object defined in opposition to it.



1. Seurat, Georges-Pierre. *Study for 'La Grande Jatte'*, 1884–5. Copyright © the National Gallery, London.

The nature of the brush as a phenomenal object can be filled out if we look again at the brushes in the Baugin and the de Kooning. De Kooning's brush concretises itself in the actual work through the way it manifests itself in the actual paint of the painting. Rather than being a mere means to an end it becomes part of the actual end-product of the work. The paintbrush involved in the dialectic that is the doing of the work comes to concretise itself as one aspect of the finished painting. As a result, to see the painting is to see, whether we are aware of it or not, the brush that was used to do it. Despite superficial appearances to the contrary the same is true of the brush in the Baugin. This brush tries to be invisible. Its invisibility, however, is conspicuous; one only has to compare it with the visibility of the brush in the de Kooning to notice it. It thus manifests itself in the end-product just as much as the brush in the de Kooning but in a different way. The nature of a brush is given, therefore, not only in relation to the painter who uses it and the manner of his use of it, but also in the end-product that concretises



2. Seurat, Georges-Pierre. *The Channel of Gravelines, Grand Fort-Philippe*, 1890. Oil on canvas. Copyright © the National Gallery, London.

itself through this use and the viewer who perceives it. The brush, correctly understood, is thus a phenomenal object tied into the overall practice of painting involving the painter, the viewer and the painting at the interface between them.

In one respect this analysis does not go far enough because it implies that though the phenomenal brushes of different painters vary, that of each painter is a unitary thing. There is de Kooning's-brush, Baugin's-brush and so on, but this is quite mistaken. If we compare the brush of Seurat's *Study for 'La Grande Jatte'* (Figure 1) with *The Channel of Gravelines, Grand Fort-Philippe* (Figure 2), however, we see that there has been an evolution.

The brush is no longer the same. It has lost some, most, almost all of its physicality. All but a single facet of its potentiality has been dropped: the brush being used simply to make innumerable, tiny, almost indistinguishable dots. This single potentiality is present in the earlier work but in an unrealised way, sullied as it is by the presence of other potentialities. By the time of the later work it has taken on a monodimensional existence. This is a revolution in the nature of the brush; almost its denial as a brush. Confined within its potential limits, it takes on an almost explosive aspect. By simplifying or restricting itself, it has attained a kind of purity, but one that only holds itself together with difficulty. It is hardly surprising that in his very last works, those of the circus, Seurat's brush seems to cease to be a brush completely, appearing to become instead a mere marker, formal and devoid of sensuality. Talk of *the* painter's brush, as if this had a unitary nature throughout the whole of a painter's use of it, is thus mistaken. The phenomenal brush, involved in the painter's activity and realising itself through his work, is continually changing, for it is given only in the immediacy that is fundamental to the lived-nature of that work. Its being as a thing is thus as open as the activity in which it is involved. This final claim has to be qualified by recognising that it is only true for periods of the practice when different painters are given the social space to paint in their own individual ways. Where this freedom is not given, the manner of painting of different painters and the phenomenal brush of each of them, will tend to coincide.

Paint is a substance. In calling it this it is not characterised objectively as anything, but only distinguished from tools like paintbrushes. This is so despite the fact that paint might seem preeminently substance-like in the traditional philosophical sense of the term; something that can be characterised physically as stuff of a certain kind with particular determinate properties. Again, as with tools, a physical description of paint might well be possible and interesting, but it will not capture the paint as the painter employs it. As with tools, paint is something that only is what it is through being used. In other words paint is paint. It is in this that the paintness of paint resides; in its being used as paint. To identify it and try and understand it in simple physical terms is to miss its very existence for what it is. Again, as with the brush, a use-description of it might be possible, but this will not capture its nature as paint. To understand it properly as paint we

must locate it within the context in which it is paint, and that is within the practice of painting.

Within this practice paint can be said to have two moments; paint before it is used and paint after it is used. These are not 'states' that actually occur, but mere abstractions. Paint is never before use, for it is essentially used, qua paint. Similarly, within the practice of painting it is never after use. So long as the painting is in progress the paint is still in use, and once done there is only the painting; the paint in a sense has ceased to be. All paint is in a process of being used, of coming to be, but in a multiplicity of different ways. It is for this reason that it is useful to consider paint in the two ideal states that it never really achieves. Paint before use is a potentiality for being; used paint the realisation of that potentiality. Painting can thus be understood as the realisation of paint. On the palette the paint before use already has a form; for instance, it is already tending to realise itself as more runny or thick. This realisation continues upon the palette once the painting is underway, for it gradually becomes a palettised mirror-image of the paint on the canvas. This realisation of the paint on the canvas remains a semi-realisation right up until the painting is done, as it is still in use, and once the painting is done it ceases to be paint and becomes a painting. If we are to understand paint, then, we need to understand it in the context of the process by which it is transformed from a before use to an after use.

Given that the materials of a practice form an ensemble, we would expect to find that the nature of paint reflected that of brushes, and this is what we do find. In the Baugin and Mondrian's *Tableau 1* (Figure 18), just as the paintbrush is conspicuous by its absence, so is the paint. It is masquerading as something else, and in such a way that it is not to be seen as masquerading. This is quite different from Corinth's *Walchensee mit Lärche* (Plate III) or the de Kooning in which the paint is quite self-consciously masquerading as something else. Both still manage to carry off the masquerade despite signalling so explicitly what they are doing, indeed this becomes a central part of the dialectic of their effect. Similarly, just as in the Baugin and the Mondrian the paintbrush becomes a cypher for the painting to happen by, so does the paint, while in the de Kooning and the Corinth the paint becomes one of the elements in the dialectic by which the painting comes to be. Put another way, in these paintings just as a dialectic is set up between the painting and the paintbrush, so it is between the painting and the paint,

one in which neither manages to break free entirely from the other. The paint refuses to renounce its being paint in favour of the painting, seeking to reconcile the conflict by turning the painting into a painting about paint. So far from being a mere means, it has almost become the end. This is most clearly apparent in the de Kooning. Here the paint appears to have achieved total liberation and command. This is a mere appearance, however, for it is still a painting and not mere paint on a canvas. It is a painting, however, in which in the doing of it the used paint deceptively gives the impression, of having made no concession to anything else, subject matter, composition and so on. As such, the paint appears to live through the painting, the painting having become almost a vehicle for the self-expression of the paint, rather than the painting to live through the self-denying sublimation of the paint, as is the case in the Baugin and the Mondrian.

Paint differs in the form that it takes in painting, not just to the extent that it lives in the painting, but in the way that it does. In the Corinth the paint achieves a thick impasto quality, like cream or putty. This fills the painting in solid masses, giving a strong, structured feel to the subjects represented. The branches of the pine tree stick out thickly, the earth stands solid beneath it, the water of the lake behind has the density of the dead sea, with a thick, creamy, almost solid sky above. The paint has coalesced into a painting here, in the actual painting itself. In Whistler's *Nocturne in Blue* (Figure 3), by contrast, the water has a silky transparency, the riverbed on the near shore a soft muddy insubstantiality, the sky is no more than a translucent haze and the lights on the other side of the river shimmer against buildings that have only a murky, shadowy existence. All of this reflects the watery, diaphanous thinness of the paint. The used paint in these two examples has achieved a different mode of being through which a different aspect of the world can realise itself before us. Both are potentialities of the paint before use.

One aspect of painting can, therefore, be understood as the realisation of the potentiality of paint by the painter, with each painter reinventing the material paint for himself. The used paint, having a phenomenal and not a merely physical existence, each different manner of working it involves, or results in, the coming into being of a new phenomenon, the reinvented paint. There are no limits to the range of ways in which paint can be reinvented in this way by the painter. It is, therefore, mistaken to say, as does Gombrich,



3. Whistler, James Abbott McNeill. *Nocturne in Blue*, 1871. Copyright © Tate, London, 2002.

that a painter is restricted in his transcription of what he sees and “can only translate it into the terms of his medium”.⁶ There are no simple ‘terms’ of media of this kind. The painter creates his own terms through painting. A painter who works in black and white is not therefore “strictly tied to the range of tones which his medium will yield”,⁷ for there is no pre-existing range of tones a medium will yield. Rather, it all depends on how the medium is used, the other plastic elements apart from tone that are generated with it and how these are worked together. To think that each medium has

⁶ E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, Phaidon, 1959, p. 30.

⁷ Ibid.

its objective nature that the painter has to work with, as Gombrich states, is to misunderstand them completely. It is to take them to be things-in-themselves, rather than what they actually are, which is elements in a lived-process, things that are reinvented, and capable of being endlessly so, within it. Paint cannot, then, be defined in terms of the sum of possible ways by which it can be realised, still less in terms of the actual ways by which it has so far been realised by individual painters. Furthermore, just as with the paintbrush, the way a painter realises it is never finally determined. The potentiality remains continually there, and is forever renewed. This is seen in the work of Cézanne, whose paint started out as thick impasto before gradually and ceaselessly changing in tune with his work, becoming more translucent and watery over time. Paint, so far, then, from being a substance in the traditional sense of this word, is a continually open potentiality. Its real being is more a becoming than any particular way of being.

Just as the nature of the brush is involved in the manner of its employment by a painter and the way it manifests itself in the end-product of his work, so too is that of paint. The different after-use realisations of its before-use potentiality are, therefore, as with the brush, not different ways of employing a single physical stuff which itself remains unchanged, but different phenomenal objects. If the phenomenal structures involved in the employment of both paint and brushes are the same, those structures involved in the lived-activity of painting, then the distinction between the before-use and the after-use of a material, which is necessary to understand a material like paint, can be seen to apply equally well to tools like paint-brushes. These too have a potentiality which can be realised in different ways. The mode of realisation, however, is different. We have seen that with paint the two poles of before-use and after-use are abstractions. Paint never becomes after-use for at the end of the process of its use is the painting, in which the paint is so sublimated that it does not appear as paint; all we are aware of seeing is the painting. It generally takes an effort to see the paint of a painting as paint. Though we are not necessarily aware of it, paint becomes concretised in the final painting. It remains concretely within the painting; though in so doing its phenomenal nature changes again. The brush too, as we have seen, is an aspect of the end-product, though it is so in a different way, only indirectly, through the way it manifests itself in the paint. The brush is merely worked with; the paint actually worked upon.

This is the difference between a tool and a substance. Though, therefore, both tools and substances have a before-use and an after-use, the mode of after-use of each is quite different. The before-use, however, is very similar. Both are potentialities that only exist within the practice; it is only in the realisation of these potentialities that the difference between them becomes apparent.

From this it is clear that the materials cannot be understood adequately outside of their place in the context of the practice of painting; that the kind of being that they have is a phenomenal being-within-the-practice and not what might be called an objective being which can be understood and described once and for all. For this reason an understanding of them requires that they be looked at in the context of their use, which is what is attempted here. The account is not meant, and does not pretend, to be complete. Other accounts, such as that of Merleau-Ponty relating the nature of a thing to man's perceptual being, or Heidegger's which distinguishes between things ready-to-hand and present-to-hand, shed light on other facets of the phenomenal nature of things. The aim here is simply to try to understand the nature of the materials of painting as they manifest themselves within the practice of painting. This could be described as an existential understanding as opposed to an objective one. The aim is not to describe things as they are in themselves, but as they are lived. This raises the question of how they are lived, what the painter does with them, the second question asked at the beginning of this chapter. To answer this question we need to understand the nature of the action that is painting.

THE PAINTER'S GESTURE AND A PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION OF THE ACTIVITY OF PAINTING

So far it has been argued that the gesture of each painter, his way of working the materials, is his own; no two painters have the same gesture. This could imply that the gesture of each painter is static, that it does not change over time. The evidence of the actual gesture of painters as it manifests itself over time in their work, however, suggests otherwise. We have seen in the work of Seurat a great change in his gesture between his early and his late paintings; the manner in which the materials are reinvented changes radically. There are two aspects to this change to a painter's gesture that

need to be noted. The first is that this change in the action of the same painter over time, this change in the way he uses the materials, is extremely slow. It is like a journey of a thousand miles in which the distance between the first and last point is very far indeed, but the distance between any two successive moments is almost insignificant. If all of Seurat's paintings were lined up chronologically, end to end, the change in the use of the materials, which over time is quite large, will be tiny between any two paintings next to one another. The second thing that would be evident is that the gradual change that taken place is in a certain direction. This can be seen in the case of Seurat simply from an inspection of three paintings; *Study for 'La Grande Jatte'*, *Le Pont de Courbevoie* (Plate IV) and *The Channel of Gravelines, Grand Fort-Philippe*. The direction is evidently towards a more regular, almost mechanical, use of the materials, both paintbrush and paint, in which each mark with the brush becomes more and more like the preceding one. There is a physicality and energy in the gesture with which the paint has been applied in the *Study for 'La Grande Jatte'*, one which gives a vibrant texture to both the grass and water and makes the overall landscape seem incredibly alive. This physicality of gesture and the presence it gives to the paint qua paint has been severely reduced by the time Seurat painted the *Le Pont de Courbevoie*. It still retains some physicality; the dots still look like dots of paint made by a paintbrush. Furthermore, they are worked together in different parts of the painting to reflect that which, as a body, they are meant to represent. Thus, those of the tree on the right are densely packed together, as are those of the grass bank, whereas those of the tree on the top left and the bridge in the distance are speckled to translate the leafiness and distance of these two things, respectively. There still remains, then, a variegation in Seurat's use of the materials in this painting. By the time of *The Channel of Gravelines*, however, this physicality of the gesture and paint has almost completely vanished, as has the differentiation of its usage. Every mark with the brush appears to be the same, with the result that every dot of colour seems to have the same quality, no matter what it is meant to depict and each collection of dots with a common figurative significance has the same speckled aspect which gives to the whole a grainy quality like sand. In these three paintings, then, Seurat's use of his materials has travelled in a very definite direction, one affecting all the materials in the same way.