

Painting of Nature – Nature of Painting

An Essay on Landscape and the Historical Position of »Barbizon«

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To the memory of Stefan Germer

1. Nature into Painting

Asked how his painting referred to nature, Jackson Pollock boasted: »I am nature.«¹ Inadvertently, even instinctively, Pollock understood an aspect of the genre of »nature painting« that we have too easily repressed today. Museum galleries today market the easel paintings associated with »Barbizon« as poetic views of the countryside surprised in its most profound yet transitory moments. The artists themselves, in the 1820s through 1850s, whose easily merchandisable canvases floated freely in and out of 19th-century bourgeois living rooms, viewed the »nature« they painted as a double-sided phenomenon conflating *subjectivity* and *subject*.

Even the critics of the first half of the 19th century, who repudiated the sketchy techniques and the unfinished veneer of these scenes, implicitly recognized the paradoxes at the center of »Barbizon's« approach to inner and outer nature: what those defenders of the established canon – along with a good share of the bourgeois public until the late 1860s – spurned was the personal handwriting of each artist's pencil, gestural tracings that refused to be subjugated to a finished and aestheticized surface. Instead of accepting such traces as the secret language of the artist's personality (as critics of the generation of Castagnary began to do), the Salon public and critics before 1848 criticized these visible traces of his pencil-gesture unworthy of a painting aiming at more than to decorate an unimportant corner of an apartment with a pleasing, but insignificant scene. Complaints about Barbizon painting were thus motivated not only by its »realistic« scenes,

but also by the language through which those scenes were expressed.² The outer nature of the forgotten French countryside, only miles from Paris, was considered undeserving representation. And so was the inner nature of the artist, as it emerged in his or her technique and approach.

Indeed, the role of inner and outer nature was changing, in »Barbizon paintings,« in an interdependent way. Estrangement is what made them both worthy of observation. The outskirts of Paris, the pre-industrial landscape, even desolate forest ponds or the primitive sluice of a brook behind a murky meadow – previous centuries would never have considered painting such scenes again and again, observing them with a personal investment. These landscapes were far from the industrial world, although not far from the lines of coach transport or from the first railway lines. They were just there, in that time and in that place, in a »here and now,« even if they seemed to belong to another world. But the empirical, assiduous observation uniting painters and beholders in front of such scenes was not devoted exclusively to what they saw, but also to the act of seeing itself.³ The artist's observation of outer nature expanded to include the observation of the self, of inner nature, or, as Zola would later label it, the artist's temper. Both directions of observation, inward and outward, were present in this new painting. And both were also beyond painting. The artist could neither render the definitive view of the pond in the forest or of the sluice behind the meadow, nor could he fix his technique once and for all in his »realization« of the scene. The painting process had entered a new situation, characterized by what Richard Shiff

has defined with the paradoxical term of a »technique of originality.« Paradoxical, because technique is a strategy of making that can be repeated, whereas originality is necessarily unrepeatable and unique.⁴ The painters' search for their inner natures in the face of outer nature became an unending quest, often resulting in interminable processes of work. Their own, personal techniques, something that could not be explained in a handbook, were an empirical search for the expression of nature as well as of themselves.⁵ Many of the essays in this book are devoted to deciphering the secrets of different »techniques of originality.« Yet others are devoted to understanding the complexity of the new situation of painting as a screen of nature as well as of subjectivity. *Painting of nature – nature of painting* – the inversion, thus, seeks to describe the new discourse of painting that first came about in what we broadly call »Barbizon« or the »school of nature.«⁶ Rather than taking Barbizon as a name for a specific school of painting or even to mark collectively those artists who lived for a long period in the region around Barbizon, in this essay, I will use »Barbizon« as a general term referring to the broad phenomenon of naturalism in French landscape painting prior to »Impressionism.«

In this introductory essay I look, from a bird's eye perspective, at the historical position of »Barbizon.« What was landscape in the system of the arts? In what sense was it considered a genre? How were landscapes to be read? I propose a paradigmatic model for reading landscape paintings according to the specific character of time and space represented, to its »chronotopes«, in the terminology of Michail Bakhtin. I then try to understand the transformations in the expectations and narrative capacities of landscape painting associated with »Barbizon.« I argue that landscape as a genre was not only changed, but that it turned into an *anti-genre* directed against the hierarchy and rhetoric of genres as they had long been understood not only by the academies, but by humanistic art theory in general. In »Barbizon,« landscape metamorphosed into a paradoxical anti-genre that would, in the logic of its further development, dis-

integrate the humanistic system of genres. Such a logic was confirmed first by Courbet, then by Manet, Degas and the impressionists, whose paintings could rarely be qualified according to the traditional generic categories of history, genre, or landscape.

2. Landscape as a Genre

Art historians usually define the genres through recourse to humanistic art theory from Leon Battista Alberti to André Félibien. Each genre is taken to correspond to a specific content and to the corresponding narrative strategies of specific sorts of artistic »texts.« Even before Félibien, the most distinguished theoretician of painting in the French academy under Louis XIV, had established a hierarchy between the traditional genres of painting, already in the 15th century, Alberti had esteemed the telling of literary, dramatic or epic stories – that is history painting – to be the highest objective of art. For Félibien, the other genres – portrait painting, genre, and landscape – although they had their own codes and objectives, deserved less elevated standing.⁷ Traditional paradigms for the high esteem of history painting derived from Aristotle's *Poetics*: what Aristotle said about tragedy was assimilated to any form of elevated storytelling in painting ennobled by literary sources. History painting, like tragedy, was supposed to purify the soul by means of a wide range of noble and deep passions. The principles of classical theatre theory – unity of action, of time, and of space – also got their hold on painting, although the unity of time, in a medium that could only present everything simultaneously, was treated slightly more generously in painting, which was in turn allowed to show different stages of a cue action.⁸ The moment depicted was to be at the same time the turning point and the one presupposed to open the spectators' eyes to elevating, moralizing insights.⁹ There was yet another reason for the superiority ascribed to history painting: in it, the human body had the most prominent place. Since the body was considered God's image, a perfect miniature model of the cosmos, it was held to be the most noble sub-

ject of art in general.¹⁰ Ultimately, the unimpeachable place of history painting was guaranteed by a certain conception of imitation, *mimesis*. It was an unquestioned presupposition that art had to imitate nature, not just by repeating outside sensation, but by revealing its perfect essence as created by God. Thus, nature, in the final instance, was not questioned: it was considered to be a perfect cosmos, a divine order. If the painter had to perfect nature, that was merely because the creator's ideas had been troubled during the process of realization, their *entelecheia*, by the intervention of evil, or of chaos.¹¹ Genre painting (representing everyday life and costumes), portrait painting (strictly devoted to the natural aspect of the depicted person), or still life painting (excluding all elements of action) were deemed unable to enact the highest sort of idealizing *mimesis*, and were thus relegated to lower places in the hierarchy of genres.¹² The same was generally true for landscape painting, although I will argue that, from the beginning, theory had problems assigning to it a well-defined place. Of course, the sort of artistic theory that was arguing for such distinctions and hierarchies of the genres was already discredited as a normative discipline by the end of the 18th century. Later, Benedetto Croce would react violently against generic criteria in literature or visual art: for him, the individuality of the single art work stood above any consideration of its genre.¹³

Today we have to consider the genres to be more complex phenomena than suggested by humanistic or academic theory. First, the relationship of artistic theory to the practical procedure of the artist has been understood as complicated and circular. Second, we understand that a genre is not necessarily articulated in relation to a theoretical definition. It exists not only beyond – but even outside of – theory. Modern film genres such as the Western or the *film noir* exist as genres before anybody reflected about their communicative codes.¹⁴ They function as a system of communication between the artists, the studios, and their publics – even before any theoretician attempts to lay down their generic »rules.« When the rules are articulated, whether by makers or

theorists, the genre is forever *changed*. Thus it is not possible to say that the genre *preexists* its definition, but a theoretically defined genre is something *qualitatively different* from one that remains undefined. I want to argue that as an art historical genre, landscape confronts us with something of the same problem as modern film genres as they are fundamentally transformed by the workings of film theory. Unlike history painting, which has from its beginnings drawn its force from the theory that validated it, landscape (and to a lesser extent, still life, genre painting, and portraiture) exists simultaneously as a defined and undefined genre.¹⁵ It functioned as a system of communication before Renaissance and Baroque theoreticians gave it »meanings.« Thus, Netherlandish landscape first was an undefined genre; its reception by humanistic and academic theory changed it into something else, making it the basis of new communicative codes that would engender a new kind of landscape painting.

Literary theory has provided a great number of models for reflecting upon the ways that genre is predefined by theory. In 1931, Carl Viëtor described genre as a unit embodied by a certain content in a certain form. But he argued that it is impossible to define the genre on a single model, a model that would function as a prototype, itself necessarily positioned outside the history of the genre. Thus, according to Viëtor, the definition of the genre is part of its history: a genre can only be defined by its historical profile. Consequently, landscape, around 1700, would be something else than landscape around 1830. The hermeneutic circle – to understand a single element presupposes an interpretation of the whole and vice versa – extends its power onto the problem of the genre. In the case of landscape, this would imply: Neither can a single landscape be defined by landscape in general, nor can landscape as a genre be defined by a set of paradigmatic examples. It is the entire history of the genre that defines a single painting as a specific part of it. In addition, the development of the genre is not directed at the definition of a quintessential prototype that would bring about the culmination of that genre. A genre is de-

fined by progress and change, by constant development. Landscape, like any genre, has its history – its beginnings, toward the end of the 16th century, as an independent unity of form and content, and its culmination during the 19th century. The genre appears with concrete art works, but it is not completely realized by them. It always goes beyond them. It is a generative structure in continuous transformation.¹⁶

Hans Robert Jauss has extended Viëtor's reflections, insisting on the fact that the genre is neither normative (*ante rem*) nor classificatory (*post rem*), but has the status of a language. The genre is an important factor regulating the expectations of reception.¹⁷ Here, we are beyond the genre in the sense of humanistic art theory, which tends to be normative. We enter instead the realm of genres whose codes have not been subject to any sort of meta-reflection such as theoretical definition and debate.¹⁸ Jean-Marie Schaeffer demonstrates that a constructivist strategy to derive the ontological status of the »genre« from a process of practical generalizations is doomed to fail: it leaves the question unresolved in order merely to put it aside. The only possibility is to deny the literary text or the art work the status of »thing« as opposed to the status of »concept« of a genre. Schaeffer considers the text to be a fact of communication, presupposing a channel of communication and its actualization by a communicative act. He sees genre as something like a contract for reading, defining the communicative intentionality of the text. If we consider only the content of text/art work and genre, the genre is somehow present in the text as a hypertext (as an idealized group of models). But, according to Schaeffer, such a viewpoint focussing on the artistic product alone remains necessarily limited. Genre can only be understood within the framework of artistic circulation and reception. Thus, the social context of the art work as well as the technical means of its circulation have an impact on genre. For example, the explosion of the media has occasioned a multiplication of genres, built on the basis of successful textual acts.

We must therefore adopt two ways of speaking about genre. Genre can be a com-

municative horizon defined – sometimes even in anticipation of a concrete artistic practice – by artistic theory. Thus, history painting, even before it existed in the sense of artistic theory, was defined, in 1435, by Leon Battista Alberti. He referred to highly successful earlier paintings that told stories.¹⁹ The full extent of his attempt at defining history painting was only realized when, after the counter-Reformation, a new generation of theorists insisted on the limitation of the *decorum* to what was strictly necessary for telling the biblical story.²⁰ Landscape painting, on the other hand, before it was subject to theoretical definitions, existed as a »natural« genre. First, Dutch painters had introduced ever more appealing landscape backgrounds into their altarpieces. In paintings by Joachim Patinir, the figural scene became small enough in relation to the surrounding landscape that it was considered a mere pretext for it. Netherlandish or German landscapes were considered in 16th century Italy to be nothing more than pleasing exercises, capable of charming even the least educated of viewers and therefore, as Vasari mocked in a famous letter to Benedetto Varchi, to be found even in the shops of the lowliest of cobblers.²¹ Previously, a painter such as Leonardo da Vinci had devoted much reflection to the observation of landscape and to its aesthetic unity. But as a matter of fact he introduced it only into the background of religious painting and portraits.²² Italian artistic theory even perceived the landscape in paintings by Gentile Bellini, Titian, and Venetian Painting, as mirroring northern imports.²³

When, around the 1620s and 1630s, landscape painting became a theme for Italian and French classical painting, no specific form of landscape theory existed. For the loves of gods, Arcadian pastoral, or heroic drama, landscape simply provided the right ambiance. Topoi such as the *locus amoenus* (a shadowy tree, a meadow, and a source), or other topoi from gentle Arcadian or heroic antiquity (always reusing the same key buildings of Rome or Tivoli) were merely the necessary backdrops of a painting's story. In most of the paintings of classical subjects by Nicolas Poussin, the figure scene is

placed in a landscape that comments upon it through its atmosphere, through its historical character, through the chiaroscuro and the colors, and even through its mood. But in the discussions of the French Academy, Poussin was not considered to be a landscape painter. On the contrary, his works were taken as a model of perfect history painting.²⁴

During the 18th century, Dutch landscape paintings were considered by French collectors as masterpieces testifying to an exquisite painterly culture.²⁵ But it is well known that, during the lifetime of Jacob van Ruisdael, an elegant coat often was a more expensive luxury product than a landscape painting.²⁶ After Pieter Breughel, Dutch landscape painting was certainly more than a »natural« genre satisfying just a minor visual pleasure for the beholder and merchandized as an affordable piece of decoration.²⁷ But it is certain that, in France during the 18th century, these landscapes were appreciated as the »natural« expression of their country, ingenious but theoretically »innocent.«

The treatise on landscape by Pierre Henry de Valenciennes that appeared in the year VIII of the French revolutionary calendar (1800) is often quoted as a starting point of the development leading to Corot and to Barbizon.²⁸ That treatise, entitled *Réflexions et conseils à un élève sur la peinture, et particulièrement sur le genre du paysage*, was printed at the end of a conservative handbook, *Elémens de perspective pratique à l'usage des artistes*, for the purpose of de Valenciennes' teaching at the École des Beaux-Arts. He advises young painters to travel to the picturesque sites of Italy as well as of France in order to gather a repertory of original landscape scenes to be used in grandiose historical landscapes. Such an introduction of atmospheric, geological, as well as meteorological observation into classical landscape would eventually destroy that genre. Furthermore, painters of the late 18th and early 19th century did so much open air sketching that the products of their outdoor work came to be valued more than the synthetic Salon paintings it was meant to prepare.²⁹ De Valenciennes' book does far more than undermine the

genre of classical landscape by means of its practical advice. By transforming Poussin into a landscape painter, he constructs a history of classical landscape, in order to launch himself as its major revivalist. De Valenciennes was indeed one of the painters who, since the 1770s, had worked for a revival of the great classical landscape in the tradition of Poussin and Claude Lorrain. His treatise summarizes not only his own experience, but also that of Jakob Philipp Hackert, Richard Wilson, and Jean-Joseph-Xavier Bidault. His strategy to ennoble the historical landscape seems so obvious that it has been overlooked: he used Poussin as the initiating and unsurpassable model for the landscape painter, wrenching him from the academic theorists who had made him the quintessential history painter. Indeed, De Valenciennes' treaty is written in the spirit of academic theory about the leading genre, history painting. In order to ennoble landscape painting in the hierarchy of genres, De Valenciennes transforms it into another sort of history painting, making a more extended use of landscape for the decor of narrative episodes.³⁰

De Valenciennes certainly was not the first to imagine landscape painting rising to the noble position accorded to history painting. Diderot had already awarded the landscapes of Joseph Vernet the same sort of unlimited esteem. The 18th century critic especially prized the way every detail in a storm scene conformed to a general theme of frightened astonishment. Diderot appreciated Vernet's painting for its unity of fantasy in much the same way as he would have prized a history painting.³¹ Diderot's concept of unifying sensation and sentiment emerged as lying halfway between the traditional conception of pictorial unity and a new conception of unity that imagined everything held together as if by an secret psychical unity. Either we can read his text about Vernet as subscribing still to the traditional paradigm for painting of a perfectly unified decor, arranged around the culminating point of a landscape tragedy. Or we can ascribe his appreciation of the convincing unity in Vernet's painting to the inscrutable inner forces he imagines transpiring there.³² The metaphor Diderot himself in-

roduces illustrates that ambiguous position. He compares the unity of feeling to gravitation in the sense of Newton: certain ideas and visions are seen as gravitating around the same theme in the imagination.³³ Gravitation was the most fundamental form of unity the rationalistic era of the encyclopedia was capable to conceive: Newtonists regarded it as a rational mechanism orchestrating the divine universe. But in Diderot's text on Vernet, it is suggestive only of a mere postulate of artistic (as emotional) unity. A fuzzy metaphor has supplanted a well grounded belief in unity derived from poetic theory.

3. The Rhetoric of Landscape

Landscape painting has, as we have seen, always occupied a precarious place in the history of the »genres.« Its relationship to other genres was unclear. It could be raised to the dignity of history, or it could be regarded as failing to assimilate the most perfect of all forms, the human body. It could even be viewed as devoted to the representation of formless forms. Between these extremes, it flourished as a genre beyond the other genres of humanistic theory. By exploring the parallels between literary genres and those of the visual arts, we can learn several things. First, the horizon of humanistic artistic theory was united. Second, the visual arts flourished under the hegemony of literary theory. Third, the classical theory of literary genres was not completed until the middle of the 18th century, by Batteux. Fourth, such parallels help us understand the position of landscape as a genre beyond the other genres, more modern and more subjective. Landscape's position in relation to the other genres resembled the position of the rising bourgeois novel as compared to the traditional literary genres: epic, drama, or lyric.

Modern authors tend to trace back to Aristotle the tripartition of the most fundamental literary genres into drama (the author lets the others speak – relationship of the author to the others), epic (the author speaks for himself, but lets the others speak in various modes – relationship of himself

and the others), and lyric (the author himself speaks – relationship to himself). Gérard Genette has demonstrated that the lyric genre was not defined in antiquity. It is only Batteux who in 1846 had ascribed it to Aristotle, but by referring to a questionable passage about dithyrambe, considered by Aristotle to be an archaic element of drama, and by Batteux to be a synonym for lyric. Plato (in *Republic*, Book III) and Aristotle (in the *Poetics*) did not take into consideration Pindar, Sappho, or any non-mimetic verses. The reduction of poetic genres to representational, mimetic genres was the consequence of the suppression of dithyrambe and lyrics as well as, in the case of Aristotle, the further suppression of any unmixed form of pure narrative, where the narrator relates everything in the first person. Quintillian gives a list of genres when he recommends certain readings to the pupil of rhetoric. But only Diomedes, toward the end of the fourth century, arranges modes and species of literature into a system. In the 16th century, the categories of literature are only explained one by one, without any evaluation of their relationship to one another. It is only Batteux who introduced the (fundamental) mode of lyric, thereby hesitating to decide between a definition of lyric as articulated in the first person and relating to real feelings, and a definition that would imagine these feelings simply as represented, such as one finds in the monologue of drama.³⁴ According to this parallel, it would be appealing to compare landscape painting to the lyric genre, whereas both epic and drama would belong to the realm of history painting.

However, the situation is more complicated. It would be misleading to associate landscape painting with lyric, not only because the former was by no means restricted to lyrical feelings such as those defined, for the entire classical era, by the elegiac tone and motifs in Virgil's *Bucolics* and *Georgics*. All sorts of figures and stories can be part of a landscape: a sleeping nymph, presented to the lyrical ego of the desiring spectator, as well as an Arcadian shepherd in an innocent landscape, the flight into Egypt as well as the discovery of the infant Moses, women washing in a river as well as

a philosopher such as Diogenes. One could argue, following Batteux, that the »representation« of immediate feelings is the foremost goal of landscape painting, whereas the other goals are merely borrowed from other genres. But the problem lies deeper. Genette quotes the criticism of Johann Adolf Schlegel, translator of Batteux into German, against the author whom he translated. Schlegel objects to Batteux' classification of lyric as imitation, insisting on the fact that the poet has to express his feelings immediately. Batteux defends his theory mostly by insisting on the fact that the poet has to translate his feelings into the codes of art, thus »imitating« them in that sense. Schlegel's critique is directed at the center of the humanistic theory of art: mimesis as an idealizing imitation, coming closer to the divine idea of creation than nature itself.³⁵

In Schlegel's vision, the lyric literary genre (where the author speaks himself in a relation to himself) escapes the entire system defined by mimesis. The immediate expression of an unknown self that speaks in relation to somebody like itself (thereby continually redefining that self) escapes the perspective of classical mimesis. It became impossible to merge imitation and perfection into one, to reconstruct a world untroubled by chaos and evil. Artistic creation could no longer be anchored in divine creation. The artistic creator could no longer address himself to the divine creator in order to illuminate aspects of creation to his readers or listeners. The unquestioned author died along with an unquestioned god. Both traversed a period of being reduced to deistic postulates before disappearing. The lyric ego, as conceived by Schlegel, expresses nothing but itself, and in the final consequence it will express itself also for itself, as something unknown to itself. That lyric narrator will become the narrator of the novel, which ceases to be regarded as belonging to the genre of drama. In dramatic narration, the author speaks not only for but also in the name of his audience, inviting that audience to identify with him in order to form the community of a nation or of a culture. The author of a novel speaks only of (and in part to) himself, inquiring into the identity of world as well as into his own identity. The

same is true for the landscape painter: ultimately (as he comes to be represented in »Barbizon«), he inquires into the nature of the world as well as into his own nature. But thereby, and before landscape painting reaches that radical status, the genre of landscape can be colored by all sorts of other genres, whether literary or pictorial. The same is true for the novel: the narrator of the novel, speaking only in his own name, can open up his narration to all sorts of epic – historical, religious, or mythic – or dramatic – tragic, comic, and satiric genres.³⁶

Equally, all sorts of literary models can influence landscape painting. Already in the medieval period, a model derived from Virgil influenced the representation of landscape first in texts, then also in pictorial representations, for example those structuring the months in the books of hours. John of Garlandia had established a scheme called *rota Virgilii* regulating even the way trees and animals appeared in landscape settings of a higher, a middle, and a lower style. The lowest style was linked to the bucolic genre, whose hero was the *pastor otiosus*. He did not transform nature but lived idyllically, without working, from what it gave him. The middle style was linked to the Georgics and to the working peasant; the highest style was epic, its hero was the *miles dominans* who strategically transformed the political landscape.³⁷ Increasingly, even before the dominance of history painting, however, such a subdivision failed to meet with the requirement of a complex pictorial rhetoric of *inventio*, *dispositio*, and *elocutio* in genres deriving their subjects from a great variety of epic, mythological, religious, and dramatic, literary sources.³⁸

There are several modern literary models for a systematical subdivision of the genres that could structure a discussion of pictorial genres – with the goal of defining the functions of landscape painting. Robert Scholes has proposed a model of the genres which has the advantage of establishing the difference, on the one hand, among the traditional genres in the age of rhetoric, and on the other, among the more complex genres established after the failure of the traditional hierarchy of genres. He suggests a system for judging »modes« according to the rep-

resentation of reality as »worse« or »better« than it appears in everyday experience. Already in antiquity, such a criterion had been used in order to classify the literary genres.³⁹ At the one extreme of such a scale is satire, seen by Scholes as presenting a world by far worse than reality; in the center, one finds the neutral description of the real in history; at the other extreme, Scholes locates romance, populated by idealized heroes far better than real human beings. Between satire and history, Scholes identifies the picaresque, that shows not entirely bad persons in a bad surrounding, but characters that might be good caught up in a world so bad that they cannot cope with it, and comedy confronting us with characters that could possibly be improved. Between history and romance we have the sentimental genres, where already perfected beings confront a better world, and tragedy, where idealized characters fulfill their destiny with heroic consequence. The novel is a complex genre starting from history and balancing on a middle axis between the two extremes. Thus, the realist novel shifts between comedy and sentiment, showing characters striving toward perfection. The naturalistic novel presents us with characters between the picaresque and tragedy, presented with imperfect destinies and/or overwhelmed by them or induced into heroic fulfillment. Scholes sees modern, 20th-century, novels as positioned ambiguously between the extremes of satire and romance.⁴⁰

Let us try to arrange the schemes of landscape according to Scholes's model. The »zero«-point of history would be mere depiction of a landscape of the past or the present. First the side of worse than real: Satire would be a ridiculed version of landscape as a vital surrounding, something like grotesque mountains and impenetrable forests. A picaresque landscape would present itself as invincible for human visitors. Picaresque would be an obstructed nature overwhelming more or less innocent spectators. Comedy would be a landscape that is bad but perfectible by man. On the opposite pole, relating to the »better than real,« the sentimental would characterize any landscape with elevated sensations. To the tragic would correspond a landscape incorporat-

ing destiny and leaving only the alternatives of heroism, on the one hand, and failure, on the other. Romance would correspond to an idealized landscape for perfect beings, whether gods, mythic heroes, or fairy tale figures. Now the genres placed between »better« and »worse than real.« Between comedy and sentimentalism, we would find the realism of perfectible, sentimental beings such as those in moralizing genre scenes or in Biedermeier realism. Between the picaresque and tragedy, we would have to place tragic (but unheroic) people who have to cope with an indomitable, merciless nature, such as Millet's peasants or Courbet's stone breakers. Between satire and romance, we would have to place a ridiculously bad and at the same time ideally beautiful landscape, or one that places the hero between these extremes. If we decide to end this game, the cliffs in the *Chien andalou* by Bunuel and Dali could correspond to that extreme position. As in literature, the in-betweens are the modern genres established after the end of the traditional hierarchy of genres: on the one side of that vector, the uncertain position of perfectible, half-elevated, partially satiric heroes who try to appropriate their surrounding (Biedermeier, Spitzweg, Waldmüller); in the center, heroes confronting merciless nature and tragic fulfillment; and finally, on the opposite side, heroes faced with ambiguous, ironic nature between ideal dream and nightmare.

Such a model, arranged to parallel that proposed by Scholes, is attractive in the sense that it offers strategies for interpreting a wide range of criticism lodged against realist or naturalist art of the 19th century, as well as for understanding the artists' strategies of defense against such criticism. Whereas the majority of critics often reproached the artists with presenting an extremely pessimistic vision of life, the artists or their defenders argued that they had presented life with deep respect, but were nevertheless subject to the conditions of a merciless world. Thereby, the artists argued to have positioned reality, to say it in the terms of Scholes's model, on the middle axis, whereas the critics had accused them of having chosen to present it worse than it

is. But Scholes's model has the disadvantage of generalizing only one – and a minor one at that – aspect of classical literary theory. There is no place in his model for the ideal past or the timeless arcadia so important for landscape. We need a more complex paradigmatic model in order to interpret landscape in relation to other literary (or visual) genres. Michail Bakhtin's theory of the novel might provide us with such a paradigmatic model.

Bakhtin has analyzed the historical forms of the novel according to two questions: when and where did the narrated events happen? What is the place of the narrator in the story? The answers to these questions enable him to define what he calls the *chronotope* of a narrative. In order to understand the time aspect of the chronotope, for Bakhtin, it is not enough to say that it took place in a distant past, in a past relatively close to the narrator's time, or in the world contemporary to that narrator.⁴¹ Bakhtin also considers whether the story is placed in past now closed to that of the narrator or in a past that has a chronological (that is, historical) continuity with the now of the narration. I propose to arrange narrative time on a vector that starts with the past and ends with the present: such a vector does not correspond to absolute time, but rather to fictional time. On one extreme side of this vector one finds the distant past. In the center one finds a past that presumes a historical continuity with the narrator and reader. On the opposite side of this vector one finds a narrative present that parallels the narrated time. We can view narrative space as discussed by Bakhtin in similar ways: if we place the narrative extremes on another vector (the space vector), one extreme would be something like a very distant area that cannot be placed in a continuum with our geographical world, something like paradise. At the other extreme, we would have to locate the narrator's actual surrounding, his »here.« If we arrange these two vectors of time and space in a system of coordinates, we can establish a complex pattern in order to characterize the *chronotope* of a narrative.

How might we then, according to such a system of coordinates, view landscape as it

appears in literature or painting? At the zero degree of both vectors, we would place a distant, vague past – such as the golden age or paradise – situated in an imaginary, geographically indeterminate, mythical region. If we now follow the vector of space we would go on with Theocritus' Sicily, which was, for a Roman of the Hellenistic period, a distant, ideal scenario, but still a place in a real geography, or Virgil's Arcadia, substitute for Sicily which, towards the end of the Roman republic had changed into a fertile province too close to Rome for idyllic dreams. If we look for less distant spaces of landscape painting, we would have to name the Campania, the landscape in the south of Latium and around Naples, seen, mostly by northern visitors, as home to shepherds and peasants living happily in a fertile landscape that made possible a life filled with dance, music, and folklore. For example, in the 1830s, Leopold Robert presented a cyclical life in the midst of nature by means of two paintings of the Campanian peasants departing for or returning from the harvest in the Pontine marshes.⁴² As Denise Delouche demonstrates in her essay in this book, at the end of the 18th century, peasant idylls resembling the Campania could also be found in the more distant areas of France. From our perspective, the closest landscape to »now and here« was that on the outskirts of Paris. Barbizon discovered a landscape known to the urban beholders through their own tourist excursions into the forest of Fontainebleau. »Barbizon« chose to paint landscapes that we could characterize as close to the narrator, as opposed to those ideal territories. But it was still a picturesque site »out there.« In the landscapes of the Barbizon painters, a less favorable climate seemed to make the peasants work hard to extract their living from the soil, reducing them often to mere survival. The most radical approach to a landscape in painting which is geographically the landscape of the painter and its public is Monet's work realized, during the 1870s, in Argenteuil. Only recently a suburban train had linked the small town on the outskirts of Paris to the capital, shuttling, on weekends, urban dwellers to the banks of the Seine, where some decades ago, reti-

rees had build small houses.⁴³ But only a few years later, Monet abandoned Argenteuil for yet more distant landscapes more suitable for entranced, esthetic reveries. Such examples give an overview of how one might assimilate Bakhtin's theories of the chronotope to landscape.

The time aspect of Bakhtin's chronotope is, as we have already seen, necessarily linked to a space aspect. We would need to place Hesiod's Golden Age or the mythic tales of gods and heroes in an unbridgeable past unrelated to any historical time. The dreams of the loves of gods in Poussin's early work partake of such a past. The voyeurism of the spectator, watching a sleeping nymph, is directed onto a mythic past. The world of Homeric epics or dramatic events of the Old Testament would correspond to something closer to history. There is a narrative around the mythic past of the Greek nation or of God's elected people which has its own historic development. However, that time is closed to any concrete, non-fictional historical memory. Historical time, linked to events in the memory of the nation, is closer to the contemporary world of the artist and his first public. Landscape backgrounds in paintings by Gentile Bellini, Dutch landscape painting of the 17th century, or Constable's paintings of the countryside around Salisbury represent views of an actual reality: they are situated in the present.

For the purpose of understanding the entire structural field of landscape in general, the model derived from Bakhtin offers far-reaching insights. At the one extreme of our system of coordinates, we had placed landscapes whose chronotope is a mythical past in a distant area. The other extreme would be a landscape situated in a »now and here« for the spectator. The chronotope of the first extreme (in the olden days, in those parts) is unrelated to a concrete spectator. The painter of such an extremely idyllic chronotope does not speak as a man of his time to concrete individuals. He speaks in the name of the most general idea of mankind, as it is guaranteed by a normative horizon of literary and anthropological values. If he is esteemed, like Poussin, as an individual artist, it is for his

having reached an exemplary degree of perfection – in the normative domain of an unquestionable essence of art.⁴⁴ He identifies with his public who are themselves united by culture, religion or, later, national identity. He speaks in the name of this public, not saying something new but saying what is or should be known to everybody in the medium of his art. He is like the epic author who never speaks for himself.⁴⁵ The chronotope of the second extreme (»now and here«) is based on a direct communication with concrete, contemporary spectators. The painter of such a chronotope »speaks« of a landscape setting potentially known to his spectators. He finds something to observe in scenarios known to his »audience.« The only thing that makes his »utterances« important is his own observation, that observation he derives from himself as a concrete individual. The »now and here« is interesting only for an inquiry into an inner and outer nature which is not stable, not fixed by normative conventions beyond question. The observer observes himself in the act of looking at the obvious, nature. This is only another way to say that the relationship of the individual toward himself as well as towards nature is interrupted by estrangement. If the artist is appreciated, it is for his individuality, for the originality of his approach. He speaks to his public in the name of an estranged nature, addressing himself to his contemporaries as alienated from themselves. He is like the author of the novel who, even if he lets the others speak, in the final analysis, nevertheless always speaks for himself.

In the interpretation of the ultimate consequences of the structural model around chronotopes of landscape we have introduced a third paradigmatic criterion, revolving around whether the author (or painter) addresses himself directly to his audience or, on the contrary, closes the narrative (or pictorial) space to his audience. In the extreme of a past »once upon a time, in those parts« the setting was absolutely closed to the spectators, although the painter presents it in the name of values he shares with the beholders. In the extreme of »now and here,« the scenario was open to the spectators, even part of their own everyday

experience. But the painter »spoke« as somebody alienated from himself as well as from his audience. Such a paradigm is paradoxical since the closer the scenario is to the audience, the more distant the author is from that audience.

At least one part of such a paradigm can be integrated into our model. Art historians are familiar with Alberti's figure in a painting who addresses the spectator by means of gaze and gesture.⁴⁶ Michael Fried has demonstrated that during Diderot's time, in works by Jean-Baptiste Greuze and Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin, the relation of the imagined scene in a painting to the spectator was cut off by a fourth wall closing the stage towards the spectator. He also insisted on the painters' new strategies to draw the spectator into the composition by dramatizing the specific moment of narration with a highly differentiated gestural and facial language.⁴⁷ Fried called these strategies absorption, as opposed to theatricality, which he characterized as the rhetorical appeal to a spectator and his attention. Stefan Germer described the same phenomenon as »the inclusion of the spectator by his exclusion.«⁴⁸ Fried also tried to demonstrate that Courbet's realism marks an extreme degree of absorption: Courbet excludes the scene from the beholder to a degree that he himself as a »painter-beholder« can create the illusion of being part of the scene – in an extreme, methodological narcissism.⁴⁹ Alberti's introductory figure and pictorial »absorption« would mark two opposite extremes of including and excluding the spectator in the chronotope of the painting. The chronotope, thus, would be characterized not only by the openness or closeness of space and time toward the spectator, but also by its openness or closeness as a complex space-time-configuration in the beholder's direction. If we introduce a third vector into our system of coordinates (transforming it into a three-dimensional model), we can at least locate any single pictorial scenario in a semantic space with regard to its being related or unrelated towards the spectator as a hypothetical figure who is part of the composition.⁵⁰ As Michael Fried demonstrated, the result of ten is astonishing: whereas a painter like

Courbet operated to extreme degree with a spectator excluded from the fictional space of painting, in Manet's painting there systematically is a figure not only looking at that spectator, but thereby pushing him into such extreme identities as to force him to become the visitor whose flowers are just handed over to a mundane *cocotte* (Olympia) or a *boulevardier* who orders something at a bar in the luxurious vaudeville of the Folies-Bergère. Manet's only strategy of not merging the fictional space of painting into the contemporary urban world is a strategy at historicizing it by complex quotations from the tradition of meaningful »great« art.⁵¹

When we are confronted with a pure landscape painting, we have difficulty defining the inclusion or exclusion of the spectator into the painting. However, unmistakable cues enable us nevertheless to define that spectator's position. As Fried argued, the frieze-like scenario of Courbet's scenes, even if it facilitates readability to an extreme degree, excludes the spectator from the fictional space.⁵² A sitting figure, seen from behind and contemplating the landscape, is a substitute for the spectator; yet that figure excludes him from the fictional field of vision even as it »teaches« him how to approach it.⁵³ And finally, the perspective of a scenario is an extremely important criterion for the inclusion or exclusion of the spectator: a huge panorama presenting a vast synthesis of a landscape excludes the spectator, whereas a scene with a perspective corresponding more or less to the visual field of the spectator includes him. For example, the huge, »material« foregrounds in Millet's painting, later inherited by Van Gogh from the school of The Hague, would play into the direction of inclusion.⁵⁴

We need such a criterion of inclusion versus exclusion of the spectator in our model because, as the example of Courbet makes clear, an extreme approach towards the »here and now« does not correspond, necessarily, with an openness of the pictorial scene toward the spectator. In Fried's book on Courbet, it seemed to be a paradox that contemporary scenes placed in the spectator's world are closed by the »fourth

wall« from the fictional space of the spectator standing before the painting, whereas very distant chronotopes often were rhetorically open to the spectator. But the problem is less complex than that »paradox« makes it appear to be. In the compact monumentality of Fried's succession of monographic studies, Manet seems to be the necessary antithesis. From the beginnings during the 18th century, absorption seemed linked to the excitement of modern media, whereas theatricality was linked to the rhetorical tradition.⁵⁵ From the renewal of history from the middle of the 18th century to Delaroche's history painting and finally to *Cabiria* – the first movie using, in 1914, a mobile camera – absorption is linked to the spectacle of history or to a new, more morally and emotionally involving sort of history painting.⁵⁶ We have associated »absorption« with the self-sufficiency of modern pictorial media from a certain history painting to cinema. Manet's strategy works in the opposite direction, aimed at breaking up the enclosure of fantasy in the closed circles of media-related fictionality.⁵⁷ In this sense, Jeff Wall, in his huge photo transparency *tableaux vivants* repeating Manet's figure arrangement, has taught us an essential aspect of Manet's work.⁵⁸ Manet's painting, indeed, places itself out of the context of visual media of his time, creating a meta-text, a meta-medium. His intellectual, modern art seeks its place beyond the media system of society. Thus, he transcends our model of the *chronotope* of painting.

Whereas the normal development of spectacular academic landscape panoramas seems to ever more accentuate the exclusion of the spectator from an increasingly absorbing scenario, the Barbizon painters invented strategies of including that spectator. Generally, these strategies aimed at involving the spectator into the act of painting while at the same time excluding him from the pictorial scene. The gestural language of the painter relates the painting to the imaginary space occupied by the physical action, in the immediate space in front of the canvas, of painting. The spectator understands the brushstroke as a trace of the painter's expressive action. Thereby, the space in front of the painting is »trans-

formed« into the space where the painter enacted, so to speak, his gestures and handwriting in order to »catch« his subject. The spectator, by understanding the gestures and handwriting of the painter, »repeats« them in his mind, thereby understanding the emotional involvement of the painter with his subject. However, such strategies of involving the spectator are different from those strategies of including or excluding the spectator by the fictionality of the subject itself. In that sense, an increasing or decreasing degree of the spectator's involvement in the painting only implies inclusion or exclusion in relation to the landscape scenario, not in relation to the language of its pictorial realization. Such a concern demonstrates the limits of the paradigmatical model we have developed using only Bakhtin's theory of the *chronotope*. Motivated directly by and according to the cultural codes underlying the painter's *subject*, it cannot be applied to the expressive power of the his *languages*.

4. Landscape, Romanticism, and the End of Rhetoric

Landscape was the genre that contributed, in the course of its development, most dynamically to the dissolution of genres. We have seen that the end of rhetorical strategies of addressing the spectator by means of the arrangement of figures led to increasingly self-contained, absorptive compositions. Ultimately, the Bakhtinian model confronts us again with the precarity of the genre of landscape. It could rise to the heights of history; it could fall to the lowest depths of useless *mimesis*. In a sense, history painting was the *only* genre in the strict academic sense; the other genres were only tolerated or subordinated as »natural« traditions of special fields. Landscape was the shadow of history, capable of accepting all the various dictates exerted by literature on painting. When painting freed itself from the horizon of *ut pictura poesis*, landscape changed from a precarious genre into a non-genre, questioning the other genres by its own radical aesthetics. That revolution, culminating in Barbizon painting, is linked

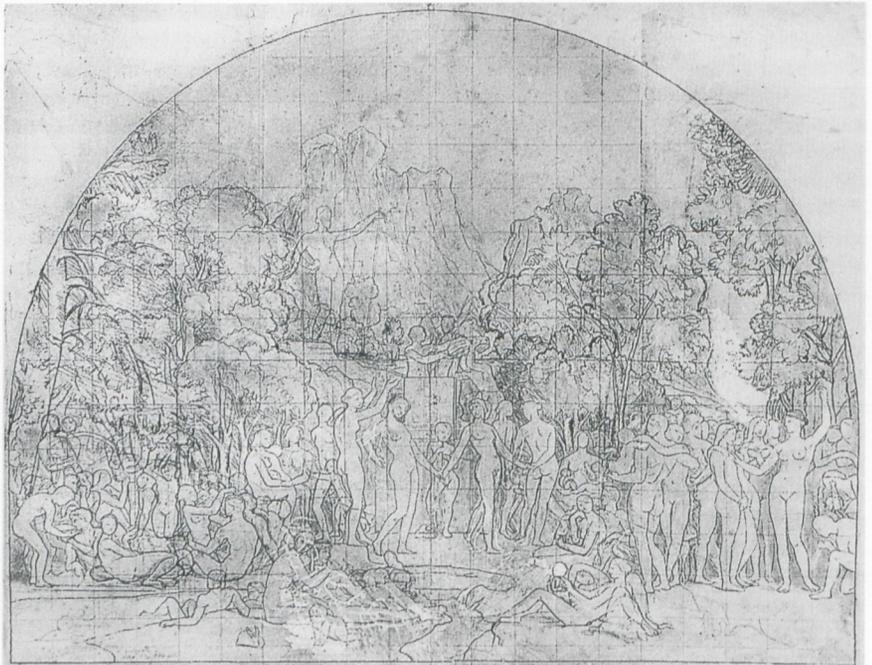
to the collapse of the rhetorical tradition. How did this change come about? I will now try to introduce patterns for a deeper understanding of that revolution. We now enter a discursive constellation where aesthetic *truth* is opposed to rhetorical conventions that were intended to charm the spectator by means of strategies of *deception*.

Classical rhetoric was born as a complex strategy destined to convince an audience of a certain argument. That was its forensic use in people's assemblies, in court trials, and in philosophical or ideological debates. Strategies of persuasion were described and classified in order to constitute a corpus of a technique of persuasion that could be taught in schools and academies. Rhetoric was thus also an institution administrating the corpus of topoi and arguments capable of convincing a given audience.⁵⁹ Already with the end of the Roman republic the function of rhetoric changed. From a tool of persuasion it gradually changed into a technique to embellish speech. Roughly, the change can be marked by the treatises of Cicero and of Quintilian.⁶⁰ As political freedom faded away, there was scarcely any room left for strategies to convince an un-

decided audience. Rhetoric changed into a corpus of ornamented speech and well arranged tropes.⁶¹ In state and diplomatic ritual or in panegyrics, the normative function of rhetoric received primary attention.

The reception of rhetoric during the Renaissance did not change that principal purpose.⁶² It was that variant of rhetoric that influenced, beginning with Alberti's treatise on painting, the visual arts. The artist's fantasy had to work according to established stages and techniques to elaborate artful speech: *inventio* and *dispositio* corresponded to the layout of figure composition with its opposing groupings; *elocutio* corresponded to the convincing gestural or mimetic language of the figures; rhetorical decor, that is, the tropes adequate for this or that argument, would correspond to the appropriate language of setting.⁶³ Under the hegemony of *ut pictura poesis*, landscape painting became part of the complex, institutionalized forms of rhetorical speech. The aim of landscape was not to discover new truths, but only new and more appealing ways to represent the old ones. Literary, mythological, and religious themes served as a treasure house for themes that could be

Jean-Auguste-Dominique
Ingres, Second modello
pour L'Âge d'or, 1843,
pencil and pen ink-drawing
with white gouache,
51 x 61 cm, Musée des
Beaux-Arts, Lyon





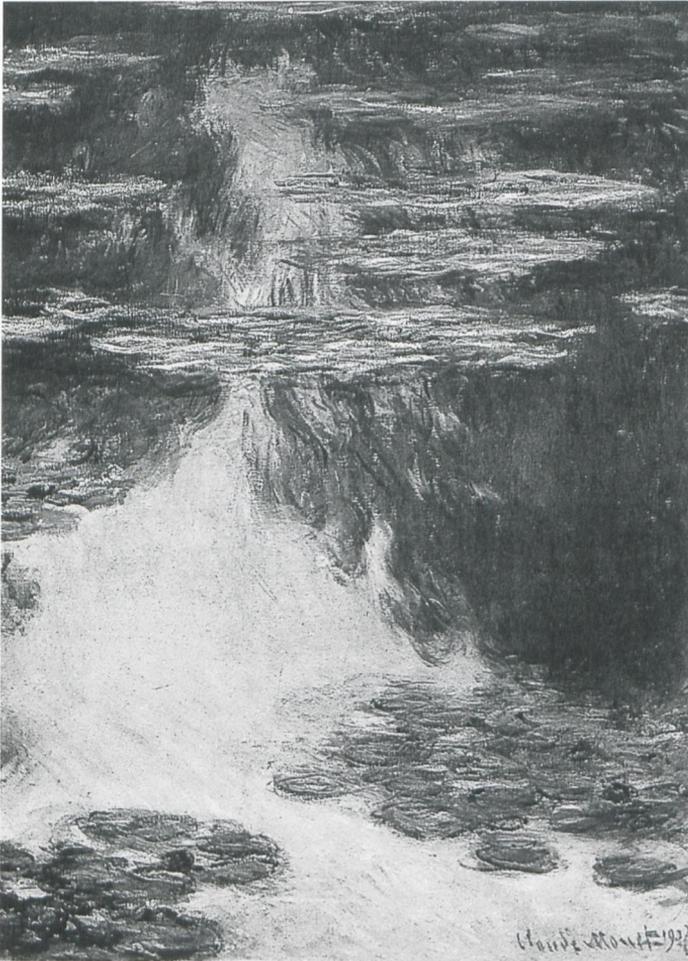
depicted with an ever increasing pictorial charm. It was important how to say the truth, how to express it even more convincingly, or, correspondingly, how to arrange ever more exciting landscapes around well known subjects.

The enlightenment changed this situation fundamentally. By the 18th century, rhetoric was no longer considered as an art of articulating old truths in an ever more convincing way, but as a technique to deceive the audiences with a series of misleading operations and hyperbolic images. In the face of such a conception of truth and beauty landscape as well had to change. Paradoxically, landscape was the last artistic genre that was forced to surrender to the rules of rhetoric. Pierre-Henry de Valenciennes treatise was a final attempt in that direction.

Tzvetan Todorov's *Theories of the Symbol* has served as a guide for the following

discussion. Todorov's book helps us to understand that the liberation of painting from the dictates of literary rhetoric was made possible, beginning in the late 17th century, by theorists' increasing awareness of the specificity of different artistic genres in relation to their functions.⁶⁴ *La Logique de Port Royale* by Arnauld and Nicole differentiated between »natural« and what they called »institutional« signs.⁶⁵ The abbé Du Bos, in his *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et la peinture*, published in 1719, was the first to insist on the basic difference between language and visual representation, arguing that painting does not use »artificial« signs like poetry, but that it uses what he labeled »natural« signs. This was, for Du Bos – as it had been for Leonardo da Vinci before him – an argument in defense of the superiority of painting over poetry: painting, he argued, speaks more immediately to the soul, or, we could say, in more 20th-cen-

Henri Matisse, *Le bonheur de vie*, 1906, oil on canvas, The Barnes Foundation, Merion, Pennsylvania



Claude Monet, *Nymphéas*
– *Paysage d'eau*, 1907, oil
on canvas, 101,5 x 74,5 cm,
signed at bottom right:
Claude Monet 1907.
Bridgestone Gallery, Tokyo

tury terms, it is more immediately absorbing.⁶⁶ Du Bos' treatise influenced Diderot as well as Lessing, both of whom – instead of insisting on the similarities of literature and the visual arts, insisted on their different aesthetic functions.⁶⁷

Todorov chooses the theories of Karl Philipp Moritz for anchoring his definition of the romantic crisis and the changing parameters of semiosis. If he chooses Moritz and not Shaftesbury, Vico, Rousseau, or Herder, it is because Moritz reflected – although his work already belonged within the new aesthetic horizon that would eventually be called Romanticism – the old theories about *mimesis* and rhetoric whereas later Romantics such as the Schlegel brothers reflected an aesthetic cosmos totally unre-

lated to the previous tradition.⁶⁸ The main paradigms of Todorov's analysis are useful for understanding the deeper roots of 19th-century landscape painting, based, as early French naturalism was (and German romantic painting was not) on a visible, highly subjective *écriture*. According to Todorov, a key notion attacked by Moritz (and later, by August Wilhelm Schlegel and other theorists) is the concept of *mimesis*. It always meant two things, which however had been completely amalgamated into one: 1. the imitation, in the visual arts, of objects of the external world, and 2. their embellishment, according to a predetermined concept of a divine nature. Both aspects were always considered to be inseparable aspects of the same operation of *mimesis*. This was because artistic creation was considered as partaking in God's creation. Moritz was not totally distanced from that model. Along with Shaftesbury, he saw the artist as a modern Prometheus. According to Todorov, Moritz nevertheless transforms that model in a way that prepares its erosion: Moritz claims that the (divine) essence of perfection – of beauty – is beyond the knowledge of the artist. Thus, beauty cannot be subjugated to the academic rules of ideal perfection or rhetorical ornament. Instead, according to Moritz, the artistic process itself has to be seen as a search for that unknown thing, divine beauty. The work of the artist does not presuppose God as a guarantor of beauty, but only postulates him. In the older tradition, the artistic process took art as its starting point, that is, assumed a complex system synthesizing the artistic experience of previous times. In Moritz's new theorization, every artist seeking his way toward perfection, instead of basing his work on previous art, has to try to reach, through art, a subjective vision of what divine unity might be. In the realm of humanistic artistic theory, art was at the beginning and at the end of such a process. Now, it served only as the end of the artistic process.⁶⁹

The consequence of this criticism of *mimesis* was a new concept of artistic beauty. It was at the same time radically subjective and radically autonomous, in the sense that beauty was no longer defined by something

else, as it had been in the value systems of classical culture or religion. Art becomes instead a sphere parallel to, or even substituting for, religion. Its values are located between God or a vague, pantheistic divinity and an equally unknown Self. All of these positions – beauty, the Divine, and the Self – are now seen as a mysterious totality, necessary to a universe whose unity is only postulated, not grounded in a solid system of unquestioned belief. Todorov insists that the art work, in this new Romantic discourse, is intransitive in its structure: it exists for itself, has its perfection without regard to anything else. But at the same time, it is but an exteriorization of the Self positioned in an abyss separating interior from exterior nature.⁷⁰ Novalis saw the consequences of that radical reevaluation of artistic theory. For him, art was not an imitation of nature, it was nature. Whereas Novalis saw art as a manifestation of nature, Friedrich Schelling tended to see it somehow as partaking of nature but in the sense that it is parallel to nature, repeating in aesthetic production the production of nature itself. Schelling explicitly compares an art work to a biological phenomenon such as a plant. The traditional concepts of *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* implied that the artistic emulation of *natura naturans* could more completely realize divine ideas, arriving at a more perfect *entelecheia*. In the Romantic context such a model would translate into a genetic emulation of nature, its secret productivity, its organic growth, or just a depiction of symptomatic nature.⁷¹

Germaine de Staël introduced that aesthetic horizon into France. In her book about Germany, censured by Napoleon but enormously popular after 1814, she states: »Le caractère distinctif de la littérature allemande est de rapporter tout à l'existence intérieure; et comme c'est là le mystère des mystères, une curiosité sans bornes s'y attache.« For the romanticism of the Schlegel brothers, she finds an important parallel deeply anchored in the French revolutionary mentality: »L'esprit général de ces critiques est le même que celui de Rousseau dans sa lettre contre la musique française. Ils croient trouver dans plusieurs de nos tragédies l'espèce d'affectation pompeuse



que Rousseau reproche à Lully et à Rameau, et ils prétendent que le même goût qui faisait préférer Coypel et Boucher dans la peinture, et le chevalier Bernin dans la sculpture, interdit à la poésie l'élan qui seul en fait une jouissance divine [...]».⁷² It is evident that Pierre-Henry de Valenciennes would correspond to Rameau and Lully in such a context. De Staël's writings were at the basis of the fight for the romantic ideal in France.⁷³ The romantic debate in France can be summed up by means of a slightly dogmatic text by Victor Cousin, *Du beau réel et du beau idéal*.⁷⁴ Cousin insists that »judgment« of beauty is at the same time enigmatic and linked to a sense of universal judgment. On the one hand, beauty is marked by highly individual aspects: the way of being impressed by beautiful phenomena varies from one person to another. An enormous variety of things can inspire aesthetic feelings. On the other hand, Cou-

Claude Monet, Sauf pleureur – Verdure échevelée, circa 1923, oil on canvas, 110,5 x 100 cm, studio cachet at bottom left. Gallerie Beyler, Bâle

sin argues, we have an irresistible feeling that our aesthetic sensations are universal. For Cousin, the spontaneity of artistic creation as well as of aesthetic appreciation was a matter of fact. However, he still places its theory between the classical and the romantic world. He reintroduces a normative horizon by means of the notion of reason, inviting reflection to insist on the universal aspects of something that is beautiful not just for the individual, but for mankind.

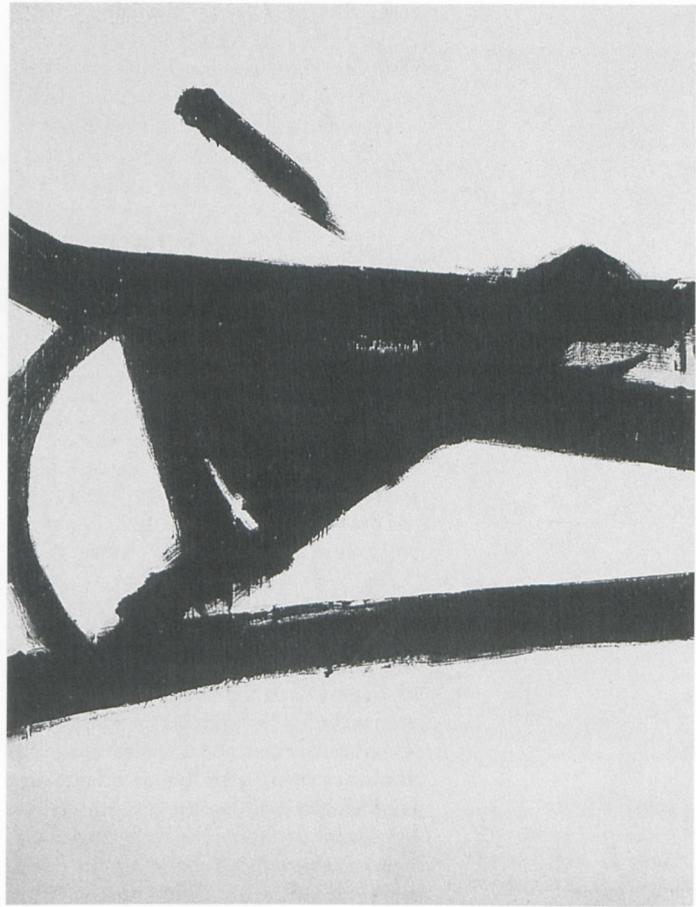
Cousin prepares us for an evaluation of the possibilities left to landscape painting after the end of rhetoric. In his view, ideal beauty can still exist beside beauty as undefinable and individualized. If we translate that *juste-milieu* thought into the fundamental artistic choices open for landscape painting, we confront a double-sided model of idealism and mysterious, individual beauty, positioned somewhere between romanticism and later forms of naturalism. On the one hand, it was still possible to repeat the old forms of idyllic landscape. On the other hand, Barbizon and the landscape painters of French naturalism inaugurated a form of landscape painting that would ultimately go beyond the scope of the traditional genre.

Although painters of the idealist or academic tradition continued to paint large, panoramic, historical, mythological, or idyllic landscapes, their works were no longer grounded in unquestioned, so to speak, human values. They were no longer legitimated by a rhetoric of the image. Of course, mediocre painters found mediocre theories in order to stick to the old models. But the more ingenious ones transformed the old genre – without abandoning it altogether – by adapting it to the new situation. Let us take as the obvious key example, Ingres's *Golden Age* (*L'Age d'or*), painted for the castle of Dampierre. For his classical subject, Ingres chose a quintessentially idyllic mood, equivalent to the humanistic ideal of happiness. Already by means of its theme, the *Golden Age* synthesizes the very essence of humanistic expectations towards art. Art historians have often linked such an idealization of figures to the humanistic tradition. But even if Ingres borrowed from antique sculpture as well as from classical

painting from Giorgone to Raffael, his painting differs fundamentally from idyllic visions in the humanistic tradition. These borrowings introduce a second subject into the scene: the tradition of painting itself.⁷⁵ Similarly, even the style of idealization, although summing up methods that can be found in Phidias, Raffael, and Canova for harmonizing contour, contributes not to the classical postulate of idealizing *mimesis* but to a new type of tradition, that of art history. Behind Ingres's strategies at ornamentizing the contours of bodies and their members is a very modern notion of affected grace that his contemporaries described as modern nervousity.⁷⁶ What we might call (with Bakhtin) the content of the form of language is stylized together with an almost exclusively rhetorical subject.⁷⁷ The treasure house of art becomes art itself. The art work here refers simultaneously to two contexts: the context of its present reception and the context of the reception of previous art works. The artist gives a voice in his own work to what had been said through other works before his own. He does not intervene as an active second voice, for example by introducing motifs from older art as quotations or with polemical or satirical distance. On the contrary, he tries to converge with the voices he introduces, to stay passive in relation to them, allowing that their rhetoric supplants his own and merges with it. He not only condenses different forms of tradition into one, but, what is more, he speaks himself in the name of that condensation. Stylization is the right term for such a merger on different levels: first, with regard to the sources in the artistic tradition the artist uses, and second, with regard to his own style which completely overlaps with the adapted material.⁷⁸ Matisse's programmatic canvas *Bonheur de vie* makes clear that a strategy of art based on art and on stylization cannot be regarded as a genuine revival of classical idylls. Almost every figure is quoted from Ingres, Titian, or other classical artists. This is unquestionably an artwork about art. But the painter does not speak in the name of art. His interventions, based on outspoken, »oriental« color, on contours implying a gestural empathy of bodily motion (even used as a lan-

guage of erotic experience as opposed to a language of voyeurism), introduce another voice. As an extremely polyphonic work, *Bonheur de vie*, in its stylized meta-classicism, is a modern expression of the earthly paradise.

To paint in a stylized tradition, thus, corresponds to the most indirect discourse, made up of serious and sometimes ironic borrowings. The phenomena of »naturalistic« or »realistic« paintings we associate with »Barbizon« are the polar opposite of stylization. There, the artist speaks in the name of his inner nature, remaining absolutely true to what he perceives as his most authentic, unmediated perception. The ultimate consequences of a similar conception of artistic creativity have been analyzed by Richard Shiff in *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism*, in a chapter presenting a careful reconstruction of the debate around the criticism of Emile Zola. Shiff argues that for Zola, the aesthetics of the artist's temper are related not only to a individualistic model of the aesthetic conception of a society, but also to a fundamentally liberal conception of truth. According to Zola, artists such as Courbet or Manet were capable of freeing themselves in an eminent degree from prejudices of the past – from preconceptions, whether academic or traditional, about what art was supposed to be. They thereby became free enough to listen to the necessities of their »temper,« or of their inner nature. Thus, according to Zola, the artist achieves a freedom that allows him to invent a fresher, more modern form of representation. An artwork marked by an exemplary lack of aesthetic preconceptions would, for Zola, inevitably insinuate itself into public fantasy. Even if such a work initially shocked comfortable expectations and well established conventions regulating communication between artists and their public, it would in the long run be perceived as newer, more modern, more appropriate to its contemporary world. Zola firmly believed that a fresh, immediate painterly approach was one of the distinguishing marks of such an art qualified as eminently free.⁷⁹ Later, Julius Meier-Graefe would correlate the development of an increasingly painterly technique with society's progress toward liberal democracy



and modern individualism.⁸⁰ Zola and Meier-Graefe likewise believed that the expression of the »temper« – of the inner nature – was linked to the line of drawing and to brushstrokes as traces of an authentic perception, as a kind of calligraphy that expressed such a perception in an inevitably personal way.

In such a view, the artist became the guarantor of aesthetic truth for his own contemporary moment. Such an aesthetic truth could only be historically relative. The struggle of the artist for self-expression in his work became an aspect and a symbol of the struggle of a society for individual liberties. Romanticism declared the unfathomability of the individual, beauty, and nature. It presumed that none of the three could be possibly reached by the artist, but defined all for the artist's exploitation. The art

Franz Kline, Accent Grave, 1955, oil on canvas, 75 x 52 in., The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio

work, thereby, became the witness of a search for beauty, for the self, and for nature. The Romantic generation ultimately believed in a secret unity guaranteed only by a distant, but merciful, divine principle. For Zola, that divine principle was substituted by progress necessarily conceptualized as a progress toward freedom. It could be argued that the artists of Barbizon were somehow situated between those two viewpoints. In the Barbizon artists Zola and his generation saw the founders of their own aesthetic vision. For the later 19th century, modern aesthetic freedom started in Barbizon.

5. The Artist in Search for the Self and the Return of the Idyllic: Myth and the Cyclical Presentation of Nature

5.1 Visual Spaces, Gestural Traces

The genesis of the work, from the first sketch to the finished painting, from the impression of nature to the carefully developed painterly vision, is hence at the center of the studies assembled in this book. For classical or even (early) Romantic landscape painting, the working process is only one aspect of a work; for the Barbizon school, however, that process makes up the center of its aesthetic appreciation and historical interpretation. The Barbizon painters left behind the traditional arrangement of foreground, middle ground and background. Their landscapes no longer embraced an entire panorama, nor did they consist of an organized, synthetic vision, such as that implied by a valley framed by mountains. The landscape is no longer a proscenium that seems to reflect, miraculously, the mood and drama of the figures within it. Even broad perspectives that resemble panoramic views – such as those found in Salon paintings by Théodore Rousseau or Charles François Daubigny – offer us only a segment of the visual spectrum – as defined by the angle limiting the visual field of the human eye. Previous landscapes had, most often, presented a synthesis of different picturesque sights as well as standard elements such as buildings, trees, *repoussoir* objects. The rectangular field limited by the canvas

was usually arranged in a way that identified the painting's perspective with the visual field of the human eye. The depicted scene, occupying the entire visual field, hence, was a substitute for normal vision. Barbizon paintings tended to be only a cut out of the visual field. The surrounding wall around the painting was not meant to be excluded by the painting's fictionality. The limits of the canvas were increasingly meant to be perceived as the outer limits of the painting, even before they became, in Cubism, an articulated part of the aesthetic structure. Painting progressively metamorphosed from an idealized proscenium into a self-conscious medium.

We cannot analyze a Barbizon painting by reconstructing how the composition was arranged from different signs and elements, or how its subjects developed from studies and plein-air sketches assembled on artistic journeys. It is impossible to analyze the painters' methods using the same standards which have been applied to classical painting from Poussin to Pierre Henry de Valenciennes. Of course, the books of Peter Galassi and Michael Clarke taught us that, in Corot's œuvre, such strategies still play a role.⁸¹ During the 1820s and 1830s, there was a considerable evolution in the kinds of sketches and more or less finished studies. Previously, preparatory sketches not destined to be exhibited were simply not considered »art« by their contemporaries. However, they were increasingly appreciated by private collectors. According to Nicholas Green, »the divisions between finished/public and preparatory/private become increasingly blurred.«⁸² New types of marketable, relatively more finished drawings were still marked by sketchy techniques. The paintings intended to be sold by the dealers were of a different kind than those intended to be exhibited.⁸³ Thus, the genre of landscape split up into a variety of new sub-genres. Richard Schiff's study nevertheless clarifies that the emergence of sub-genres has significantly less impact than the increasingly central importance of open air study. Corot often quotes – by means of figures, of the architectonic elements of his landscapes, and of the mood as conferred by atmosphere and composition



– the language of the traditional canon, nevertheless without entirely fulfilling the linguistic/iconic presuppositions on which it was based. Shiff inquires into Corot's complex plays on tradition and on painting as a language of inner and outer nature.⁸⁴ Thus, even Corot's technique can hardly be explained as a rational approach to the construction of a landscape composition. Instead, the brush is continually re-oriented against nature. The stroke transforms itself from one subject to another, sometimes radically. Individual painting techniques were adapted in a hitherto unknown way to the individual subject – not just to the specific genre the subject was part of. Corot's technique is personal and unmistakably individual, corresponding to the individuality of the artist, to his specific mood, and to the subject. The brushstroke – and with it the gestural involvement of the artist – is transformed into the individual, poetic rhythm of the painting. Never before had the brushstroke been so plainly the vehicle of aesthetic vision.⁸⁵

The collection of Henrik Willem Mesdag, now a museum in The Hague, demonstrates the radicality of these new techniques. The Dutch painter also collected unfinished works, which testify to the genesis of such painting even more distinctly than finished works. Beneath its surface, a painting such as Daubigny's *L'isle de Vaux* (*The Isle of Vaux*, oil on canvas, 97 x 131 cm) in the Mesdag Museum might recall the forceful diagonals of Franz Kline.⁸⁶ For despite the strong spatial recession, the flat intersections of the diagonals have their own unmistakable spatial dimension. The recession of space, in other words, in no way denies the tension on the surface of the work. This tension is rooted in the painter's gestures, which remain visible from the first time the subject is captured to the last brushstroke. Daubigny often calms the initially vehement strokes in the process of adding successive layers of paint. The surface becomes an individual, animated epidermis which offers not only the fictional space of a landscape, but also the imagined

Jackson Pollock, Number 3, 1951, ink on rice paper, 25 x 38 7/8 in., Virginia Wright Fund, Washington Art Consortium, Washington D. C.

space in which a gesture of making has been enacted, and which is now remembered by the traces of pencils and brushstrokes. The painter of a panorama or a painting with an extreme horizontal format has been traditionally expected to play down the viewer's awareness of his own presence, his standpoint and resulting distance from the subject. Daubigny, instead, keeps the beholder at a distance, in relation to an implied perspective corresponding to the distance of the painter stretching out his arm in order to reach the canvas with the pencil. Thus, his landscapes give us the impression that they are being held up to the viewer, just as a calm body of water can appear to be flat. Space is revealed in the indissoluble dialectic, on the one hand, of the range of the eye, and on the other hand, of the range of the brush and of its painted gesture. In Daubigny's paintings, there is a complex confusion between the materiality of the painted surface and that of the materiality of landscape with its dense atmosphere. The same is true for the flat diagonals, interwoven around the horizon. They operate like a calm horizon and at the same time as calming gestures.⁸⁷ That double bind of surface and gesture has nothing to do with the Munich landscape in the Oise valley, that has been attributed to Daubigny (Pl. 1). In this work, unlike those we know to be by Daubigny, a path introduces the spectator into the depth of a sweet valley, dividing the landscape into two parts, thereby creating a rather old-fashioned picturesque arrangement. That is why I would tend to attribute the landscape to a follower of Daubigny. It was not unusual for Barbizon painters to be accompanied by young artists and amateurs who often posed their easels close to that of the emulated master.⁸⁸ To say the least, the Munich landscape, in Daubigny's oeuvre, could hardly be considered as an important work.

In a similar case, a painting such as Théodore Rousseau's 1867 *Paysage boisé et rocheux* (*Landscape with Rocks and Trees*, oil on canvas, 23,5 x 40 cm) from the Mesdag Collection might have begun as a calligraphic tapestry of brushstrokes before the artist, in a final step, identifies, with some denser brushstrokes, some areas of the can-

vas as a section of sky, a pond and perhaps a rock formation, or brings out a group of trees.⁸⁹ In the drawings, certainly, the forest seems an excuse for creating a jumble of near and far, graphic and plastic, the effect of which is hardly attenuated by the realization of the subject. For even if the thicket captures our gaze with its deceitful promise of a nearby forest canopy and a distant open glade, we also become aware of an independent, abstract calligraphy on the surface of the painting. It creates a different spatiality implied by the movement of the hand holding the pencil, a room not deeper than what is within the hands' range but dense like the range of action of the hand. The sky is often painted in only after the forest, and it too constitutes at once a broken series of patches and a continuous, irregular polygon which sinks down over and between the branches of the trees. Nicholas Green in his 1982 exhibit argued that Rousseau cleverly played out these new strategies against the old expectations of landscape painting. The artist shows again and again his mastery of the classical and particularly the Romantic repertoire of synthetic landscapes and distant views. Yet the organic unity of these framed illuminations, the ostensible views and sublime clearings usually turn out to be empty promises which are broken by the isolation of the subject or the overwhelming foreground.⁹⁰

In his 1981 book on the drawings of Honore Daumier and Jean-François Millet, Bruce Laughton was able to demonstrate the importance of the artist's physical association with his subjects.⁹¹ Laughton chronicles the friendship and collaboration between Daumier and Millet, and opens our eyes to the fact that both artists, seemingly so different in their personalities, shared a common artistic intent. Both sought to capture, in the figures they depicted, with lines and gestures that are sympathetic to the specific strain of their postures, their implicit gestural emotions. The emphasis of the brush or the hardness of a pencil thus corresponds not only to the painter's emotion, but at the same time to that of the subject, which the artist strives to reduce to an emotional formula. The artist attempts to extract from his own personal experience

an emphatic response which enables him to become one with his depiction. Van Gogh's intention in creating myriad sketches of sowers was the same: He sought to capture their essence and thus demonstrate his complete sympathy with his subject.⁹² Increasingly, the *détachement* of emotion becomes the artistic norm. The painter denotes his own emotional reaction in a seemingly uninvolved way.⁹³ Again, Manet and his followers will draw the final consequences from that strategy of enacting the working process.

5.2 The Countryside and Urban Projections: Millet and the Cycles of Life

The personal handwriting of the painter had a hitherto unknown importance for painting, generating a series of new types of marketable paintings and drawings. The painters of Barbizon liberated themselves from the pressures and images of the academic-classical tradition in previously unsuspected measure. In opening themselves to nature, they were met with a realm of unlimited possibilities. Everything could now be depicted, even – or perhaps especially – the most insignificant of places. The Barbizon painters chose poetic views of seemingly unimportant sites that did not correspond to a traditional idyllic vision. They thereby rejected the importance accorded to subject matter in general, introducing subjects functioning as anti-subjects. The subject should not distract attention which was now directed towards the process of painting. However, the subject matter was not entirely thrust into the background. Increasingly, the seemingly »natural« forest of Fontainebleau with its archaic rocks, its deserted ponds and its oak trees aged centuries became a codified *sujet* in itself. The life of peasants, following the cycles of nature, the rituals of their labor, were increasingly presented, to the urban spectators, in their timeless »otherness.« Nature was reduced to a group of almost obsessively recurring motifs, and not just in the work of Rousseau and Millet or Courbet. Barbizon painting, soon, assumed mythic power without, however, merely re-introducing ancient myths of classical antiquity or

Christian religion. Thus, when we speak of the creation of myth in the painting of early Naturalism, we are not pointing to classical mythology or a fragmented recourse to Christian or Romantic images. Myth must be understood here in a much more radical sense: It is not the condensing of narratives from an earlier time, but a new construction of timeless, seemingly »natural« narratives. The double sided »nature of nature« of Barbizon painting, »nature« meaning the interior as well as exterior world, reappears in the subject matter (the *sujet*) as it was transformed by the painters. On the one hand, the myth seemed to correspond to a vision of life, as »performed« in its form closest to nature by the peasants, working the soil with archaic techniques. Sometimes, Darwinist ideology on the struggle for existence was mingled with that vision of peasants struggling with the merciless soil and climate. Thus, Millet for example reconstructed myth in his painting, according to a *universal* vision of life, life *outside the self*. Life *inside the self*, as expressed in Barbizon landscapes, was not part of a cyclic system of nature realizing itself in its various seasons, corresponding to the full range of moods a human ego can experience. The psychic energies as expressed in landscapes were, so to speak, not just aspects of a cyclic nature, of the full range of human moods. Instead, their hold on the painter as well as the spectator was total, merciless. Isolated, gigantic rocks, old trees overshadowing ponds or springs streaming out of caves in the rock functioned as allegorical expression of primordial psychic energies, of female and male fertility and sexual desire. In the same way isolation and desolation of a landscape expressed loneliness and castration, and spring and blooming stood for sexual fulfillment and personal triumph.

These feelings as symbolized by new, often subconscious ways of allegorizing the landscape were not those of the peasants who had always lived in the areas from where the painters chose their subject matter. Also, a painter such as Millet did not represent the »natural« life of the peasants according to their own opinions. In the same way the emotions and feelings aroused by or expressed through landscape

were those of educated, urban individuals, the vision of peasant life was a projection of bourgeois views. Authors ranging from Robert L. Herbert to Christopher Green have described how the Barbizon artists re-invented nature as well as the peasant as living a »natural« life according to urban needs and visions. Herbert was the first to suggest that the mythification of rural life was an answer to the industrialization pursued with such verve during the *Second Empire*. Creditors gambled on the realization of utopian advances in modern infrastructure, only a part of which is covered by the term »Hausmannization.« On the one side, positivistic proponents of progress and risk-taking industrialists, on the other, the return to an archaic nature: It is evident that the two camps were related. Herbert underlined that the painters chose a site that had been connected only recently to Paris by modern lines of transport and was thus within reach of urban dwellers. Furthermore, he demonstrated how subjects depicted by the painters were part of the archaic economy in the area of the Fontainebleau forest, including the right to gather firewood – rights which were threatened by a capitalistic use of the forest's resources. Finally, he insisted on the painters' struggle against modern reforestation of the area that would have changed the archaic character of that seemingly prehistoric landscape. Nature mythicized by the painters in its archaic character thus turns out to be a construction within the dialectics of increasing closeness and protected »otherness.«⁹⁴

Christopher Green studied the new vision of the countryside and of peasant life under an urban hegemony and their systematic interdependence in a new form of urban discourse. He not only found that the urban projections on the rural surroundings of Paris took place earlier than during the *Second Empire* and »Hausmannization.« Green insists on the influence the romantic printing press had on popularizing landscapes which were within the reach of middle class tourism. From the 1830s, picturesque views of French landscapes such as those recommended by Pierre Henry de Valenciennes were available for every

household. Also, »nature« had already been reinvented, according to urban needs, in the Parisian dancing gardens, in parks with vaudeville attractions: there, in the midst of a »natural« scenario and in fresh air, all classes of urban dwellers could mix in order to give full expression to their »natural« needs, even those regarded as of lesser repute. But the most important aspect of Green is that the rapidly evolving, capitalist economy and society of Paris soon forced this view of countryside into the framework of its own ideology, its own desires, its needs and its projections of what was to be considered as »natural.«⁹⁵ According to Green, the reconstruction of myth in Barbizon painting inevitably had to be seen as interdependent with urban fantasies and circulation of projections.

That interdependence of urban projections and mythic countryside is most apparent when viewing the political aspects of naturalist subject matter. In 1973, Timothy Clark provided important new impulses for Barbizon studies by demonstrating that Courbet's *Stone Breakers* (*Les casseurs de pierres*, 1850, oil on canvas, formerly Dresden, destroyed in 1945) and Millet's *Sower* (*Le semeur*, 1850, 101 x 82,5 cm, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts) were allegorical figures alluding to social misery.⁹⁶ Two years later, Robert L. Herbert showed Millet's *Gleaners* of 1857 (*Les glaneuses*, 83,5 x 111 cm, Paris, Louvre), the *Death of the Woodcutter* of 1859 (*La mort du bûcheron*, oil on canvas, Copenhagen) and the *Man with the Hoe* of 1860–1862 (*L'homme à la houe*, oil on canvas, 80 x 99 cm, U.S.A., private collection) to be further images which were rejected by contemporary society largely because of their apparent glorification of suffering.⁹⁷ It became evident that the revolution of 1848 was an extremely important catalyst for the forming of a new type of allegorical meaning in painting. The dangerous forces of France, the »couches dangereuses« of »la France profonde« that had been suppressed from the consciousness of the political classes of the capital returned as mythic figures. They seemed to be legitimated by higher values than Saint-Simonist optimism and positivistic belief in progress. These higher values, projected into mythic

realms, also functioned, however, within an urban discourse.

Millet's painting and its success in the public reception sufficiently demonstrates these correlations. After 1848, Millet consistently presented peasants as mythic figures. The cycles of birth, motherhood, work and death in their lives represent the daily and seasonal cycles of growth and decay. And yet Millet's peasant scenes are not a flat condemnation of the industrial revolution or the optimism of his time about progress.⁹⁸ The first stages of that process should be taken into account. Denise Delouche, a specialist on the painting of rural Breton life, has discussed the discovery of the French province and its transformation from the popular-genresque to Realism.⁹⁹ The archaizing view of pre-industrial life is found not just in the Barbizon school, but in more moderate genre painters up to Jules Breton.¹⁰⁰ The forced individuality of the »couches productives,« which included the Saint-Simonistes of all the modern ranks, from banker to laborer, led to the peasant's complete loss of individuality. Millet resolutely denigrates him to the critic Ernest Chesneau's »animal farouche des caractères.«¹⁰¹ In the end, only the merciless laws of survival confirm the peasant class as pantheistic priests of nature, the same laws which make the peasants poor and isolate the bourgeois from nature. The critical reception of Millet has been characterized by a fatalist view of the stoic virtues of peasants, of their absolute connection to nature, and of the inevitability of social hierarchies, as Christopher Parsens and Neil MacWilliam have shown in their 1983 article, *Alfred Sensier and the Myth of Rural France*.¹⁰² This revelation has given us a new perspective on Millet studies. At least since the late sixties, the pre-industrial world was the consummate archaic life, transcending rational thinking. The myth is no longer being narrated, but introduced as something inherent to the lives of the indigent peasants. If Millet's figures, representing the misery of »la France profonde,« were at first the awe-inspiring, heroic laborers for the bourgeois and *parvenus*, they later embodied the very myth of authenticity and the merciless laws of survival. Peasants become the pantheis-

tic priests of nature, and the work morale of the small, toiling family appears natural. Millet's secularized Madonnas, for example, were never shown in the rigid framework of larger, rural families, but in the realm of the small family nucleus increasingly characteristic of upper and middle class existence. Of course, this very facet of his agrarian world seems to be a bourgeois projection.

Idyllic worlds of rural existence had always reflected the longings of a ruling aristocratic or bourgeois oligarchy for an innocent life close to nature – a life, however, totally unrelated to the peasants' struggle for existence.¹⁰³ When the hardships of the peasants' dependence upon nature became prominent, now, the bourgeoisie in contrast could reflect, in a complex allegory, the vicissitudes of capitalistic life, or destiny as dependent on the ups and downs of the stock market. Although often pessimistic in their mood, Millet's visions of peasant life, indeed, reconstruct a traditional form of idyllic otherness in a new functional framework. The idyll as a literary genre, according to Bakhtin, is characterized by the following criteria:¹⁰⁴

1. The enacting figures are always close to an imaginary habitat replacing nature.
2. That region is well defined, rather small, and closed to the outside world. Therefore its inhabitants to whom it guarantees safety and stability can easily know it in its totality.
3. Dynamic, progressing time is lost in a cyclical time. The repetitive cycles of life guaranty the continuity of families from the ancestors to the descendants. All aspects of life, birth, love, marriage, work and death, are unified in a »natural« cycle. The vision of cyclical life ennobles all the aspects of everyday life – hourly chores, or work of each season, preparation of banquets and costumes. These tend to represent a ritual in the service of a higher destiny.
4. Reality is also ennobled by fine arts and religion.
5. The reduction of complexity and the idealization of life supplement each other. According to Wolfgang Preisendanz, we can add a further criterion:
6. Nature as an unrelated stage for life and culture as a conciliating instance tend to be

opposed to each other. That opposition, however, tends to disappear during the 19th century.¹⁰⁵

Usually, these aspects of idyll are to be found in romances in regional setting, in family stories, educational or sentimental novels. The function of idyll is to recover an imaginative *locus amoenus*, most often situated in an ideal past. Millet's peasants, at the first sight, do not correspond to such an imaginary world. They rarely find security and safety in a idealized habitat. They do not live in a distant past. They seem to exist in an a-temporal time usually – but not always – uninfluenced by the industrial revolution. Robert Herbert has argued that the *Gleaners* clearly were earning their humble living on the largest farm near Barbizon.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, in some paintings the narrated time is tinted with biblical dimensions. Thus, the *Gleaners* can be read at least alluding to the biblical theme of Ruth and Boas. In this way, Millet seems to reconstruct idyll as tinted by pessimism, allowing for a heroic struggle for existence in a hostile world. But he integrates into the idyllic projection not only a more disillusioned vision of life. He also shifts it into the realm of grandiose, mythic or religious conceptions of life.

The reconstruction of myth corresponded not only to the specific Darwinism permeating a bourgeois world. The myth of rural life, as created by Millet, became a spectacle mirroring the ethos and fate of bourgeois existence. Guy Debord, in his *Theorie du spectacle*, has interpreted the media entertainment accompanying the modern society of the masses and structuring the rhythm of life within it also by its cyclical character. According to Debord, man as reduced to the marketable value of his working capacity, was submitted to a radically measurable time of production. Corresponding to the time of work in the productive apparatus, we find spare time as the »consumable« form of time. Time as a medium of vital experience and fulfillment seems to be relegated to leisure. The capitalistic offers to structure spare time into leisure, however, are constructed on the model of working and productive time. Thus, they can only imitate vital time in

what Debord defines as pseudo-time. Illustrated papers followed by publicity work, film, and the entire media machine depict seasonal pleasures and feasts. Thereby, they merely imitate the temporal structure of vital experience: »Le temps pseudo-cyclique est celui de la consommation [...], où le vécu quotidien reste privé de décision et soumis, non plus à l'ordre naturel, mais à la pseudo-nature développée dans le travail aliéné; et donc ce temps retrouve tout naturellement le vieux rythme cyclique qui réglait la survie des sociétés pré-industrielles. Le temps pseudo-cyclique à la fois prend appui sur les traces naturelles du temps cyclique, et en compose de nouvelles combinaisons homologues: le jour et la nuit, le travail et le repos hebdomadaires, le retour des périodes de vacances.« Debord insists that the cycles of life are only *represented* in their doublings – »à la fois comme temps de la consommation des images, au sens restreint, et comme image de la consommation du temps, dans toute son extension.«¹⁰⁷ Millet's mythic visions of peasant life can be interpreted as a complex allegory of the cycles of the urban existence of upper and middle classes. The spectacle of rural life, as constructed by Millet, would conquer an important place among the prejudices structuring bourgeois prejudices. As their transformation by Giovanni Segantini would demonstrate, the mythic vision of peasantry became especially efficient in societies at the threshold between agrarian and industrial economy. Subject matter made banal and invented originally by Millet would remain a cornerstone even for nazi painting.

Millet, in his modernized, negative idyll, pessimistic as well as mythified, often alluded to Christian religion. However, the paintings were not religious in the sense that they invited the spectator to share the belief of the people represented in the paintings. Millet did not invite the spectator to react immediately to peasant life in a religious way. Instead, he presented religion merely as structuring the life of the peasants depicted, in a world separated from that of the spectators by an unbridgeable distance. Peasant life together with its religious structuring is present only in the realm of Millet's

art. Religion thus confers its capacity to transfer the structure of ideological views onto art. Art, thereby, becomes the sphere out of which a higher meaning was offered – but only in the form of allusion and »meaningful« fantasy, not in the form of binding belief. The ritual of transferring religious power to art is an important factor in the history of the autonomy of art as a bourgeois category.

Nature, in the work of Millet, thus, was constructed in the sphere of the mythical otherness of rural existence. It was perhaps first with Théodore Géricault that reality was revealed to be a reification of the artistic self. The Naturalists revered him as their founding father. Régis Michel discussed the psychological dimension of Géricault's inventions in the Paris exhibition and other publications.¹⁰⁸ His work is so compelling, not just because he takes Lacan and the new social psychology seriously, but because he is an expert on the making of art in the Enlightenment era from Diderot to David. In 1989, in the exhibition *Le beau idéal*, he was able to shed much light on the fictions of classical beauty. Within the world of Napoleonic classicism, Géricault emerged as an artist who invented himself, without recognizing any mentor. He realized his visions of erotic struggle, blind and brutish self-affirmation as well as sublime failure and castration in a painting of a contemporary catastrophe, *Medusa's raft* (*Le radeau de la Méduse*, 1819, oil on canvas, 491 x 716 cm, Louvre, Paris). »Reality«, in his painting, ultimately was the expression of subconscious desires and fears in the realm of contemporary images and experiences. Now, Michel interprets Millet's construction of »natural« life as a healing substitute to a world the self was unable to cope with. The psychological approach again reveals itself as being the quintessentially critical approach of contemporary art history. It is the only one capable of proposing answers to a central question that has been formulated recently. In his 1987 essay on *art social* between the aestheticization of misery on the one hand and social cruelty on the other, Wolfgang Drost covered the entire spectrum – including the gaps – between idealized projection and depicted reality in the

painting of Realism. Drost observes that both were dependent on one another. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon failed to observe this in his attempt to villainize nature and turn it over to the waiting posse. The psychological approach attempts to bridge that gap, by explaining how »reality« was constructed, from the beginning, according to modern myths, as a projection responding to unconscious desires and fears.

5.3 Courbet: Psychic Energies of Nature and Painting

The discussion on Géricault also had an impact on the interpretation of Courbet's work. More than other artists, Courbet linked vain narcissism and the project of reconstruction in a binding vision of »reality.« At the basis of his achievement are highly contradictory tendencies such as personal obsession and social utopia, highly subjective strategies of pictorial narration and the invention of a universal language of »realism.« The expression of his own individuality and the invention of an all-encompassing »reality« are not opposed to each other in his work. Myth seems to embrace personal neurosis as well as social ethics and utopia. Also, the parameters of mythical nature and the individual handling of the brush are intersecting. Courbet, for example, tailors nature to the figures in his *Stone Breakers* both by cropping the view and through his painting technique. He only represents that which is part of the stone breakers' field of vision. The viewer thus becomes a stone breaker as well, vicariously assuming their identity. Perhaps this is what made Millet's *Gleaners* so offensive at first. We are a long way from panoramas peopled by tiny staffage figures in landscapes too vast to traverse. In most of the paintings, though, the painter before his subject sees his own nature instead of the nature of the peasants. The uniformity of the subject, in other words, is only the uniformity of his sensibility, which leaves its traces in the brushstrokes. On canvases by Rousseau or by Daubigny, we can observe a continuous reduction of gestural vehemence from the first contact of the brush with the canvas to the last layer of paint. This is not simply a ques-

tion of the strokes becoming less generous, less wide-ranging, with the progressive delineation of the motifs. The decreased emphasis also reflects the sublimation of the feeling which the isolated place inspires. The artist sees no absolutes in his work; his own nature can be as archaic as the motif from nature. The appropriation of nature according to the classical rules is transformed into the wistful painting of an enigmatic nature beyond reach. »Reality,« thus, was the result of a complex process of psychological sublimation, of the subject silencing its initial impulse to conform with a vision of the outside world.

Courbet, however, reenacts that process with a different, more extensive aim: He attempts to anticipate a social and political reconstruction of lost unity in his painting. For the Frankfurt exhibition *Courbet und Deutschland*, Klaus Herding described Courbet's use of the palette knife and his treatment of paint in the sense of a material conception of nature so authoritatively that I need only cite the catalogue in passing.¹⁰⁹ Courbet, like most of the painters of early French naturalism, wants the spectator to identify with the figures as well as with the »material« forces and energies in his painting. But that was only part of the game. By its subject matter, Courbet's painting anticipates a utopian identification of interior and exterior nature in a total unification. Courbet postulates unity 1. as constituting an undivided »reality« – a material world uniting the spectator and what he sees in the painting, 2. as constituting a psychic world of generative (sexual) power and 3. as constituting a social world of ultimately common interests.

The formation of myth in the work of Courbet was initially studied with some hesitation, but recent analyses have become more and more compelling. Inspired by Hélène Toussaint's portentous essay, Aaron Sheon published an article in 1981 on Courbet's interest in dreams, hypnosis, sleepwalking and sleep phenomena.¹¹⁰ His study is concerned not purely with the 1865 *Sleepwalker* (*La Voyante*, or *La somnambule*, ca. 1855, oil on canvas, 47 x 39 cm, Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie, Besançon), but with the artist's self-analy-

sis, his critical examination of his own narcissism, and finally the many depictions of sleeping or sleepy women in his oeuvre. It was a short associative step from here to *The Origin of the World* (*L'origine du monde*, 1866, oil on canvas, 46 x 55 cm, private collection), lascivious female nudes, and the numerous depictions of caves or the source of the tiny Loue river in a grotto. The chthonic symbolism and the feminization of nature here evident have already been noted by Werner Hofmann.¹¹¹

Following Timothy Clark, Courbet's achievement was seen especially in terms of the burned *Stone Breakers* of 1850, the depiction of rural bourgeoisie in the *Burial at Ornans* (*Un enterrement à Ornans*, oil on canvas, 315 x 668 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris) of the same year and other such paintings in which the hard social realities of the provinces were held up against the clichés present in the capital. Now, however, the thematic unity of Courbet's work has again been brought to the fore. Sarah Faunce, for example, sketched out this new image of Courbet in the introduction to the Brooklyn Museum's 1988 Courbet exhibition.¹¹² Both her and Petra Chu's essays counter the pejorative view of the artist's less political works which prevailed during the seventies, for example in Albert Boime's assessment.¹¹³ It is true that Courbet increasingly conformed to the demands of the market, acting as his own promoter in order to prove his viability in the new entrepreneurial system. Still, paintings such as the *The Battle of the Stags* (*Le combat de cerfs*) of 1860 show that Courbet's understanding of survival had simply assumed a new guise, just as his conception of the materiality of nature was brought out in universally acceptable paintings of myth. Even in the paintings of stags fights and hunting, death and the struggle for survival are translated into the perspective of a Darwinist era.

A renewed glance at Courbet's *The Studio of the Painter* (*L'atelier du peintre*) (Pl. 68) demonstrates the radicality of his modern mythologies. Hélène Toussaint and Klaus Herding achieved a major breakthrough in Courbet studies by showing that the figures in the left half of this enigmatic painting were disguised political portraits

from the 1850s.¹¹⁴ Herding went so far as to interpret their appearance as a kind of secularized *sacra conversazione*. In his eyes, they represent the star witnesses in an *adhortatio ad principem* directed at Napoleon III. Linda Nochlin accepted that interpretation in 1988, although pointing to the heterogeneity of the painting. To her, the cowering Irish mother is the key figure, testifying to the sexual myths of the suffering female and the active male, of the seen and the seeing. Michael Fried was able to show in his 1990 book that psychological strategies for the creation of modern myth typify Courbet's work. Fried proposed a more complex interpretation of »Courbet's femininity« within the framework of his interpretation of Courbet's work. According to Fried, Courbet systematically symbolizes the process of painting and perceiving in the work itself, trying to force the spectator into the pictorial scene. In his painting about painting par excellence, *The Studio of the Painter*, real allegory determining a phase of seven years in my artistic life (*L'atelier du peintre, allégorie réelle déterminant une phase de sept années de ma vie artistique*, oil on canvas, 359 x 598 cm, Paris, Louvre), Courbet is painting, surrounded by a group of allegorical and another group of real persons who were important for his life and thinking. For Fried, the painter as depicted in his studio is a variation on the artist's self-portraits in which Courbet continually questions his own role as a perceptive being. Courbet in his studio is the center of his contemporary world, a *demiurge* who mediates the image of that world. He himself is seen adding a last stroke of the brush to the almost finished canvas of a landscape representing a beautiful valley seemingly in his native *Franche-Comté*. Behind the painter, who is sitting in front of his painting, stands a naked woman – according to Courbet an atelier model – who sympathetically observes the painting as well as the act of painting. As proven by the x-ray photograph of the canvas, a little boy also observing the painter's work was added only when the painting was almost finished. The relationship of the painter and the model to the idyllic landscape on the easel is complicated in a manifold way. First, the painter does

not face the canvas, but sits obliquely in front of it, presenting his entire body as seen in a profile. The naked model, instead of being directed towards the landscape she contemplates, is slightly turned toward the spectator. Second, the woman's contours esthetically correspond to the landscape. The white robe she holds in front of her breast corresponds to the river flowing in the landscape painting. Traditionally, the female figure has been interpreted as alluding to truth (Théophile Silvestre) or to nature. Thus, Courbet, immersed in a painting of nature, is thereby being observed by a figure representing nature. However, Fried does not suggest that the male painter (presenting his beautiful »assyrian« profile) paints nature as feminized, legitimated, so to speak, by an imaginary realm of female »reality«. Instead, he suggests that the painter in his self-observation as well as the spectator identify with the female figure. She is the *mise-en-abîme* of beholding, the repetition of the way the painting should be looked at in the painting itself.¹¹⁵ In this way, the painting created according to a radicalized concept of nature, reality, also is to be observed by the spectator in the name of his (inner) reality. Painting and perceiving, in front of Courbet's painting, become a metamorphosis of a radicalized emancipation of »reality,« the claims of inner and outer nature inseparably intertwined in human interest. Nature, thus, is present in front of the painter, in his landscape painting, and behind his back, in its substitute, the naked model, a »real allegory«.

Thus the painter himself assumes the role of *natura naturans*, which Fried – rejected by Linda Nochlin – terms Courbet's femininity. As for Courbet's »femininity«, Fried insists on the prominent role of female figures seen from behind who introduce the spectator into the painting, thereby inviting him not only to share their gaze but also to get involved into action, whether it be work or a bathe in a river. According to Fried, Courbet revises the active (male) role of perceiving and the passive (female) role of being perceived. The obvious analogy of Courbet's painting of a female genital organ in *The Origin of the World* and his paintings of the Source of the Loue (1863–64) sug-

gested to different authors that his version of nature, materially rendered with thick color applied with the palette knife, has been feminized. Other paintings of water flowing in the direction of the spectator vaguely seem to confirm that idea. Fried first questions that such anthropomorphic mirroring in »material« painting can simply be attributed to subconscious desires: »automatism and will (including the will to represent in paint) cannot simply be contrasted with one another.« Instead, he sees those paintings »as the product, perhaps by-product, of an enterprise that has for its primary aim the accomplishment of quasi-physical merger between painter-beholder and painting.« As Courbet's painting »calls into question [...] all distinction between the realms of human activity and material nature,« the eroticized drama of nature, instead of relating in its objecthood to a subjective, desiring beholder, is translated into an all-encompassing reality.¹¹⁶ Myth in Courbet's work becomes an etiology not merely of a male, narcissistic, but of a generalized ego, mediated through painting as a form of nature above and about nature. This interpretation is not at odds with the materialism of the realist, for such works are also based on the ego in a sense: The artist's own nature is plumbed just as materially as the external nature. Fried seems to extend the concept of real allegory from the atelier-painting to all of Courbet's painting.

With his paintings, Courbet also constructed his own public image, adopting the identity of a mythic artist. Courbet was considered to be the quintessentially »Bohemian« artist.¹¹⁷ The »Bohemia« was a rather heterogeneous social group whose unity was constructed by the myth of an existence »outside« the system and the values of bourgeois, urban life. Various social models of the *Empire* saw fit to send young men from rural areas in France to schools, in an effort to enable their entry into bourgeois society. But an industrial culture that could generate work for the newly educated remained a mere promise, at best a project which the *Second Empire* pursued with renewed vigor. The shattered hopes of young intellectuals and unestablished artists intersected in the realm of »not yet,« or maybe

»never« or »nevermore.« Their solace-seeking in alcohol and drugs was exaggerated to the point of opening the door to a new sensuousness which the rational sense of sight alone could not attain. Following Baudelaire's theory of the hidden interrelations of sounds, smells, and colors, these became a basic motif of the avant-garde.¹¹⁸

In many ways, Courbet and the Barbizon artists were part of and added new vigor to the myth of the »Bohemia«. As in that social sphere where artists or would-be artists mixed with workers, *midinettes*, ragpickers or criminals, the artist explicitly or implicitly identified with the workers and craftsmen, by insisting on the materiality of paint or by revealing the secrets of technique on the canvas itself. Not only in Courbet's self-portraits was the artist presented as a marginalized hero and a worker in his painting. In Daumier's work, acrobats, clowns, pierrots and other characters from the circus first became allegorical substitutes for the artist, and then for a more authentic existence at the borders of modern life mechanisms.¹¹⁹ Marilyn Brown has examined the »Bohemian« myth of gypsies and the social reality it expressed.¹²⁰ Following Daumier, naturalism increasingly drew from »Bohemia« the ostensibly marginalized group which included ragpickers and impoverished artists, *midinettes*, laborers, and *bon vivants*. Robert Herbert has already demonstrated that Barbizon was considered a colony of the Parisian Bohemia somehow lost on a deserted island, so to speak. The artist, by placing his identity within that »real« myth of Bohemia, thereby came at the same time to be closer to and more distant from the urban, bourgeois viewer. The esthetic distance, eliminated in the extremely visible technique (for example in Courbet's use of the palette knife) and in the choice of the chronotope, was reconstructed on a new basis. The artist behaved like a messenger of »authentic« life presented to an alienated, urban world. It is not astonishing that the artists invented new strategies for putting distance between and identifying with the viewers, surrounding their presence in the painting with the mythic aura of the »Bohemia«. It is more surprising that the urban public accepted

art as a product imported, so to speak, from the mythic margins of society into their urban world. Part of bourgeois society imagined that somewhere in the margins of their culture, there was a life dictated only by truths of the heart. Consequently, these busybodies began to expect artistic truth to come from that same sphere. They were looking for evidence of a life which they denied themselves. Also, a new type of art dealers financed a new genre of young artists at the beginning of their career, however without lifting them to the level of bourgeois existence. They speculated on the »Bohemian« existence, often maintained by the artists even as a fiction. The myth of »Bohemian« painting structured the reception of art and by metamorphosis changed it into a social reality.

»Barbizon«, thus, marks a turning point inaugurating a modern discourse on the arts. With the role of the subject and the artist's originality the role of art changed: art was considered to be a messenger of a deeper, more authentic relationship to nature as transformed by the historical process. The art market was reorganized according to new marketable testimonies from the artistic process. The status of the art work was at the same time that of a revelation of inner and outer nature, therefore a gift that came from the margins of an alienated existence, and that of a marketable commodity.¹²¹ Even as a marketable object, the art work »revealed« new truths about the inner forces of the ego as well as the outer framework of what had to be considered the »nature of nature.«

Acknowledgements

Jann Matlock helped not only to put this essay into English, but also to clarify the ideas. Derick Dreher and Maxine Clark also helped to reshape my English.

Notes

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Abstract

The paintings of the Barbizon school have a key position in the history of an ever more painterly artistic language of *painting* that will finally result in gestural abstraction. At the same time, »Barbizon« marks a turning point: a system of the arts dominated by the humanist theory of the arts comes to an end, and modern ideas about autonomous art start to dominate the production as well as the reception of art works.

Landscape has always been a genre whose place in the hierarchy of the genres was disputed. It could rise up to the esteem of history painting, but it could also be devalued as a mere reproduction of chaotic matter. When Romanticism questioned the values of classical artistic theory as well as traditional rhetoric, landscape metamorphosized into the genre that would undermine the hierarchy of genres.

Landscape painting of early French Naturalism was a culminating episode in that historical evolution. According to humanistic art theory, the aims of landscape painting were dictated by the concept of *mimesis*. The painters were re-

quired not only to represent nature, but also to render it in an idealized version. Academic techniques of idealization served to regain the ideal beauty of God's creation that had since been lost. Romanticism repudiated these techniques. Now, the aesthetic ideal seemed out of human reach while at the same time being the ultimate value worthy of inexhaustive searching. Also, the position of the artist towards nature changed. He tried to find himself in the midst of nature. However, estrangement distanced him from exterior as well as from his own inner nature whose unity he only invoked in his aesthetic creation. The Barbizon artists found a new language for that search for themselves in the mirror of nature: the visible, nervous brushstrokes, highly individual techniques, like handwriting expressive of the unfathomable, inner life. In that language, inner and outer nature become undistinguishable. The search for the self and the elaboration of the art work, the observation of outer nature and the awareness of the artist's own emotions are fused into the artistic process.

On the basis of their new expressive techniques, many of the Barbizon artists found new, partly unconscious myths about nature and a life close to it. Thereby, they did not reconstruct classical idylls. Such idylls could only be represented, by now, in the language of stylization. Thus, Ingres blended his own fantasy totally to the tradition of art history. Millet or Courbet, on the contrary, presented nature as transformed by modern psychology to a public whose projections were conditioned by the rhythms of urban life. One of the new myths was an authentic life, following the truths of the heart, at the margins of society: whether in the Bohemia of artists or in Barbizon.

Résumé

Dans le combat séculaire pour la libération de l'écriture picturale, les tableaux de Barbizon occupent une place décisive. L'abstraction gestuelle de Pollock et de Kline est l'ultime conséquence de cette évolution. Les artistes de Barbizon marquent la rupture avec le système artistique d'obéissance humaniste d'une conception moderne de l'autonomie artistique.

Dans la hiérarchie traditionnelle des genres, le paysage n'a jamais vraiment eu sa place. Sans doute a-t-il gagné la même estime (ou presque) que la peinture d'histoire, mais il pouvait aussi bien être pâti de ne reproduire que la nature chaotique. Quand le romantisme s'est affranchi de la théorie humaniste comme de la vieille rhétorique, le paysage devint un genre destiné à briser – puis à ruiner – les frontières imposées par la hiérarchie académique.

Le naturalisme pictural des paysagistes français marque l'apogée du processus. Selon la

théorie humaniste, le concept de *mimesis* avait défini la tâche que le paysagiste devait accomplir. Les procédés académiques pour idéaliser la nature devaient lui restituer la beauté perdue de la création divine. Le romantisme ébranla ces façons obsolètes. L'idéal esthétique se mua en inaccessible absolu. C'est ainsi que changea la position de l'artiste vis-à-vis de la nature, qu'il devait affronter, dans sa quête de lui-même. La nature extérieure et la nature intérieure lui étaient également étrangères quand bien même l'unité perdue fut conjurée. Les artistes de Barbizon trouvèrent une langue nouvelle pour traduire cette quête de soi dans le miroir de la nature extérieure: les traces du pinceau, tout comme les traits de l'écriture expriment l'insondable de la vie intérieure. Dans l'intimité de l'artiste, nature intérieure et nature extérieure s'entrelacent. La quête de soi et le travail artistique ne deviennent plus qu'un, l'observation du monde extérieur et l'inspection des sensations se réconcilient.

C'est à partir de ces principes que les artistes de Barbizon et leurs émules retrouvèrent des mythes nouveaux, en partie inconscients. Mais ils ne pouvaient ressusciter le classicisme de l'idylle. Désormais, celui-ci ne se manifeste qu'à travers un idiome stylisé. Un artiste comme Ingres utilise encore deux registres: le sien et celui de la tradition artistique. Mais chez Millet, chez Courbet, on se trouve face à une nature psychologique où se projettent les rythmes de la vie urbaine. L'un de ces mythes étant celui d'une existence vouée aux idéaux du sentiment, en marge de la société, que ce fût dans la bohème citadine ou la rusticité de Barbizon ...

Zusammenfassung

Die Bilder der Schule von Barbizon nehmen eine Schlüsselstellung in der Entwicklung einer zum Malerischen befreiten Malerei ein, deren letzte Konsequenz die gestische Abstraktion sein wird. »Barbizon« bezeichnet zugleich einen Wendepunkt vom System der Künste, wie es durch die humanistische Kunsttheorie bestimmt wurde, hin zu einer modernen Auffassung autonomer Kunst.

Die Landschaft als Genre hatte in der Hierarchie der Gattungen stets einen prekären Platz. Sie konnte den Rang der Historienmalerei erreichen, aber auch als Reproduktion der

chaotischen Materie abgewertet werden. Als während der Romantik die humanistische Kunsttheorie zugleich mit der traditionellen Rhetorik abgelöst wurde, avancierte die Landschaft zu jenem Genre, das die Hierarchie der Gattungen aufbrechen und letztlich ablösen sollte. Diese Entwicklung kulminiert in der Landschaftsmalerei des frühen französischen Naturalismus. Gemäß der humanistischen Kunsttheorie war die Aufgabe auch der Landschaftsmalerei bestimmt durch das Konzept der *mimesis*. Gefordert war nicht nur die Darstellung der Natur, sondern auch deren Perfektionierung. Die akademischen Techniken der Idealisierung dienten dazu, die Natur der verlorengegangenen Schönheit göttlicher Schöpfung wieder anzunähern. Die Romantik zweifelte an diesen Verfahren: Ihr mutierte das ästhetische Ideal zu etwas zugleich Unerreichbarem und Absolutem. Dadurch wandelte sich die Position des Künstlers gegenüber der Natur, der er sich auf der Suche nach sich selbst zuwandte. Die innere wie die äußere Natur wurden dem Künstler fremd, beider Einheit ist im Werk nur noch beschworen. Die Künstler von Barbizon fanden eine neue Sprache für diese Suche nach sich selbst im Spiegel der äußeren Natur: den sichtbaren Pinselduktus, wie die Schrift Spur und Ausdruck des unergründlichen, inneren Lebens. In ihm durchkreuzten sich innere wie äußere Natur. Die Suche nach dem Selbst und die Arbeit am Kunstwerk, die Beobachtung der äußeren Natur wie die Selbstwahrnehmung der eigenen Emotionalität wurden eins.

Auf dieser Grundlage fanden die Künstler von Barbizon zu neuen, teils unbewußten Mythen über die Natur und das naturnahe Leben zurück. Dabei rekonstruierten sie jedoch nicht die klassische Idylle. Diese konnte nur noch durch Stilisierung vergegenwärtigt werden, indem ein Künstler wie Ingres seine eigene Sichtweise mit einer kunsthistorischen Tradition des Idealschönen amalgamierte. Bei Millet oder Courbet steht eine psychologisierte Natur als Projektionsfläche den Rhythmen des urbanen Lebens gegenüber. Einer dieser Mythen war der eines Lebens nach der Wahrheit des Herzens an den Rändern der Gesellschaft, in der großstädtischen Künstler-Bohème oder der scheinbaren Abgeschiedenheit von Barbizon ...