The Border between Art and Life: Reconsidering Neo-Impressionism within the History of Deconstructing Art

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Introduction: Art and Life, Unmatchable Couple

We have a variety of strong desires in our daily lives—peace of mind, good friendships, health, wealth, love, a nice bottle of wine. In short, we strive hard every day to become happy. How much can art contribute to such daily-life interests directed to the pursuit of happiness? This paper will attempt to answer this question via a case study of 19th century Neo-Impressionism.

Certainly, considering the Kantian aesthetics of disinterestedness and its influence on the following generations, modern and avant-garde art since the 18th century has kept a definite distance from our "vulgar" life. The art historian Donald Kuspit, who is known for his psychoanalytic methodology, says, "Avant-garde art seems far from happy, and has even been understood to be unhappy to the extent of being mad"[1]. The philosophy of this argument might be debatable, but Kuspit's point seems to be supported by fact. For example, the most popular avant-garde artists like Van Gogh, Cézanne, and Munch were all "unhappy" in terms of daily life satisfaction. Van Gogh struggled with mental illness all his life and ultimately committed suicide, and Cézanne finished his life as a difficult and unsociable old man. Munch had a nervous breakdown triggered by unrequited love. These are just the most famous examples; others abound.

The critic Karsten Harries claims that the first and foremost determination of avant-garde is its negativity. He says, "How could art be anything else?"[2] Another critic, José Ortega y Gasset, calls it the "suicidal gesture of art". According to him, "Art has never shown more clearly its magic gift than in this flout at itself. Thanks to this suicidal gesture art continues to be art"[3]. Y Gasset parallels such "suicidal gesture of art" with the "dehumanization" of avant-garde art. "If the new art is not accessible to every man this implies that its impulses are not of generically human kind"[4]. Avant-garde art has thus kept sound humanity away, rejecting daily happiness and health. Says Herbert Read, "Life itself is tragic, and a profound art always begins with this realization"[5]. The traditional definition of art since the 18th century is that its purpose is to pursue the perfection of aesthetic beauty. In this sense, art is nothing other than an extremely punctilious *ars* (technique) that denies our daily trivial interests and happiness.

It is not easy for us to reconcile our daily life interests with our artistic ones. In his *Dehumanization of Art* in 1925, Y Gasset asked a critical question: "What is behind this disgust for the human sphere as such, for reality, for life? Or is it rather the opposite: respect for life and unwillingness to confuse it with art, so inferior a thing as art?"[6] The situation had not changed into the 1980s. The prime avant-garde theorist Peter Bürger stated that if art were totally fused with daily life, both would be wrecked, but that if art were totally separated from daily life, art

would be suffocated[7]. Even for us, living in the 21st century, such recognition would certainly exist. Art and daily life deal with each other from a careful distance. With that in mind, I would like to start the following chapters.

1. If "Every Human Being is an Artist," What Does the Future Look Like?

There has always been a certain discourse that separates art and daily life. Considering the Kantian aesthetics of disinterestedness, this is even a *raison d'être* of art. On the other hand, we should not forget that there have been some trends merging art and daily life interests. Considering their history and current situations, this chapter examines the validities of such trends.

If asked to name post-18th century movements that synthesize art and daily life, we could name the Arts and Crafts movement of the late 19th century, and the functionalistic Industrial Designs in the 1920s. However, these movements applied the refined aesthetic values of art world to daily life practices. In other words, these were approaches from the upper side. Conversely, there are certain movements that tie art to ordinary people (not professionals), i.e. the movements towards the "democratization of art". According to Haruhiko Fujita, two people embody the core of this trend: the Indian art historian Ananda Coomaraswamy and the German artist Josef Beuys[8]. Coomaraswamy is known for his famous words in 1938, "Artists are not special human beings, but all the humans are artists". Beuys is also well known for his words, "Every human being is an artist". Since then, their thoughts have become the core principal for those – art therapists among them – who would like to recapture art that has been held by elite artists and to endow the general public with it. However, as Fujita points out, these words were initially used in different contexts from what future generations ascribe them to.

Coomaraswamy said, "The artist was not a special kind of man, but every man a special kind of artist. It was not for him to say what should be made, except in the special case in which he is his own patron making, let us say, an icon or a house himself. It was for the patron to say what should be made; for the artist, the "maker by art", to know how to make"[9]. In short, Coomaraswamy did not recommend that ordinary people become artists. He just required artistic viewpoints for patrons on the basis of the traditional order system of art works. Furthermore, Beuys's intent in the above quotation does not necessarily coincide with the "democratization of art" either. He claimed that we should use "our creativity" not only in art but also in "the society, economics, politics and others". His main focus was "creativity" and not the "artist"[10]. Placing these quotations in context tells us that the democratization of art does not have a long history.

In fact, it is as late as at the beginning of the 1960s when Beuys' slogan "Every human being is an artist" realized in a literal sense not as a metaphor. Among them, we could pick up the following three significant examples: the artistic movements driven by the 1960s counterculture on the American West Coast; the current of art therapy advocated by Margaret Naumburg right after the Second World War, which spread all over the world until the end of the 20th century; and the De-Art movement that flourished in Japan in the 1990s.

In the 1960s, a new kind of art popped up that fused art with life in tandem with the Counterculture movements, which interrogated elitist avant-garde art on the East Coast[11]. For

example, the communities of Drop City in Kansas, Arcosanti in Arizona, and the Esalen Institute in California rose up one after another. There, naturalistic practices such as self-sufficiency, vegetarianism, and nudism were implemented and celebrated, and some people began to think that such life itself was art. For instance, Drop City has inspired as many as 2000 small communities, and they regarded their lives themselves as art (Fig. 1)[12].

Similar movements in Japan can be found in Takaaki Kumakura's "De-Art", which rose in the late 1990s and the early 2000s after the collapse of the Japanese bubble economy. As the advocates of counterculture criticized East Coast elitism in the US, Kumakura criticizes the unequal society brought by stoicism of the extreme capitalism. He rejected the value of hard work, and sought bland art. To use Pierre Bourdieu's term, Kumakura avoided "distinctions" of taste and society, and deconstructed art itself, calling his work "De-Art"[13]. In the early 2000s, Kumakura renovated a rice shop in Tokyo and rebuilt an artists-in-residence called "Kyojima Henshushitsu (Kyojima Editorial Office)". In "Kyojima Henshushitsu", every living act, such as "walking, greeting, shopping, drinking", was regarded as art[14]. There, the "distinctions", which make the art world what it is, did not exist. Art and daily life were virtually unified. However, does such a movement have a future as art?

The core issue can be seen in a certain feud between "art therapy" and "art brut" or "outsider art", all of which popped up right after the WWII. "Art therapy" is a movement started by Margaret Naumburg, who proposed artistic creation as a part of medical treatment. What is important here is that, basically, "art therapy" has a different goal from that of "art brut" or "outsider art", the latter of which were advocated by Hans Prinzhorn and Jean Dubuffet, respectively. The ultimate goal of "art therapy" is treatment. In 1966, Naumburg said, "When the therapist convinces the patient that he accepts whatever the patient may express, the patient often begins to project in images what he dares not put into words"[15]. For example, if we look at a sketch by one of Naumburg's patients (Fig. 2), we will notice that the sketch was not drawn for artistic appreciation. On the other hand, "art brut" and "outsider art" seeks the validation of its creation by certain professionals in the art world. In this sense, there must be a bright line between art therapy based on treatment, and art brut or outsider art that is created for artistic appreciation[16].

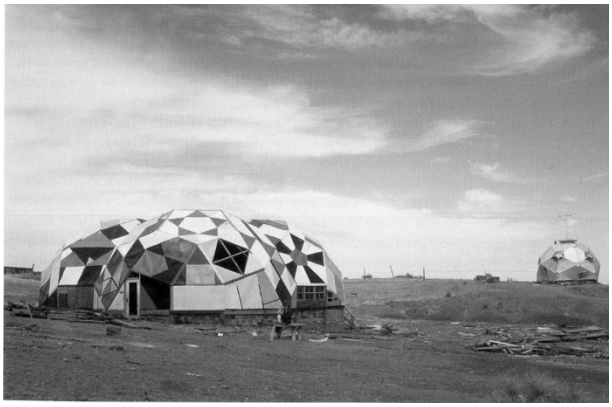

Figure 1: "The Complex" (1967) at Drop City, designed by Steve Baer（From Elissa Auther and Adam Lerner, ed. *West of Center* (2012)）

Figure 2: A drawing by a patient of Margaret Naumburg (From Margaret Naumburg. *Dynamically Oriented Art Therapy: In Principles and Practice* [1966])

According to Tadashi Hattori, since the mid-1970s, some institutes for the disabled have found a certain value in outsider art, and have built ateliers and galleries for residents to create and display their work[17]. Japan is a country in which "welfare-type outside art" is flourishing, such as Ryuzaburo Shikiba, who promoted Kiyoshi Yamashita, and Kazuo Yagi, who taught pottery at care facilities in Shiga Prefecture[18]. However, even in Japan, art totally free from evaluation, which Naumburg dreamed of, or, to use Kumakura's words, art totally unrelated to "hard working," cannot be established. For example, the competition hosted every year by the Iwate Kirara Art Association in Iwate Prefecture includes the "Kirara Grand Prize". Some people claim that works of art brut should not be evaluated by this differentiation and appreciation; however, once the organizers established the Grand Prize, many participants came to enjoy the exhibition[19]. In the 67 psychiatry hospitals that make up the Association of Tokyo Psychiatric Hospitals, patients can exhibit their artworks only after adjudication in the "Kokoro no Art Exhibition"[20]. In short, even in institutional care, "distinction" is indispensable to art.

Even Tadashi Hattori, who has supported the synthesis of outsider art and welfare for many years, worries, "The honeyed relationship between outsider art and contemporary art has undesirable possibility to be regarded as certain egalitarianism. In other words, the exhibitions are read as a crude message of egalitarianism, in which every body -- whether the disabled or not – is essentially the same. Accordingly, it is capable to hide various questions about qualities behind the art works…Japanese outsider art is destined to walk on the perilous border between welfare and art"[21]. Eradicating "distinction" on art, make "every human being an artist", dismantling the art world, and transcending the border between art and daily life… all of them in fact are close to a certain Utopia, and those who seek for them cannot help walking "on the perilous border". After proposing this very modern problem, I would like to re-examine French Neo-Impressionism starting in 1886 as a pioneering art movement that tackled with the problem of art and daily life as early as the 19th century.

2. The Neo-Impressionists as Pioneers – Were They Health Freaks or New Agers?

Neo-Impressionism, which started with George Seurat's "Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte" (1886), has mainly been studied in terms of the basis of scientific color theory and optics. However, what I would like to focus on in this paper is the Neo-Impressionists who dismantled the art world by transcending the border between art and daily life.

Although little known, the Neo-Impressionists founded a short-lived (1893-1894) "boutique" in Paris in order to sell their own works. Almost all the members of the movement took part in it: Paul Signac, Maximilien Luce, Henri-Edmond Cross, Hippolyt Petitjean, Théo Van Rysselberghe, Charles Angrand, and Camille Pissarro and his son Lucien[22]. The boutique was founded on the basis of the anarcho-communist ideal of mutual aid in direct opposition to the blatant commercialism of the Durand-Ruel gallery[23]. Although this project lasted only a year, it unequivocally played a central role in the dissemination of Neo-Impressionist aesthetics and politics.

Strangely, the facade of this gallery was painted with bright blue and red letters[24]. A wall of such vivid color is not suitable for the exhibition of paintings. Why did the Neo-Impressionists

choose to do this? As a hint, I would like to refer to Paul Signac's letter, written sometime in the winter of 1893-1894, to his colleague Van Rysselberghe:

> Prepare for a pretty present for January...I suspect that we will not have the Pavilion [the boutique] in March ...how sad it is, our boutique has been already forgotten on the rue Laffitte.... Blue on Dahlia, round and metallic letters, vermilion reds... it used to sing a good dynamogenic song of gaiety, light, force, health... a triumph[25].

This letter tells that the "boutique" was colored with blue and vermilion red, like dahlias. Considering that most of the Neo-Impressionist artists were French, there is a possibility that they wished to evoke the national colors of blue and red. However, the Neo-Impressionists were genuine anarchists who even denied the concept of nations. There is no possibility that such extreme leftists would use blue and red in a nationalistic connotation. In this letter, Signac claims that the blue wall and the red lettering of the Neo-Impressionist boutique manifested "gaity, light, force, health". Through this coloring, Signac focused on not only aesthetic pleasure, but also the pragmatic ideas of "force" and "health". In other words, Signac's letter supported the idea that the combination of red and blue does not so much affect one's sense of beauty as the sense of *bien-être*, or well-being. The coloring was supposed to support the viewer's happiness. Here, therefore, the border between art and quotidian life was transcended.

The discourse of blue and red in Neo-Impressionism deserves attention in terms of the fusion between art and life. As early as 1886, when Neo-Impressionism became known as a group, they particularly chose blue and red. From the mid-1880s on they participated in the Red and Blue Dinners (*Dîners du Rouge et du Bleu*) hosted by Doctor Paul-Ferdinand Gachet, who was famous for attending Vincent Van Gogh at his death[26]. Gachet was engaged in what is now called alternative medicine, such as homeopathy, hydrotherapy, magnet therapy, and color therapy. Reportedly, at the Red and Blue dinners, Gachet imparted his medical knowledge as well as that of art, literature, and politics[27].

The origin of the name for the "Red and Blue Dinners" is somewhat obscure. However, considering the participants' interdisciplinary interests toward medicine and art, we can point to their interest in color therapy as a part of their interest in alternative medicine. According to American color theorist Faber Birren, color therapy, along with sunbathing, was increasingly prescribed as a cure for mental instability from the 1870s onward[28]. The combination of red and blue in this context came to be regarded as a significant treatment for restoring mental equilibrium. For example, American color theorist Seth Pancoast[29], French psychologist Charles Féré[30], and German color theorist A. Osborne Eaves[31] believed that red accelerated the nervous system and blue relaxed it, and that balancing the two colors would keep the equilibrium of the nervous system.

The writer Joris-Karl Huysmans, in his masterpiece *À rebours* (1884), picked up the topic of color therapy. The mentally unstable main character Jean Des Esseintes shut himself up in a room painted in orange and blue, and was finally cured. "The setting was complete. At night the room subsided into a restful, soothing harmony. The wainscoting preserved its blue, which seemed sustained and warmed by the orange. And the orange remained pure, strengthened and

fanned as it was by the insistent breath of the blues"[32]. Huysmans, who was not only famous as a novelist but also as an art critic, had a close relationship with some Neo-Impressionists such as Seurat, Signac, and Pissarro[33]. Considering this background, we could understand the reason why Signac thought the boutique's blue and red wall was good for health.

Besides color therapy, the Neo-Impressionists were interested in homeopathy and hydrotherapy. Homeopathy is a therapy, created by German doctor Samuel Hahnemann in which a patient takes a highly diluted concentration of small amount of poison that produces symptoms similar to the disease as it cures. Dr. Gachet, who hosted the Red and Blue dinners, specialized in homeopathy, and prescribed homeopathic medicine for the Pissarro, Van Gogh, Cézanne, among others. Also, it is said that Octave Mirbeau and Elisée Reclus, both of whom were anarchists very close to the Neo-Impressionists, devoted themselves to homeopathy[34]. Among them, Pissarro was an ardent believer in homeopathy. In his last years, Pissarro was suffering from an abscess of the prostate gland. Although his surgeon wished to operate to prevent the infection from spreading, his homeopathic doctor objected to the operation, and Pissarro died of blood poisoning in 1903[35].

Three homeopathic doctors prescribed medicine in the Neo-Impressionist circle. The first was Paul-Ferdinand Gachet; the second was Georges de Bellio, from Bucharest, who was, like Gachet, a collector of Impressionist art. The third was Dr. Léon Simon, who cared for Camille Pissarro in his last moments, and played a central role in French homeopathic medicine. Although Simon was a doctor by profession, the other two were art collectors as well. They were therefore well acquainted with the art world and its movements.

At the beginning of the 1890s, many of the Neo-Impressionists left Paris and moved into less built-up suburbs and villages. Purportedly Signac moved to St.-Tropez to cure his chronic asthma[36], Henri Edmond Cross, who was always sickly, likewise moved there for his health[37]. They were obviously interested in both physical and mental health, which is shown in the paintings of bathers by Edmond Cross, Maximilien Luce, and Pissarro (Fig. 3). For example, Pissarro criticized the formulaic nudes of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts as a "disease," and said, "You must draw the nude as you draw chickens, ducks and geese!"[38] Around this period, Pissarro made a large number of nudes in oil paintings and prints, and even posed as a model for a painting of female bathers because models were not available at that time[39]. This tells us that for Pissarro it was not a formalistic beauty, but rather the subject of the bather itself, that mattered. In fact, the nudes painted by Pissarro and Luce, as shown Figure 3, have distorted breasts and bellies. It tells that not the proportion of the female nudes but the hygienic practice of keeping the body clean that was important.

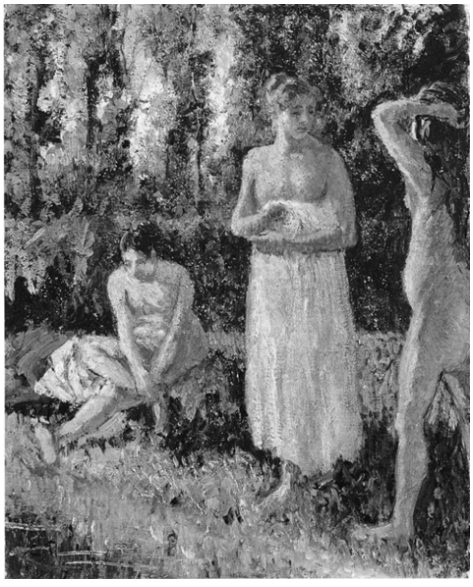

Figure 3: Camille Pissarro, "Bathers", c. 1895, oil on canvas, 41 x 33 cm, Private Collection

In this way, the Neo-Impressionists showed a new "way of living" as early as the turn of the 20th century,

almost anticipating how the centrist leftists in capitalist countries of the late 20th century would be infatuated with alternative medicine and the back-to-the land-philosophy. As the following sections reveal, their interest in health ran parallel to their interest in art. However, as the last section has clarified, to erase the "distinction" between art and daily life is not easy. The following sections will identify how the Neo-Impressionists successfully merged art with life.

3. The Fusion of Art and Life: Equilibrium

This paper examines the concept of "equilibrium", which connects well-being and the aesthetic value of beauty. In *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionnisme* (1899), Signac argued that "By only taking account of the optical mixture of pure elements, maximum luminosity and coloration, moreover, the controlled usage and *equilibrium* of these elements according to the rules of contrast, gradation, and irradiation, the technique of divisionism can guarantee the integral harmony of the work"[40]. In this section, I will confirm that the Neo-Impressionists and their circle regarded the concept of "equilibrium" as transcending art and they looked to the political and ethical backgrounds in the concept. The Neo-Impressionist Charles Angrand later wrote to his fellow Neo-Impressionist Maximilien Luce in 1909 that "equilibrium is the law of the cosmic world"[41].

Equilibrium," a relatively new concept, emerged with the development of the physical sciences in the mid-sixteenth century. From the beginning, the word signified the balance between opposing forces, as it does now, and developed alongside the system of mathematical quantification, as applied by advocates of the physical sciences and of psychology[42]. In this sense, "equilibrium" should be differentiated from traditional concept of "harmonie" which derives from Greek "harmós" meaning junction and joint. In the West, the concept of "harmonie" has developed along with the concept of proportion since the age of Pythagoras. It is supposed to separate visual "form" by certain percentages, such as 1:2, 2:3. On the other hand, "equilibrium" is related to the "quantity" of phenomena. The latter is related to abstract concepts such as energy and money. "Equilibrium" is case by case applied to "energy balance", "money balance", "balance of human relations", "balance of nutrition", "mental balance", among others. In short, "equilibrium" is a very versatile concept.

First of all, let us look at the political side. The concept of equilibrium was a fundamental tenet in anarchist philosophy, which captivated the Neo-Impressionist painters. Camille Pissarro strongly recommended that his son Lucien read Proudhon's *De la Justice dans la révolution et dans l'Eglise* (1858), where he writes: "God of builders is not Substance, not Cause, not Soul, not Monad, not Creator, not Father, not Verb, not Love, not Paraclet, not Redeemer, not Satan, nothing that corresponds to a transcendental concept: everything metaphysic is here out of the way. This is personification of universal Equilibrium"[43]. Moreover, in his popular leaflet "Anarcho-Communism: Its Philosophy and Ideals," the central figure of anarchism Peter Kropotkin emphasized the importance of social equilibrium by stating that society "looks for harmony in an ever-changing and fugitive equilibrium between a multitude of varied forces and influences of every kind, following their own course"[44]. In this way, the Anarchists regarded "equilibrium" as peaceful balance among ever-changing forces. In this sense, "equilibrium" is a

political creed.

Moreover, all the alternative medicines that the Neo-Impressionists practiced, such as color therapy, homeopathy and hydrotherapy, are based on the concept of "homeostasis", the faith in the intrinsic natural balance of nervous functions. Although the word itself was coined by Walter B. Cannon in 1929, the nineteenth-century physiologist Claude Bernard proposed the stability of the bodily processes in *Léçon sur let phénomènes de la vie communs aux animaux et aux végétaux* in 1878[45]. In fact, the discourse of homeostasis, or a belief in an intrinsic bodily and social stability, was widely shared by a large number of European psychologists, physiologists, medical doctors, and philosophers among Bernard's contemporaries[46]. A large number of the adherents of alternative medicine believed in the homeostatic stability of the human body.

As I have discussed above, the function of the quasi-complementary set of red and blue in nineteenth-century color therapy was to control nervous tension to maintain the body's internal equilibrium. Also, the homeopathic notion of health was largely based on faith in the intrinsic natural balance of nervous functions (homeostasis). According to Samuel Hahnemann, the founder of homeopathy, there were only two kinds of diseases, "sthenia" and "asthenia". "Sthenia" was the result of over-stimulation or over-irritation, and "asthenia" was the result of insufficient stimulation. Therefore, there were only two treatments: "sedatives," such as bleeding, cold applications, emetics, purgatives, and diaphoretics, which served to soothe irritations; and "stimulants", such as purging and sweating, and the use of hot applications, meat, spicy foods, wine, and exercise, which stimulated the affected area[47]. Interestingly, Hahnemann did not identify any material causes for disease, and regarded the cause of disease as only "mistunings of the enlivening power-force-energy [*Kraft*, in German] of the human body". In other words, Hahnemann took the energy-monistic view. Hahnemann's theory was surely succeeded by the subsequent homeopathic doctors, and they argued that disease derived from causal matter, but from the break of the equilibrium of the bodily force. For example, in their main books, the homeopathic doctors Gachet and Simon, both of whom were close to the Neo-Impressionists, claimed that the disruption of the body's "equilibrium" caused disease[48].

Hydrotherapy in the late 19th century had a similar intention. It was not intended to cleanse the surface of the body, but sought "equilibrium" brought by temperature differences (nerves and pulses change, according to it). It was in the 1890s when the Neo-Impressionists became interested in hydrotherapy. Before then, in 1888, in his *The Baths and Wells of Europe*, John Macpherson studied how to adjust bodily temperature, sweating, and blood circulation by changing the water temperature[49]. Also Constantin James, who practiced hydrotherapy in France, said in his *Traité de thérapeutique thermal* (1867): "Hydrotherapy is an act of re-equilibration of the bodily harmony. Because all the important functions [of the body] are influenced by the nerve system and the circulation of capillaries"[50].

So far, this paper has confirmed that the concept of "equilibrium" can be applied to the political and therapeutic fields. Here I would like to return to the concept of "equilibrium" in the art of Neo-Impressionism. The key is complementary contrasts. Complementary colors are the combinations that produce white light when mixed. On the color wheel, complementary colors are in opposite positions on the diagonal lines. As I will show, for the Neo-Impressionists, complementary colors were the most important combinations. Complementary colors have

geographical “equilibrium” on the diagonals. However, more than that, in the neuro-psychological color theory to which the Neo-Impressionists referred, complementary colors are the combination closely related to homeostasis of the healthy body.

This can be read in Ogden Rood’s *Modern Chromatics* (1879, French 1881), which the Neo-Impressionists read avidly. Rood admitted that the contrast of complementary colors were the most comfortable for the viewers, and explained how complementary afterimages appear in the viewer’s eyes.

> It is quite easy to explain their production [complementary afterimage] with the aid of the theory of Young and Helmholtz. Let us take as an example the experiment just described. According to our theory, the green light [G] from the little square of paper, acting on the eye, fatigues to some extent the green nerves of the retina, the red [R] and violet [B] nerves meanwhile not being much affected. When the green paper is suddenly jerked away by the string, grey light is presented to the fatigued retina, and this grey light may be considered to consist, as far as we are concerned, of red, green, and violet light. The red [R] and violet [B] nerves, not being fatigued, respond powerfully to this stimulus; the green [G] nerves, however, answer this new call on them more feebly, and in consequence we have presented to us mainly a mixture of the sensations red and violet, giving as a final result rose-red or purplish-red[51].

On the basis of this neurological standardization of color vision, Rood believed that complementary afterimages are generated as a result of fatigue caused by the labor of the nerves. Rood connects afterimages with nervous system reactions that struggle for homeostatic equilibrium among the three optical nerves[52].

Several prominent physiologists also espoused this theory. Herman von Helmholtz clearly stated the importance of “avoiding lopsided fatigue of the optical nerves, and of keeping their function equal.” Helmholtz’s significant text on art, “Optisches über Malerei” (the source text for his popular lectures on optics in painting delivered in Germany from 1871 to 1873) was available in French under the title of “L’optique et la peinture”, as a part of Ernst Brücke’s text, *Principes scientifiques des beaux-arts* (1878)[53]. In this article, Helmholtz wrote, “the muscle is tired by work, the brain is tired by thinking, and by mental operations; the eye is tired by light.” Accordingly, Helmholtz recommended that painters arrange their colors in a manner that avoids lopsided fatigue. Drawing on Young’s hypothesis concerning the trichromatic nature of optical nerves, Helmholtz defined ideal harmonies as contrasts of two complementaries and of three primaries[54].

The Neo-Impressionist painters firmly believed that complementary contrasts are the most beautiful contrasts of all[55]. In fact, most of their works were based on complementary contrasts. The Neo-Impressionists’ attachment to the complementary colors is extreme. For example, Camille Pissarro printed his exhibition pamphlet in red letters on a green background[56]. Also, the red and blue wall of the Paris boutique were equal to the complementary contrasts in terms of keeping the equilibrium of the nervous system. Moreover,

Seurat and Pissarro were known to paint their frames in the complementary colors of their paintings[57].

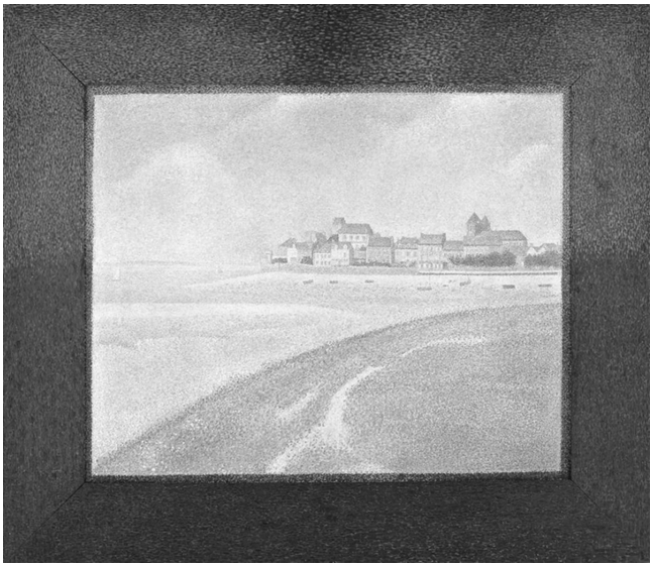

Figure 4: Georges Seurat, "View of le Crotoy", 1889, oil on painting, 70.49 x 86.68 cm, The Detroit Institute of Art

However, the Impressionists were supposedly interested in complementary contrasts not in terms of form (*eidos*) but of matter (*hylē*), which can be seen in their way of dealing with frames. For example, let us look at Seurat's "View of le Crotoy" (1889) (Fig. 4). The blue ocean in the painting is carefully contrasted with wide pale yellow on the thick frame. However, these contrasts are not those in which the colorist Michel-Eugène Chevereul were interested. Chevereul has found the complementary contrasts that each color strengthens at their thin edge. On the other hand, Seurat's widely spread colors do not have outlines, and are covering the canvas like a mist. What matters here is not form, but matter.

In this way, what the concept of "equilibrium" – the core policy of the Neo-Impressionist activities – broadly sought for was beauty, health, and political correctness. Here "to stay comfortable without fatigue" is the best value (we can add that this policy is suitable for the contemporary concept of happiness, or the late capitalistic concept of happiness). It is no exaggeration that the fusion between art and life in Neo-Impressionism was possible in such a special sense of values.

4. The Fusion of Art and Life: Color

The reason the Neo-Impressionists could walk "on the perilous border" is the transcendental nature of color as medium. The critic John Ruskin's words -- which had a major effect on the color painters such as Impressionists and Neo-Impressionists – hint at the special character of color as media. In his *The Elements of Drawing* in 1857, Ruskin claimed that a painter must commit his life to the practice of coloring:

> You *ought* to love colour, and to think nothing quite beautiful or perfect without it; and if you really do love it, for its own sake, and are not merely desirous to colour because you think painting a finer thing than drawing, there is some chance you may colour well. [...] You may, in the time which other vocations leave at your disposal, produce finished, beautiful, and masterly drawings in light and shade. But to colour well, requires your life. It can not be done cheaper. The difficulty of doing right is increased – not twofold nor threefold, but a thousandfold, and more – by the addition of colour to your work. [...] the difficulty is strangely increased, – and multiplied almost to infinity by this great fact, that, which form is absolute, so that you can say at the moment you draw any line that it is either

> right or wrong, colour is wholly *relative*. [...] so that every touch must be laid, not with a view to its effect at the time, but with a view to its effect in futurity, the result upon it of all that is afterwards to be done being previously considered. You may easily understand that, this being so, nothing but the devotion of life, and great genius besides, can make a colourist[58]. [emphasis in original]

Ruskin's passionate and even threatening statement expresses an explosive nature of color. As a familiar example, we can look at various specialists from various fields such as art, science, psychology, medicine, and commerce, gathering at conferences on color like the Color Science Association of Japan. Another example can be seen in Roy Osborne's *Books on Colour* (2007), which deals with as many as 28 fields – architecture, chemistry, classification, colorants, decoration, education, fauna, food, glass, graphics, history, lighting, literature, metrology, music, optics, painting, perception, philosophy, photography, printing, psychology, science, symbolism, television & computing, terminology, therapy, and vision[59]. In short, audaciously speaking, color is life itself.

The French phenomenologist Emmanuel Lévinas and Japanese philosopher Junichi Murata claim that color is not to be seen, but lived[60]. Their expression of "living color" implies that color is the medium that can tie art to life. Even in the age of the 19th century avant-garde's motto of "l'art pour l'art (art for art's sake)", the Neo-Impressionists fulfilled the fusion of art and life. This must have been because they were all colorists.

Conclusion: Banal Geniuses

The Neo-Impressionists realized the fusion of art and life – it basically appeared in the West after WWII -- with the help of "equilibrium" and "color". However, to use the word Hattori – as I mentioned above – the Neo-Impressionists walked "on the perilous border of art and life" as well as 20th-century artists. In his *From Delacroix to Neo-Impressionism*, Paul Signac -- the core figure of the Neo-Impressionists -- discussed the problem of the Neo-Impressionists' paintings. Neo-Impressionist paintings almost look same, and critics claimed that the only character of their paintings is that of "*communauté* (community)"[61]. This problem is the same as that of a certain type of 20th century art that promoted the "democratization of art." Criticized in such a way, by referring to Epinal comics and Japanese prints, Signac defiantly said that there was no problem even if one did not know whose work it is[62].

David Sutter, who contributed to the realization of the Neo-Impressionist uniform schematization, said in his *Philosophy of Beaux-Arts*, "genius is no longer the talent of creating new things. If the word is applied to human beings, it means nothing"[63]. Considering the raison d'être of avant-garde art, this statement is audacious. However, if the Neo-Impressionist art sought for "pleasure" and "happiness" bought by "equilibrium" and "color", this statement sounds natural. The Neo-Impressionist art sought for the pole in which the desire of life and that of art rarely overlap. In fact, this is also the pole from which art is destroyed. We – who are facing with the contemporary fusion of art and life – should reconsider this paradoxical character of the Neo-Impressionist denial of the artistic privileges.

Notes

[1] Donald Kuspit, H*ealth and Happiness in the Twentieth-Century Avant-Garde Art*, Cornell University Press, 1996, p. 8.
[2] Karsten Harries, *The Meaning of Modern Art: a philosophical interpretation*, Northwestern University Press, 1968, p. 61.
[3] José Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art, and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature*, Princeton University Press, 1948, p. 48.
[4] Y Gasset, ibid., p. 8.
[5] Herbert Read, *Art and Alienation: The Role of the Artist in Society*, New York: The Viking Press, 1967, p. 13.
[6] Y Gasset, ibid., p. 29.
[7] Peter Bürger, "Das Altern der Moderne" in Adorno-Konferenz <01, 1983, Frankfurt Main> (Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1983), n.p.
[8] Haruhiko Fujita, ed. *Art to Fukushi: Artist toshiteno Ningen* (Art and Welfare: Human Beings as Artists), University of Osaka Press, 2009, p. 4.
[9] Rama P. Coomaraswamy, *The Essential Ananda K. Coomaraswamy*, World Wisdom, 2004, p. 175.
[10] Fujita, ibid., p. 6.
[11] Elissa Auther and Adam Lerner, ed. *West of Center: Art and the Counterculture Experiment in America, 1965-1977*, Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2012.
[12] Auther and Lerner, ed. ibid., p. 7.
[13] Takaaki Kumakura, *Datsu-Geijutsu/Datsu-Shihonsyugi* (De-Art/De-Capitalism), Keio University Press, 2000, pp. 1-36.
[14] Takaaki Kumakura, *Bijutsushi Tokusyu C*, Keio University Press, 2003, p.64.
[15] Margaret Naumburg. *Dynamically Oriented Art Therapy: In Principles and Practice*, New York: Crune & Stratton, inc., 1966, pp. 2-3.
[16] The similar statement can be seen in the following books and articles: Hiroyuki Arai, *Ikiteiku E: Art ga hito wo iyasutoki*, Aki Shobo, 2013, pp.25-26. Tamaki Saito, "art brut wa sonzai surunoka" (Kenjiro Hosaka, Wataru Asada ed., *Art brut, Art, Japan*, Heibonsya, 2013, p.91). Tadashi Hattori, "Nihon no Fukushi-Shisetsu to Geijutsu-Katsudo no Genzai" (Haruhiko Fujita ed., *Geijutsu to Fukushi, Human Beings as Artists*, University of Osaka Press, 2009, pp. 241-242).
[17] Tadashi Hattori, "Nihon no Fukushi-Shisetsu to Geijutsu-Katsudo no Genzai", ibid., p. 243.
[18] Hattori, ibid., p. 245f.
[19] Tamaki Saito, "art brut wa sonzai surunoka", K. Hosaka ed. (2013), p. 99.
[20] Hiroyuki Arai, *Ikiteiku E*, 2013, p. 38.
[21] Hattori, ibid., p. 260.
[22] Erich Franz , ed, *Signac et la liberation de la couleur: de Matisse à Mondrian*, Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1997, p. 69.
[23] Robyn S. Roslak, *Neo-Impressionism and Anarchism in Fin-de-Siècle France: Painting, Politics and Landscape*, Aldershot, England ; Burlington, VT : Ashgate, 2007, p. 42.
[24] Kathleen Adler, *Camille Pissarro: A Biography*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977, p. 147.
[25] This unpublished letter is now in the Getty Research Center archive. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine. Accents are often omitted in this original French: "Préparez nous un chouette envoi pour Janvier... il est craindre que nous n'ayons pas le Pavillion en Mars...quel trou, notre boutique dans cette vieille lune de rue Laffitte...Bleu vers dahlia, lettres rondes et metalliques, rouges vermillons...elle chante deja la bonne chanson dynamogénique de la gaiete, de la lumière, de la force, de la santé...un triomphe".
[26] Paul Alexis (under the pseudonym Trublot), "A minuite", *Le cri du people*, 25 juillet, 1886; 13 mai,

1887; 15 novembre, 1887. -------, “Trubl’au vert – Trubl’Auvers-sur-Oise”, *Le cri du people*, 15 août, 1887.

[27] Pissarro and Vincent Van Gogh were particularly interested in medical topics (Anne Distel, *Cézanne to Van Gogh: The Collection of Dr. Gachet*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1999, p. 5f.)

[28] Faber Birren, *Color Psychology and Color Therapy: A Factual Study of the Influence of Color on Human Life*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1950.

[29] Seth Pancoast, *Blue and Red Light*, Philadelphia, J. M. Stoddart & co., 1877, p. 267.

[30] Charles Féré, *The Pathology of Emotions, Physiological and Clinical Studies*, trans. by Robert Park, London: The University Press, 1899, pp. 25-34.

[31] A. Osborne Eaves, *Die Kräfte der Farben* (1906) as cited in John Gage, *Color and Meaning: Art, Science, and Symbolism*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999, p. 252.

[32] Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature*, trans. by Margaret Mauldon, Oxford University Press, 1998, Chapter 2.

[33] Letters 145 & 146 in Camille Pissarro, *Correspondance de Camille Pissarro*, 1980, pp. 203-205. Paul Signac, *D’Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionnisme*, Paris: Herman, 1964, p. 110. Paul Smith, “‘Parbleu’: Pissarro and the political color of an original vision”, *Art History*, vol. 15, no. 2, June 1992, p. 235.

[34] Gary S. Dunbar, *Elisée Historian of Nature*, Hamden, Conn. : Archon Books, 1978, p. 27. Henriette Chardak, *Elisée Reclus: L’homme qui aimait la Terre*, Paris: Edition Stock, 1997, p. 183. Anne Distel, *Cézanne to Van Gogh*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1999, p. 5; Marianne Delafond, *A L’Apogée de L’Impressionnisme: la collection Georges de Bellio*, La Bibliothèque des Arts, 2007, p. 40. Sisley and Renoir also practiced homeopathy.

[35] Adler, ibid., pp. 189-190. Camille Pissarro, *Camille Pissarro: Letters to his son Lucian*, ed. John Rewald, Boston: MFA Publications, 1972, p. 360.

[36] Ferretti-Bocquillon, Marina, Anne Distel, John Leighton, and Susan Alyson Stein, *Signac: 1863-1935*, Exhibition Cat., The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Yale University Press, 2001, p. 27.

[37] Virginia Baily Noland, *Henri-Edmond Cross*, Master’s Thesis, Lousiana State University, 1989, abstract.

[38] Ralph Shikes and Paula Harper, *Pissarro: His Life and Work*, New York: Horizon Press, 1980, p. 270.

[39] Camille Pissarro, *Correspondance de Camille Pissarro*, tome 4, edited by Janine Bailly-Herzberg; preface by Bernard Dorival, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1980, p. 229.

[40] Emphasis – Kato. Paul Signac, ibid., p. 92.

[41] Letter of Charles Angrand to Maximilien Luce on 4 Octobre, 1909: see Charles Angrand, *Correspondences 1883-1926*, Rouen : F. Lespinasse, 1988, p. 202.

[42] The first recorded use of the French word “équilibre” was used in 1544 as a meaning of equivalence (Le trésor de la langue française informatisé).

[43] Pierre-Josephe Proudhon, *De la Justice dans la révolution et dans l'Eglise*, Paris: Garnier frères, 1858, tome 2, p. 212. For more on Camille Pissarro, see Ralph Shikes and Paula Harper, 1980, p. 68.

[44] Peter Kropotkin, *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings*, ed. Roger N. Baldwin, New York: Dover Press, 2002, p. 124.

[45] Erma Fox, *Homeostasis and Philosophy*, Master’s Thesis, San Diego State University, 1991, p. 5.

[46] For more details, see Yukiko Kato, *Color, Hygiene, and Body Politics: French Neo-Impressionist Theories of Vision and Volition, 1870-1905*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Durham, NC: Duke University, 2010, Chapter I.

[47] Rima Handley, *A Homeopathic Love Story: The Story of Samuel and Mélanie Hahnemann*, Berkeley: Horth Atlantic Books, 1990, p. 58.

[48] Paul-Ferdinand Gachet, *Etude sur la Mélancolie*, doctoral thesis, Montpellier: University of Montpellier, 1858, 13.
[49] John Macpherson, *The Baths and Wells of Europe: with a Sketch of Hydrotherapy, and hints on climate, sea-bathing, and popular cures*, London: Edward Stanford, 1888, pp. 72-73.
[50] Alain Caubet, "Les eaux et les bains dans la thérapeutique française des dixhuitième et dix-neuvième siècle", *Spas in Britain and in France in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Annick Cossic and Patrick Galliou, Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006, pp. 146-147; note 21 & 22: Constantin James. *Traité de thérapeutique thermal*, 6th edition, Paris, 1967.
[51] Ogden N. Rood, *Modern Chromatics*, New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1973 (1879), p. 237. (French translation: *Théorie scientifique des couleurs et leurs applications à l'art et à l'industrie*, Paris: Librairie Germer Bauillière et Cie, 1881.)
[52] Rood, ibid., pp. 161, 273.
[53] Hermann von Helmholtz, "l'optique et la peinture", Ernst Wilhelm von Brücke, *Principes scientifiques des beaux-arts, essais et fragments de théorie*, Paris, G. Baillière et cie, 1878, 169f.
[54] Helmholtz, ibid., pp. 191, 217-218.
[55] Georges Roque, *Art et Science de la Couleur: Chevreul et les Peintres, de Delacroix à l'abstraction*, Nîmes: Éditions Jacqueline Chambon, 1997, p. 61f. John Gage, *Color and Meaning: Art, Science, and Symbolism*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999, p. 165.
[56] Roque, ibid., p. 258.
[57] Didier Semin. "Note sur Seurat et le cadre", Avant-guerre sur l'art, etc., no. 1, 2 trimestre 1980; 53-59. Roque 1997, pp. 256-259, 316-317. Pissarro started painting complementary contrasts on frames around 1880, and Seurat started at the end of the 1880s.
[58] John Ruskin. *The Elements of Drawing*, Boston and New York: Colonial Press Company, 1909 (1857), Section 152; pp. 133-134.
[59] Roy Osborne, *Books on Colour 1500-2000*, uPUBLISH, 2007.
[60] Junichi Murata, *Shikisai no Tetsugaku* (Philosophy of Color), Iwanami Shoten, 2002, p. 233f.
[61] Signac, ibid., pp. 100-101.
[62] David Sutter. *Philosophie des Beaux-Arts, appliquée à la peinture*, Paris: Vve A. Morel et Cie, 1870, p. 78.

Yukiko KATO, "Geijutsu to Seikatsu no Bunsuirei : Art Kaitai no Rekishi kara Shin-insyoha wo Saikou suru", *Tetsugaku*, No. 132, Mita Tetsugakukai, March 2014, pp. 281-307.