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From Bohemia to Arcadia: Renoir between Nervous Modernity and Primitive Eternity

Renoir and the Contradictions of Happiness

Renoir is often all too quickly labeled as the "painter of happiness."[1] On the one hand, paintings such as *Ball at the Moulin de la Galette* fig. 1 and *Luncheon of the Boating Party* fig. 2 are part of our conception of Impressionism, a painting style supposedly devoted to the portrayal of the happiness of modern people in nature.[2] Frolicking day-trippers and tourists are bathed in soft light and find themselves in an always sunny and inviting atmosphere. On the other hand, we sneer at opulent nudes in classicizing contours, childlike women, and dreamy children, which Renoir elevated to a guiding theme since *The Bathers* of 1884–87 fig. 3, deemed the manifesto of his anti-avantgarde art. At first glance, the work of the later Renoir since the 1880s, his revitalization of the idyll and its tradition, reaching from the Renaissance through the eighteenth century to French neo-traditionalism and the *retour à l'ordre,* have little to say to modern irony and postmodern cynicism. Feminists see it as fulfillment of male desires. Projections onto women and onto art complement each other here. As has so often been the case since the Renaissance, since Botticelli, Giorgione, and Titian, art as a whole is feminized: Venus or nymphs, goddesses or bathers populate heavenly landscapes as well as more intimate paradises. They do not content themselves with appearing as mere objects of art alongside others. Arcadia, this other-worldly shore, yearned for by city dwellers and *décadents,* harboring shepherds living in harmony with nature, advances to the very realm of art itself—remote as fiction, always longed for, never reached.[3]

Renoir brings this myth back to life, but he does not borrow his image of women only from Titian or Giorgione, from Rubens or François Girardon. Rather he endows his female figures—often reduced to the expression of femininity itself—with what Michel Foucault has described as the "sexual hysteria" of the nineteenth century. His women with their childlike innocence seem to be naturally destined solely to eroticism and motherhood.[4] In Renoir's early work, however, the idyll is not yet transcendent: he finds it at sites of leisure and amusement on the outskirts of Paris, which he, as well as many of his contemporaries, would travel to via horse-drawn omnibuses or the new suburban trains. He had already painted bathers in 1868, at the swimming hole of La Grenouillère near Chatou fig. 4, side by side with Monet.[5] As long as Renoir still strived to become Charles Baudelaire's

"painter of modern life," thus until about 1880, the happiness portrayed in his works is the happiness of the *couches nouvelles,* the new middle classes—in which the poet Stéphane Mallarmé had seen the true addressees of Impressionist painting as early as 1876, and to which the majority of viewers of Impressionist paintings still belongs today.[6] Renoir thus stands for the happiness within our reach. In any volume or calendar devoted to Impressionist painting, he is given a central place—Renoir, the Impressionist par excellence.

But the more he enraptures us on first sight, all the less does he seem to prevail under a closer look. Édouard Manet, the gracious yet roguish observer of modern life, captures our desiring gazes. Even today, we are still open to perceive his specific mixture of intimacy and detachment, by which alone introspection into the small nooks and crannies of life is possible. Manet is the painter of the ever exposed secret.[7] Edgar Degas depicts racehorses as well as young female dancers and beautiful women crouching in the washtub, capturing fleeting moments in astounding impartiality and from idiosyncratic viewing angles. He impresses us with the analytical insight of the physician, the anthropologist, the sociologist. Nevertheless, a magical melancholy still lies within his misanthropic profanation of the most beautiful incarnations of femininity. Even his voyeurism—which he took to the limits of experimentation—he ascribes to a socially perfectly acceptable disregard for worldly matters. The misery felt by the model, the painter, and the viewer are compensated by the reinforcement of a narcissistic ego.[8] Claude Monet shatters the notions of earlier landscape painting, in which the view of nature as the destiny of its inhabitants was still preserved, if only in fiction. The figures in his landscapes are no longer accessories protectively surrounded, sublimely surmounted, or truculently menaced by nature. Monet lifts the veil of chiaroscuro, both mellow and ponderous, and gives room to landscapes bathed in light, compositionally revealing their contrasts by means of resolute brushstrokes. His radically aesthetic approach to nature is the foundation of modern "moods": the subtle harmony of nature with the oscillations of "psychism" (a term used by Monet's contemporaries), which, his records of the fugitive conveys, can only be experienced at the cost of a previous alienation from nature as a living environment—the estrangement of the tourist.[9] Is Renoir, by contrast, only the preserver of the idyll? Is the compensation he gives for his venture into modernism only the vision of an everlasting return to a world of childlike harmony, compliant women, and all-agreeing desires?

Admittedly, Renoir *is* the painter of happiness; but the repetition of this stereotype—with the encouraging gesture of a waiter

inviting tourists to his terrace fig. 2—has hardly ever satisfied anyone. Even the feminist interpretations go beyond this cliché. Somehow we do intuit how endangered the idyll, beneath its surface, actually is.[10] The attempt to liberate Renoir from his widespread "sickly sweet popularity," or to look behind his "trademark," the "bewitchingly red-cheeked, curvaceously padded figures of young women," is not new. Already in 1996, Götz Adriani introduced an exhibition catalogue by addressing this idea. Beholding the dream of happiness and simultaneously looking behind its curtains is a topos that has accompanied the reception of his art from the very beginning. How has Renoir become the painter of an innocence easy to see through—and never actually innocent? This is the question to which we shall devote ourselves. From Julius Meier-Graefe to Adriani, the banality of Renoir's happiness has been contrasted, above all, with the subtlety of his formal qualities, first and foremost the "weightlessness of his colors."[11] This falls too short. Formal qualities remain lifeless unless set in relation to the subject of painting. The charm that Renoir unfolds upon us even today is of poetic, not formalistic, nature. It is also in thematic terms that Renoir puts his figures into a tension between visions of happiness and their actual life, governed by commerce, love (including bought love), and the precariousness of the bohemian world. Bohemia, this increasingly large fringe of society in which artists and writers met with workers and revolutionaries, petty criminals with maidservants and shop girls, social climbers with dropouts, was more to Renoir than the mythical realm of the rebellious avant-garde artist. In Bohemia, genius and madness were closely intertwined, just as happiness and despair, love and prostitution, insouciance and syphilis. Renoir grew up in this precariousness. His later biographers portrayed him not only as "child of nature," but also as nervous and over-anxious. Happiness was the construct of his art, even when he imprinted it onto bohemian life. It is especially in his complex, early works that we can find traces of the constructed nature of this happiness.

Renoir intrigues us by a happiness that defies everything—but this defiance, as well as his obstinate delight in counterworlds, has to be kept in mind if we want to do justice to this sensitive, frail, working-class boy who worked his way up from poverty to a sophisticated clientele. He could only satisfy the expectations laid upon him if he remained detached, acting as a child of nature and a solid craftsman. A natural talent, to be sure, refined not only by craftsmanship, but also by an inborn nervousness, a disorder that would soon become known as "neurasthenia" and seen as a symptom of over-civilization, of overworking, of the consciousness of one's own precariousness,

and—as Sigmund Freud was the first to stress around 1900—of excessive sublimation, lack of satisfaction.[12] Renoir, the nervous and over-anxious child of nature—this is the contradiction we have to pursue if we want to understand the contradictions running through his modern idylls. In this light, his visions of happiness become a much more ambiguous matter. In postmodern discourse, happiness has been in vogue for about fifteen years. Renoir was convinced of being able to find it in a precapitalist society. His father had been a tailor, he himself a porcelain painter—both trades had been ruined by industrialization. The merchandise, created by solid handicraft, was allowed to be decorative—this he also applied to his painting. Modern authors seek for happiness beyond the capitalist world of commodities as well; however, they seek for it in a future that has learned to abjure the promises of eternal recurrence. Admittedly, even happiness beyond the world of commodities is a commodity in itself, in accordance with the merciless mechanisms of capitalist absorption.[13] The longing glance to a transcendent and ancient world beyond our world of capitalism definitely is modern, and this glance we can find in Renoir as well if we face the inherent contradiction that we ourselves cannot escape either.

It is precisely the early Renoir, Renoir "in the making," who shows us more than just *one* path to happiness. The early Renoir is the painter of the intimate portraits of Lise Tréhot, his mistress from 1866 to 1873, whose fleshy face conveys an overly weary, overly melancholic, overly shadowed impression (**cat. 10, 11**). The intimacy with this eminently real figure is followed up in 1876 by a half-length nude of a model known as "Margot," her features dimly illuminated by a dappled light falling through the foliage (*Nude in the Sun,* 1875–76, Musée d'Orsay, Paris). Some—such as the contemporary critic Paul Mantz—have seen therein an image of decay, others the fascination of the female body. Even modern authors dare to interpret the opulence of Renoir's nudes not only as an expression of sensuality, but as a mark of a quite brutal deformation.[14] As in the nudes of Botticelli and Titian, Joan Miró and Willem de Kooning, the female nude advances from a mere subject of painting to the metaphor of painting itself: the eroticism *in* the painting is sublimated to the eroticism of painting itself. Without taking into account the development from *Lise with a Parasol* fig. 5 to Margot, Renoir's later curvaceous nudes—often reclining and merging with the landscape like Giorgione's *Venus* (1510, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister)—must remain enigmatic. Renoir forces the viewer of his early paintings into an intimacy that must have seemed

inappropriate to the bourgeois salon visitor. The sociologist Georg Simmel was the first to describe the philistine gaze of the modern flâneur: empathic but aloof, he appraises potential pleasures on the basis of where his money will net him the highest satisfaction.[15] Lise and her sleepy, melancholic expression must have already felt too intrusive to him. In reality, it is his own gaze that her stare into the distance mirrors.

Then we also know Renoir as the painter of the anonymous city crowd, depicted in various prominent locations. In the year of the 1867 Universal Exposition, he stands on the quai de Conti—newly constructed under the direction of the prefect of Paris, Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann—and depicts the view onto the cupola of the Institut de France, the temple of intellectualism. From the cupola, the Pont des Arts runs across the picture, leading to the southern façade of the Louvre fig. 6. In the foreground, shadows of passers-by on the Pont du Carrousel—behind the viewer—fall across the picture. Or, in one of his rare winter pictures—Renoir did not like the cold—he shows us skaters on the newly installed, ice-covered lake in the Bois de Boulogne (**cat. 13**). In 1869, he discovered La Grenouillère (roughly meaning "frog island") together with Monet, near Bougival, at a sharp bend of the Seine beyond which Versailles lies farther west by way of Marly or Louveciennes. To the young Parisians, the place was like an improvised stage: on two firmly moored boats a dance floor, a bar, and bathing decks had been installed fig. 4. Via narrow footbridges one could reach a small, circular island with a tree in the middle, and from there one would access the boats. Here, elegant tourists mingled with dancing couples and bathers, people from the near-by weekenders' and pensioners' cottages in the vicinity with city dwellers who had come via the new suburban train.[16] Even before the fall of the Second Empire, Renoir was already idolizing the new middle classes, which would develop into the foundation of the state during the Third Republic, established in 1871 after the defeat of Napoleon III. The closing manifesto of their triumph can be seen in George Seurat's day-trippers, which he—a generation younger than Renoir—would show parading on a Seine isle near Asnières, dehumanized to the likes of dolls. The painting, titled *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte,* was presented at the last Impressionist group exhibition in 1886 fig. 7.[17] Renoir's passers-by never merge into a homogeneous crowd as Monet's do, nor do they represent a colorful flock in which an individual consists of no more than several brushstrokes at a closer look. Renoir almost always fleshes out his couples, his

mothers, his groups of girls in bright sunlight, his parading officers, his flâneurs and coquettes to an extent that their clothing and posture can be clearly distinguished. One could easily complete his paintings to group portraits. Youth, fashion, and elegance were just as crucial as with the graphic illustrations in the increasingly popular magazines. Labor and old age neither occur in Renoir's paintings of the picturesque center of Paris nor in the depictions of fashionable excursion destinations in the suburbs. Renoir arrives at his masterpiece, *Ball at the Moulin de la Galette,* by combining intimate insight and an embracing overview fig. 1.

Around 1868, he had Lise—despite her being his mistress—pose arm in arm with his friend and fellow painter Alfred Sisley, who himself was in a relationship with another woman, Eugénie Lescouézec fig. 8.[18] The result was the modern image of an engaged couple, as well as a genre portrait enlarged to life size. The painter presents the gentleman's caressing affection and the lady's grateful intimacy from the perspective of a close friend, who recognizes these gestures as habitual but none the less touching.

Finally, there are the paintings for which Renoir draws on classical tradition or modern exoticisms. These are neither aftereffects of his academic training with Charles Gleyre, the painter of mythological idylls,[19] nor premature evidence of a more conservative late oeuvre. Rather, they run through the entire body of his work, perhaps with the exception of the core years of his participation in Impressionism, which encompass the years from 1874 to 1881 at the most. It is probably not Lise, as has always been maintained, who stood model for his *Diana* in 1867 fig. 9, wherein Diana the huntress is sitting on a riverbank, supplemented by a shot deer as an oversize still life (The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.). Lise, however, modeled for a bather in 1870—she has just removed her clothes and is stepping into the water in the posture of the Venus Pudica (*Bather with a Griffon,* Museu de Arte de São Paulo, see fig. 30).[20] In both paintings, classical antiquity is overwritten with its French refractions, with the memory of Diane de Poitiers, the famous courtesan, but also with Gustave Courbet's opulent *Young Women on the Banks of the Seine* from 1856, which the founder of realist painting had forced into fashionable, but overly tight corsets, not hindering the girl in the foreground from looking at the viewer in a sleepy and lascivious way fig. 10. Already when we look at Courbet's *Young Women,* particularly at the nearly deformed face of the foremost figure, blinking at us languidly, not only our eyes but also the other

senses seem to be involved.[21] Renoir almost consistently endows Lise Tréhot's face with the very same drowsy and melancholic voluptuousness, especially when she poses for him as an odalisque in 1881, this time an obvious homage to Eugène Delacroix fig. 11.

Thus, Renoir does not content himself with invoking officially approved traditions of the history of art that had become accessible by means of books and illustrations. And above all, he does not bring in the past to insist on the rupture that the present has performed with it, such as Manet does. Manet continuously shows us that art can never quite catch up with modernity: *Olympia,* the high-end prostitute looking her client in the eye, is not just a successor to the *Venus of Urbino*—although she, too, presumably bore the features of a courtesan. As a "commodity through and through" (Baudelaire), she not only stirs fears of sexually transmitted diseases, but she presents her body as the epitome of capitalism itself.[22] Whereas Manet juxtaposes tradition to a modernity estranged from tradition, Renoir makes history extend until today—everything is put into the present tense. To him, Courbet, his contemporary, stands for tradition as much as the Venus Pudica does, Delacroix as much as Manet—from whom Renoir borrowed *alla prima* painting and the expressive chiaroscuro. Lise Tréhot as a model already ensures that Renoir's bathing Venus is just as contemporary as the lady in white shaded by a parasol fig. 5.

Yet another tradition is conspicuously present in his manifestos of the "vie moderne": the tradition of the *fêtes galantes*—inspired by Antoine Watteau's *Embarkation for Cythera* see fig. 31 and other idylls—is continued at La Grenouillère fig. 4 and the Moulin de la Galette fig. 1. The isle of the blessed becomes a frog pond, and the dancing café close to Montmartre, named after the windmill and the sweet waffles that used to be served there, is filled with courteously restrained amorous longings. At La Grenouillère, anybody can watch the bathers, without having to fear of growing antlers and being torn to pieces by his own hounds, as befell Actaeon when he beheld Diana and the bathing nymphs. Not only does the eighteenth century live on in Renoir's idylls, but Arcadia as well. There, life in harmony with nature is granted only to the shepherds with their flutes, not the visitors from the cities, the *décadents,* such as Virgil's Gallus or Jacopo Sannazaro's

Simplizio, who are driven back to nature by an unrequited love.[23] Happiness remains barred to the elegant, melancolic lute player in Giorgione's (or Titian's?) *Pastoral Concert* fig. 12—one of the most famous paintings in the Louvre—, whereas the flute-playing shepherd is truly happy, but oblivious of his state.[24] Being happy and being aware thereof seem to

be mutually exclusive. Watteau, Pater, and Lancret had already brought Arcadia, the elegiac country, into the courtly feasts and elegant societies of their time.[25] And Renoir inscribes it into his *Ball at the Moulin de la Galette,* where simple middle-class people are allowed to be longing and happy at the same time, and are furthermore permitted to be aware of their happiness—though perhaps not until they view themselves in Renoir's paintings.

Renoir, the painter of erotic intimacy, the painter of the fashionable crowd and the "modern life," the painter of a tradition reaching until the present—all these meticulously elaborated identities seem to merge harmoniously in the end. And yet even in his most exuberant works, in which everything seems to amount to complete fulfillment, we find nostalgia and longing, as if happiness were yet to come—or had already passed and could only thus be recorded. Renoir's historical time opens into the present just as his scenarios do: his contemporaries constantly reproduce a happiness that is but a fleeting projection onto the present—but nevertheless inscribed into an ever-present history. Like the vibrant light dividing into dappled patches beneath the foliage, so do present and past, fulfillment and longing oscillate in Renoir's paintings. It may be happiness—but it is a nervous happiness.

Biographical Stereotypes: the Working-Class Boy, the Painter of Female Beauty, the Frenchman

If we want to gain a deeper understanding of the modern idyll in Renoir's early work, the first thing we have to do is deconstruct the clichés surrounding his personality, the myth "Renoir." "Who was Renoir?" his contemporaries as well as modern art historians have asked themselves. But the chief witnesses to have written about Renoir from a biographical perspective have passed on an image that was heavily fashioned by the painter himself. Since the 1890s, he had presented himself as a forerunner of conservative modernism—and he was followed on that path by younger painters such as Maurice Denis and Aristide Maillol around 1900. By means of laborious biographical research, Jean-Claude Gélineau[26] and later Marc Le Cœur[27] have revealed that the self-portrayal of the artist conceals a substantial amount of facts about his life. Surely anyone can be discreet, but Renoir pushes his precarious existence in the Parisian Bohemia into the background, in favor of his beginnings as an artisan. Renoir's secrecy concerning decisive stages of his career shows that he himself has contributed to the myth long established in the

art-historical literature. Even if we do not deem the recent research a sufficient answer to the question of who Renoir really was, it does at least bring up the question of how Renouard—as his name appears in early documents[28]—could become "Renoir." How has Renoir managed to construct his own myth?

It is common knowledge in art history that the art dealer Ambroise Vollard—who had been an advocate of Cézanne since the late 1890s, and soon after also of Picasso and the Cubists—has had a decisive influence on our image of Renoir.[29] In 1919, Vollard published a lavish and abundantly illustrated monograph that was translated into German as early as 1924, into English in 1925, and received a second edition in 1938.[30] In this book, Vollard reports of conversations he had with the artist, and he emphasizes the authenticity of his reports by passing off large parts as verbatim transcripts of Renoir's accounts, occasionally also in the form of interviews. In the German translation by Alfred Dreyfus, extensive passages that appear as a continuous monologue in the original are presented as interviews, by the insertion of short questions supposedly asked by Vollard. This, of course, is fiction; Jean Renoir, the artist's son, confirmed in his memoirs that his father had pulled the dealer's leg. He used to say: "Not bad, Vollard's book on Vollard."[31] It is thus vital to break through Vollard's claims of authenticity.

At the beginning of his book, Vollard describes how he got to know Renoir in 1894: he presents the painter of women as surrounded by women of proletarian as well as bourgeois origin. According to Vollard, the artist's housemaid had the looks of a *bohémienne,* but Madame Renoir had been as "buxom and amiable as one of those pastels by Perroneau of some good lady of the time of Louis XV." To him, the difference between the women reflected the painter's internal contradictions: "It was the first time that I had ever seen him. He was a spare man, sharp-eyed, and very nervous, giving one the impression that he never stood still."[32] Barbara White might have been misled by Vollard when she tells us of the physical contrast between the painter and his wife, Aline—a farmer's daughter from Burgundy and eighteen years younger than he—in 1973: "While Renoir was very thin, she was fat." From nothing but this quote, she already infers his attitude as that of a "well-meaning male chauvinist." Indeed, Vollard stylizes their first meeting into the introduction of a painter of natural femininity and motherhood—just as White sees him: "To Renoir, the nude woman is sexuality, maternity and comfort."[33] However, to the eyes of the art dealer, the nervous and frail painter also had female traits himself: his tidy studio imparted the "impression of an almost feminine neatness."[34] Thus he was to have felt his way into the element of feminin-

ity. Supposedly, any woman suited him as a model: the housemaid, women whose complexion refracted light well—any but women of fashion. "I don't see how artists can paint those over-bred females they call society women! Have you ever seen a society woman whose hands were worth painting?" Even Raphael's Venus in the Villa Farnesina, beseeching Jupiter, had been robust: "She looks like a great, healthy housewife snatched for a moment from her kitchen to pose for Venus! That's why Stendhal thought that Raphael's women were common and gross."[35] As Tamar Garb already observed in 1992, this is how the myths of Renoir's "pure" painting have been constructed: the female body is natural, the pigment is feminine, and the act of painting—doubtlessly imparting physical pleasure—is masculine.[36]

Then Vollard gives a detailed account of Renoir's youth as a porcelain painter, his industrious, steady life as a craftsman, his likes and dislikes. He tells of his sharing Charles Gleyre's studio with Sisley, Monet, and Bazille, episodes that are included in any book on Renoir today. And the conversation always comes back to women, models (although Renoir does not speak of Lise Tréhot), eroticism, and happiness. Vollard introduces the myth of the unsophisticated child of nature by telling anecdotes of the painter's literary preferences: his wife wanted to read a novel to him in the evening as it was their habit; they looked for *La Dame de Monsoreau* by Alexandre Dumas *père*, a chivalrous story from the time of Henri III. But they were not able to find the book. Then their talk came to Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal:* "I detest that book above all others!" the painter was to have said. Also *La Dame aux Camélias* by Alexandre Dumas *fils* must have ranked among the decadent reading Renoir wanted nothing to do with: "Never!" he protested. "I detest everything the younger Dumas has written, and that book more than all the others. I've always had a horror of sentimental harlotry!"[37] The artistic ideals of the past, on the other hand, he adored. He saw them embodied by Jean Goujon's nymphs on the Fountain of the Innocents near Les Halles—"He has purity, naïveté, elegance; and at the same time the form itself is amazingly solid"[38]—as well as by François Boucher. Vollard tells us of the high praise Renoir held for Boucher's *Diana Leaving Her Bath* see fig. 33. By means of such seemingly authentic quotations, the art dealer presents the artist as a crude, proletarian child, who has tediously worked his way up to the ideals of classical beauty. Even this was perhaps not a progress, but a reversion, as Renoir cultivated the family myth that they were descended from nobility by the lineage of his grandfather, whose family had been killed during the Reign of Terror. Renoir, nervous and dreamy in life, disciplined at work—these are the characteristics by which his brother Edmond had already

described him in 1880 in a leading Parisian journal for luxury and modern culture. Apparently the only way the artist was able to calm his nerves was by confronting his subject, by facing the likewise nervous light "en plein air."[39]

Vollard's book was by no means the first monograph devoted to Renoir. The distinguished German art critic and historian Julius Meier-Graefe had already presented a thorough and sophisticated work on the artist in 1911, in which he gave a well-conceived interpretation of both his personality and his work.[40] Therein, he looks at Renoir against the background of the contemporary avant-gardes, his own elaborate theory of art, as well as Vitalism, a philosophical trend at the turn of the century, whose most prominent representatives were Friedrich Nietzsche in Germany and Henri Bergson in France. In his book *Modern Art: Being a Contribution to a New System of Aesthetics*—first published in 1904—Meier-Graefe had elevated the unconcealed, visible trace of the brush and the use of impasto colors not only to the trademark of the artist, but to the hallmark of modernism, which was to focus on the emancipation of the individual. To him, as to Émile Zola before him, the world we perceive has always been the conception of outstanding individuals who have been able to impose their way of viewing the world onto others. And these individuals now were praised with the same impetus with which Nietzsche had celebrated the will to power.[41] With its elaborated, often extravagant use of language, Meier-Graefe's work forms a remarkable contrast to Vollard's journalistic style. For biographical information, however, Meier-Graefe drew on the book of the art dealer, his interpretation thus being unmistakably influenced by Vollard as well—and even by Renoir himself, who doubtlessly knew how to manipulate the critic as well as the dealer. It is in the interplay between Vollard and Meier-Graefe that the myth "Renoir" took shape.[42]

To Meier-Graefe, Renoir is more than the painter of "melodious rhythms . . ., the Fragonard of our days," an artist of balance between the "old, which we sum up under the broad concept of the Baroque," and modernity. The critic does conclude that Renoir projects the past into the present, but he goes beyond this: the painter is seen as both artisan and naïf, and by means of this alliance, culture was to have found its way back to nature. This also determines "Renoir's relationship to the great artists of his time. . . . He is the most natural of them. More natural than Courbet, in spite of—or perhaps due to—Courbet's naturalist dogma. More natural than Manet, Cézanne, and Degas, however precious their insights into the nature that the artist has to seek may be. Because . . . he is the least sophisticated of them, because . . . a child's smile glistens from his

works, a primitive, irresistible sound of nature. The other painters are children of our time, children of struggle. They wrestle with nature, usurp it. The demonic distorts their gestures. This one man seems born with nature, like an ancient Greek, a Poussin, a Mozart. He paints just as the bird sings, as the sun shines, as flowers bloom. Never has art taken shape so artlessly, like a suckling reaching for its mother's breast. Instinct becomes creation."[43] Meier-Graefe contrasts Renoir as child of nature with the Promethean character of the modern, which Enlightenment and Romanticism, as well as the symbolist *décadents,* had invoked since Goethe and Hölderlin.[44] Among the *décadents* of his time, whom Max Nordau spoke of in 1892, he sees a primitive in Renoir—a primitive of remarkable craftsmanship.[45] His craftsmanship, granting him a kind of urban primitivism, was the secret of Renoir's art to his old friend and fellow combatant Georges Rivière. In a monograph published in 1921, full of anecdotes and written in the style of memoirs, he draws the picture of an idyllic precapitalist Paris, an image still evoked by later socio-historical art historians, in particular Timothy Clark, of a society before the living areas of the various social classes had been segregated by the redesign of the capital under Haussmann. "Renoir's parents were artisans of the kind which could be seen in large numbers in the France of old. Modest, frugal, with a taste for beautiful things." Rivière also mentions the walks the young artisan took in Louveciennes with his mother, with her "exquisite sensitivity."[46]

It is such myths that constitute Meier-Graefe's imagery in his portrayal of the young Renoir. The boy painted his first picture for an older porcelain painter: "He painted stoutly away at it. It was a portrait of Eve before the Fall." The artisan advised that "the boy should become a painter, for as a decorator of porcelain he would be able to earn 12 or 15 francs a day at most." He predicted him a brilliant future. The resources for an appropriate training of the painter of the still-innocent Eve, however, were lacking, so for the time being, Renoir had to carry on working as a porcelain painter, later as a painter of shop blinds, "transparent painted curtains." The decadence of capitalism turned the craftsman into an artist, a primitive among the modernists: "Renoir would no doubt have remained a porcelain painter forever if the invention of porcelain printing had not materially damaged the manual technique. Yet again, the demise of a common good had led to the benefit of an individual."[47]

Meier-Graefe's interpretation of the downfall of manual porcelain painting—triggered by the use of preprinted stencils—as a symptom of the "demise of a common good" seems rather heavy-handed. In 1904, in the introduction to his *Modern Art,* he had con-

structed a contrast between the so-called *Raumkunst* of the powerful corporations and the modern art of the emancipated individual, expressing himself by the liberal use of brushstrokes. Art Nouveau and Jugendstil—which Meier-Graefe still had passionately promoted in the late nineteenth century, together with socialist utopias aimed at overcoming the opposition between manual labor and industrial production—represented *Raumkunst*. In 1904, even Hagia Sophia was *Raumkunst* to him. Its counterpart is the individualism of the modern painter, which had successively unfolded along the line of the *alla prima* painting of late Titian and Franz Hals, Rembrandt and Gustave Courbet, Manet and Max Liebermann.[48] When, in 1911, he writes that the "demise of a common good" had turned into the "benefit of an individual," he is alluding to the growing contrast between the decline of *Raumkunst* and the triumph of picturesque painting in modern individualism.[49]

However, Renoir was to have a special status in this development, and certainly not only due to the foundation of his technique in craftsmanship. His trade also anchored his vision in a collective spirit: his beginnings as an artisan as well as his consciousness of his talent "set a goal for his romantic daydreams and ensured him a rare virtue among modern artists: modesty." At the same time, Renoir was looking for meaning in art history. "'Moi je reste dans le rang.' I liked his words without knowing exactly how to interpret them." If he had confronted nature directly, he would have followed the path of an individualistic aesthetics, just as the Impressionists, just as Monet did. "Renoir did not see himself as belonging to the Impressionists and neither should we count him among them. He categorically rejects the very principle which is crucial to Monet: the unconditional respect of nature. Nature, he once told me, does not help you in creating art. Whatever you do with nature, you will inevitably end up at an impasse." But where did Renoir find his inspiration then? "The explanation he gave me would astound many who see him as a child of nature. . . . 'Au musée, parbleu!' was his reply."[50]

In the eyes of Meier-Graefe, this contradiction is the key achievement of the "child of nature" of art history. To him, Renoir's nigh impossible synthesis of culture and nature seemed like a miracle; had not nature always—and particularly since the Enlightenment—been seen as the counterpart to culture, as a place of origin to which any attempt of return would prove futile? This miracle had become possible in the case of Renoir for he was not a modernist, not a *décadent,* not a latecomer who had atrophied in the division of labor and been spoilt by the Babylonian confusion of urban life. In his painting, Meier-Graefe reencounters the long-lost art of the

collective, precisely because he does not see Renoir as a bourgeois individualist. A member of the middle class thus conjures up the collective art of a worker: "Our time has intellects. We make amazing analyses and reduce the world to a couple of figures. And here, out of the vapor of the city, there is someone who creates a garden where milk and honey flow and people walk who have not had to witness the decline of humanity. But they are not mere phantasms: he creates them out of flesh and blood, the sunlight warming their skin; he creates them from our godless, materialistic world, naïve as a Giotto, exuberant as a Rubens. . . . Who would have thought that positivism would be expressed so overtly in our days, that the country of the great skeptics and *blagueurs* would produce such a flagrant testimony of the radiant affirmation of life? One may well call it a miracle—and a happy miracle it is indeed."[51] According to Meier-Graefe, this miracle could have only taken place in France, the one nation so naturally cultured that it would succeed in reconciling Babylon with Arcadia: "He is the purest Frenchman of his generation."[52] In a newspaper article of 1928, Meier-Graefe yet again elevates Renoir to the last remnant of an anti-individualistic collective art: "Renoir was the first to see through the questionable social aspects of modern art, the 'splendid isolation' of individualism, and—as far as it is possible for anyone living in our days—to renounce the self and seek the common."[53]

Needless to say, this so panegyrically praised and mythicized "Renoir" has already been shaped by the classicist ideas of the retro-avantgardes. But Meier-Graefe avoids the word "classicism." The emphasis of his book is not on the mature and the late Renoir, but on the works of the 1860s and 1870s, which were the most interesting to him. The value of his analysis lies in the intertwining of the myth "Renoir" with a detailed poetological analysis of his work. An aspect the critic comes back to again and again is the "intimate compliance of form and feeling"—which he, of course, can only conjure up imploringly: "It shows itself in an extraordinary stability, a rare and vivid fullness of his figures, and gives a firm structure to the artist's idyll."[54] Space, relief, and plasticity are the key words in his emphatic descriptions.

Meier-Graefe stresses the simplicity of Renoir's pictorial resources. The critic's vitalistic pathos as well as his analytical depth complement Vollard's anecdotal and conversational style well. Particularly in Germany, the works of both have substantially shaped the image of Renoir since the 1920s—whereas France has yet to discover the richness of Meier-Graefe's analyses. The conservative avantgardes of the 1920s have naturally also left a mark on the myth we owe to Meier-Graefe, Vollard, and Rivière. Since Jean Cocteau had

proclaimed the *retour à l'ordre* in 1917, initially only in order to reconcile Cubism—spurned as too German and too complicated—with the *esprit français,* there had been attempts to bring the progressive spirit of the avant-gardes together with tradition and to obtain support for this project among the "fathers" of modern art.[55] In 1920, André Lhote, searching for artists that consult nature not with their eyes but with their spirit, came across Renoir: "Like Cézanne, he discovered the divine principles of balance, of which he avails himself in order to master the economy of the microcosm that a painting constitutes."[56] In 1931, Robert Rey included Renoir in a study devoted to the "renaissance of classical feeling," a book that emphasizes the anti-individualistic character of modern classicist art.[57] Already in the 1890s, conservative neo-traditionalists such as Denis and Maillol had adopted Renoir as a model; the 1920s would pick up from there. Just recently, in a major exhibition, tribute was paid to Renoir as a leading representative of the "retro-gardes."[58]

However, it will not suffice to look at Renoir's work from the perspective of his late conceptions of art, and to condemn or praise him as altogether backward-looking. For his art is not some kind of neo-historicism, but rather a de-historicizing strategy in order to bring together the distant with the recent past, and both with the present, as Maier-Graefe has recognized. This is also in line with the strategies by which the retro-gardes present their theory of art. Not long ago, it has been noted that artists, from Maurice Denis to the masters of the twentieth century and the *retour à l'ordre,* like to present eternal truths about art—often downright truisms—by means of aphorisms. In doing so, they frequently build on the French moralists of the seventeenth century—and naturally argue against the intellectual style in which the avant-gardes explain their artistic language, deriving it now from recent discoveries, now from the perspective of the modern, now from the fourth dimension, and now again from a vitalistic thrill of speed.[59] Renoir's nostalgic admiration of the "old" arts and crafts fits into this frame quite well. In an anonymous letter to the journal *L'Impressionniste,* published on the occasion of the Impressionists' exhibition in 1877, he deplores the ugliness and triteness of the new Louvre, whereas the old parts of the building, despite featuring the same basic structure, he considers as beautiful testimonies of experienced craftsmanship; he also saw this contrast between the Paris Opera and Gothic monuments. In 1883 and 1884, Renoir was working on a grammar of art, and in 1910 he wrote an introduction to Cennino Cennini's book on late medieval painters.[60] His enmity toward industrial production can be read as a Marxist criticism on the alienation of man from his labor, by which the English Arts and Crafts move-

ment—whose goals Renoir doubtlessly supported—must have been impressed. But this criticism would later break into a conservative incantation of eternal artistic values, for which the late Renoir is monopolized—and certainly with good reason.

Neo-traditionalism and the *retour à l'ordre* have shaped the image of Renoir as the texts of his contemporaries have progressively claimed their place in the history of art. Renoir as an outsider to the middle classes, which thus deemed him the child of nature par excellence—this myth has survived until today. Robert L. Herbert describes him as the working-class boy who did not experience the decadence of luxury but had to press his nose up against shop windows and hope to partake in that dream world one day. What was to others insipid habit, part of the *ennui,* this particularly Parisian weariness, was to him the prophecy of a world of commodities that could grant true happiness.[61] According to Adriani, Renoir indulged in "the pleasurable sides of a bourgeois ideal of living" and "was not willing to pass judgment on the injustice of the world."[62] Paul Tucker sees even the artist's nervousness as founded in the fear of falling back into poverty, a fear that the social climber can never quite overcome.[63] This socio-historical analysis surely is justified, but Renoir himself seems to have downright cultivated his image as a working-class boy and a child of nature. Not only in his life and in his self-portrayal, but also in his work, he has reconciled art and commerce. His vision of happiness, however, has by no means always been backward-looking: in his early work, it is even into the most perfect idylls that he inserts allusions to precariousness and prostitution—circumstances that he had by no means yet escaped.

The Intimate Made Public: Bohemia and the Art of Living

We may be tempted to set aside Marc Le Cœur's research on the young Renoir and his relationship to Lise Tréhot as the indiscretions of a genealogist, attempting to present the painter's friendship with his ancestor, Jules Le Cœur—nine years older than Renoir—in the proper light. Has he not always stressed that it was Le Cœur who broke with the libertine painter in 1873? Nevertheless, his research gives us a different picture of Renoir than we have obtained from Meier-Graefe, Vollard, Rivière, as well as from his son, the film director Jean Renoir. Le Cœur does not portray Renoir as an artisan and child of nature, but as a bohemian, having endured a life of poverty and precariousness, of failed and rejected fatherhood. Even without such knowledge, we can perceive traces of Renoir's bohemian life in

his Impressionist paintings. Nevertheless, it is a different image of the artist that thus emerges. The child of nature, the pioneer of the "renaissance of classical feeling"[64] had a dark side, similar to that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.[65] He did not only paint his model Lise, but also loved her—until 1872 or 1873, when she became involved with an architect whom she later married. Renoir had two children with Lise, both of them apparently not acknowledged by their father: a son born in 1868, of whom no trace remains, and a daughter born in 1870, whom the artist inquired about discreetly throughout his later life.[66] In Bohemia, the driving forces were not only poverty and ambition—the manifestations of a stereotypical heroism which had been part of the artist's cliché since Romanticism.[67] It also involved precarious romance, the belated founding of families, as well as their failure. Not everyone succeeded in ennobling the first chapters of his life by means of the later ones.[68] For women and illegitimate children, the risk of getting caught in a lifetime of precariousness was particularly great. Renoir himself kept a lifelong silence about his affair with Lise.

The painter paid tribute to his bohemian period in a manifesto picture: a landscape with two nudes—as Anne Distel has discovered, it is presumably the picture hanging on the wall in the top right corner in Frédéric Bazille's famous painting *Bazille's Studio; 9 rue La Condamine* see fig. 56—which had been rejected by the Salon in 1865. He protested against this rejection with a painting of bohemian life in Marlotte, a poverty-stricken village near Barbizon in the Forest of Fontainebleau see fig. 53.[69] Quite similarly to Courbet's *After Dinner at Ornans* (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lille), it depicts the moment of rest after a meal in a rustic setting. But in Renoir's painting, the table is being cleared, and a relaxed conversation is about to unfold. A bearded man sitting to the right has the newspaper *L'Événement* in front of him, in whose pages Zola had defended Manet and Monet in the spring of 1866.[70] He is holding a cigarette paper between his fingers and turning to an unknown, clean-shaven man opposite him who is listening to his words interestedly and amusedly—as Le Cœur has been able to show, he is a teacher and thus only a visitor to the bohemian world.[71] Behind them, another listener is standing, remarkably similar to the man speaking, likewise listening and reaching into his tobacco pouch. Renoir's rather vague memories of the scene make it difficult to identify the individuals. The bearded men might be identified as Sisley, Le Cœur, or even Renoir himself. The old woman leaving the scene, of whom we only see the back of her head next to the speaker's hat, is the owner; the girl who is attentively focused on lifting a huge pile of dishes with two cups stacked on top is Nana, Re-

noir's very young housemaid, whose easy morals he seems to have emphasized in his conservations with Meier-Graefe and Vollard. As Meier-Graefe observes in 1911, the painting is not only devoted to Bohemia, but also designed in an airy and naïve bohemian style: "It is a very casual improvisation in shades of brown, painted without any ambition. The heads seem to be the product of playful brushstrokes, just as the droll poodle, which a child could have drawn. But the childlike succeeds in portraying what often eludes consciousness. One can feel these people, not only the people themselves but what they have in common, the nature of their togetherness, the essence of their harmless existence."[72] If we compare Renoir's composition to Courbet's *After Dinner,* it becomes clear that this togetherness was irritable and fragile: Courbet shows a halted moment in the stream of time, but in Renoir's painting it is activity which dominates, the tense atmosphere between the painter's friends, the concentrated action of clearing the table—a scene involving Mother Antony that seems to be appended in the background as a second layer of the composition.

But above all, there are puzzling forms behind the group, among them an oversized head, a musical score, and a text. These elements represent the predecessors of the group, as the painter reported to Vollard rather mystifyingly: "The motifs in the background of the picture were borrowed from sketches actually painted on the wall. These 'frescoes,' unpretentious but often quite successful, were the work of artists habitués of the place. I myself painted the profile of Murger, which appears in [*The Inn of Mère Antony*] high up at the left."[73] The mention of himself in this quote is striking: Renoir pays tribute to the writer Henri Murger, who since the mid-1840s had regularly published humorous and sentimental anecdotes in *Le Corsaire,* taken from his observations in studios, brasseries, and cafés. His play *La Vie de Bohème,* written together with Théodore Barrière and published in 1849, as well as his novel *Scènes de la Vie de Bohème,* published two years later, were based on these anecdotes. In the preface to the play, Murger reflects on the name "Bohemia," originally used for the country from which gypsies were thought to originate, but which now designated a lifestyle typical in Paris since the Romantic period—a lifestyle of people who possess nothing but their belief in art, a place where the gap between the Académie and the poorhouse or the morgue is but a fine line. This concept of Bohemia had existed since Villon, Molière, Tasso, and even Shakespeare, but it had grown as a result of the "martyrology of mediocrity" as well as the self-chosen outsider status of "amateurs," whom Murger despised.[74] When Renoir alluded to bohemian circles, the reference to Murger had already be-

come a cliché. Later on, starting from its opening night in spring 1896, Giacomo Puccini's *La Bohème*—for which Murger's material had been worked into a libretto by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa—would become one of the most popular operas of all time.

In 1866, however, the idyll still seemed more fragile than in Renoir's later recollections. The diary of the brothers Goncourt, who visited Mother Antony's inn in 1863, tells us of the griminess of the place, where a libertine society would have gathered around three o'clock to have their lunch, amidst women, wine, and song.[75] Murger himself had frequented the inn in Marlotte, accompanied by his dog; perhaps this is what the poodle, looking at the viewer in astonishment, refers to. Unlike the dog sleeping under the chair in Courbet's painting, this poodle, for all that it is harmless, seems to be guarding the access to the scene. But above all, the strange shapes from the bohemian world, oversize and tumultuous, loom above the three art enthusiasts threateningly. Later on, Renoir seems to have entirely rewritten the story of his bohemian life. In 1971, Helmut Kreuzer devoted an in-depth study to the Parisian Bohemia and its treatment in literature. He distinguishes between a green, black, and red understanding of it: "The first reflects the glamor of bohemian life (youth, freedom, gaiety, colorfulness), the second its misery (poverty, vice, desperation), the third its defiance and struggle." Religious concepts are implied: purgatory, paradise, and perdition. In subsequent research, the contrast between the Romantic perception of Bohemia as freedom and enjoyment of life and the hopeless hope of the multitude of ambitious writers, curators, soldiers, journalists, and artists—in short, between Bohemia according to Murger and Bohemia according to the author and art critic Jules-Antoine Castagnary—has been elaborated on.[76] In his recollections, Renoir changed sides from a differentiated picture, in which Murger's idyll and Castagnary's criticism were joined, to Puccini's immaculate and romanticized idyll.

Without doubt, this is also true for the portraits of Lise Tréhot. His relationship to the model was in no way a purely private matter. Even today, we recognize her in numerous paintings and can reproduce the roles she played, just as we can reproduce the roles that Manet's famous model Victorine Meurent played—as *Olympia* (1863, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, Salon of 1865), in *Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* (1863, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, Salon des Refusés 1863), as *Woman with a Parrot* (1866, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), or even in downright travesties: as *The Fifer* in a military band (1866, Musée d'Orsay, Paris) and as a torero (*Mlle Victorine Meurent in the Costume of an Espada*, 1862, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).[77] Indeed, the most famous portrait of Renoir's model even bears her name: *Lise*

with a Parasol fig. 5. In 1868, Zola regarded her as a spiritual "sister" to Monet's Camille—who had become known due to a portrait painted the year before—and praised her with the remark that she was "one of our women, or in fact rather one of our mistresses." The writer intuited the allusion to a private affair.[78] The "great truth and the happy pursuit of the modern" portrayed in the figure with bright sunshine collecting in her white dress was so over-articulate that a contemporary caricaturist, André Gill, satirized her as a white tambourine with an umbrella. Other graphic artists, such as Henri Oulevay, exaggerated the contrast between the shadowed face and the brilliantly white appearance. In any case, the dominant brightness underlines the shadowy melancholy in Lise's face. She looks aside, just as Odette in Marcel Proust's *Du Côté de Chez Swann* (1913), who may have sought the eyes of Swann's rival, de Forcheville, while Swann was still trying to get a glimpse of her heartwarming Botticelli smile.

Meier-Graefe never tired of praising the painting. "Against a mighty tree trunk, on which several patches of sun gleam like nacre, the lady in white appears as if taken from a fairy tale. Her white is the wonderful white of our grandmothers' muslins, scented and transparent. It lets the more solid white of the undergarment shine through. Like a cloud it envelops the whole figure, running down her beautiful arms up to her hand... Yet another tone of white is found in the narrow-brimmed hat, and finally, most beautiful of all: her skin." Meier-Graefe rates Renoir higher than Courbet and Manet, higher even than Velázquez: "Manet's high-strung subjectivism did not have time for fairy tales. His eyes, devouring everything visible at lightning speed, failed to catch the invisible, which Renoir feels and knows how to impart, and which is indispensable if bare flesh is to be transformed into lifelike girls and women."[79] The viewer becomes just as familiar with Lise as with Manet's Victorine or Monet's Camille. Monet had often painted Camille, his later wife. Zola emphatically praised his painting of an elegant Camille absorbed in thought, exhibited in the Salon of 1866: according to him, "this young woman," who seemingly merges with the wall, is seen as with the eyes of "a longtime friend," and unlike in fashionable painting, even her heavy green dress tells us "who this woman is"—at any rate not a "doll." Ségolène Le Men has recently described how the public was able to follow the "novel" of Camille in Monet's paintings, unfolding from exhibition to exhibition, like in a play.[80] Monet's "family novel" was brought to life again by his friend Renoir in the 1870s, as several items of this exhibition display (**cat. 28, 29, 31, 32**). Taking all models from Victorine to Lise in consideration, it is not only private affairs that are made public here, but modern private life itself, presented in all its conflicts and contradictions.

Renoir shows us Lise, the "mistress of our time," in many roles. Perhaps it is already a foretaste of the euphemistically termed "art of living" that we are allowed here, under which later avant-gardes experimented with alternative concepts of partnership and sexuality, from the ménage à trois to the communes of the 1960s.[81] A year after her first appearance, Lise was to be found in the Salon again, this time in a painting plainly titled *In Summer* (**cat. 11**). While she had embodied spring the year before, now her forlorn gaze at the viewer, her loose hair, the blouse nearly slipping off her shoulder stand for the lethargy of midsummer. Melancholy and erotic delusion have entered an almost lascivious alliance.[82] Meier-Graefe was considerably less enthusiastic about its "cold putty-gray color."[83] Around the same time, Lise Tréhot appears as Sisley's pretend fiancée in *The Engaged Couple* fig. 8. Even before Renoir presented her as an oriental odalisque fig. 11 and featured her several times in a kind of Parisian harem (*Parisian Women in Algerian Dress,* 1872, The National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo), he leads us into the intimate life of this young woman again and again. Such nuances can be perceived in *The Engaged Couple,* too: his friend, entirely depicted in shades of black and white, is leaning toward the model somewhat possessively, while Lise, aware of his closeness, looks up indecisively. The orange and yellow colors of her dress underline her unconcealed sensuality, while he merges into the landscape, part of the scenery like the background of a photographic portrait. Lise's melancholic voluptuousness and her tendency to avert her eyes from the viewer can be traced throughout all of her pictures (**cat. 8–11, 14–16, 25**). The viewer is invited into a vaguely displayed intimacy: neither that of the naturalistic novel, nor the Proustian social satire, this is a private life that has been put before us, a life as it was lived not only in bohemian circles, but also in large parts of a society in which male adultery was tolerated, regarded as natural. In Renoir's work, Lise Tréhot brings together the contradictions of Arcadia and Bohemia, of intimacy and its prevention by society.

But even the seemingly cheerful visions of modern love that Renoir painted in these years reflect the duality of Eros and Thanatos. As an example, we may choose the painting *La Loge,* which Renoir submitted to the first Impressionist group exhibition—one of the first works in which he publicly revealed his unique talent for arranging modern life in staged portraits see fig. 83. His contemporaries unanimously praised the masterpiece.[84] Castagnary ambiguously describes how "this woman, in the evening, in artificial light, wearing a low-cut dress and gloves, made up, a rose in her hair, a rose between her breasts, evokes a phantasm." In this lady, a "black and white cocotte [prostitute]" a critic by the name of Jean Prouvaire saw the

epitome of what awaited the young ladies viewing the picture: "Look here, young ladies, and behold what will become of you. Your cheeks made up pearly white, your eyes lit up with a passionate but trite flame, golden binoculars in your hand, you will be attractive but featureless, delicate but stupid. This lady, who is as little interested in the play being performed as in the gentleman sitting next to her, is your future, and I fear you are not even dismayed by it." Prouvaire called himself the "commentator," probably after a figure in Victor Hugo's novel *Les Misérables* (1862), a lover of beautiful things, who is confronted with prostitution after going to the theater on his birthday.

At the same exhibition, Renoir also presented his *Dancer* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), whose ethereal beauty we like to contrast with that of the ballet dancer—characterized by the cunning means of social anthropology as a future prostitute—whom Degas presented in 1881, a rather smaller than life-size, colored wax sculpture (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.).[85] Renoir was praised for this painting as well: Marc de Montifaud compared the girl to Peri, a Persian fairy-tale princess, who fed only on the scent of a lotus blossom. Prouvaire, however, brings the shadow of venal love into this so fragrant scene.[86] He seems to be describing Degas's dancer rather than Renoir's when he refers to Banville's story of a modern Mignon, published in 1866, describing a dancer at the Opera, the daughter of a cosmetics saleswoman: "With her dark red hair, her overly pale skirt and overly red lips she makes us think of the 'thirteen-year-old woman' Théodore de Banville described so cruelly in his *Parisiennes de Paris.* As a result of work taken on too early, her legs have already become heavy and her feet are not delicate enough for her pink silk shoes: the lean, long arms, however, are still those of a child . . . A little girl? Probably. A woman? Perhaps. A young girl? Never." Not only in this picture of an "opera rat," but also in a nude portrait of a boy painted in 1868 (**cat. 12**), Renoir develops the drama of puberty.

In his most famous painting, *Ball at the Moulin de la Galette* fig. 1, Renoir leads us into the world of ordinary people, or rather into an unclear ambience in which all classes mix: workers and prostitutes, established artists and bohemians. His friend Rivière described the large, lively tableau as a sophisticated social study and open-air history painting—as if he wanted to refute the widespread stereotype that Impressionism was a style of painting capturing but fleeting impressions.[87] The contemporary response was similar: the critics commented foremost on the estrangement through the dappled painting style and furthermore tried to surpass each other in rediscovering the characteristics

of their era in the painting. A certain "Jacques" referred to the painting as the most significant in the entire Impressionists' exhibition of 1877 and described the portrayed women as "simple working-class women, good folk from the suburbs . . . with no ulterior motives." Ch. Flor O'Squarr (Oscar Charles Flor) praised the sunshine refracted by the foliage and falling onto the little girls' fair hair, rosy cheeks, and ribbons. The dancing café he saw as possibly the last "guinguette" in Paris. His contemporaries knew what he meant: a particular kind of cheap tavern. Philippe Burty, however, criticized the lack of solid elements in the vaporous painting; to him, the buzz of the event was not sufficiently grounded in clearly outlined chairs, benches, and tables. He missed a clear anchoring of Renoir's romantic Impressionism in reality.[88]

The composition is a large collage of individual scenes, held together by its density and the mise-en-scène above the heads of the figures, the orchestra and the façade of the building, as well as the rhythm of the gas lamps. In the center, there are two women in the foreground, leaning over one of the green benches placed around the dance floor and chatting with a man sitting on a chair and facing backward—a substitute figure for the viewer. The two women, the sisters Jeanne and Estelle, a kind of double model of the same type of dreamy beauty, translate contemporary fashion into an aesthetic world wherein everything seems to consist of youth, color, and light. The male figure seen from behind is also part of a table at which two friends are sitting, one of them looking up from what he is writing, the other drawing thoughtfully on his pipe. In 1921, Rivière—whom the writing figure wearing a straw hat represents—supplied us with the names of the models and the artists in the painting: mostly Naturalists, but also some who had nothing in common with Impressionism.[89] The three men grouped around the table are disrupted in their absorption by the women, who are most probably about to ask them for a dance. Not until now do we notice that the bench and the table do not actually match perspectively—yet another reason for the groups to dissolve and go dancing. One of the dancing couples, consisting of the picturesque figure of the Cuban painter Pedro Vidal and the model Margot, is already looking toward the group—or perhaps toward the viewer. As he already did in *The Inn of Mère Antony* see fig. 53, Renoir proves himself a master of group compositions in which various centers of action and different poles of attention are assembled in a fascinating way. The closeness of this picture to genre painting, for all that it combines a group portrait with a contemporary scene, has rightly been emphasized. Although we know the figures' names thanks to Rivière, they are nonetheless

generalized to types—the youthful cast of a modern idyll, as well as the social category of those concerned with concealing their origin through fashion and manners.[90]

In 1911, Meier-Graefe emphasizes the "pantheistic . . . animation of the scene." When he speaks of the unconventional relief-like modeling of light and color, he has completely endorsed the general tone of contemporary criticism. Again, he performs a vitalistic analysis of the correspondences between style and object of painting. "The brush meets the canvas as the sun meets the throng dancing beneath the trees." Light and color determine the rhythm of this crowd, into which each individual figure merges. "You have to see into it," and take part. "To do so requires the kind of good will which is needed to enter such a company of dancers. You have no choice but to join in, unless you want to mope in a corner. A little jolt is necessary in order to see the world as it is seen here."[91] The social component and the contradictions of the atmosphere, however, are overlooked in such a description.

Perhaps it was Renoir himself who set things straight. He later insisted to Vollard that he had spun straw into gold. He wanted to show the lack of inhibition with which young women would model for him. But in that context he also discusses the question of the prevalence of prostitution among the female clients at the Moulin de la Galette, as if there were a link between the willingness to pose and prostitution. Renoir also proves Rivière a liar, for Rivière had insisted that the painter had organized the tableau entirely "en plein air." "As luck would have it, I found some girls at the Moulin de la Galette, like the two in the foreground of my picture, who asked nothing better than to pose. One of them used to write to me about her appointments on gold-edged note-paper. I used to see her delivering milk in Montmartre. One day I learned she had a little apartment which a box-holder at the opera had furnished for her. But her mother had made her promise that she would not give up her job. At first I was afraid that the more or less serious lovers of these models whom I had taken from their nest at the Moulin de la Galette would forbid their 'wives' to come to the studio. But they were good sports too; I even got some of them to pose. But you mustn't think that these girls gave themselves to anyone who happened along. There was fierce virtue among some of these children of the street."[92] Vollard has Renoir talk about his attitude toward the people on the fine line between the petite bourgeoisie and prostitution, between virtue and seduction. It was around the same time that Rivière described the place as being frequented by working-class families from Montmartre whose daughters would dance there, as well as prostitutes—albeit only to

dance.[93] Even today, there still are art historians who interpret Renoir's masterpiece against this background, as a nostalgic memento of the repression that the people of Paris had suffered by the defeat of the Commune in the spring of 1871.[94]

A drawing by the artist brings us closer to the ambivalence of the setting: he created it in 1877 or 1878 as an illustration to Zola's novel *L'Assommoir.* Nana—the main character in what may be Zola's most famous novel—and her friends go out for a walk in the street, displaying their youthful charm fig. 13. The drawing captures the same girlish bloom that Jeanne and Estelle display, but these girls do not turn to an unknown young man across the bench in elegiac beauty, but rather with vulgarly flirtatious gestures to perplexed workers across the street.[95] Here Renoir shows us the milieu his idylls are actually constructed in. Superficial courteousness can be deceptive. We do not know whether he himself sees the joyful company in the *Ball at the Moulin de la Galette* as an epitome of happiness, or projects this idea onto his figures and his viewers. The refracted sunlight that Renoir distributes across the tableau so generously may stand for the fact that he does not simply carry us away into a dream of happiness. Before the critics found access to the picture, they commented on the alienating technique. While the viewer is allowed to share in the dream, he is supposed to reflect on it as well—as the fulfillment of desires that have arisen in an altogether contradictory milieu. Beyond picturing an earthly paradise, Renoir always lets us feel the misery, the struggle for survival as well—the kind of life that his scenarios of secular salvation are based upon.

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3 Hans Belting, "Exil in Arkadien: Giorgiones *Tempesta* in neuer Sicht," in Reinhard Brandt, ed., *Meisterwerke der Malerei: Von Rogier van der Weyden bis Andy Warhol* (Leipzig, 2001), pp. 45–68; Wolfgang Iser, *Das Fiktive und das Imaginäre* (Frankfurt, 1993); Elisabeth Cropper, "'Hic vicit Venus': Amour et désir au XVIème siècle à Florence," in Danièle Cohn and Frédéric Cousinier, eds., *Daniel Arasse, historien d'art* (Paris, 2010), pp. 87–104, as well other essays by the same author on painting and femininity in the sixteenth century.

4 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* vol. 1, *The Will to Knowledge* (New York, 1980); Tamar Garb, "Renoir and the Natural Woman," *Oxford Art Journal* 8, 2 (1985), pp. 3–15, again in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds., *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History* (Boulder, 1992), pp. 295–312; Tamar Garb, *Bodies of Modernity: Figure and Flesh in Fin-de-Siècle France* (London, 1998), pp. 169–70.

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9 Robert L. Herbert, *Monet on the Normandy Coast: Tourism and Painting, 1867–1886* (New Haven et al., 1994); Ségolène Le Men, *Monet* (Paris, 2010); Michael F. Zimmermann, "Radical Alienation—Radical Involvement: A Brief History of Subjectivity and Landscape up to Impressionism," in *From Corot to Manet: The Ecology of Impressionism,* ed. Stephen Eisenman, exh. cat. Complesso del Vittoriano, Ala Brasini, Rome (Paris, 2010), pp. 107–19.

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11 Exh. cat. Tübingen 1996, p. 15.

12 Sigmund Freud, "Sexuality in the Aetiology of the Neuroses" (1898), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* ed. James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud, vol. III *1893–1899* (London, 1962), pp. 263–85; Philipp Sarasin, *Reizbare Maschinen: Eine Geschichte des Körpers 1765–1914* (Frankfurt am Main, 2001), pp. 399–451.

13 There is a vast number of works on offer, but the following may be highlighted: Dieter Thomä, *Vom Glück in der Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main, 2004); Wilhelm Schmid, *Philosophie der Lebenskunst: Eine Grundlegung* (Frankfurt am Main, 1998); Annemarie Pieper, *Glücksache: Die Kunst, gut zu leben* (Munich, 2003).

14 Guy Cogeval, "Expanding Flesh," in exh. cat. Paris / Los Angeles / Philadelphia 2010, pp. 18–25. Cogeval cites Gustave Coquiot, *Renoir* (Paris, 1925), p. 217, who speaks of being "beside himself with all those bums, tits, and midriffs." Cf. also Matthias Krüger, *Das Relief der Farbe: Pastose Malerei in der französischen Kunst-*

kritik 1850–1890 (Munich, 2006); Daniela Bohde and Mechthild Fend, eds., *Weder Haut noch Fleisch: Das Inkarnat in der Kunstgeschichte* (Berlin, 2007).

15 Georg Simmel, *Philosophie des Geldes* (Berlin, 1987).

16 Robert L. Herbert, *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society* (New Haven and London, 1988), pp. 210–19.

17 Michael F. Zimmermann, *Seurat and the Art Theory of His Time* (Brussels, 1991).

18 Anne Distel, in exh. cat. London / Paris / Boston 1985, p. 189.

19 William Hauptman, "Delaroche's and Gleyre's Teaching Ateliers and Their Group Portraits," *Studies in the History of Art* XVIII (1985), pp. 79–119.

20 Le Cœur 2009, p. 32, and in this volume, pp. 223–34. Le Cœur has rightly emphasized that Lise is not the model for Diana, but is not convincing when he presumes that a different model may have posed for the *Bather with a Griffon*.

21 Ségolène Le Men, *Courbet* (Paris, 2007); *Courbet – Ein Traum von der Moderne,* eds. Klaus Herding and Max Hollein, exh. cat. Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, Frankfurt am Main (Ostfildern, 2010).

22 Walter Benjamin, "Charles Baudelaire. Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus," in idem, *Gesammelte Schriften,* ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main, 1991), vol. I, 2, pp. 509–653 and note; vol. II, 3, pp. 1064–212; Timothy Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton, 1984), pp. 79–146.

23 Winfried Wehle, "Diaphora—Barock: eine Reflexionsfigur von Renaissance. Wandlungen Arkadiens bei Sannazaro, Tasso und Marino," in Joachim Küpper and Friedrich Wolfzettel, eds., *Diskurse des Barock* (Munich, 2000), pp. 95–145.

24 Belting 2001 (see note 3); Gabriele Frings, *Giorgiones* Ländliches Konzert: *Darstellung der Musik als künstlerisches Programm in der Venezianischen Renaissance* (Berlin, 1999).

25 For a substantial revision of the image of Watteau, we are indebted to Christian Michel, *Le "célèbre Watteau"* (Geneva, 2008). Michel demonstrates that Watteau was a member of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture as a history painter, not as a "peintre de fêtes galantes," and was in no way at odds with its ideals, as criticism and art history had presumed since the nineteenth century, conjuring up the myth of the bohemian artist. It was the generation of Watteau's pupils which was regarded as "peintres de fêtes galantes." On idyllic love and the sociology of love and marriage in the eighteenth century, cf. the essay by Niklas Luhmann, *Liebe als Passion: Zur Codierung von Intimität* (Frankfurt am Main, 2007).

26 Jean-Claude Gélineau, *Jeanne Tréhot, la fille cachée de Pierre-Auguste Renoir* (Essoyes, 2007).

27 Le Cœur 2009 and in this volume, pp. 223–34.

28 Anne Distel, "Renoir's collectors: the pâtissier, the priest and the prince," in exh. cat. London / Paris / Boston 1985, pp. 19–29.

29 Isabelle Cahn, *Ambroise Vollard: Un marchand d'art et ses trésors* (Paris, 2007); Jean-Paul Morel, *C'était Ambroise Vollard* (Paris, 2007), p. 368.

30 Ambroise Vollard, *La vie et l'œuvre de Pierre-Auguste Renoir* (Paris, 1919); idem, *Auguste Renoir* (Berlin n. d. [1924]); Vollard 1925; idem, *En écoutant Cézanne, Degas, Renoir* (Paris, 1985).

31 Jean Renoir 1962, p. 16.

32 Vollard 1925, pp. 15–16.

33 Barbara Ehrlich White, "Renoir's Sensuous Women," in Thomas B. Hess and Linda Nochlin, eds., *Woman as Sex Object: Studies in Erotic Art, 1730–1970* (London, 1973), pp. 166–81, here pp. 169, 181.

34 Vollard 1925, p. 17.

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36 Garb 1985 (see note 4), here in Broude / Garrard 1992 (see note 4), pp. 295–96.

37 Vollard 1925, pp. 19–20.

38 Ibid., p. 24.

39 Edmond Renoir, letter to the publisher Emmanuel Bergerat, in *La Vie moderne* 1, 11 (June 19, 1879), quoted in Julius Meier-Graefe, *Auguste Renoir* (Munich, 1911), pp. 17, 60, and Elda Fezzi and Jacqueline Henry, *Renoir, période impressionniste, 1869–1883* (Paris, 1985), p. 12.

40 Meier-Graefe 1911 (see note 39); considerably expanded new edition: *Renoir* (Leipzig, 1929); this was reissued in Frankfurt am Main in 1986, with an afterword by Andreas Beyer, pp. 233–40.

41 Julius Meier-Graefe, *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst* (Stuttgart, 1904); idem, *Modern Art: Being a Contribution to a New System of Aesthetics,* trans. Florence Simmonds and George W. Chrystal (New York and London, 1908).

42 On March 16, 1911, the critic desperately noted in his diary: "The little book about Renoir is giving me a lot of work. The corrections of the old transcript are escalating into a huge affair, and I'm making no progress. I must give up writing about art." Presumably Meier-Graefe was referring to earlier notes he had prepared in 1904 for his *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst*. He did in fact revise his image of Renoir. On March 2, 1911, he writes about a meeting with Vollard, who, in particular, gave him information about the people depicted in Renoir's *Luncheon of the Boating Party*. Cf. Julius Meier-Graefe, *Tagebuch 1903–1917 und weitere Dokumente,* ed. Catherine Krahmer (Göttingen, 2009), pp. 159–60.

43 Meier-Graefe 1911 (see note 39), pp. 5–6.

44 Jean Pierrot, *The Decadent Imagination, 1880–1900* (Chicago and London, 1981).

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49 Kenworth Moffett, *Meier-Graefe as Art Critic* (Munich, 1973).

50 Meier-Graefe 1911 (see note 39), pp. 20–24.

51 Ibid., p. 78.

52 Ibid., p. 22.

53 Julius Meier-Graefe, "Renoir im Rückblick," *Berliner Tageblatt* 506 (October 25, 1928), quoted in Moffett 1973 (see note 49), p. 90.

54 Meier-Graefe 1911 (see note 39), p. 33.

55 Monika Steinhauser, "'Retour à l'ordre': Zum Traditionsverständnis im Richtungsstreit der Kunstdiskussion zwischen den Weltkriegen," in Helmut Gebhard and Willibald Sauerländer, eds., *Feindbild Geschichte: Positionen der Architektur und Kunst im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 2007), pp. 87–146.

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59 Margherita d'Ayala Valva, "Gli 'scopi pratici moderni' del 'Libro dell'arte' di Cennino Cennini. Le edizioni primonovecentesche di Herringham, Renoir, Simi e Verkade," *Paragone* 56, 3, 64 (2005), pp. 71–91.

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61 Herbert 1988 (see note 16), pp. 6–7, 96–99.

62 Exh. cat. Tübingen 1996, p. 18.

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64 Cf. note 57.

65 Robert Spaemann, *Rousseau, Mensch oder Bürger: Das Dilemma der Moderne* (Stuttgart, 2008).

66 Cf. the essay by Marc Le Cœur in this volume, pp. 223–34.

67 Cf. Nathalie Heinich, *L'élite artiste: Excellence et singularité en régime démocratique* (Paris, 2005).

68 Cf. the essay by Peter Kropmanns in this volume, pp. 237–54.

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87 Georges Rivière in *L'Impressionniste,* 1877, quoted in Fezzi / Henry 1985 (see note 39), p. 12.

88 Cf. the collection of contemporary criticisms in exh. cat. Washington, D.C. / San Francisco 1986 (see note 6), pp. 234–36.

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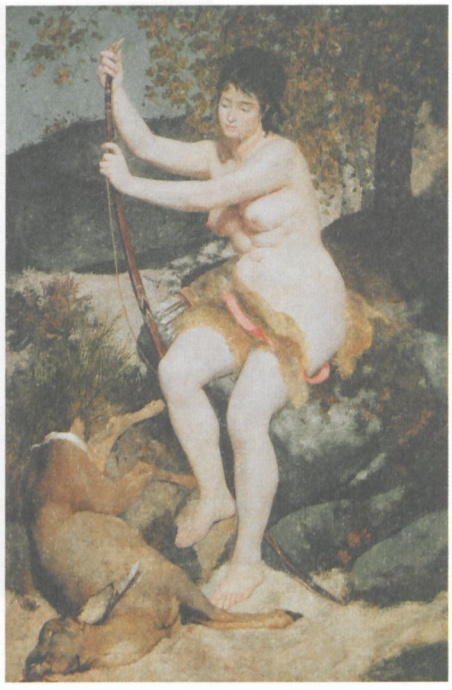

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Fig. 1 Pierre-Auguste Renoir
Ball at the Moulin de la Galette, 1876–77
Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Fig. 2 Pierre-Auguste Renoir
Luncheon of the Boating Party, 1880–81
The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

Fig. 3 Pierre-Auguste Renoir
The Bathers, 1884–87
Philadelphia Museum of Art

Fig. 4 Pierre-Auguste Renoir
La Grenouillère, 1868
Oskar Reinhart Collection 'Am Römerholz', Winterthur

Fig. 5 Pierre-Auguste Renoir
Lise with a Parasol, 1867
Museum Folkwang, Essen

Fig. 6 Pierre-Auguste Renoir
Le Pont des Arts, 1867
The Norton Simon Foundation, Pasadena

Fig. 7 Georges Seurat
A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte, 1884–86
The Art Institute of Chicago

Fig. 8 Pierre-Auguste Renoir
The Engaged Couple, 1868
Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud, Cologne

Fig. 9 Pierre-Auguste Renoir
Diana, 1867
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Chester Dale Collection

Fig. 10 Gustave Courbet
Young Women on the Banks of the Seine (Summer), 1856–57
Petit Palais, Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris

Fig. 11 Pierre-Auguste Renoir
Odalisque (Woman of Algiers), 1870
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Chester Dale Collection

Fig. 12 Giorgione
The Pastoral Concert, ca. 1508–10
Musée du Louvre, Paris

Fig. 13 Pierre-Auguste Renoir
Workers' Daughters on the Outer Boulevard, 1877–78
Pen and brown ink, over black chalk, on ivory laid paper
Illustration for Émile Zola's novel *L'Assommoir*
The Art Institute of Chicago, The Regenstein Collection