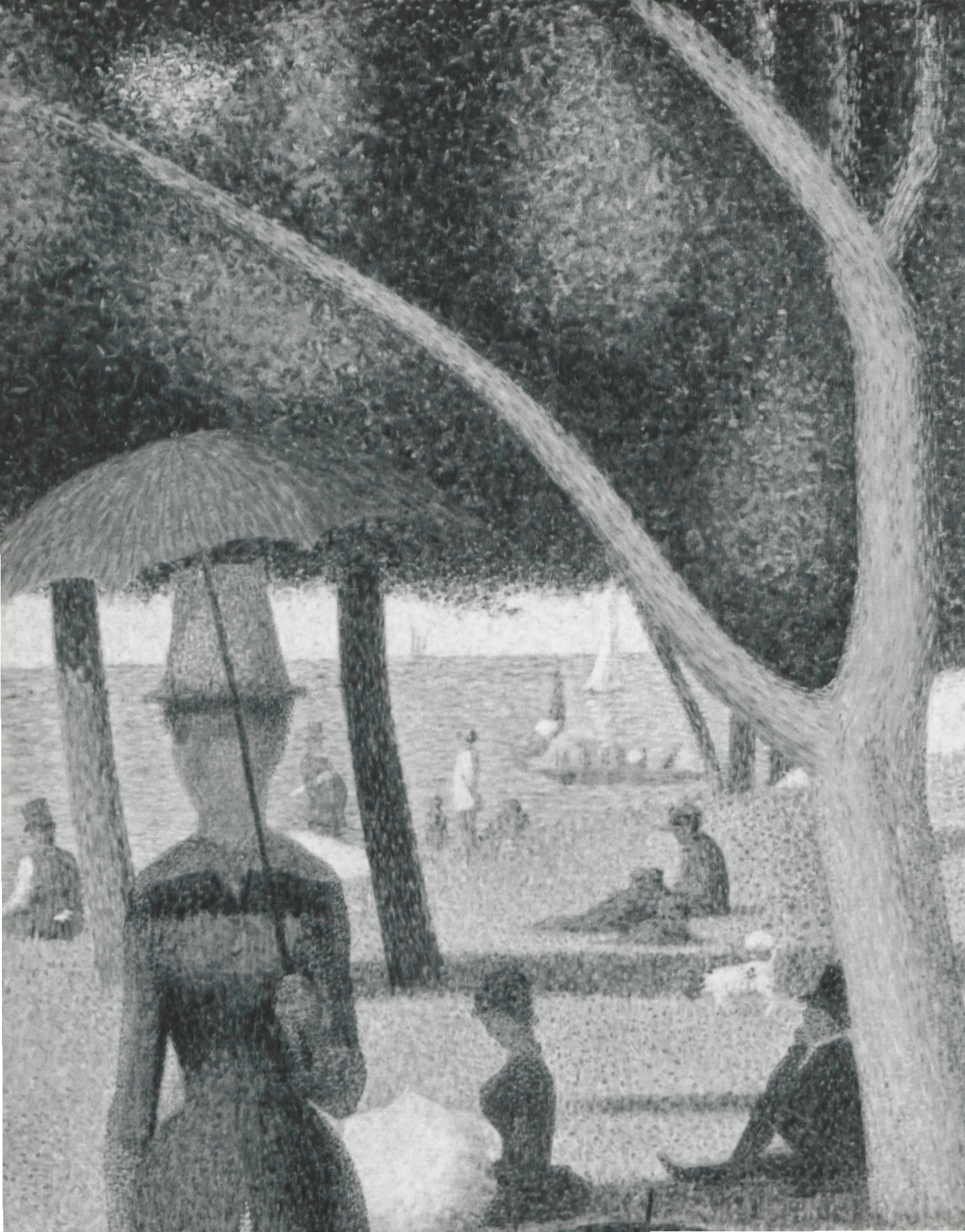

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Seurat, Charles Blanc, and Naturalist Art Criticism

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DIRECTOR OF FINE ARTS during the revolutionary year of 1848 and again for three years after the Commune in 1871, founder of the *Gazette des beaux-arts*, the first professor of aesthetics and art history at the Collège de France, Charles Blanc (fig. 2) exerted enormous influence through his writings.[1] That Georges Seurat was influenced to some degree by his *Grammaire des arts du dessin* has long been acknowledged.[2] The evidence of Blanc's importance for the young artist needs only to be cited briefly here. In the oft-quoted letter to his friend the critic Félix Fénéon of June 20, 1890, Seurat wrote that he had read Blanc in the "collège," that is, before he was eighteen years old and prior to his entrance to the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1878.[3] The Belgian poet-critic Emile Verhaeren surmised from his conversations with Seurat that "in *La Grammaire des arts plastiques* [*sic*] by Charles Blanc, an entire theory was formulated that, in its fundamental ideas, seems exact. This was his starting point."[4] Another poet-critic, Gustave Kahn, reported that Seurat had an unrivaled knowledge of Blanc's work.[5] Furthermore many of the works that Seurat later studied, not only those of Michel Eugène Chevreul and D. P. G. Humbert de Superville, were mentioned and discussed by Blanc. In 1970 Robert L. Herbert wrote that Seurat's "subsequent readings were either confirmations or scientific extensions of what Blanc says in his eclectic summaries,"[6] a conclusion that has since been widely accepted.

FIGURE 1. Georges Seurat (French, 1859–1891). *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of the Grande Jatte* (detail of pl. 2).

The eclectic nature of Blanc's art theory has also been long recognized, thanks particularly to the work of Misook Song, although much remains to be done on the sources of his particular idealism.[7] However, in linking Blanc with Seurat, the tendency has been to examine the writer's focus on color theory and technique to the exclusion of other influential ideas. It is without doubt important that Blanc consistently interpreted the art of Eugène Delacroix through Chevreul's theories. Seurat not only adopted some of Blanc's views on color mixture, but also deeply penetrated his entire approach, drawing upon the theorist for significant aesthetic judgments. Blanc was probably the last art theorist to reduce the entire historical development of art to a set of trans-

FIGURE 2. Charles Blanc (1813–1882). Photograph. Photo: courtesy Michael F. Zimmermann.

historical laws of art, to a grammar. With this attempt, he defended normative aesthetics against the multiplicity of ideals of art produced by art-historical and critical research. Although he believed in eternal laws of art, he differed partly from traditional academic art doctrine in accepting different ideals for different genres of art: he considered Phidias, not Raphael, David, or Ingres, the master of line, Rembrandt the master of light, and Veronese and Delacroix the masters of color.

Seurat's belief in invariable aesthetic laws for the various genres of art originated in Blanc's thinking. When Seurat began to paint in an Impressionistic style, he sought to transform Blanc's still relatively traditional set of laws of art in such a way that it did not contradict the technical and scientific development of contemporary society. But the decisive model for Seurat's search for rules was Blanc's traditional academic idealism and not the natural sciences. Even after 1886, when Seurat transferred his allegiance from Blanc's system of values to Charles Henry's pseudo-scientific theories, based on fashionable research about the physiology of the nervous system, this switch was merely a new solution for the artist's continuing idealistic search for an aesthetic canon.

Charles Blanc enriched idealistic academic theory through his consideration of nonacademic art and his inclusion of new theories of color and form. His eclectic approach did not alter his academic preferences or his belief in the dogmatic theories on which these were based. That he had an essentially academic mentality can be deduced from the title of his book alone, *Grammaire des arts du dessin*. Like all academics, he regarded painting as an art of drawing. He did not, however, regard drawing as the only mastery which an artist can obtain or against which all others should be seen as less desirable. Chiaroscuro and color were for him equally important, as his enthusiasm for the work of Rembrandt and Delacroix demonstrates. While Blanc repeated the arguments of traditional academic theory in support of the superiority of drawing, he also looked to modern natural science for evidence in support of this belief. According to Blanc, the further along the evolutionary scale a given breed develops, the more it is shaped by drawing and the less by color.

Indeed, wrote Blanc, the richness of color in nature can never be attained by art. He maintained, for this reason, that the artist cannot achieve true beauty through imitation of nature alone, which he dismissed platonically as the mere aping of nature. "Nature is thus superior to art in this inferior region that is color." To the artist, nature appears everywhere in its endless multiplicity: it seems outside the realm of universal concepts. In the success of the naturalists, Blanc saw a decline in French painting: "The painter of style sees the great side, even in little things; the realist imitator sees the small side, even in great things." In comparison with other beings, man alone has the ability to rise above instinctive behavior; where this occurs, there is character. Where finally the individual appears to represent the entirety of humanity, there is beauty, according to Blanc. "Situated between nature and the ideal, between that which is and that which should be, the artist has a vast distance to

traverse in order to go from the reality that he sees to the beauty he divines." The artist should portray a purer image of reality: he should find the ideal that is constituted by the essence, and not merely the surface, of the visible.

What however is to be understood by the "ideal" in art? How can the artist capture it in his works? Blanc believed that the neoplatonic ideal by which man is seen as a perfect microcosm mirroring the macrocosm can be achieved through the study of the human body—the crown of creation, the most complete realization of the divine idea. Since ancient times, the argument against this view has been that there also exist ugly human beings and that they too must be represented in art. Blanc responded to this complaint with a distinctively modern argument: modern science, he said, teaches that the embryo in the mother's body passes through the stages of the evolution of the race in an abbreviated form. Through this process, blemishes may remain that explain the animal-like physiognomy of many humans. Man—the beautiful Adam, the original human body, he who alone corresponded to the ideal of the microcosmic body, an "abridgment of the universe"—has been lost forever. For Blanc the search for this original image constitutes style, and he called the search for style the duty of the artist. "Art is charged with discovering it, hidden at the center of the interior image, feeble and obscured, but still present in the human soul."[8] In this context, Blanc paraphrased Humbert de Superville, who derived the "absolute signs in art" from the human body, and especially from physiognomy.[9]

Naturally Blanc considered the model for his theories the Antique, which he felt most completely realized style in art. For him the Antique meant Greece, which produced one artist par excellence: Phidias. "Phidias created form equal to his idea. He rendered the one as beautiful as the other was great . . . he captured the ideal in the essence of reality, of purified reality, transfigured, as if he had for an instant lifted the veil concealing the perfect example, issued from the hands of God. . . . Phidias overcame the distance that separated Greek art from perfection."[10] Elsewhere Blanc wrote: "You inhale the essence of truth, which is beauty, you experience growing admiration, which will be hereafter without reservation and without return." According to Blanc, it was impossible even for one of the nineteenth-century's champions of the Antique, J. A. D. Ingres, to reach this level: modern individualism leads to a tense and exaggerated style. About Ingres's *Angelica* (São Paolo, Museu de Arte), which Seurat probably copied while he was a student in Henri Lehmann's atelier,[11] Blanc remarked: "His aversion to the trivial often pushed him to a counterproductive excess, that is to say to bizarre exaggeration, in a mannered style." Only the more collective art of Antiquity could express general ideas and forms.

Blanc completely dismissed Ingres's exclusive preference for drawing. "To say that drawing is everything says a great deal; it replaces the very definition of painting with one that is much more appropriate to sculpture. . . ."[12] Parallel to the pure principles of art completely realized by Phidias were Blanc's pure principles of painting. Christianity, according to the theorist, tumbled man from his pedestal; as a result, he now found himself in the midst of nature. Correspondingly, painting superceded sculpture as the most important of the arts; the naked, beautiful, human figure was no longer the ideal, but rather the clothed, chaste, emotional human. As a two-dimensional art, painting retained the essential spiritual inwardness of sculpture and could achieve a full corporeality. In this way, Blanc managed to venerate artists such as Rembrandt and Delacroix alongside of Phidias and Ingres.

Not surprisingly, Blanc's relation to Delacroix was contradictory. On the one hand, he reproached him: "The human body is creation's masterpiece: It is a poem whose text is sacred. Each may translate it into his language, but only on condition that he respect general laws and not disturb the body's harmonious mechanism or distort its movements, as Delacroix so often does." On the other hand, he recognized that Delacroix "was protesting against sculptural painting, which is almost as dangerous as pictorial sculpture." In the end, Blanc admired Delacroix because the artist took into consideration specific laws of art and applied them to color, bringing this particular aspect of painting to its fullest realization. He interpreted the artist's oeuvre thoroughly from the perspective of Chevreul's color theory, which he integrated into his canon of art. "People believe that color is a pure gift from heaven and that it possesses incommunicable mysteries, but this is an error; color is learned like music."[13] Blanc concluded: "It is because he understood these laws, studying them thoroughly after having sensed them intuitively, that Eugène Delacroix was one of the greatest colorists of modern times, one might say the greatest."[14] It is striking that Blanc like Seurat was interested only in the colorist in Delacroix,

while he practically ignored Delacroix the Romantic; indeed he expressly warned against this side of the great painter.[15] Blanc emphasized the harmony rather than the expressiveness of colors in Delacroix's paintings. "Delacroix himself always retained the piquant in the harmonious: He pursued unity in the mutual penetration of opposites."[16] Blanc also established general rules for the formation of light and dark tones, guidelines that Seurat followed in most of his drawings: a painting should never have two bright or two dark masses of the same intensity. Half-tones should occupy about half of the surface; the other half should be parcelled out into equal areas of light and dark. "Nothing less than the genius of Rembrandt can change these relationships, limiting [as he did] the field of light to about one-eighth of the space."[17]

In his 1880 book *L'Oeuvre de Rembrandt*, Blanc described the classicists' criticism of Rembrandt—that he was a poor draftsman—as a heresy of the orthodox. He praised the Dutch artist for the qualities that could not be achieved by the correct and elegant style of the classical school: "In Rembrandt's drawing are essential qualities that he possesses to the highest degree: expression and perspective. Regarding expression, which results from the movement and pose of the figure, it would be difficult for this quality to be more simple, stronger, or more penetrating than it is in Rembrandt."[18] But it was not his ability to render the lively movements of figures that made Rembrandt, in Blanc's view, one of the great paradigmatic artists, but rather his masterly construction of pictorial space by means of chiaroscuro.

Blanc's principles for the handling of color, light, and shadow were complemented by the ideas of the painter and influential teacher Thomas Couture, as expressed in his most important text, *Méthode et entretiens d'atelier*. Couture distinguished two ways in which painters treat color. The first, used by a group he called the *coloristes*, strives for the harmony of colors with natural tones. The second, employed by the *luminaristes*, sacrifices the exact tones of nature to the magic of light. Couture considered Rembrandt the supreme *luminariste* and Veronese the greatest *coloriste*.[19] The similarities between Couture's and Blanc's ideas are probably explained by a mutual influence. Blanc distinguished between artists of color and artists of chiaroscuro. He did not like Delacroix's lithographs, and conversely he preferred Rembrandt's etchings to his paintings. In the letter Seurat wrote to Fénéon cited above, the artist stated that he relied upon "the precepts of Couture on the fineness of tones." He saw a retrospective exhibition of Couture's works and probably read his essay. His reference to the "fineness of tones" probably refers to Couture's section on "Les Coloristes et les luminaristes."[20]

Seurat's dependence on the theories of Blanc and Couture can help explain the great stylistic difference between his early drawings and his early oil sketches. As Herbert has clearly established, Seurat developed his mature drawing style probably near the end of 1881, certainly by 1882.[21] At this time, he switched from an early academic drawing style that gives primacy to line over light and dark to an opposite method in which contours are formed by means of masses of light and shadow. This change cannot be explained, as scholars have attempted to do, simply by the fact that he had left the academic environment of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and had joined the Impressionist movement. It is also incorrect to think that Seurat was preoccupied almost exclusively at this time with the problem of light and shadow, for which drawing provided an excellent and simple solution.[22] Certainly Rembrandt was the most important source for this development in Seurat's drawing technique, due to the influence on the young artist of the writings of Blanc.[23]

While it is not contested here that Seurat first achieved maturity in drawing before he created finished works in oil, we can no longer assume that the difference between the drawings and oil studies can be explained by sequential development. Granted, in the year 1882, Seurat devoted most of his attention to drawing. In a period during which drawings became for him works of art in their own right, he learned to control light and dark. Developing a soft, but nonetheless monumental, style with conté crayon, he must already have been concerned with color. Thus many of the early oil sketches surely date from the same period. For example, one of the few paintings that has been assigned to 1880 represents gold-red flowers in a cylindrical vase (fig. 3). This charming painting already reflects the color theories of Blanc and Chevreul.[24] It also displays traits characteristic of Seurat's painting style. As in Paul Cézanne's work, space is no longer indicated by a central perspective construction. All lines are inserted into a geometrical framework whose rhythm repeats the rectangular parameters of the canvas. The simple modeling, however, creates an effect

FIGURE 3. Georges Seurat. *Vase of Flowers*, c. 1880. Oil on canvas; 46.4×38.5 cm. Cambridge, Mass., The Harvard University Art Museums.

of three-dimensionality. On the other hand, the basic stylistic conception of a drawing of roses in a vase (fig. 4) contrasts strongly with the early oil paintings. The round form of the vase, filled with well-defined, white blossoms, is set off against a dark background. Although this sheet, which has been dated 1883,[25] is related to the still life discussed above, through its powerful spatial effect and clear pictorial structure, the effect in each is achieved by totally different means. If one were to see in these two works a stylistic development, one would have to reverse the generally accepted dating.

The stylistic difference between the drawings and the oil sketches is better explained by Seurat's varying intentions in the two media. Following Blanc's recommendation, he constructed drawings according to principles of light and shadow and paintings according to principles of color. Consequently he considered the Barbizon School artists, whom he apparently saw as *luminaristes*, to be better models for his drawings than for his paintings. It is therefore hardly surprising that Seurat's drawings are related to the style of Jean François Millet and Théodore Rousseau, whereas his early attempts in oil, executed simultaneously with drawings, are oriented toward a more Impressionistic style.

Blanc's theories were not the only and perhaps not even the most powerful impulse for Seurat in his attempt to reconstruct Impressionism on a solid, theoretical foundation and as an ambitious approach to painting, based like academic art on careful, studied methods. The idea, however, that this more accomplished form of painting had to choose man as its most important subject did stem from Blanc. If, at the time of his interest in Impressionism, the artist paid attention to contemporary art criticism, he must have seen the movement from a critical distance. In the 1870s, critics such as Emile Zola

FIGURE 4. Georges Seurat. *Roses in a Vase*, c. 1881–83. Conté crayon on paper; 30×23.5. Photo: Hauke 1961, vol. 2, no. 572.

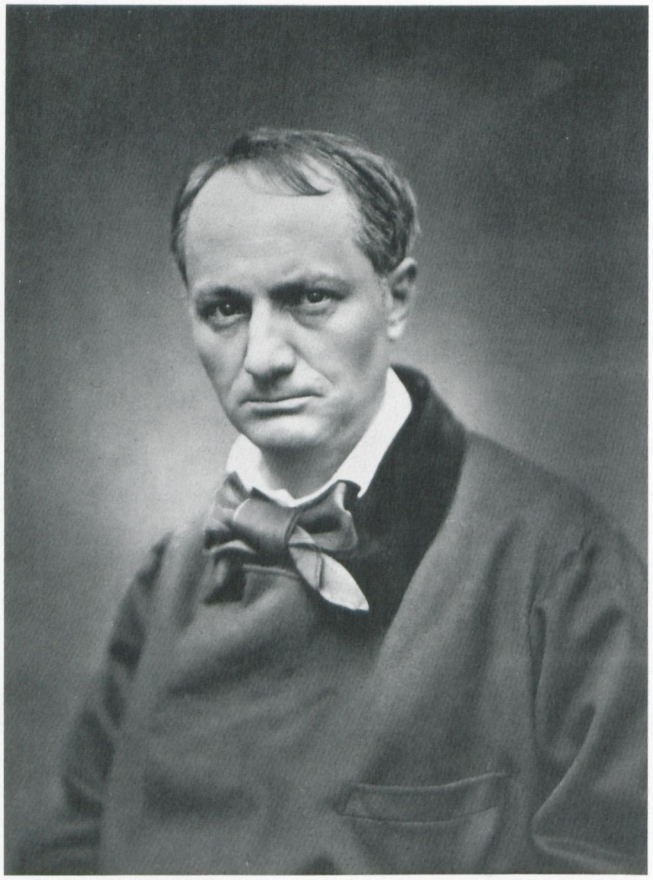

FIGURE 5. Etienne Carjat (French, 1828–1906). *Charles Baudelaire* (1821–1867), 1878. Woodbury type; Rochester, New York, International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House.

(fig. 6) were writing about Impressionism not merely as the newest phase in the general development of painting, but rather as the most modern expression of naturalism or even Realism, founded by Courbet, Millet, and the Barbizon School, and dominating the art world since 1850.[26] It was in 1878, in the midst of the most productive period of Impressionism, that the writer Théodore Duret grandiosely declared: "The Impressionists descend from the naturalists and have for fathers Corot, Courbet, and Manet."[27] The defense by Charles Baudelaire (fig. 5) of modern subjects in painting is one of the earlier expressions of a tradition which sees the same aim in naturalism and Impressionism. Some of the poet's famous words on the artist Constantin Guys can be quoted here in relation to the *Grande Jatte* because they seem to fit it better than any other painting: "He is looking for that quality which you must allow me to call 'modernity'; for I know of no better word to express the idea I have in mind. He makes it his business to extract from fashion whatever element it may contain of poetry within history, to distill the eternal from the transitory."[28]

Like these and other critics, such as Fénéon, Seurat apparently considered naturalism to be the style of the future, a style suited to the new, liberal, or even radically liberal, society. Zola's famous definition of what he regarded as the essence of art, presented in an article he wrote in 1865 in opposition to Pierre Joseph Proudhon's evaluation of Courbet as a socialist painter, already expresses a liberal attitude that becomes clear if we reinsert this well-known remark into the context of the refutation of Proudhon: "I totally relinquish humanity to the artist. My definition of a work of art would be, if I were

FIGURE 6. Etienne Carjat. *Emile Zola* (1840–1902), c. 1876–84. Woodbury type; 23.9 × 18.5 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago, Photo Gallery Restricted Fund (1961.770).

to formulate it: 'A work of art is a corner of creation seen through a temperament.'" Zola continued, addressing Proudhon directly: "Thus you have not understood that art is the free expression of a heart and an intelligence, and that the more personal it is the greater it is."[29] Seurat accepted some aspects of this thinking. On a sheet of paper where he had copied excerpts from Delacroix's writings, he noted: "It is the strictest application of scientific principles seen through a personality."[30] Despite his anarchistic convictions, Seurat's friend Paul Signac would still agree in 1894 with Zola's arguments against Proudhon: "It was a trap into which even the best-intentioned revolutionaries like Proudhon too often fell, of insisting upon a precise socialist direction in works of art, whereas, in fact, this tendency is encountered much more strongly among the pure aesthetes, revolutionaries by temperament."[31] Signac's and Fénéon's anarchism, and probably also Seurat's moderate form of anarchism, could be regarded as a more radical continuation of the liberal tradition in the criticism of Zola, Duret, Duranty, and others.

In 1876 Edmond Duranty defended the sketchy character of Impressionist painting with a burst of liberal rhetoric: "Let it be, let it pass. Do you not see in these attempts the anxious and irresistible need to escape the conventional, the banal, the traditional, to reclaim the self, to run far from the entirely regulated, bureaucratic spirit that weighs upon us in this country . . . ?"[32] But Duranty himself and other critics—especially Zola, Duret, and J. K. Huysmans—no longer accepted its unfinished character. They awaited a more perfect, a more fully studied form of art and concluded that Manet, Renoir, Monet, Caillebotte, and Sisley were the forerunners of a great, naturalist painting style of the future, which would express the liberal spirit of its time in finished masterworks.

Even in the article quoted above, Duranty wrote: "I would have thought that a painter who had captured this immense spectacle [of modern life] would have finished by attaining a firmness, a calm, a sureness, and a breadth of vision that perhaps no one at present can claim, and by acquiring a mastery of execution and feeling."[33] Zola announced his break with Impressionism in the June 22, 1880, issue of *Le Voltaire*. Here he not only turned against Claude Monet, whom the writer believed to be too easily satisfied and too prolific, but also against the principle of painting executed exclusively in natural light. "In my opinion, it is necessary to capture nature in the impression of a minute: only, this minute must be fixed forever on canvas by a deeply knowledgeable brushwork." While Zola still accepted the basic innovations of Impressionism, he did not believe that its current practitioners had fulfilled its potential: "The formula is there, infinitely divided: but nowhere, in none of them, does one find it applied by a master. They are all precursors, the man of genius is not yet born."[34] In the same year, Huysmans, referring to the psychological experiments of Jean Martin Charcot, famed director of the mental hospital at La Salpêtrière, diagnosed the Impressionists as suffering from atrophy of the retinal nerves. Many paintings "could confirm the experiences of Doctor Charcot with the changes in the perception of colors that he noted in a number of the hysterics at La Salpêtrière and in a number of people afflicted with illnesses of the nervous system."[35]

We can only speculate as to the causes of this shift of opinion.[36] All of the critics discussed here were fervent supporters of a French republic, which was realized only in 1879, when Comte Marie Edmé de MacMahon was forced to retire as president. It was only after that date that the many attempts to re-establish the monarchy after 1873 finally were doomed to failure. Since the fall of the government of Thiers, the French Republic had been ruled mostly by anti-republican politicians; only as the result of a series of elections toward the end of the decade was the constitution increasingly supported by solid republican majorities.[37] According to Hippolyte Taine's very influential sociology of art, the nature of art depends strictly on its geographical and political environment. Taine saw an ideal political and social situation such as the democracy in Athens at the time of Solon as forming the basis of great art like that of Phidias.[38] Following this logic then, the most prominent advocates of the long-awaited true republic would have expected it to produce an art that, if not equal to that of Phidias, at least reflected a similar mastery and completeness.

From the very beginning, Seurat appears to have striven for the qualities of the great artist these critics were waiting for. He therefore applied his originally academic theories to naturalistic subjects. He did not merely attach himself to Impressionism, but rather sought to work his way through naturalism from its beginnings. This goal explains Seurat's reaching back to the art of Millet, Courbet, the Barbizon School, and finally also to the suburban scenes of Jean François

Raffaëlli.[39] Instead of continuing the development of Impressionism as expressed in the most progressive works by Monet and his friends, Seurat tried to establish his own style on the basis of naturalism.

Seurat finally succeeded in synthesizing his early drawn and painted work in *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of the Grande Jatte* (pl. 2). In his earlier *Bathing, Asnières* (pl. 1), he had put aside, for the most part, the styles of both his early drawings and oil sketches. Instead, he oriented himself toward models with which he had been engaged only relatively recently. The landscape is Impressionistic; the way figures are placed in the setting relates to the art of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes. With the *Grande Jatte*, however, Seurat looked back to his earlier drawing style, for example, to that of his representations of stylishly dressed women in the streets (see fig. 7). He also returned to his earlier oil paintings; the oil sketches for the *Grande Jatte* display a style different from that of the *croquetons* for *Bathing*. From the beginning, Seurat followed a method that diverged from his technique for the elaboration of composition in *Bathing*. Even the first oil studies for the Chicago painting are less Impressionistic in effect; in them Seurat was far less concerned with a natural representation of the landscape he had chosen as a stage for his figures. In fact after only minimal preparatory study, he appears to have resolved the issue of the landscape background.

FIGURE 7. Georges Seurat. *The White Coat*, c. 1883. Conté crayon on paper; 31×23 cm. Photo: Hauke 1961, vol. 2, no. 570.

The formation of the landscape did not evolve primarily from *plein-air* studies. Its resolution can be seen in three extant drawings. The first (fig. 8) shows a few trees on the river bank; their surface appearance does not resemble that in the final painting. A great, intricate tree represented in the foreground is the model for the large tree to the right of center in the painting. The painter added the missing branch to the painting. At the left of the drawing, two V-shaped trees are placed close together. They also appear, on a smaller scale, in the finished picture (see fig. 1), where the dark tree to the far left is retained, but doubled, so that both frame the pictorial center marked by the woman with a red umbrella. Finally the tightly grouped trees appear in the right background of the *Grande Jatte*, which had been reshaped more clearly in another of the drawings (fig. 9). The tree in the left foreground is taken from the drawing *Tree and Man* (fig. 10).

From these three sheets and Puvis de Chavannes's *Sacred Grove* (p. 138, fig. 6), Seurat quickly developed the final rhythm of the landscape space. In Puvis's work, the landscape is organized in a very similar configuration.[40] The spatial intervals that structure the *Grande Jatte* imitate the composition of the trees in Puvis's painting. This structure is repeated in all of the oil sketches. Into the finished landscape, Seurat inserted figures painted in a style which corresponds closely to that of the drawings. In *Bathing* Seurat, clearly employing an academic method, had used models he had partially drawn as nudes in his studio. For the *Grande Jatte*, he appears to have studied figures on the site. His main compositional problem was clearly the spatial arrangement of the fig-

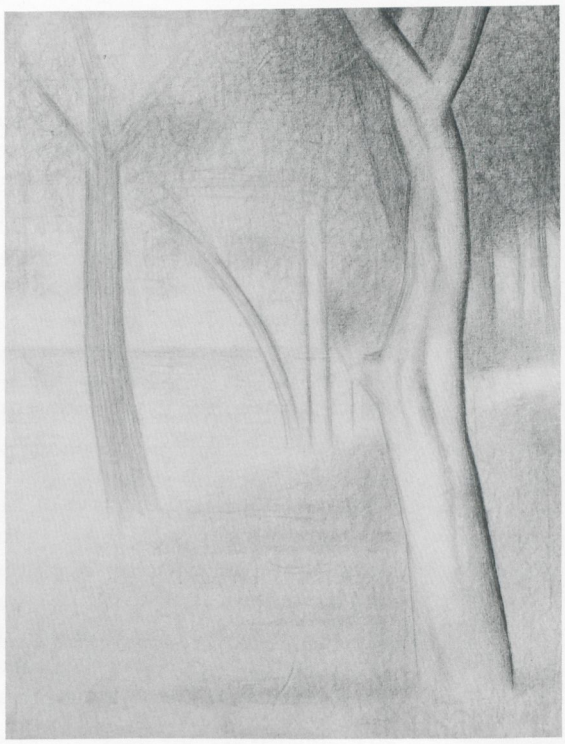

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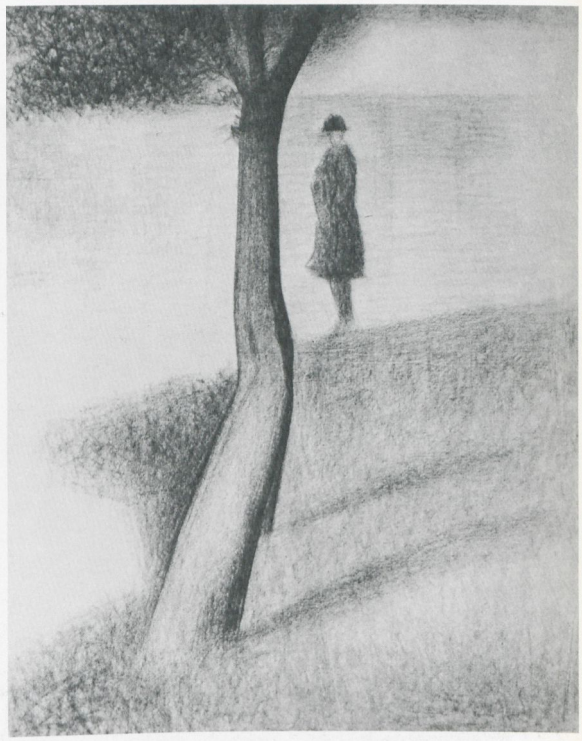
FIGURE 8. Georges Seurat. *Landscape with Trees: Study for the "Grande Jatte,"* 1884. Conté crayon on white laid paper; 61.9 × 47 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago, Helen Regenstein Collection (1966.184).

▽
FIGURE 9. Georges Seurat. *Landscape with Trees: Study for the "Grande Jatte,"* 1884. Conté crayon on white laid paper; 47.3 × 61.1 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago, Helen Regenstein Collection (1987.184).



△ FIGURE 10. Georges Seurat. *Tree and Man: Study for the "Grande Jatte,"* 1884. Conté crayon on paper; 61 × 46 cm. Wuppertal, Stadtische Museum.

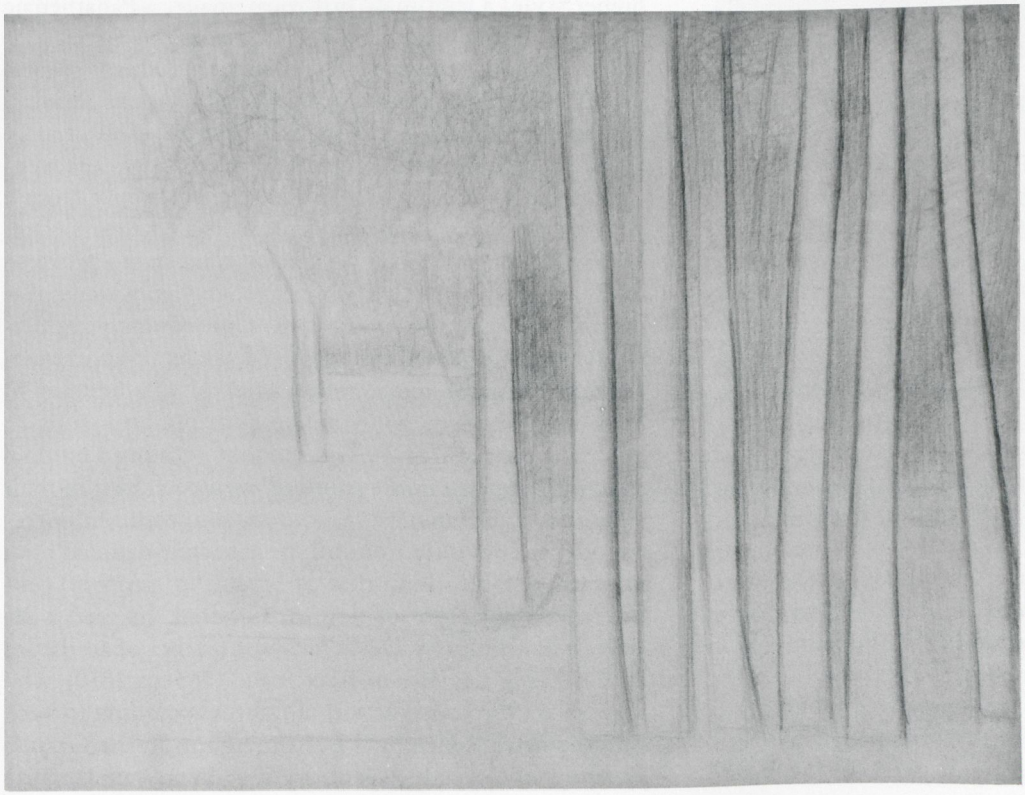


FIGURE 11. Georges Seurat. *Woman Fishing: Study for the "Grande Jatte,"* 1884. Conté crayon on Ingres paper; 30.7 × 23.7 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, from The Museum of Modern Art, Lizzie P. Bliss Collection (55.21.4).

ures and the simultaneous expression of perspectival depth and relieflike monumentality. For Seurat this problem was new; while it does not occur in the earlier, independent drawings, it is clearly visible in the preparatory drawings for the *Grande Jatte*. Apparently they were executed later than any of the *croquetons* for the painting.[41]

It has often been remarked that, with these drawings, Seurat renounced Chevreul's laws for the careful lighting and shading of the background, thus heralding a new stylistic phase. However, there is a simple reason for this apparent style change: in the earlier drawings for *Bathing*, Seurat had seen that his method of lightening or darkening the background in order to surround a value by its opposite, creating halos or *auréoles*, was only practicable in the water reflections. In the painting, it was not possible to form the entire background in clear or shadowy, gray or colored masses, which would have clarified the figures. Therefore Seurat refrained from using this method in the drawings as well. In the water, the contrast of the halos around the figures is somewhat clearer than in the grass. Consequently, Seurat retained this method for example in the drawing of the fisherwoman on the far left (fig. 11). He was now forced to obtain the desired clarity of the pictorial structure through another means. His peculiar, naïvely graceful avoidance of overlappings replaces the *auréoles*. For example, the tip of the sitting woman's umbrella abuts exactly the skirt of the mother at the center of the composition; the umbrella of the older individual next to the nursemaid abuts the trumpeter's leg.

The sculptural feeling of the painting, which the Cubists would praise, derives from the light-dark pattern first articulated in the drawings and then captured in the painting. This synthesis indicates a desire to create a higher style, a legitimate historical image, a Panathenaic frieze of contemporary society, according to Seurat's famous dictum, recorded by Gustave Kahn.[42] Seurat wanted to find the contemporary ideal of art, as Phidias, according to Blanc, had found the eternal ideal of art.

As everything Seurat did was intentional, the synthesis of the *Grande Jatte* did not result simply from a stylistic tendancy toward a kind of modern classicism. Just as Blanc considered the ideal of classicism a problem in the work of Ingres, so Seurat probably considered this ideal a problem in his own work. Consequently the artist did not use any of the approved academic techniques to attain classical appearances, even though he tried to establish a modern approach to painting analogous to academic procedures. His methods of creating a rational pictorial language in the painting are astonishing in their simplicity and frankness. Seurat sought geometric correspondences not only to fulfill the academic demand for a classical composition, that is to say, a strongly geometricized structure of figures. Granted, he read a sequence of articles by David Sutter, a teacher of aesthetics at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts from 1865 to 1870, who insisted on the construction of figures according to various geometric schemes.[43] But the figures in the *Grande Jatte* are not exactly bound by a geometrical structure

regulating and harmonizing their position and scale, as recommended by Sutter. Nor is the perspective strict: the space in the painting is not preconstructed or box-like; and, as Meyer Schapiro noted, despite the friezelike arrangement of figures across the picture plane, the perspectival center of the painting is at the right of the composition. Paradoxically, even in the foreground and background planes parallel to the picture plane, there is a diminution in scale from right to left.[44]

Before Seurat elaborated the composition, he seems to have decided on the style of the figures. According to John House, their rigid appearance and forced movements result from a desire to express a mood in opposition to the picture's depiction of radiant weather, and thus "the form of the *Grande Jatte* is an essential part of its meaning."[45] Their style does not just reflect the formal motives of the artist but also his desire to express what he saw, to feel the scene the way the people he depicted saw it. The *Grande Jatte* mirrors the world of the middle-class people strolling on the island. The rigidity of the forms and the naïve avoidance of overlapping inevitably reminds one of the holistic world of educational children's books, where everything has its place and order. But Seurat maintained a critical distance from the world he pictured. Visible in the *Grande Jatte* is a certain ironic treatment of subject not apparent in *Bathing*. This irony was to be characteristic of all of Seurat's late figure paintings. If, as House has argued, *Bathing* and the *Grande Jatte* were originally planned as counterparts, irony can be seen in the opposition of strong, life-sized men and young boys in *Bathing* and the tightly corseted men and women in the *Grande Jatte*. The confrontation is comical. Style and meaning have become one.

The *Grande Jatte* obviously inspired a moving and deeply bitter prose poem by Georges Michel. A librarian at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris from 1886 on, he published poems and poetical prose texts under the pseudonym Ephraïm Mikhaël. The little-known text, entitled "The Toy Shop," reads:

> I no longer remember the time, or the place, or if it was a dream. . . . Men and women were coming and going along a long, sad promenade; I moved in and out of the crowd, a wealthy crowd, giving off the aromas of women's perfume. And despite the soft splendor of the furs and velvets that brushed against me, despite the red smiles of cool lips seen through fine veils, I began to experience a vague sense of anxiety as I gazed at the strollers marching slowly and monotonously to my right and to my left.
>
> On a bench, a man was watching the crowd with strange eyes and, as I approached him, I heard him sob. I asked him what distressed him so and, raising his great, fevered eyes toward me, the weeping man replied: "I am sad, you see, because for days I have been shut up here in this toy shop. For days and for years, I've seen nothing but puppets, and I am sick of being the only one alive. They are made of wood, but so marvelously fashioned that they move and speak like me. Yet I know that they can only make the same movements, utter the same words, always.
>
> "These beautiful dolls, dressed in velvet and fur, who leave, trailing in the air behind them, an enticing odor of iris, are even more exquisitely articulated. Their mechanisms are even more delicate than the others, and when you know how to work them, they give the illusion of life. . . ."[46]

Like the Parthenon frieze, the *Grande Jatte* is a classical vision of its time—apparently, however, without much sympathy for the ambitions of the society it represents. Phidias's ideal was, for Seurat as it was for Blanc, no longer obtainable. The irony in the *Grande Jatte* seems to be a consequence of the sense of contemporary classicism expressed by Baudelaire: "Since all centuries and all nations have their beauty, we inevitably have our own. This is as it should be. . . . Every beauty contains something eternal and something transitory. . . . The circumstantial element of each beauty is to be derived from the passions, and as we have our particular passions, we have our beauty."[47] A classical vision that does not flee into a timeless arcadia nor borrows from the methods of an outmoded art of painting must inevitably be ironic.

Zimmermann, "Seurat, Charles Blanc, and Naturalist Art Criticism," pp. 199–209.

I wish to thank Susan F. Rossen. Without her advice, I could not have expressed my ideas in this language which is not mine.

1. On Charles Blanc, see Misook Song, *Art Theories of Charles Blanc 1813–1882* (Ann Arbor, 1984), pp. 10–16; T. J. Clark, *Image of the People. Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (London, 1973); idem, *The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France, 1848–51* (London, 1973); P. Vaisse, "La Troisième République et les peintres. Recherches sur les rapports des pouvoirs publiques et de la peinture en France de 1870 à 1914," Thèse d'Etat, University of Paris, 1980, pp. 78–80.

2. Charles Blanc, *Grammaire des arts du dessin. Architecture, sculpture, peinture* (Paris, 1867). It first appeared in the *Gazette des beaux-arts* between 1860 and 1866 in installments.

3. The letter is reproduced in facsimile in Hauke 1961, vol. 1, p. xxi. Several versions of this letter exist. See Herbert 1962, p. 167; and Homer 1970, pp. 17–19, 268–70.

4. Verhaeren 1891, pp. 430–38, reprinted with insignificant variations in Emile Verhaeren, *Sensations* (Paris, 1927) and excerpts reprinted in Broude 1978, pp. 25–30.

5. Kahn 1971, p. 7.

6. Herbert 1970, pp. 23–26.

7. Song (note 1). Song emphasized Blanc's eclecticism, tracing it to the ideas of the nineteenth-century philosopher Victor Cousin. She also explored the connections between Blanc's color theories and Neo-Impressionism. The emphasis in my account of Blanc lies more on his traditional academic idealism. I first studied Charles Blanc (without unfortunately knowing Song's work) for a Ph.D. dissertation on "Seurat and Artistic Theories of His Time," with special reference to the French physicist and aesthetician Charles Henry, for the University of Cologne in 1985.

8. Charles Blanc, *Grammaire des arts du dessin*, 3d ed. (Paris, 1876), vol. 3, pp. 9–10, 20, 25–28, 30, 32. This is the edition that Seurat most probably read.

9. Ibid., p. 32. See D. P. G. Humbert de Superville, *Essai sur les signes inconditionnels dans l'art* (Leyden, 1827); and Barbara M. Stafford, *Symbol and Myth. Humbert de Superville's Essay on Absolute Signs in Art* (Cranbury, N.J., and London, 1979).

10. Blanc (note 8), pp. 445–46.

11. On Lehmann, see S. M. M. Aubrun, *Henri Lehmann 1814–1882. Portraits et décors parisiens*, exh. cat., Paris, Musée Carnavalet (1983).

12. Blanc, *Ingres* (Paris, 1870), pp. 65–66, 213, 225.

13. Blanc, "Eugène Delacroix," in *Les Artistes de mon temps* (Paris, 1876), pp. 38, 40, 43.

14. Blanc (note 8), p. 564.

15. Félix Fénéon, "Notes inédites de Seurat sur Delacroix," *Bulletin de la vie artistique* (Apr. 1922), cited in Broude 1978, pp. 13–15.

16. Blanc (note 13), p. 62.

17. Blanc (note 8), p. 554.

18. Blanc, *L'Oeuvre de Rembrandt* (Paris, 1880), p. xxv.

19. Thomas Couture, *Méthode et entretiens d'atelier* (Paris, 1867), pp. 222–26.

20. Couture's eclecticism has been compared with Seurat's approach by Albert Boime, *Thomas Couture and the Eclectic Vision* (New Haven and London, 1980), pp. 489–92.

21. Herbert 1962, pp. 35–36, 44.

22. The character of the drawings that exhibit both epic and naturalistic qualities is regularly cited as justification for this view. The misconception that Seurat worked exclusively with black and white for many years before turning to color (and that, when he did, his oil sketches became less dark and melancholic in mood) presumably goes back to the comments of critic Gustave Kahn. Kahn, who was not acquainted with the artist before 1886, elaborated this view in his obituary of Seurat. See Kahn 1891, cited in Broude 1978, pp. 22–25.

23. Herbert was the first to consider the possibility of Rembrandt's influence on Seurat. In 1956 he examined a portfolio of popular prints (unfortunately they were subsequently destroyed) in the possession of Seurat's descendants. Among them were several Rembrandt etchings and a few drawings. The reproductions after Rembrandt included some that had been printed in a supplement of *Le Figaro* of Apr. 8, 1882. See Herbert 1962, pp. 60–63. Norma Broude noted that the strong distortion of the Rembrandt originals seen in these reproductions occurred because of the heliogravure technique. As a result, the fine structure of the Rembrandt originals had vanished. See Broude, "The Influence of Rembrandt Reproductions on Seurat's Drawing Style: A Methodological Note," *Gazette des beaux-arts*, ser. 6, 86, 1293 (Oct. 1976), pp. 155–60. According to Herbert, the portfolio included reproductions that clearly did not come from *Le Figaro*. It is possible that they were from Blanc's book on Rembrandt (note 18), which was accompanied by original-sized engravings after Rembrandt by Firmin Delangle. In these the

copyist paid special attention to the reproduction of the light-dark effects and to perspective. The drawing is however quite crude, occasionally to the point of caricature.

24. See Dorra and Rewald 1959, no. 7. The painting is obviously very early, perhaps a bit later than 1880, the date indicated by Dorra and Rewald. Dorra described it as "unmistakably in the Impressionist manner" (p. lxxix). Related to Blanc's theories are the greenish halo above the red flowers; the use of little brushstrokes with different colors, especially in the background (inspired by Blanc's recommendation of "gradation"); and the arrangement of dark and light.

25. Hauke 1961, vol. 2, no. 572. This is probably because of the dissolution of the forms. The dating of the drawings of the years 1881–83 remains highly speculative.

26. Emile Zola, "Salons et études de critique d'art," in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. by Henri Mitterand (Paris, 1969), vol. 12, pp. 1003, 1034.

27. Théodore Duret, "Les Impressionnistes" (1878), reprinted in *Critique d'avant-garde* (Paris, 1885), pp. 63–64.

28. Charles Baudelaire, *Curiosités artistiques, l'art romantique, et autres oeuvres critiques*, ed. by H. Lemaître (Paris, 1980), p. 466, trans. in idem, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. by Jonathan Mayne (London and New York, 1970), p. 12. In this regard, it is interesting to note that, according to Kahn, Seurat had a drawing by Guys hanging in his studio. See Broude 1978, p. 22.

29. Emile Zola, *Le Bon Combat. De Courbet aux impressionnistes*, ed. by Gaeton Picon (Paris, 1974), pp. 38–39.

30. Herbert 1970, p. 25. These excerpts were taken from [E. Piron], *Eugène Delacroix, sa vie et son oeuvre* (Paris, 1865), cited in Broude 1978, pp. 13–15.

31. Signac 1891, p. 4; trans. in Herbert and Herbert 1960, p. 480. Richard Shiff gave a more detailed account of the concept of artistic freedom in Impressionist art criticism. He discussed the epistemological consequences of Zola's and other related definitions of art and convincingly argued that it can be conceived in a more subjectivist (romantic) and a more objectivist (naturalist) way. But he gave no emphasis to the idea that a vision that takes liberated temperaments as the basis of art can be seen in the ideological context of French republicanism. See Richard Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism* (Chicago and London, 1984), pp. 21–38.

32. Edmond Duranty, *La Nouvelle Peinture* (Paris, 1876), p. 33.

33. Ibid., pp. 31–32.

34. Zola (note 26), pp. 1015, 1018. Zola's new stance had been foreshadowed in his review "Lettres de Paris: Deux Expositions d'art au mois de mai," written for Russian readers of *Le Messager de l'Europe* (Jun. 1876); trans. in Zola (note 29), pp. 172–86.

35. J. K. Huysmans, "L'Exposition des indépendants en 1880," *L'Art moderne*, 2d ed. (Paris, 1902), pp. 103–104.

36. A much-disputed question, which cannot be resolved here, is whether this change in the critical climate created a crisis for Impressionism in about 1880. The view that it did is fully presented by Joel Isaacson in the exhibition catalogue *The Crisis of Impressionism 1878–1882* (Ann Arbor, 1980), pp. 1–47. See also Charles S. Moffett, "Disarray and Disappointment," in San Francisco 1986, pp. 293–309.

37. See Odile Rudelle, *La République absolue. Aux Origines de l'instabilité constitutionelle de la France républicaine 1870–1889* (Paris, 1982).

38. Hippolyte Taine, *Philosophie de l'art*, 2d ed. (Paris, 1881), pp. 97–256. Taine discussed (pp. 247–56) the Parthenon frieze in detail, interpreting it as a portrayal of Athenian society at the time. Seurat obviously saw the frieze this way, to judge from comments attributed to Seurat cited by Kahn (see note 42).

39. See Herbert 1962, pp. 63–65, 87–91.

40. The picture was shown in the Salon of 1884. It seems that Seurat's friend Edmond François Aman-Jean helped Puvis transpose it from the preliminary drawing to the large canvas. See Rich 1935, pp. 47–48; Robert Herbert, "Seurat and Puvis de Chavannes," *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin* (Oct. 1959), pp. 22–29; Benedict Nicholson, "Reflections on Seurat," *The Burlington Magazine* 104, 720 (May 1962), pp. 213–14; and E. F. Aman-Jean, *Souvenir d'Aman-Jean* (Paris, 1970), p. 18.

41. Dorra and Rewald 1959, no. 138b-j; Hauke 1961, vol. 2, nos. 627–35, 644. This issue cannot be discussed here.

42. In an article about Puvis de Chavannes, Kahn quoted "a young Impressionist innovator": " . . . the Panathenaic frieze was a procession. I want to make modern people move about as on these friezes in their most essential characteristics. . . ." See Kahn, "Exposition Puvis de Chavannes," *La Revue indépendante* (Jan. 6, 1888), pp. 142–43, cited in Broude 1978, p. 20. Herbert 1962 was the first to identify this "innovator" as Seurat (pp. 110, 168 n. 35).

43. David Sutter, "Les Phénomènes de la vision," *L'Art* (Jan.-Mar. 1880). See Homer 1970, pp. 18, 270 n. 27; Niels Luning Prak, "Seurat's Surface Pattern and Subject Matter," *The Art Bulletin* 53, 3 (Sept. 1971), pp. 367–78.

44. Schapiro 1935, p. 12, and 1978, p. 106.

45. House 1980, p. 348. According to House, the inclusion of the *Grande Jatte* in the background of *The Models* (pl. 5) is an ironic allusion to stylistic difference. The elegant, relaxed contours of the nudes in the later painting indicates that the stiffness of the figures in the earlier composition was intentional.

46. Ephraïm Mikhaël, *Poésie. Poèmes en prose* (Paris, 1890), pp. 131–33; trans. in Sven Loevgren, *The Genesis of Modernism*, rev. ed. (Bloomington, Ind., and London, 1971), pp. 218–19. The style of the anonymous introduction to the 1890 citation of Michel's poems suggests that it may have been written by Fénéon. This prose poem seems to be historically more directly related to the *Grande Jatte* than the accounts of it and its site by Jules Christophe, Gustave Coquiot, and other critics. Seurat may have met Michel at the regular Monday-night get-togethers of Robert Caze, to which he had been invited since 1884 at the instigation of Albert Dubois-Pillet. See Jean Sutter, ed., *Le Néo-Impressionnisme* (Neuchâtel, 1970), p. 16.

47. Baudelaire (note 28), p. 195.