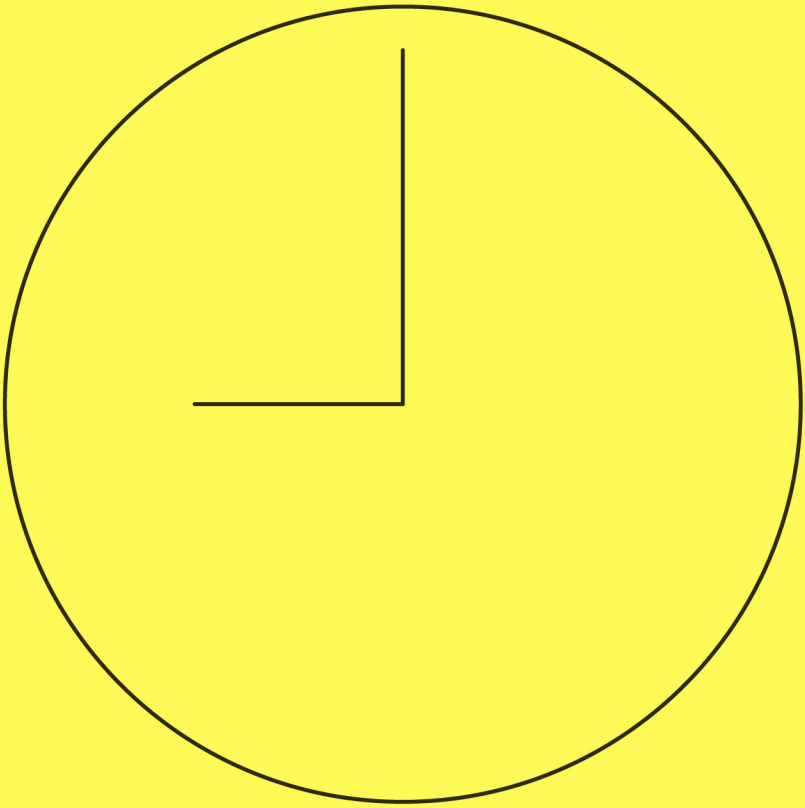

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL

BEITRÄGE ZUR
KUNSTGESCHICHTE
UND VISUELLEN KULTUR

#3–2025

BIBLIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION PUBLISHED BY THE DEUTSCHE NATIONALBIBLIOTHEK

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at http://dnb.dnb.de.

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The electronic open access version of this work is permanently available on https://www.arthistoricum.net and https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2025.3
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ISSN 2701-1569 / eISSN 2701-1550

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PICTORIAL REALISM AND TIME. EARLY MODERN TO NOW

ed. by Thomas Hughes
& Rachel Stratton

PART I

https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2025.3

ARTICLES – ARTIKEL

REVIEWS – REZENSIONEN

INTRODUCTION

PICTORIAL REALISM AND TIME. EARLY MODERN TO NOW

Thomas Hughes & Rachel Stratton

Introduction

In recent years, temporality has become a major, if not inescapable issue in studies of the visual. However, sufficient attention has not been paid to how expanded accounts of temporality in art history might have a bearing on how we understand the workings of pictorial realism, with notable exceptions, particularly Marnin Young's study of realism in late nineteenth-century France.[1] In looking beyond the French context, our special issue takes its cues from multiple directions, not least the marked development in contemporary art away from abstraction and towards new kinds of figuration. No doubt underlying such a development is the ongoing relevance, even necessity of realism: the need for artists and art to make a purchase on the planetary realities and ecological exigencies, as well as embodied experiences, particular to our time. Art historical investigations need to build upon such developments.

A good place to start is Merriam-Webster's definition of realism as "the theory or practice of fidelity in art and literature to nature or to real life and to accurate representation without idealization".[2] Expanding upon and challenging this concise definition through the particular lens of temporality, these essays approach realism as an attitude, a set of investments, and a particular approach to handling the conundrum of how to represent reality in all its manifold temporalities in the static, pictorial image. At the same time, these articles press home how the pictorial negotiation of temporality is often key to what might be called realism's conventional or even traditional concerns, namely the artist's intervention in their contemporary social reality.

1
Marnin Young, *Realism in the Age of Impressionism. Painting and the Politics of Time*, New Haven, CT/London 2015, which views a resurgence in realist practice in late 1870s and early 1880s France in terms of resistance to the emphasis on instantaneity in ascendant impressionism – and which still dominates the historiography of the period.

2
"Realism", *Merriam-Webster* (4 September 2025).

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
6/3, 2025, 297–302

https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2025.3.113433

In arriving at this characterisation of the concerns of pictorial realism, we find ourselves drawn to Raymond Williams's definition, from his still-provocative *Keywords. A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, published in 1976. As Williams points out, realism

> is a difficult word, not only because of the intricacy of the disputes in art and philosophy to which its predominant uses refer, but also because the two words on which it seems to depend, real and reality, have a very complicated linguistic history.[3]

With this in mind, we wish to point out that this special issue originated in a conference designed to open the discussion to a global range of speakers. However, we are clear about the limitations to our endeavour, not least those that are bound to language. This special issue, like our conference, is one conducted in English – the language that presides in art historical discourse and teaching in the Anglo-American world, and the one that was Williams's subject of inquiry. Without getting drawn too far into that tangled linguistic history, we can pinpoint the emergence of "realism" as a new word in the nineteenth century. Two senses of this new term in English (and also French) are most relevant for the investigations here: (1) the description of a physical world newly conceptualised as independent from mind or spirit (and therefore closely related to emerging notions of materialism); and (2) "a method, or an attitude in art and literature – at first an exceptional accuracy of representation, later a commitment to describing real events and showing things as they actually exist".[4] Staying with the second sense, this "commitment", as Williams explains, sprang from a desire on the part of artists to represent and also to intervene in the political reality of the day. It goes without saying that this motivation was not confined to nineteenth-century Europe, and articles here investigate the situation in post-independence Nigeria, the modern and contemporary United States, as well as modern Europe.

With all of that said, when dealing with pictorial forms of "realism", we as art historians are writing, inescapably, in a context profoundly shaped by dominant discourses about nineteenth-century French art. "More specifically", Michael Clarke writes in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms*, realism

> has been associated with a movement in French painting which lasted from c. 1830 to the 1860s and deliberately eschewed the obscure subjects normally found in academic

[3] Raymond Williams, *Keywords. A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, London 2014 [1976], 253.

[4] Williams, Keywords, 254.

> art in order to concentrate on portraying contemporary themes, including urban or rural life.[5]

This, of course, is often capitalised as Realism. This is a version of realism, furthermore, which, finding specific fruition in nineteenth-century France, is far from mutually exclusive from the general tendency identified by Williams and others. Artists are acutely aware of these histories of realism and throughout these essays we find artists engaging with realism as an attitude in art, and appropriating and transforming realism's critical legacies. In looking beyond the French context, then, this special issue nevertheless keeps that classic – if not hegemonic – definition of realism in full view, if only to throw into relief the finer discriminations of the individual contributors' arguments. We will also leave it to contributors to handle further nuances, if not enigmas, such as the proximity of other terms including "naturalism" and "documentary" to "realism".

Moreover, focusing on the ways artists represent temporality puts pressure on the first definition of realism in Williams's account. Many of the contributions in this special issue reveal that artists, in seeking to represent their physical and material world, particularly their environmental conditions, staged unmistakably *imaginative* encounters with the world and imbued their works with effects which stimulate the imaginative reception of the viewer. Temporality, we argue, is the key issue here: because feats of imagination, it turns out, are required in order to evoke the multi-temporal reality of experience in the static field of the pictorial. A particularly striking symptom of this is a repeated tension thrown up that goes beyond the dichotomy of realism and academicism so familiar from established nineteenth-century art histories. We find emerging, again and again, in the essays in this special collection, a paradox concerning realism, on the one hand – the tendency to represent and intervene in "real life" – and idealism, on the other – the capacity for art to imagine the world as it might be. At times, as the contributions show, these attitudes can become intertwined in such a way that the one depends on the other.

At this point it is worth us clarifying some of our own fundamental terms. By "pictorial", we mean simply "pictures": the essays here explore oil painting, watercolour, photography, ink wash painting, and also theoretical writings about pictorial media. Questions relating to film, video art, and gaming are beyond the specific remit of these essays, though we hope the situations covered here speak to those further realms of realism. "Temporality" refers to the human experience of time, as distinct from the physical phenomenon of time as it might be conceived outside of us. Temporality, then, is constructed and re-forged with each historical moment and with each unique human subjectivity. Human power is very much at

[5] Michael Clarke, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms*, Oxford 2010, 209.

stake in these constructions.[6] Each contribution tackles particular constructions of temporality in its own way. All that is left for us to add, eschewing the long history of philosophical speculations about the nature of the human experience of time, is that the forms of temporality encountered in these pictorial realisms can also operate at the level of something like intuition: artists evoke the possibility of a "before" and "after", a sense of time's lived uneven flow that, for all its specific historical contingencies, can be felt powerfully by the viewer today.

If artists' representations and interventions in realism have been understood predominantly socially, in terms of class, the essays in this special issue offer a widening of the politics of realism to evoke the environmental "reality" of a place, a society, a social situation, and an ecology.[7] We in turn hope this project speaks most directly to *our* contemporary social and planetary reality. In this vein, the essays in this special issue often attend to how artists represent human encounters with the other-than-human – with the land, both in labour and in enjoying labour's fruits, and with the land's other-than-human inhabitants; with pollutants; even with the machine, supposedly that most "unnatural" of humanity's creations. As developments in artificial intelligence (AI) bring fresh challenges to notions of the "authenticity" of experience, "the real" and "realism", we trust the contributions will continue to resonate with readers in the years to come.

The viewer of pictorial realism, when it is at its best – as the contributions demonstrate – is filled with a sense of multiple temporalities, of temporal plenitude, as they gaze upon and take in artists' attempts to capture their worlds. Furthermore, the realism of another, unfamiliar time and place has an uncanny ability to continue to speak to our co-ordinates later in time, as reality continues to unfold.

Spread across issues 3/25 and 4/25 of *21: Inquiries into Art, History, and the Visual*, the contributions not only cover a broad range of material in terms of location, medium, and subject, but also a range of approaches, from theoretically inflected re-interpretations of noted works and figures, to more locally scoped, social-historical excavation and analysis of the dynamics of particular situations. As such, this collection also showcases the diversity of art history being practised today.

Alex Potts, adopting a broad view in his article *Temporality and the Politics of Class in Nineteenth-Century Realism*, theorises the realist impulse that has long and continues to drive artists' work. Returning to pivotal writers such as Walter Benjamin and adapt-

6
For a particularly eloquent study along these lines, one which thinks this through in relation to gender and sexuality in literature, see Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds. Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, Durham, NC/London 2010.

7
Seminal studies that define realism in terms of class include: T. J. Clark, *Image of the People. Gustave Courbet and the Second French Republic, 1848–1851*, Greenwich, CT 1973; Linda Nochlin, *Realism*, Harmondsworth 1971.

ing Fredric Jameson's analysis of literary realism for the specific difficulties and paradoxes of the pictorial, Potts also establishes the breadth of this special issue in terms of both space and time, encompassing late twelfth-century China, nineteenth-century Russian, British and French painting, and twentieth-century photography.

In his contribution *The Rose and the Worm. Imaginative Realism and Time in Ruskin's Turner*, Thomas Hughes proposes that the English Victorian art critic John Ruskin's writings on the paintings of J. M. W. Turner amount to a nascent and wayward theory of realism, one most immediately geared towards the effects of the Industrial Revolution and opening onto questions of environment and the workings of the imagination. Hughes shows how Ruskin's concept of imaginative realism emerges from Ruskin's negotiation, in his criticism, of individual and collective memory.

In Joe Bucciero's essay, *Grossberg's Realism. Art, Industry, and New Processes of Life*, Carl Grossberg's pictures of machinery and architecture produced in Germany from the 1910s until his death in 1940, "precise, realist, yet also strange",

> are situated as dynamic responses not only to recent artistic developments but also to key questions of manual and intellectual labor in an environment increasingly given to technological rationalization

and in terms of "a realism based on a synthesis of 'old' and 'new' techniques, human and technological capacities".

While the slow, repetitive and even cyclical temporalities of the rural have long functioned as antitheses to urban temporality's epitomisation of modernity, in 1930s Czechoslovakia an array of different realisms was inscribed in the countryside through photography and film. Julia Secklehner's contribution *Rural Temporalities. Positions of Realism Between Social Documentary and National Photography in Central Europe* considers the fusing of urban and rural temporalities in the work of Irena Blühová and Karol Plicka to explore new rural realisms at the intersection of modernist form, ethnography, and reportage.

In her article *Photographic Realism in Nigeria. Akinọla Lasẹkan and Postcolonial Memory*, Perrin Lathrop focuses on the work of twentieth-century Nigerian artist Akinọla Lasẹkan. "Lasẹkan's realism", as Lathrop describes,

> merged the technological modernity, documentary quality, and reproducibility of photography with the socio-political truth-telling of satire and caricature to revise and monumentalize Nigerian histories, myths, and narratives,

little more than a decade after the former British colony became an independent nation. The disjunctures of realism, between the future once dreamt of and the realities of history, are played out in

Lathrop's analysis of relations between painting and photography, and between imagination and naturalism.

Interrogating contemporary artist Sayre Gomez's so-called X-scapes in his contribution *Slow Spectacle. Los Angeles in the Art of Sayre Gomez*, Daniel Spaulding argues that the distinctive quality of these hyperrealist paintings of Los Angeles has to do with their combination of temporalities, encompassing the contradictions of throwaway consumption, "slow spectacle", and the resistant times of the Earth.

This special issue stands as a landmark, not only in putting focus on the issue of temporality in interpretations of realism, but as a decentred and global collection of analyses of what we can call the realist impulse, and the many different forms it takes through time and space. While there are always risks in undertaking work that is unconventional in terms of historical periodisation and geographical range, we hope that these contributions and their framing in *21: Inquiries into Art, History, and the Visual* will enable a further deepening of our understanding of the many distinct and shared drives behind artists' commitment to realism.

Thomas Hughes's research focuses on nineteenth-century art and aesthetics. He has published widely on John Ruskin, and also Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Walter Pater and Marcel Proust. His work has particularly focused on queerness and representations of nature. Other writing considers subjectivity and language in Michael Baxandall and T. J. Clark.

Rachel Stratton is an art historian and curator whose work centers on twentieth- and twenty-first-century art. She is currently a guest curator at the Yale Center for British Art. Her research explores global modernisms, the entanglements of art, science, and politics, and artistic exchange between Britain and its former colonies.

ARTICLES
BEITRÄGE

TEMPORALITY AND THE POLITICS OF CLASS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY REALISM

Alex Potts

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
6/3, 2025, 305–338

https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2025.3.113434

ABSTRACT

Art with substantive realist resonance derives much of its impact from a capacity to visualize and bring to mind realities, social as well as more straightforwardly materialist, that matter to the larger world in which an artist lived. The present study addresses the temporal and imaginative complexities integral to the constitution of any realist art that has genuine traction. In so doing, it brings to the fore the alternatives that realist painting, particularly its "classic" nineteenth-century versions, offer to modern, and above all modernist, conceptions of realism as holding up for view a stilled moment from the ever-ongoing, ever-shifting, and on occasion rupturing dynamics of time. The analysis draws on literary theorizing of the temporalities of modern realism by figures such as Frederic Jameson.

KEYWORDS

Realism; Temporality; Imagination.

I. Realism

Art with any substantive realist resonance derives much of its impact from a capacity to visualize and bring to mind realities, social as well as straightforwardly materialist, that matter to the larger world. This could be said to characterize realism as a broader artistic tendency but applies in particular to the historically specific "classic" form of realism that took shape in nineteenth-century Europe and persisted as a point of reference for subsequent, modern and postmodern conceptions of and critiques of realism. This article draws attention to features of nineteenth-century realism that are occluded or misconstrued in dominant later modern understandings of it.[1] Such features, it is argued, are also evident to varying degrees in work produced in other historical and geographical contexts and can as a result be envisaged as pertaining to realism in a broader typological sense. They are not exclusive to nineteenth-century realism but rather are brought sharply into relief by it – a favouring of the lowly and everyday as distinct from the elevated or the ideal, and an attendant class politics that opens up the artistic imaginary to the lower classes as a significant presence in the broader social fabric. Arguing against a pervasive view of realist art, and nineteenth-century realist art in particular, as giving rise to fixed and reified images, mired in literal-minded, or quasi-photographic renderings of a once living and constantly changing reality, this article draws attention to features that invert such characterizations. The scene portrayed in a classic realist work might initially have an appearance of being suspended in static immobility, but extended viewing unfixes this, plunging it back into a larger temporal environment. Also important is the imaginative power mobilized in more compelling scenes conceived in a realist mode, giving them a resonance that extends well beyond what is literally seen. The article points to the presence of such features in comparable works in realist mode produced in other contexts and informed by somewhat different cultural and social agendas. The point is that no neat chronological limits can be placed on generic artistic categories such as realism if they are to possess substantive interpretative power. Equally, historicist periodizing only has validity in so much as it takes account of the non-contemporaneous tendencies disrupting any strictly phased model of historical development.

Nineteenth-century realism took shape as a self-conscious (if contested) cultural movement and set of commitments that established realism as an artistic tendency with a marked class political character, and as such made larger claims for itself than a simple aesthetics of lifelikeness or truth to nature. It was forged in a

[1] For a fuller treatment of these changing valences of realism, see Linda Nochlin, *Realism*, Harmondsworth 1971, 13–23 and Alex Potts, *Experiments in Modern Realism. World Making, Politics and the Everyday in Postwar European and American Art*, New Haven, CT/London 2013, 23–24, 29, 49–57. Recent structuralist and poststructuralist critique of realism has played an important role in consolidating a conception of realist depiction as a reification and freezing of the "real".

world where an emerging socialism and communism were giving new substance and urgency to the politics of class and processes of class struggle, and not entirely coincidentally producing formative critiques of capitalism such as Karl Marx's.[2] Thus realist art's rendering of temporally dynamic moments of intensified interest in everyday, mundane-seeming visible realities was closely allied to its capacity to picture significant aspects of the larger social world constituted by the lives and labours of those situated outside the privileged milieu of high art.

Such Issues are made very evident in the Russian artist Ilya Repin's famous *Barge Haulers on the Volga* [Fig. 1], one of several major paintings dating from the 1870s to engage with the material substance of a lower-class reality – work such as Hubert von Herkomer's in Britain and Max Liebermann's in Germany. The painting was clearly based on first-hand witnessing of a situation very like the one depicted and drew on details the artist recorded at the time. But it could not simply be a direct transcription of a scene observed at first hand, however much it might initially appear as such. Rather it was a scene projected and elaborated by the artist based on memories and records of what he had seen, and possibly too what he had heard and read about barge hauling and its exploitation of human labour. In many ways it appears vividly real because of the pictorial imagination exercised in its creation, even as its rendering of hard gang labouring may give the immediate appearance of an almost photograph-like truth to life.[3] For a start the spatial configuring, which somewhat distances the carefully delineated setting while allowing the figures to assert themselves as strong presence, is not strictly speaking photographic. Also the temporality conveyed is a complex extended one, not a single frozen instant. The scene is redolent of a relentless collective labouring that has no immediate prospect of relief, subject to an ineluctable temporal dynamic like the flowing of the river current against which the men are ever having to struggle. Complementary to this effect is a presentation of the individual figures as also existing to some degree in their own temporal worlds. While most are shown absorbed in and brutishly dulled by the relentless effort demanded of them, three show clear signs that their horizons can on occasion open out a little beyond this. One elder figure at the back glances to one side to take in something that has caught his attention. Another towards the front casts a glaring look ahead to whomever might be witnessing the scene, while the younger figure in the middle looks up, momentarily breaking from the coerced rhythm of heavy labour and mutely protesting the bonds binding him to it.

2
On social realism in nineteenth-century art and mounting concern with what at the time was termed the social problem, see Linda Nochlin, *Misére. The Visual Representation of Misery in the 19th Century*, London 2018, 7–26, and Alex Potts, Social Theory and the Realist Impulse in Nineteenth-Century Art, in: *Nonsite* 27, 11 February 2019 (15 January 2023).

3
David Jackson, *The Wanderers and Critical Realism in Nineteenth-Century Russian Painting*, Manchester 2006, 38–41.

[Fig. 1]
Ilya Repin, *Barge Haulers on the Volga*, 1870–1873, oil on canvas, 131.5 × 281 cm, St. Petersburg, The State Russian Museum. Wikimedia Commons, public domain, 28 December 2011 (13 October 2025).

A further level of temporal logic is manifest in the simultaneous presence of the rhythms of an older pre-industrial working life and the intrusion of a more modern one temporarily speeded up. A steam-powered ship approaching in the distance to the right of and behind the wooden sail-powered barge signals changes taking place that were competing with and further depressing the already impoverished means of subsistence of gang labourers such as these, before eventually eliminating their livelihood. Diverse temporal worlds converge, the slow plodding pace of physical hauling in a world dependent on heavy physical labour, and the mechanically driven pace of the steamship that was generating its own less immediately visible ways of exploiting human labour.

Realism of this kind is far from being an exclusively modern Western European phenomenon and it is important to take this into account even if not the main concern in the present context. Realist depictions of labour that convey social hardships associated with the working life, and are redolent of a certain class consciousness, are to be found in Song Chinese ink drawings for example. The visual vocabulary may be quite different, testifying to the presence of realist ambitions within visual representational practices that look very unalike. Realism does not manifest itself in any one clearly defined artistic "style". Rather it has to be worked into and exploit the artistic languages available to it, and from which it derives many of its aesthetic and semantic inflections. The contrast between the delicate pen work of the Song drawing of a *Buffalo and Herder* [Fig. 2] and the thick impasto of Gustave Courbet's painting of the *Poor Woman of the Village* [Fig. 3] is immediately striking. For a viewer schooled in Western European realist painting it might initially seem that the latter is considerably more realistic than the sparely rendered Chinese work (this is executed on a fan designed to be held up and viewed closely rather than looked at from a distance hanging on the wall). Depicted is a thin undernourished barefoot boy in tattered clothing, head bent down and partially hidden by a mass of unruly frizzy hair, returning with his meagre pickings from a hunt (a small bird skewered on a stick) driving an equally unkempt, undernourished and exhausted ox that can barely drag itself forward on its worn out hooves. This is the antithesis of the prevailing image of oxen in bucolic scenes of rural labour and agricultural fertility, though it is not alone and has a number of striking parallels.[4]

Evidently the Chinese drawing, dating from the twelfth century, was not informed by the same social or class consciousness as Courbet's nineteenth-century work, but it does nevertheless have its own realist social and political charge. There is abundant evidence of such painting representing, like similar scenes conjured up in poetry of the period, an awareness that conditions of extreme impoverishment endured by ordinary people was a social and eco-

[4] Bo Liu, The Multivalent Imagery of the Ox in Song Painting, in: *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 44, 2014, 33–84, here 34–37.

[Fig. 2]
Buffalo and Herder, Late 12th century (Southern Song), fan painting, ink and light colours on silk, 25.1 × 28.2 cm, Thomas D. Stimson Memorial Collection, Seattle Art Museum No. 48.208. Courtesy Seattle Art Museum. Photo Elizabeth Mann.

[Fig. 3]
Gustave Courbet, *Poor Woman of the Village*, 1866, oil on canvas, 86 × 126 cm, private collection. Wikimedia Commons, public domain, 12 March 2022 (13 October 2025).

nomic problem, rather than an entertaining curiosity or a condition that was simply part of their deserved lot.[5] If the Chinese work eschews the dense painterly materiality generally thought of as characteristic of artistic realism, its spare and subtly rendered delineation offers its own vivid picturing of the physical hardship and impoverishment endured by those struggling to secure a bare means of subsistence. In both works, interestingly, the figures seem to float in space rather than being anchored in a perspectivally elaborated spatial arena, thereby possibly giving a more compelling sense of the figures as both distinct from and enveloped within their bare, somewhat hostile, less than pastoral environment.

II. Temporality – Pictorial and Literary

There is a rather fuller exploration of realist temporalities in literary studies than in writing on the visual arts, partly because of a pervasive paradigm that visual art deals with static scenes while temporal phenomena fall under the aegis of the literary. Before visual art practice expanded beyond painting and sculpture and graphic work to include filmic work and performance, this distinction, famously established as a paradigm of theorization of the arts by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in his *Laocoon*, had a certain validity.[6] However this does not mean that picturing in the visual arts is of its very nature essentially atemporal. An image or picture may be literally static as material object, but its making and its viewing take place in time, as do also the phenomena it conjures up, however distant and slow paced any possibility of their immediate change appears to be. In negotiating this, a lot is to be gained by turning to the conceptualization of the temporalities of realism in literary theory. Fredric Jameson's analysis of the characteristic realism of the nineteenth-century novel in his study *The Antinomies of Realism* (2013) provides a particularly fruitful basis for an enlarged understanding of the temporalities that come to the fore in realist pictorial depiction.[7] He develops a particularly suggestive distinction between scene and the setting out of scene on the one hand, and story and the narrating of events and developments taking place over time on the other. For him, the unstable coexistence of these competing modes of presentation is a defining feature of the realist novel. The case being made here is that analogous if differently constituted temporal complexities inform the realism manifest in visual art.

5
Ibid., 68–81.

6
Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoon. An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, Baltimore/London 1984, originally published in German in 1766.

7
Frederick Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, London 2013. The basis of his theorizing is elaborated in the introduction and first two chapters.

We need, he argues, to

> have in our grasp the two chronological end points of realism, [...] its genealogy in storytelling and the tale, its future dissolution in the literary representation of affect. A new concept of realism is then made available when we grasp both these terminal end points firmly at one and the same time.[8]

His further elaboration of the polarity is particularly suggestive for a rethinking of the temporalities of pictorial realism:

> What we call realism will thus come into being in the symbiosis of this pure form of storytelling with impulses to scenic elaboration, description and above all affective investment, which allow it to develop towards a scenic present which in reality, but secretly, abhors the other temporalities which constitute the force of the tale or récit in the first place.[9]

The temporality of the récit, he explains, is the regime of "past-present-future" and the scope this gives for narrative development of personal identities and destinies, whereas the temporality of its alternative is "the impersonal consciousness of an eternal or existential present" which at its limit becomes "pure scene, a showing [...] altogether divorced and separated from story telling".[10]

The distinction Jameson makes develops out of and gives new substance to similar dualities current in critical debate about the formal constitution of the nineteenth-century realist novel. A key instance is the duality between showing and telling, which received its classic formulation in Percy Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction* (1921), and has been invoked not only in discussions of the realist novel such as Jameson's[11] but also in studies on time-based filmic work.[12] While showing in Lubbock's sense can be related to scenic elaboration and telling to story telling and narrating the parallel is far from being exact. Lubbock envisaged his distinction on a

8 Ibid., 10.

9 Ibid., 11.

10 Ibid., 25.

11 Ibid., 21.

12 André Gaudreault, *From Plato to Lumière. Narration and Mostration in Literature and Cinema*, Toronto/Buffalo 2009. In his account, showing is associated with staging and mostration, and telling with textual narration (70–71). This distinction is taken up in Lúcia Nagib's recent study of realism in cinema: Lúcia Nagib, *Realist Cinema as World Cinema. Non-cinema, Intermedial Passages, Total Cinema*, Amsterdam 2020, 77–79.

somewhat different basis from Jameson, namely between showing as dramatic presentation and telling as literary elaboration. In the former scenes and events appear to unfold in the reader's immediate purview (as in a theatrical performance), whereas in the latter, an author's or narrator's perspective intervenes, establishing an overview of the material being related.[13] On the one hand there is what Lubbock also calls a "scenic" mode in which the story "is brought immediately to the level of the reader", and on the other what he terms a "panoramic" or tableau-like mode in which the story "is overlooked from a height".[14] The telling or panoramic mode, in Lubbock's theorizing of it, includes descriptive elaboration as well as narration.

Lubbock's duality thus confuses or blurs the temporal distinction Jameson envisaged as primary. For Lubbock, the cumulative effect of an extended telling might be a tableau existing in an extended present, rather than a development or dramatic story. At the same time, his understanding of the turn taken by later novel writing, such as Gustave Flaubert's and Henry James's, does concur with Jameson's view that such work was moving to a denarrativized scenic or proto-modernist mode.[15] Of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856) for example, Lubbock commented: "Who, in recalling the book, thinks of the chain of incident that runs through it, compared with the long and living impression of a few of the people in it and of the place in which they are set?" Lubbock's analysis was to some extent haunted by issues of temporality that preoccupied Jameson, though, interestingly, his approach also opened up the possibility of a more fluid interplay between the temporality of the pictorial and literary. For him, the overall effect of the literary elaboration of a sequence of events and situations did not necessarily come together as an overarching story or dramatic development (he was not particularly interested in plot). It could also do so as a kind of tableau, a pictorial panorama disposed in space.[16] The use of the term tableau rather than picture is suggestive in this context in that

13
The distinction is nicely articulated in Lubbock's terse encapsulation of it as one between "close direct vision" and "wider survey". Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction*, London 1923, 201.

14
Ibid., 72.

15
Ibid., 82. Lubbock's use of the word scenic is rather different from Jameson's. He had in mind scene as enacted directly in drama rather than as de-narrativized presentness. Writing about Henry James's late novel *The Ambassadors*, he explained how everything "is rendered, whether it is a page of dialogue or a page of description, so dramatically because even in the page of description no-one is addressing us, nobody is reporting his impression to the reader. The impression is enacting itself in the endless scenes and images" appearing "directly to the onlooker [...] not by way of any summarizing picture-making". At the same time, the overall impression he envisaged the book making resembles that made by the scenic work in Jameson's analysis: "Yet as a whole the book is all pictorial, an indirect impression received trough [the main character's] intervening consciousness beyond which the story never strays." Ibid., 170.

16
See the passage on James's novel writing quoted in the previous note.

it calls to mind a freely disposed array or ensemble that need not be structured compositionally or narratively as an integrated totality.

Closer to Jameson's duality was György Lukács's classic formulation of the conflicting imperatives of literary narration and description on which Jameson quite clearly draws[17] and which has also found an echo in studies of visual art.[18] The duality was developed by Lukács in an effort to distinguish between the earlier realism of novels such as Honoré de Balzac's, which he saw as grounded in some overall narrative totality, and in this respect representative of an earlier more 'heroic' phase of bourgeois culture, still struggling for dominance, and what he diagnosed as the corrupted realism of later nineteenth-century naturalism. This, the decadent art of the age of undisguised bourgeois hegemony, he envisaged as disintegrating into endless uninflected elaborations of factual detail and transient states of mind. The ideological thrust of Jameson's account of the demise of realism as its storytelling, narrating component gave way to pure scenic elaboration is somewhat different from Lukács's. He was not categorically anti-modernist like Lukács and did not envision this development in quite the same way as symptomatic of a general degeneration of bourgeois culture and its social fabric in the age of high capitalism and imperialism. Yet he similarly traces the vicissitudes of realism from its formation to its dissolution at the end of the century as realism's hybridity of story and scene gave way to what he saw as a proto-modernist regime of scenic affect.[19]

How might Jameson's conception of the hybrid nature of literary realism, its compounding of a scenic present and the temporal dynamic of story, as well as Lukács's and Lubbock's related negotiation of dualities embedded in the novel form, play out in realist picturing? On the one hand there is narrative or history painting which stages an event or drama, framed by scene or setting, often by figuring a pregnant moment suggestive of a transitioning between past and future, a cusp as it were in the trajectory of an ongoing

17
Lukács emerges as key figure at several points in Jameson's study. Jameson, Antinomies of Realism, 4–5, 210–211, 266–267.

18
Svetlana Alpers, Describe or Narrate? A Problem in Realistic Representation, in: *New Literary History* 8/1, Autumn 1976, 15–41. Alpers though inverts Lukács's priorities by making a case for the value of the descriptive mode found in early modern Northern European art as distinct from the usually privileged narrative mode associated with the art of the Italian Renaissance.

19
The text dealing with this issue that had the widest impact was Georg Lukács, Narrate or Describe. A Preliminary Discussion of Naturalism and Formalism, in: id., *Writer and Critic*, London 1970, 110–148. The essay first came out in Russian in 1936 and was disseminated more widely when published in German in *Essays über Realismus*, in 1946 and subsequently in a fuller version, that includes a short discussion of Russian socialist realism omitted in the English translation, in *Probleme des Realismus*, Berlin 1955. On Lukács's analysis and the filiations and differences between it and Jameson's, see Alex Potts, Lukács. Marxism and the Politics of Form, in: Brian Winkenweder and Tijen Tunali (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Marxisms in Art History*, New York/London 2025, 74–87.

narrative.[20] At the other extreme is purely scenic, largely non-figurative work, such as landscape or still life. Realist picturing generally operates in an intermediate zone, neither pure scene nor presentation of an event or action. What is pictured rather is a situation [Fig. 4 and Fig. 5], elaborated in the stance and positioning and presence of the figures, as well as the overall tenor of their environment. The composition may not be governed by the dynamic thrust of some single clearly definable narrative, but suggestions of narrative are not excluded. Also, realist picturing, rather like much realist novel writing, is marked by democratic distaste for hierarchy, social or aesthetic, and stays clear of exceptional or spectacular events of the kind featured in traditional history painting or literary drama.[21] Instead it deals in more ordinary situations and experiences, that have their own temporality and significance.

While in such realist art the visualizing of telling particularities of situation or milieu may take precedence over compositional devices coordinating the actions of the figures, the sense of temporality conveyed is not that of a static, unchanging present. Nothing dramatic is happening in a painting such as Max Liebermann's *Workers in a Beet Field* [Fig. 4],[22] but it is not as if nothing at all is happening. There may be little in the way of storytelling, and attempts to achieve this through anecdotal contrivance tend to detract from a realist work's effect. At the same time, such realist picturing is permeated by small-scale temporal fluctuation and change. The figures are presented as engaged in low-level action as well as interaction with their material environment and one another. The regularized, repeated physical activity appropriate to much agricultural labour featured widely in realist art, and did so for reasons that were formal as well as ideological. The sense of repetitive but variegated action called to mind was at one remove from mere mechanical repetition, while the scene depicted was enlivened by suggestions of an ongoing durational temporality rather than a static one frozen in time. Once, however, realism became an entrenched mode in high art, the picturing of such field labour lost much of the political substance still evident in this work by Max Liebermann. This formalizing of physical labour, moreover, rarely achieved the realistically variegated dispersal and fluctuating rhythmic effect of Liebermann's scene of labouring.

20
Lessing, Laocoon, 19–22, 78–79. Lessing makes the point that a pregnant moment is not literally an instantaneous one: "in great history paintings, the moment is always somewhat extended" (91).

21
Georg Lukács developed an influential sociologically grounded analysis of this formative feature of the realist novel in his study *The Historical Novel*, London 1962, 149–151. The latter first came out in 1937 in a Russian journal and became more widely available with the publication of a German translation in 1955.

22
Matthias Eberle, *Max Liebermann, 1847–1935. Werkverzeichnis der Gemälde und Ölstudien*, vol. 1: *1865–1899*, Munich 1995, 106–107.

[Fig. 4]
Max Liebermann, *Workers in a Beet Field*, 1873–1876, oil on canvas, 99 × 209 cm, Hannover, Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum. Wikimedia Commons, public domain, 7 January 2012 (13 October 2025).

[Fig. 5]
Hubert von Herkomer, *Eventide. A Scene at the Westminster Union* (Aged Female Wing of St. James's Workhouse in Soho), 1878, oil on canvas, 110.5 × 198.5 cm, Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery. Wikimedia Commons, public domain, 2 October 2022 (13 October 2025).

The matter of fact presentation of the scene Liebermann depicted, the decidedly realist take-it-or-leave-it disposition of the figures and their material environment, does not adhere to a spatially consistent photograph-like naturalism, but is amplified by simple yet effective pictorial contrivance. The figures digging in the field do not sink into the pictorial space of a window-like view but are thrust forward from the flattened backdrop-like vista behind, prompting the viewer to take some note of them and the sense they might have of their situation. The effect is enhanced by the woman pausing with folded arms, leaning on her hoe and facing out, adding a potentially confrontational note to the scene. The actuality of the labouring depicted lies not just in accurate visual documentation of a working process but also in the pictorial evocation of direct physical engagement between the bodily actions of the workers and the stuff of soil and vegetation. The picturing also extends beyond a literal materiality to embrace social and psychological registers relating to the lot and experience of the figures subjected to the drudge of this repeated physical labouring, while taking what opportunities there are momentarily to break from their mostly joyless immersion in it. Their presence, both individually and collectively, endows their labouring with a significance that grows in the viewer's awareness on extended consideration. Their labouring may be thoroughly earthbound, as Lieberman's painting in its very substance makes clear, at the same time that what compels the figures to persist in their work in the way they do are outside social forces over which they have no control, but from which, as Liebermann indicates, they from time to time break away. Their labours are clearly embedded within their immediate rural environment, just as the depictions of them working are in the landscape of Lieberman's painting. At the same time they do lead lives within this environment rather being merely trapped within the labouring it entails. A capacity for enduring and even to some degree resisting subjection to the endless toil some of them show opens out to horizons, however limited, that extend beyond the literal ground they are digging.

III. Temporalities of the Pictured Situation

How might one characterize the temporality informing a scene such as this, a persisting, slightly changing situation that exists in time even as it does not articulate the trajectory of something taking place conveyed by the transition from one scene to the next in a novel? Philosophical analysis of time consciousness – of the forms in which time becomes manifest to the mind – aims to reconcile two different conceptions of the immediate apprehension of time: firstly, awareness of the single moment and secondly, awareness of temporally extended phenomena such as change, persistence, and succession. Broadly speaking, time consciousness that embraces both has been conceptualized in three different ways. One could be described as a cinematic model (though first formulated well

before the invention of the photographic snapshot and cinema) in which the awareness of the moment has no temporal extension, and the mind infers phenomena such as change and succession from a sequence of separate snapshot-like apprehensions. The second is a durational model in which immediate consciousness extends over a temporally extended span rather than being limited to a punctual instant, in effect internalizing direct apprehension of change, succession, etc. Thirdly there is the intermediate or retentional model. While positing, like the cinematic model, non-durational awareness of an immediate present, it envisages this present as filled out with a changing array of retentions of moments that have just taken place as well as protensions of ones immediately about to occur. Some immediate sense of past-present-future, of succession is built into awareness of what has become a partially extended present moment.[23]

The retentional model has immediate consequence for how one might envision the durational temporality of the array of figures in a realist work such as Liebermann's *Workers in a Beet Field* [Fig. 4]. They are not frozen in place but animated by suggestions of some ongoing gesturing or action that extends into a very immediate past and future. But more is at issue than this contracted, localized level of temporal succession and change. The figures are evidently figures with pasts and possible futures located beyond this immediate present. Their situation in a larger sense, both socially and materially, is not entirely circumscribed by their immersion in the present process of labouring. Their labouring life consists of more than just hacking and hoeing, even if such labouring fills up a large part of it. They may not be harbouring revolutionary thoughts, or even concerted aspirations for a different life, but they are at least somewhat more than the physical tasks on which they spend much of their time. What principally invites this apprehension is the pictorial projection of them as presences, both individual and collective, looming up before the viewer. Unlike traditional genre painting, which tends to keep to a restricted small-scale format, categorically different from that of history painting, not only is the scale of the whole picture more expansive, but the single figures occupy a larger, more substantive proportion of the picture space. In contrast to the usual comic or caricatural figures of traditional

[23] Barry Dainton, Temporal Consciousness, in: Edward Nouri Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* , 2022, §1.1. (15 January 2023). Husserl was a key figure in modern thinking about the phenomenology of a retentional mode of time consciousness. His ideas are set out most fully in Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, Bloomington 1964, first published in German in 1928. A shortened version of this analysis had already appeared in German in 1913. On such issues of temporality as they bear on figurative sculpture, see Alex Potts, Temporality in Modern Sculpture, in: Kristin Gjesdal, Fred Rush and Ingvild Torsen (eds.), *Philosophy of Sculpture. Historical Problems, Contemporary Approaches*, New York/London 2021, 50–71.

genre painting, those in realist paintings such as Liebermann's loom as evident presences within their immediate environment.[24]

Liebermann's painting presents the viewer with a figurative ensemble, a social world, subject to the temporal imperatives of gang labour, a long established feature of rural economic activity. A rather different social situation and its attendant temporality comes to the fore in a painting by the Anglo-German artist Hubert von Herkomer, *Eventide: A Scene in the Westminster Union* [Fig. 5].[25] The latter institution was a well-known London workhouse, part of which had become a facility to house impoverished old women, more a place of confinement than a refuge for the elderly of the kind provided by charitable foundations catering to the somewhat better off and socially more respectable. The dominant temporality here is a regulated institutional rather than workplace one. This becomes the "natural" rhythm of life for its inmates, whose lives drift around within its confines. The work or labour of the Victorian workhouse, however, has not entirely been left behind. Several elderly women busy themselves with needlework, a prevalent form of female sweated labour at the time.[26] Intermittently pursued, such labouring forms a complementary variation on the pictured environment's temporality of aimless institutional life, punctuated by the temporal round of the times of day that prevail in the world outside, as well as the more extended round of the phases of life, ending in old age, as suggested by the title.

There is another issue at stake in Herkomer's rendering of the scene, namely his endowing several of the figures with the signs of a certain autonomy and self-possession, even while making the impoverished and oppressively barren conditions of their workhouse environment vividly evident. The figures embody lives that extend beyond the immediate material circumstances of their present situation, sometimes evidently so as in the pose and look of the seated figure in the right foreground. The balance of affect between figures and setting was a precarious one, with one critic complaining that the artist's "laying stress upon the cheerless

24
This is also true of a few earlier paintings of peasants and workers, such as those by the Le Nain brothers (for example, Louis (or Antoine?) Le Nain, *Peasant Interior with Old Flute Player*, ca. 1642, oil on canvas, 54.1 × 62.1 cm, Fort Worth, Kimball Art Museum, and Louis and Antoine Le Nain, *Blacksmith at His Forge*, ca. 1640–1642, oil on canvas, 69 × 57 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre). These similarly broke with mainstream conventions governing the depiction of the lower classes in genre paintings of the early modern period and into the earlier nineteenth century, even as they remained relatively modest in scale. In most early modern and pre-realist genre paintings of lower-class life, the figures featured as entertaining motifs and pictorial staffage rather than presences that asserted a certain autonomy.

25
Lee MacCormick Edwards, *Herkomer. A Victorian Artist*, Aldershot 1999, 76–78. The painting had its origins in Herkomer's design for a print titled *Old Age – A Study at the Westminster Union* published in *The Graphic* 15, 7 April 1877, 324–325.

26
The commentary in *The Graphic* on Herkomer's print quoted him as saying "These old bodies formed a most touching picture. Work they would, for industry was still in them; but it was often most childish work – still it was work. The agony of threading their needles was affecting indeed." Ibid., 326–327.

spaces of the bare wall and the expanse of boarded floor [...] overpowers the elements of purely human interest".[27] Still, signs of self-possession evident in some of the foreground figures and the subtlety of the pictorial modulations of light and dark on floor and walls mean that this is no conventional scene of unadulterated poverty and decrepitude. These qualities, together with the painting's gritty realism, put it in a different register from standard Victorian depictions of poverty with their overt appeals to self-indulgent sentiment and pity. There is a further rather different dimension to the social imaginary at work in the conception of the painting. The milieu formed by this assembly of figures is quite distinctive: they are all more or less in the same situation, theirs is a shared lot, they inhabit the same environment, but absent is vital social interaction or bonding with a shared past. They exist within a community, but one in which they remain largely estranged from one another, brought together as they are by the happenstance of material impoverishment and the impersonal institutionalizing solutions to social problems developed in the nineteenth century.[28]

Pictorial contrivances enhance the sense of this as a scene in constant low-level movement, most particularly the subtly illuminated and shadowed expanse of floor. This is not a hole in the picture, an empty space setting off the figures, but a constantly shifting arena reshaped by figures coming and going. It plays an integral role, like the walls, in configuring a scene that encompasses a variety of localized situations and activities, with figures sewing, walking, sunk in fatigue, and some in small groups that include young attendants supervising and helping out. Rather than one integrated grouping of figures, the picture displays an ensemble of situations and scenes, a panorama of a social world unfolding before one that cannot be taken in with a single glance. Some scenes loom larger and clearer in the foreground, others almost fade away in the background, complemented by others presenting themselves as a little more immediate but still not wholly legible. This is rather in the way that the present scene being read in a novel exists with a degree of immediate clarity, while recollected scenes that come to mind at this juncture are partly shadowed or faded in the distance of time. The way in which Lubbock envisions the sequential presentation of scenes in a novel as taking shape in the reader's mind in what he calls a "tableau" offers a possibly fruitful basis to think about the temporal effect of the layout of scenes in a picture such as Herkomer's.

27
Edwards, Herkomer, 76–77.

28
The distinctive formation of such alienated togetherness began to preoccupy social theorists in the late nineteenth century. A systematic distinction was established between the traditional community (*Gemeinschaft*) held together by closely felt social bonds and the atomized society (*Gesellschaft*) characteristic of the modern world governed by impersonal social and economic forces, principally those of the market, in which such customary bonds had been dissolved. This theorizing received its classic formulation in Friedrich Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* first published in Leipzig in 1887.

Like Jameson, Lubbock sees a scenic formation displacing a narrative one in the later nineteenth-century novel. Plot and dramatic action, still very much a feature of the work of earlier writers such as Balzac, give way to scenic or tableau-like elaboration.[29] He may be less strictly historicist in his conception of this development than Jameson. He does for example identify significant instances of a scenic mode in the work of earlier novelists such as William Thackeray.[30] However, he shares with Jameson the view that, over the course of the nineteenth century, classic realism ceded to a form of novel writing in which an extended present, an affect-laden landscape of the mind, took precedence over dramatic action and larger developments occurring over time. In Jameson's telling, this new form of novel writing was not categorically anti-realist but not quite realist either, though the overriding thrust of his analysis is that the scene/story dichotomy defining the temporal logic of nineteenth-century novel writing ceased to have any real purchase with the advent of full-blown modernism. As a result the larger history of realism and modernism his analysis implies can in effect be folded into a standard stagist view of historical change and development in which the earlier mode gives way to and is replaced by a structurally distinct more modern one. It is possibly more fruitful to privilege Jameson's handling of the temporal antinomy central to his understanding of realism over this less fully argued historical framing of such realism's supposed beginning and end.

Such analysis parallels art historical theorizing of the demise of realism and its displacement by distinctively modern or modernist conceptions of pictoriality. Michael Fried's analysis has been particularly influential in this regard. Broadly speaking he argued that nineteenth-century pictorial realism, in order to convince as being credibly real rather than artificially staged or theatrical, required the scenes or situations depicted to appear durational and absorptive. Eventually, however, efforts to sustain this mode of representation and the slowed-down durational temporality it entailed became unsustainable. In the work of the later nineteenth-century avant-garde the slow absorptive scenes of realism gave way to a more instantaneous pictoriality, as in Impressionist painting and above all the work of Edouard Manet. Such pictures were grasped, not as depicted scenes slowly unfolding before the viewer, but above all as flat painted surfaces facing the viewer and seizing the viewer's

29
Lubbock does not set out a history of successive modes of novel writing. Nevertheless he does draw attention to the significant difference between the part played by story and dramatic action in the work of Balzac and Dickens (for whom "it is the plot [...] that makes the shape of his book", Lubbock, Craft, 129) and their relative absence in later work by Henry James and Flaubert.

30
Ibid., 97. In a particularly resonant passage (109), Thackeray is described as roaming "to and fro in his narrative, caring little for the connected order of events if he can give the sensation of time, deep and soft and abundant [...]".

attention through their striking instantaneousness of effect.[31] The logic of such work operated against the representational ambitions of realism, and its slower paced, more measured temporalities, and also contained *in nuce* the imperatives of full-blown, radically abstract modernist work. There are affinities in this understanding of a move to pictorial abstraction with Jameson's theorizing of a shift from realism to the subjectivized presentness of the modernist scene and evacuation of the temporality associated with story telling.[32] In modernist abstraction, the interplay between the visual impact made by the situation depicted and that of the paintwork applied to a flat surface in realist work gives way to a situation in which the painting itself becomes pure presence, an immediately apprehended play of form and colour, evacuated of suggestions of a depicted real world and its lived temporalities. The temporality of such an abstract modernist scene is that of subjectively felt presentness detached from the temporalities of an objectively constituted real world.

Fried's formal modelling of the shifting priorities at work in the change from a realist mode to a modernist one have been developed further in some notable recent studies on late nineteenth-century art. These offer a cultural historical fleshing out of Fried's schema, bringing into play changes taking place more broadly in conceptions of temporality in a world dominated by the pace and accurate time measure of modern industry and the increasing mechanization of travel and communication. In this context, the effects of instantaneity that Impressionist work cultivated could be seen as having an immediate affinity with modernity's speeded-up temporalities and more precisely specified measure of moments in time that the slower durational temporalities of classic realist work lacked.[33]

While temporality is central to both the literary and art historical understandings of the modern vicissitudes and demise of realism, the art historical take tends to be rather more historicizing and formalistic. With Jameson, "classic" realism internalizes an antinomy of scene and story telling that eventually issues in the dominance of pure scene in modernist work. The conceptualizing of a shift from realism to a mode that tends to prevail in art historical writing is a more simply constructed move between distinct modes set in opposition to one another – modernist abstraction versus

31
Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s*, Chicago/London 1996, 290–291. Marnin Young offers a substantive elaboration of this theorizing of pictorial temporality in *Realism in the Age of Impressionism. Painting and the Politics of Time*, New Haven, CT/London 2015, 4–5, 186–187.

32
Jameson himself pursues such an affinity in a brief discussion of Monet's late haystack and cathedral series. Jameson, Realism, 41.

33
Young, Realism, see particularly 7–9. André Dombrowski, Instants Moments Minutes. Painting and the Industrialization of Time, in: Felix Krämer (ed.), *Monet and the Birth of Impressionism*, Munich 2015, 36–45, here 37–39, and elaborated more fully in his book, *Monet's Minutes. Impressionism and the Industrialization of Time*, New Haven, CT/London 2023.

realist representation, instantaneity versus duration. Realist practice is presented as being unsustainable in the face of an increasing incompatibility with the overriding temporal and formal imperatives of its times. Jameson's literary model of realism's hybrid nature has some considerable relevance to a rethinking of artistic realism that might complicate such categorically historicizing narratives of its demise.[34] Generally speaking, art historical models are more fully embedded than Jameson's literary one in a stagist conception of historical development with its clearly delimited phases increasingly at odds with the conflict-riven, unmanageable beast of present-day historical temporality. The more persuasive models in these circumstances are ones of combined and uneven development, in which ruptures and interactions between persistent, often archaic survivals and emerging modernities constitute the very fabric of the modern.[35]

IV. Variegated Temporalities of Realism

While a sense of concrete actuality – both materialist and social – is central to realist art, so too are memory and imaginative projection. The scene depicted is conceived, not just as a sum total of objectively neutral visible and palpable facts but as a pictorially and imaginatively compelling phenomenon. Such projection has a lot to do with what makes the scene come vividly alive. As Peter Brooks put it in his classic study *Realist Vision*, "Realism in the quest to know and to detail the environment in which ordinary experience unfolds discovers that vision alone is inadequate, that sight triggers the visionary".[36] Significantly the German naturalist painter Max Liebermann titled the apologia for his realist commitments "The Phantasy in Art". Arguing against the view that symbolist or abstract, non-naturalist work drew more on the resources of phantasy or imagination than realist or naturalist work, he maintained:

> The more naturalistic a painting is, the more it must be filled with phantasy (phantasievoller), for the phantasy of the painter lies not – as Lessing still presumed – in the representation of the idea, but in the representation of reality or,

34
The prevalence in writing on the visual arts of such strictly structured periodization, in the shift from one mode to another, becomes a matter of historical necessity and has a lot to do with the influence of early formalist accounts of modern art's trajectory of development. Clement Greenberg's writing in particular has had a significant impact in this respect, directly and indirectly, on Anglo-American historical and critical writing about modern art and modernism.

35
Steve Edwards, Time's Carcass. Art History, Capitalism, and Temporality, in: Winkenweder and Tunali, Marxisms in Art History, 146–161.

36
Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision*, New Haven, CT/London 2005, 147.

> as Goethe aptly expressed it, "The spirit of reality is the true ideal."[37]

There is the further point that in visual art, the temporal realities of the scene or situation depicted have to be imagined by both the artist making it and the audience viewing it. These temporalities are not just literally there, even to the extent that they are in a literary text by way of its exposition of a succession of scenes and events. Realism in visual art tends to favour projections of change that are not particularly dramatic or eventful, and remain anchored in a relatively mundane, everyday pacing of time. Big events are not in themselves a focus, but rather the impact they have on aspects of the everyday registered in its shifting complexion over time. But there is also a current in realist work where a situation is infused with suggestions of a special, intensified moment embedded in a more ordinary, measured temporality. Performance, both as event and as repeated ritual occasion, seized the attention of several artists, not as an act that transcended the everyday, but as a phenomenon that played a significant part in the lives of both performers and audience.

Edgar Degas's depictions of the ballet are particularly intriguing in this respect. The scenes on which he focused are ones in which the special temporality of the performance as theatrical event has largely been displaced by that of humdrum, demanding work, training, and rehearsing. Seeing the realism in a work such as Degas's *The Rehearsal of Ballet Onstage* [Fig. 6] though can be difficult nowadays, obscured as this art now is by phantasies about the glamour of ballet. Close consideration, though, reveals aspects of the scene, as well its conception, that bring it into the ambit of the realist work being discussed here. Balletic dance involves taxing physical exertion and strict adherence to disciplined routines, as is made quite explicit in some of Degas's more prosaic depictions of dance classes and rehearsals.[38] The inclusion of two seated male figures on the far right of *The Rehearsal of Ballet Onstage* also brings into view the system of male authority organizing and disciplining the female dancers' work. The more prominent one, lounging back in his chair, with the relaxed demeanour of being very much in

37
Max Liebermann, Die Phanstasie in der Malerei (1904/1916), in: *Die Phantasie in der Malerei. Schriften und Reden*, Frankfurt am Main 1978, 39–66, here 52.

38
Edgar Degas, *The Rehearsal*, 1878–1879, oil on canvas, 47.6 × 60.9 cm, New York, The Frick Collection. Because the current custom of wearing informal gear for training and most rehearsal work was not yet established, modern viewers can gain a misleading impression of the seemingly glamorous costuming of the dancers in these scenes by Degas. That female labour was a concern of Degas's is also evident in paintings he did of laundresses and milliners. There is the further issue that the class politics of the ballet were very different at the time. For critical commentary noting Degas's truthfulness, not just to the class origins of the young ballerinas, but also to the punishing physical routines they underwent affecting their bodies, as did hard physical labour generally amongst the working classes, see Carol Armstrong, *Odd Man Out. Readings of the Work and Reputation of Edgar Degas*, Chicago 1991, 49–54, and Joris-Karl Huysmans's critical commentary on Degas's work in the Impressionist exhibitions of 1880 and 1881, quoted in Ruth Berson (ed.), *The New Painting. Impressionism, 1874–1886, Documentation*, San Francisco 1996, vol. 2, 291–292, 348–349.

[Fig. 6]
Edgar Degas, *The Rehearsal of the Ballet on Stage*, ca. 1874, oil, turpentine, traces of water-colour and pastel over pen-and-ink drawing, 54 × 73 cm, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, public domain.

charge, is likely the director of the ballet.[39] A further social dynamic is introduced with the top-hatted gentleman seated beside him, one of the ballet's wealthy patrons who would have enjoyed privileged backstage access to the dancers.[40] The rehearsal setting brings these social dynamics into much closer view than could the picturing of a performance, even as elements of the latter's intensifying glamour enter into the scene depicted. The physical effort, disciplining and attentiveness to the demands of the job required of the dancers would of course momentarily be made to vanish for the audience in the "magical" moment of performance.

Aspects of the overall disposition of the scene in Degas's painting bear intriguing similarities to that in Herkomer's more evidently social realist picturing of the marginalized impoverished elderly in a gloomy workhouse environment [Fig. 5]. In the Degas there is a similar informal array of figures in different small-scale scenes or situations. Some dancers are taking a break and stretching or lounging about and waiting for their "moment", some practising and one in particular galvanizing herself and performing a difficult dance routine for consideration by the director. The environments in the two paintings are at one level radically different. At the same time, both are interiors enclosing figures within a social world with its set routines and temporal rhythms. In both, the skilfully contrived yet unostentatious pictorial elaboration of light and shade and expanses of empty floor enhance the effect of continually fluctuating change in contrast to static staging. The overall impact of the ensemble of scenes and figures in the two paintings could with some justification be seen as a pictorial equivalent to the literary tableau created by an informal succession of scenes and situations and low-key events in a novel.

The British artist Walter Sickert, a friend of Degas's, who was also drawn to picturing the realism of performance, adopted a rather different perspective, focused on the audience rather than performers or potential performers, and situated socially slightly downscale. His theatre of choice was that of the London Music Hall rather than the Paris Opéra.[41] Degas too did on occasion give prominence to the audience, but mostly in picturing the lower or at least more hybrid class milieu of the café concert rather than

39
The male dance master busily corralling the performing girl's efforts was also a figure of considerable authority and of much higher social status than the dancers.

40
The Paris Opéra at the time was notorious for the affairs it facilitated between dancers and moneyed male supporters. Degas himself produced a series of monotypes on the subject, originally designed as illustrations, but rejected, for a light-weight publication about these seedy goings-on. Armstrong, Degas, 65–70.

41
Thomas Kennedy, The Music Hall and the 'Stage-Struck Artist' and Billy Rough, The Much-Abused Apostle of Music-Hall Art. Sickert and the Stage, in: Emma Chambers (ed.), *Walter Sickert*, London 2022, 54–56, 80-83.

the theatre.[42] In paintings such as *Little Dot Hetherington at the Bedford Music Hall* [Fig. 7], Sickert skilfully brought together the spot-lit performer and the audience receding in the dark, the one embodying the intensified moment of the theatrical event, the other the impact of this on the more ordinary, ongoing temporality of watching and witnessing.[43] The unusual pictorial contrivance, with the performer reflected in a mirror in which the backs of the audience and of the chairs on which they are sitting are visible, makes for a scene in which the performance seems to manifest itself in the immediate purview of the audience, contracting the literal distance between the two. Which is after all true to the audience's experience of moments of intensive engagement when nothing else seems to exist except for what is happening on stage.

Sickert also depicted the audience in its own right in pictures where the exceptional moment of performance was not viewed directly but reflected in the animated and excited responses it elicited. The painting, *Gallery of the Old Bedford* [Fig. 8], of which there are several versions, features the lower-class audience seated high up in the gods or gallery, far from the stage, but drawn in more actively to the performance enthralling them than the more "polite" audience, reclining in comfortable seats nearer the stage.[44] Such paintings are striking instances of the imaginative reach of what one might call "the time of realism", capable of projecting moments of performative intensity within a more mundane, ongoing passage of time, and in Sickert's case, doing so with a sharpened awareness of social class. *Gallery of the Old Bedford* pairs nicely with *Little Dot Hetherington at the Bedford Music Hall*. One of Little Dot Hetherington's best-known song routines was "The boy I love is up in the gallery", and this featured in the painting's title at an exhibition held in London in 1895.

A further aspect of Sickert's art is worth highlighting in this context. Some of his more remarkable works, and the same can be said if to a lesser extent of Degas too, stand as significant exceptions to a historical logic whereby at some point modernism can be seen as definitively displacing realism as a viable pictorial mode. Even so it should be noted too that Degas, in his very late work, did shift to a more modernist mode, following a trajectory in line with that traced

42
Degas's more fully elaborated painting of the audience at a balletic performance, *The Ballet Scene from Meyerbeer's Opera "Robert le Diable"* (1876, oil on canvas, 76.6 × 81.3 cm, London, Victoria and Albert Museum), differs from Sickert's music hall works in that the audience is shown casually continuing its everyday social exchanges rather than attending to the performance.

43
Wendy Baron and Richard Shone (eds.), *Sickert Paintings*, New Haven, CT/London 1992, 74–75.

44
Ibid., 96–97, 100–101.

[Fig. 7]
Walter Sickert, *Little Dot Hetherington at the Bedford Music Hall*, 1888–1889, 51 × 61 cm, private collection. Alamy.

[Fig. 8]
Walter Sickert, *Gallery of the Old Bedford*, ca. 1894–1895, 76.2 × 60.4 cm, Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery. Bridgeman Images.

in Jameson's analysis, but rather less wholesale.[45] The materiality of medium, already exploited in his earlier, more realist phase, began to play an increasingly central role in his late ballet pictures, with the affect in these deriving to a considerable degree from a dissolution of realistic detail in abstract, partly colourist effects that have their own distinctive subjectively felt charge. There is an immediately apprehended intensity, but this has less to do with concrete realities of scene and figure than with atmospherics generated by materially variegated patches of colour and intriguing, closely felt concatenations of exposed body parts and textured fabric.

Undeniably, formal and temporal dualities such as scene and story, or realist depiction and modernist abstraction, as well as more traditional ones of imaginative intensity and commitment to realist factuality, do carry considerable weight. While their imperatives are at some level in structural conflict with one another, there are also conjunctures, however, where they come together productively. When and how that becomes impossible cannot be determined in advance, however much the imperatives conveyed by certain situations in the history of art and culture might suggest this to be the case. Such a situation, a very real one at that, was created for instance by the enthusiastic take-up of anti-realist forms of abstraction and privileging of the instantaneous over the durational by artists and critics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries committed to a modernist or avant-garde agenda. At the same time several of Sickert's achievements, as well as Degas's, are reminders to take seriously the persistence of significant alternatives to such conceptions of the artistically modern in a society riven as it was by radically uneven and conflicting social developments.

A realist art inevitably continues into the present day, however much its modalities of conception and presentation have changed. The late Allan Sekula's work is a significant case in point. Evident in his work is a rigorous commitment to the documentary facts of photography. This coexists with modernist unease about the instability and potential duplicity of such apparent truthfulness, along with an imaginative amplification of what can be made immediately apparent to the eye not dissimilar to that in earlier realism. His photographic images exist at one level as almost casual snapshots of visual fact. But much more is invested in them than this. In a

[45] See for example Edgar Degas, *Dancers on a Bench*, ca. 1898, pastel on paper, 58 × 83 cm, Kelvingrove, Glasgow Art Gallery and Museums. This makes for an instructive comparison with Degas's earlier *Two Dancers on a Stage* (ca. 1874, oil on canvas, 61.5 × 46, London, The Courtauld); one dancer's attentive examination of the other's realization of a difficult dance step establishes this as a rehearsal rather than performance scene. Both works are to some degree hybrid, in that both draw to vital effect on realist and proto-modernist tendencies, even as social and material particularities of the scene depicted in the earlier one are more fully elaborated, and in this sense more realist. The comparison was suggested to me by Thomas Hughes.

work such as *Fish Story*,[46] the individual images are drawn into a complex interweaving of textual narration and visual imaging – of story and scene – whose breadth and scope are more akin to that found in the realist novel than in earlier realist painting. The latter generally kept within the constraints of the single picture, even as the resources of pictorial elaboration were exploited to amplify the dynamic complexity and imaginative reach of the situation depicted beyond what might be captured in a straightforwardly naturalistic, snapshot-like view. Significantly Sekula was assiduous in remaining true to the documentary particularity and limits of the photographic image and stayed clear of the pictorializing cultivated by many of his contemporaries such as Jeff Wall. For him the single photographic image took on its resonance and larger political meaning through incorporation in a broader "tableau", whose inherent dialectical complexity and diversity of imaged actualities would be capable of truthfully registering the complexity of the modern capitalist world's unstable and conflict-ridden realities.[47]

His *Shipwreck and Worker, Istanbul* [Fig. 9] was conceived as one element in a photowork titled *TITANIC's Wake*, inspired by the artist's response to the environmental damage caused by an elaborate set erected at a site in rural Mexico for the re-enactment of the sinking of the Titanic in James Cameron's 1997 Hollywood blockbuster. In the writing accompanying the display of this series of photographs, writing which Sekula saw as being integral to the work's substance, he dwelt on the mythic resonances that historically scenes of shipwreck once possessed, as instanced for example by Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, and which linger on in the modern world of air travel and container shipping. At the same time, he muses on the debris and damage left behind by Cameron's empty, melodramatic recreation of the legendary sinking of the Titanic.[48]

It is important that the viewer take from the photo the very ordinariness, almost banality of the wrecked hulk and of the seemingly thankless and endlessly repetitive task of clearing up the debris, along with more imaginatively resonant ideas of seafaring and wreckage. Such a conception was developed further in a later series, *Shipwreck and Workers*, featuring assorted scenes of shipping and labour in the modern world.[49] Sekula appended a particularly

46
Fish Story took the form both of a gallery display and a book with alternating text and portfolios of photos (Allan Sekula, *Fish Story*, Rotterdam 1995).

47
Gail Day and Steve Edwards, *The Documentary Poetics of Allan Sekula*, London/New York 2025, see particularly 77–110.

48
Allan Sekula, TITANIC's Wake, in: *Art Journal* 60/2, 2001, 26–37; Hilde Van Gelder, A Matter of Cleaning Up. Treating History in the Work of Allan Sekula and Jeff Wall, in: *History of Photography* 31/1, 2007, 68–80.

49
Gelder, A Matter of Cleaning Up, 68–69, 77.

[Fig. 9]
Allan Sekula, *Shipwreck and Worker, Istanbul*, from the series *TITANIC's Wake*, 1998–2000, cibachrome print, 86.4 × 127 cm, courtesy the Allan Sekula Studio.

suggestive text to this work that makes specific reference back to the image *Shipwreck and Worker, Istanbul*:

> A worker shovels debris in front of a freighter
> blown up against the shore:
> the Angel of History absorbed in his task,
> disguised as one of Brueghel's peasants.
> Build a sequence based on another picture that is not part of the sequence.
> Many work and few rule.[50]

"Build a sequence..." references his working procedure here of taking the image, *Shipwreck and Worker, Istanbul*, from *TITANIC's Wake* as the inspiration for a further series, in which the image itself does not feature directly, even as its powerful associations resonate there and leak into the two alternative views of the same wrecked hulk. Sekula here inventively exploits the way in which a realist image's "scene" can become the locus of a network of narratives, or "récits", to bring into play again Jameson's formulation of the temporal complexities of "classic" realism.

The larger politics of such realist renderings of labour are insistently highlighted in Sekula's formulation "Many work and few rule", then given a further imaginative twist by his characterizing the apparently ordinary scene of labouring as "the Angel of History absorbed in his task, disguised as one of Brueghel's peasants". The angel of history conjured up in Walter Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History* momentarily makes its appearance in the world of the labouring peasant presented in Pieter Brueghel the Elder's famous painting *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* [Fig. 10].[51] In other words, the modern apocalyptic image of Benjamin's angel momentarily cohabits the artist's earlier vision of never-ending, everyday, persistent labouring oblivious to whatever unusual eruptions might drop from the sky.

Brueghel is one of the great early masters of pictorial realism. His intriguing picturing of Icarus's failed mythic exploit is a particularly dramatic instance of his work's thoroughly earthbound nature, true to the ongoing temporalities of the commonplace, but also open to imaginative leaps, exceptional moments when time gains an unusual intensity, moments that are quite out of the ordinary yet also embedded in reality's mundane persistence.[52] Like

50
Allan Sekula, Shipwreck and Workers (15 January 2023).

51
Sekula quoted the passage from Benjamin in the original more extended text appended to the entry on *Shipwreck and Workers* posted on the digital website mip (museum in progress) (12 September 2025). The text has subsequently been replaced with a shorter one.

52
On Brueghel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, see Robert Baldwin, Peasant Imagery and Breugel's Landscape with the Fall of Icarus, in: *Komthistorisk Tuiskrift*, 55/3, 1986, 101–114, and on Brueghel more generally, T.J. Clark, *Heaven on Earth. Painting and the Life to*

[Fig. 10]
Pieter Brueghel the Elder, *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, ca. 1560, oil on canvas, 73.5 × 112 cm, Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Arts. Wikimedia Commons, public domain, 30 December 2012 (13 October 2025).

the paintings by Sickert and Degas, Brueghel's picture presents the imaginative intensity of the exceptional moment as occuring within, and in his case engulfed within, the rhythm of ongoing everyday living. His art acts out more explicitly than its nineteenth-century counterparts an inversion of the elevated dramatics of history painting effected by the down to earth and more lowly situational logic of realism. At the same time, its imaginative leaps and mythic associations are utterly inseparable from reality-bound social and material processes, a quality it shares with the Sekula. This historical shuttling from nineteenth-century realism, forward to modern art, and backward to a rather exceptional early modern low life depiction, makes manifest key underlying features of classic realism that recur across historical time.

Alex Potts is author of *Flesh and the Ideal. Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History* (1994 and 2000), *The Sculptural Imagination. Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (2000), and *Experiments in Modern Realism. World Making, Politics and the Everyday in Postwar European and American Art* (2013). He was co-editor of *Modern Sculpture Reader* (2007/2012) and has written widely on modern and contemporary sculpture. Currently he is completing a book on naturalist depiction of labour and the social in later nineteenth-century art. Recent publications include the articles *Temporality in Modern Sculpture*; *Social Theory and the Realist Impulse in Nineteenth-Century Art*; *Impressionism and Naturalism in Germany. The Competing Aesthetic and Ideological Imperatives of a Modern Art*; *The Aesthetics and Politics of Pictorial Realism in Peter Weiss's Writing*; and *The Social, Real and Imagined, in Stanley Spencer's Figurative Art*. He taught at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor where he was Max Loehr Collegiate Professor in the History of Art.

Come, London 2018, ch. II, Bruegel in Paradise, 74–126 and Joseph Leo Koerner, *Bosch and Brueghel. From Enemy Painting to Everyday Life*, Princeton, NJ/Oxford 2016, 268–364.

THE ROSE AND THE WORM

IMAGINATIVE REALISM AND TIME IN RUSKIN'S TURNER

Thomas Hughes

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
6/3, 2025, 339–368

https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2025.3.113435

ABSTRACT

John Ruskin does not make much use of the term 'realism' to describe J. M. W. Turner's art in *Modern Painters* (1843–1860) but in *The Three Colours of Pre-Raphaelitism* (1878), looking back over his earlier, sprawling, five-volume treatise, Ruskin says that his work there revealed Turner to have been a 'realist'. Avoiding broader histories of that most nineteenth century of art terms, this essay begins by taking Ruskin at his word. Close readings of the passages on Turner in *Modern Painters* will show how there is indeed a kind of nascent realism being theorised by Ruskin, one that includes but extends beyond the well-trodden territories of industrialisation, and social and environmental tumult. The essay will show how there are two main, intertwined strands of Ruskin's examination of Turner's imaginative realism, the phenomenological and the ecological. Temporality overarches and frames Ruskin's analysis in *Modern Painters* in ways that shed light on realism's fundamental procedures as an attitude in art practice and art criticism. In particular, the essay considers how Ruskin's emerging concept of realism negotiates individual and collective memory. In doing so, the essay offers up implications that might be taken into a thorough re-evaluation of the history of nineteenth-century painting in Britain in relation to the emerging art term 'realism' and its use by one of the period's most prominent art writers.

KEYWORDS

John Ruskin; Joseph Mallord William Turner; Realism.

John Ruskin does not make much use of the term 'realism' to describe J. M. W. Turner's art in *Modern Painters* (1843–1860) but in *The Three Colours of Pre-Raphaelitism* (1878), looking back over his earlier five-volume treatise, Ruskin says that his work there revealed Turner to have been a 'realist'.[1] Why might Ruskin in 1878 want to claim 'realism' for his work on Turner, claim that he had been writing about realism all along since 1843? Avoiding broader histories of that most nineteenth century of art terms, my essay begins by taking Ruskin at his word, insofar as my close readings of the passages on Turner in *Modern Painters* will show how there is indeed a kind of nascent realism being theorised by Ruskin here – or rather, nascent *realisms*. I will be paying particular attention to the workings of Ruskin's visual analysis of Turner and offering my own visual analysis in the process.

Curators and scholars have long been at pains to show that Turner, for all his Romanticism and Classicising idealism, attempted something like an accurate depiction of human life in history. Sam Smiles has argued that Turner expands the possibilities of conventional topographical art into "historiated landscapes"; David Blayney Brown and Amy Concannon that Turner's art engaged in representing the birth of the modern world.[2] In a sense, the literature already offers us a 'realist' Turner. This, the argument goes, is the Turner who captured scenes of contemporary social and industrial reality amidst fast-changing English landscape in unforgettable works like *Leeds* (1816) [Fig. 1] or *Shields, on the River Tyne* (1823). My argument is not merely that Ruskin, responding to the critics who had ridiculed Turner, said all that before, but that this idea – that Turner managed to capture something of human experience at a time of almost apocalyptic social change – is only one aspect of *Modern Painters*, which is cathedral-like in its vast, interwoven complexity. To put this another way, to consider Turner's 'realism' only through the lens of industrialisation and modernity is to let slip from our grasp other, equally extraordinary and still-gripping components of Turner's realism, which Ruskin's examination in *Modern Painters* helps us see. There are two main strands of Ruskin's examination of Turner's realism, the phenomenological and the ecological: both feed into an expanded notion of the social in Ruskin, though these are not terms or discriminations Ruskin, nor perhaps Turner himself, would have recognised. To take things in

1
John Ruskin, The Three Colours of Pre-Raphaelitism [1878], in: Edward Tyas Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (eds.), *The Works of John Ruskin*, 39 vols., vol. 34, London 1908, 147–174.

2
Sam Smiles, *Eye Witness. Artists and Visual Documentation in Britain 1770–1830*, Aldershot/Brookfield, VT 2000, 170. David Blayney Brown, Amy Concannon, and Sam Smiles, *Turner's Modern World*, London 2020. For an ecocritically minded extension of this way of seeing Turner, see Frédéric Ogée, "A New and Unforeseen Creation". Turner, English Landscape and the Anthropo(s)cene, in: Charlotte Gould and Sophie Mesplède (eds.), *British Art and the Environment. Changes, Challenges and Responses Since the Industrial Revolution*, New York 2022, 166–181.

[Fig. 1]
J. M. W. Turner, *Leeds*, 1816, watercolour and ink on paper, 29.2 × 43.2 cm, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

turn. One of Ruskin's preoccupations in *Modern Painters* is to demonstrate how an embodied phenomenal experience of the world is rendered by Turner (over and over again) in static pictures. That preoccupation gives onto another. What does it mean to look at pictures evoking past embodied experience of nature in the present, the mid-nineteenth century? These are two sides of the same realist coin for Ruskin: Turner's phenomenology and his ecology. In different but related ways, time is ultimately at issue in both of these preoccupations. Temporality therefore overarches and frames Ruskin's nascent realisms in *Modern Painters* in ways that shed light on realism's fundamental procedures as an attitude in art practice and art criticism. In particular, we will see how Ruskin's emerging concept of realism negotiates individual and collective memory.

As Caroline Levine has convincingly put it, "Victorian realism's own theorists focused less on the verisimilitude of the product than on the labour that went into its making". Ruskin counts among those Victorian theorists of realism, though his significance in this vein, as Levine's article attests, continues to reverberate louder in histories of English literature than in histories of European painting. That is a pity. In Levine's understanding, realism as theorised by Ruskin and practised by novelists such as George Eliot, is fundamentally a means of reaching out, reaching out towards the real and towards the Other, with art as mediation.[3] Levine's formulation is a good starting point, but the pictorial realism that Ruskin theorises at length is more bizarre than Levine's account would suggest. Fundamentally, reaching out to the Other, to the world, to realism, entails for Ruskin confronting time, change and the place of beauty in the world, and how these values acquire form in pictorial representation. Realism, for Ruskin, therefore opens onto the imagination. Ruskin's writings on painting generally, and Turner especially, approach from various angles a notion of what we might call imaginative realism.

Looking at the five volumes as a whole, at their most extreme – at their most paradoxically simple – Ruskin's work on Turner seems to suggest: to pollute this world is to pollute our imaginations. Drawing on myth and history, geology and meteorology, poetry and imagination, in Ruskin's argument distinctions between human and other-than-human, between imagination and world, between ideal and real, break down. The interconnectedness of our imaginations with the material world is what Turner saw, modern filth what he painted, and hell is what will come to be. Yet, despite the gloom – despite the evident *reality* of all this in 1878 – Ruskin left something open, the possibility of regrowth. He parts with the readers of *Modern Painters* on a final ambivalence between the worm of gnawing decay and the regenerate rose of scarlet beauty. The worm is in the

[3] Caroline Levine, Visual Labour. Ruskin's Radical Realism, in: *Victorian Literature and Culture* 28/1, 2000, 73–86, here 75. See also Part 1 in Levine's book *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense. Victorian Realism and Narrative Doubt*, Charlottesville, VA/London 2003.

ascendant at this point, to be sure, but Ruskin's rose never quite fades entirely.

As this special issue shows, 'realism' cannot be pinned down. Rather, its value as a category of the history of art, and as a practice of art, lies with the way it enfolds all manner of concerns, passions, commitments, within the conviction that art *can* take a view on life. A case like Ruskin's epitomises the value and enduring power of realism. Ruskin's particular versions of realism stand as alternative and still-misunderstood attitudes to the aesthetic and ethical opportunities afforded by art's imperfect representation of the real.

I. All That Is Solid or Spectral

In *The Three Colours of Pre-Raphaelitism*, an essay which appeared, in two parts, in the journal *Nineteenth Century* in 1878, Ruskin looks back over the birth of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, particularly referring to three pictures, reproductions of which Ruskin says happened to be hanging in a bedroom he was recently staying in: Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *The Annunciation* (1849–1850), John Everett Millais's *The Blind Girl* (1856) and a small watercolour by Edward Burne-Jones, which Ruskin says depicts a marriage-dance, and which Ruskin's editors E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn plausibly identify as *The King's Wedding*.[4] Turning to the common approach or attitude supposedly uniting the three pictures, Ruskin writes:

> I believe the reader will discover, on reflection, that there is really only one quite common and sympathetic impulse shown in these three works, otherwise so distinct in aim and execution. And this fraternal link he will, if careful in reflection, discover to be an effort to represent, so far as in these youths lay either the choice or the power, things as they are or were, or may be, instead of, according to the practice of their instructors and the wishes of their public, things as they are *not*, never were, and never can be: this effort being founded deeply on a conviction that it is at first better, and finally more pleasing, for human minds to contemplate things as they are, than as they are not.[5]

Things as they are or were, rather than things as they are not: the Pre-Raphaelites, Ruskin says, painted reality. Not the unreal bewinged archangel approaching reverently the Virgin through, perhaps, a highly geometric composition of garden and colonnade; but, rather, a youth with flaming feet waking up a poor teenage girl

[4] John Ruskin, The Three Colours of Pre-Raphaelitism, in: *Nineteenth Century* 4/21, November 1878, 925–931 and 4/22, December 1878, 1072–1082. See id., Three Colours, in: Cook and Wedderburn, vol. 34, 151, n. 2.

[5] Id., Three Colours, in: Cook and Wedderburn, vol. 34, 155. Ruskin's emphasis.

in her untidy bed (albeit, as Ruskin himself admits, an "English" girl, and not a "Jewish" one). A poor blind girl and infant sitting at the edge of a common on an English summer's day.[6] This is reality as the Pre-Raphaelites painted it. The question of how Burne-Jones's art – Burne-Jones being a second-generation Pre-Raphaelite, not coming out of his shell and into his artistic own until the 1870s, and more typically associated with the Aesthetic Movement – fits in with this view is, in itself, a matter of deep fascination, though one for another place. Thinking more particularly of the Rossetti and the Millais, what Ruskin is saying is not perhaps surprising at first glance. The idea that the Pre-Raphaelites dispensed with academic convention and offered a fresh look at the world was an established one. But *The Three Colours of Pre-Raphaelitism* gets bolder, more sweeping and daring in its theoretical claims: Ruskin goes on to explicitly label this Pre-Raphaelite attitude or purpose – to paint things as they really are, or were, or may be – a kind of 'realism'. Describing himself as having been in "more or less active fellowship" with the Pre-Raphaelites, "the men who founded our presently realistic schools", he quotes a lengthy passage from the third volume of *Modern Painters* (1856) and then states:

> [...] but if the reader can refer to the close of the preface to the second edition of the first, he will find this very principle of realism asserted for the groundwork of all I had to teach in that volume.[7]

Ruskin's note on the same page adds: "The *third* edition was published in 1846, while the Pre-Raphaelite School was still in swaddling clothes."

Ruskin's claim that the first volume of *Modern Painters* was in some sense a consistent theory of realism is the nugget of gold in an otherwise reiterative piece. It is reached only after Ruskin's lament – again familiar enough to readers of Ruskin, and of European Romanticism for that matter – for the disappearance of reverence and mystery in an age of mechanistic knowledge, and then a reiteration of Ruskin's old narrative of the decline of Renaissance culture around the time of Raphael. The brevity of the *Nineteenth Century* essays makes it harder to feel the nuance and relevance in Ruskin's thinking. But that nuance and relevance, I suggest, are easier to find

6
Interestingly enough, Suzanne Fagence Cooper has suggested Ruskin's ex-wife, Effie Millais, obtained the older girl's "dirty and threadbare" petticoat from an old woman she saw while out shopping for poultry in Bridgend, just outside Perth. Effie is said to borrow the petticoat and later return it along with a shilling for the poor old woman's trouble. In Cooper's narrative, Effie thereby provides the solution to John Everett's artistic dilemma as to the petticoat's colour, in the nick of time. Suzanne Fagence Cooper, *The Model Wife. The Passionate Lives of Effie Gray, Ruskin and Millais*, London 2010, 144. This anecdote opens onto the longstanding question of the "authenticity" of such Pre-Raphaelite representations of poverty-stricken individuals and the possibly condescending, or downright exploitative, means of their production. I am grateful to Dr Sarah Gould for drawing my attention to Cooper's account.

7
Ruskin, Three Colours, in: Cook and Wedderburn, vol. 34, 162.

in the mass of thoughts – I want to say delightsome mess – about art and 'truth' making up *Modern Painters* as a whole, and it is this mess – shifting, organic, dynamic – that Ruskin is pointing us to in 1878. In fact, as I will be arguing, it is in the later volumes of *Modern Painters* that a nascent realism emerges really compellingly. In those volumes, Ruskin actually clears the way to argue that art, by merit of its very realism, can transform reality, the world itself, despite the pessimism also present on its pages. It is not just that *Modern Painters* was so widely read by artists and writers, was so deeply assimilated into the culture of the nineteenth century and, by turns, into the bedrock of modernism; though that is justification enough. But as I have alluded to above in my introduction, and as I will be going on to demonstrate, Ruskin's almost-articulations of realism in *Modern Painters* actually describe tensions that remain not only present but, as other contributions to this special issue also demonstrate, central to contemporary analyses of the phenomenon of realism. Of fundamental importance is the role of imagination in Ruskin's conception of art that strives to represent reality. That said, to remain with the 1878 essay a bit longer, Ruskin does have very pointed things to say as he looks around at the late nineteenth century. He finds a "solid, or spectral – whichever the reader pleases to consider it – world of ours". In this account of the modern world, it is not quite that all that is solid has melted into air; in fact, it is not that at all. Rather, says Ruskin, modern mechanical binarism cramps the human imagination, reducing existence to empty materialism or thinning it out into phantasmagoria.[8] Modernity has a need, more than ever, of imaginative realism, Ruskin is saying.

Turning now to the second edition (1844) of *Modern Painters*, volume 1 (1843) where Ruskin redirects his 1878 reader, Ruskin says that the rationale of his first book on art was to counter the critics of Turner who complained that his pictures looked nothing like "nature" (or reality) and "by thorough investigation of actual facts" to prove that "Turner *is* like nature, and paints more of nature than any man who ever lived". Some critics declined to agree and Ruskin triumphantly quotes a piece of such criticism, from *Blackwood's*, which says, "'It is not [...] what things in all respects really are, but how they are convertible by the mind into what they are *not*, that we have to consider.'" Ruskin suggests that the aim is rather to "undergo the harder, but perhaps on the whole more useful, labour of ascertaining what they are".[9] Reality itself needs to be straightened out if realist art is to be appreciated.

Contextualising Ruskin in relation to mid-Victorian empiricism, the literary critic Peter Garratt intriguingly suggests *Modern Painters* can be read as an "empiricist drama" narrating a kind of journey towards knowledge (or "Truth") and also staging the

[8] Ibid., 163.

[9] John Ruskin, Modern Painters, vol. 1 [1843–1844], in: Cook and Wedderburn, vol. 3, 51–52.

inevitable breakdown of that journey, as subjectivity is continually re-foregrounded and the unknowability of the world, and of Turner, is reinscribed throughout the "roughly textured" treatise – and, in particular, at the anti-climactic ending of volume 5 (1860).[10] This reading is compelling, particularly in its acknowledgement of the generative and disruptive conceptions – eruptions – of subjectivity throughout Ruskin's aesthetics. In what follows, my interpretation for the most part sits alongside Garratt's overarching reading, but in shedding light on the particular twists and turns in Ruskin's argument I never lose sight of the fact that, while Ruskin's aesthetics are evidently far-reaching, Ruskin was principally concerned with theorising a specifically pictorial realism. In doing so, particularly in the later three volumes (1856–1860), Ruskin often moved beyond the intellectual conventions available to him to produce a compelling written account of the force of visual representation that was, in essence, anti-philosophical in its contradictory and intuitive unfolding.

The first third or so of *Modern Painters*, volume 3 is devoted to a discussion of realism, although Ruskin, confusingly enough, more often uses the term "naturalism" here. In general, the terms 'realism' and 'naturalism' overlapped extensively in the nineteenth century. It is true that in Victorian usages naturalism continued to have connotations particular to science (as in naturalist theology, scientific naturalism) and therefore was oriented, in general, towards 'nature' or the other-than-human. On the other hand, realism increasingly came to suggest, as Raymond Williams points out in his indispensable *Keywords* (1976), a kind of art that sought to represent human reality amidst a material world.[11] Furthermore, Chapter 2 of Ruskin's third volume is entitled Of Realization and concerns the degree to which, "supposing the subjects rightly chosen, they ought on the canvas to look like real angels with real violins, and substantial cats looking at veritable kings; or only like imaginary angels with soundless violins, ideal cats, and unsubstantial kings".[12] In some sense, the whole resumption of the *Modern Painters* project after the hiatus after volume 2 begins with the question of the relation of verisimilitude to imaginativeness in pictorial representation. Given Ruskin's horror of jargon and philosophical nit-picking – which could sometimes descend into farce, as it does here – there is little sense in trying to distinguish clearly in Ruskin between naturalism and realism. In what follows, it will become clear how Ruskin's usages of "naturalism" and variants in 1856 in

[10] Peter Garratt, *Victorian Empiricism. Self, Knowledge and Reality in Ruskin, Bain, Lewes, Spencer and George Eliot*, Madison, WI/Teaneck, NJ 2010, ch. 2, Ruskin's *Modern Painters* and the Visual Language of Reality, 71–101, "roughly textured" is on p. 76.

[11] Raymond Williams, *Keywords. A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, London [1976] 2014, 254.

[12] John Ruskin, Modern Painters, vol. 3 [1856], in: Cook and Wedderburn, The Works of John Ruskin, vol. 5, 35.

Modern Painters, volume 3 chimes with his statement in 1878 that the premise of his whole project on Turner was realism. We should not forget that one of the main points of *Modern Painters* is that relations to nature define human life and the progress of human society – there is, in fact, an apt theoretical neatness to Ruskin's conflation of these terms, realism and naturalism, just as they were emerging into new senses in the culture. His many contradictions aside, Ruskin's reasoning can also be characterised as enormously considered and often, in rather ironic ways, razor-sharp.

The third volume commences by taking Sir Joshua Reynolds to task about the relation between "historical" art and "poetic" art, that is art that is most concerned with emulating particular facts about the world, on the one hand, and art which is more concerned with unchanging truths reached through poetic insight, on the other. Ruskin takes issue with the low value afforded particularity by Reynolds, arguing that such observed particularity is present in the greatest works of art of utmost imaginative and emotional power. Ruskin at various points acknowledges the potential deceptiveness of art as emulation of the real. It would be a transfixing, admittedly sublime thing for a painter to capture a moment, for example, from the life of Christ, in all the colours of its historical reality. But such an achievement, says Ruskin, lies well beyond the scope of human ability – though, speaking hypothetically for a moment, he says that perfect imitation would not automatically be good or bad, rather its value would depend on the motive behind or spirit driving the representation. In evaluating real artists' motives, good and bad, with examples from the history of art, Ruskin comes to a number of primary and corollary observations which have a bearing on his emerging concept of realism, for example that "*distinct* drawing" – i.e., clarity of detail in the delineation of particularities – would tend to characterise great art, though invention and imagination are also, again, emphasised.[13] At one point, reaching a conclusion of sorts, Ruskin states "it is never *great* art until the poetical or imaginative power touches it", "and the imaginative painter differs from the historical painter in the manner that Wordsworth differs" from the geological writings of Horace Bénédict de Saussure.[14]

Geology and how it might be grasped by the imagination has a precise bearing on Ruskin's examination of Turner, of course. But to remain with Ruskin's developing aesthetics in *Modern Painters*, volume 3, having made the claim that only imaginative art is great, he says that the historical subtends the imaginative – that is, particularity is the foundation for poetic greatness. It is at this point, in Chapter 4, that Ruskin introduces the term "ideal", which he uses eccentrically, and quite thought-provokingly, to mean an artist who conceives of ideas about the real world originating in observation.

13
Ibid., 60. Ruskin's emphasis.

14
Ibid., 65. Ruskin's emphasis.

Of ideal artists, there are three types, the first two of which are relevant here. The first, says Ruskin, is the purist, who avoids "pain", "pollution", and "imperfection", depicting only the aspects of reality deemed positive by this quite one-dimensional version of imagination.[15] Fra Angelico is one of Ruskin's examples in this vein. Then we come to the central type of artist theorised in this first part of the crucial third volume, the "naturalist". Naturalist art, Ruskin says in Chapter 7, "concerns itself simply with things as they ARE, and accepts [...] the evil and the good".[16] The naturalist paints things as they are, the painful as well as the pleasurable, and the imagination works to 'harmonize' and 'place' the content, good and ill, not to numb the painful effects or emphasise the pleasurable, but rather to reveal as much of the complete variations of reality as possible. The evil or lowly is not despised but is included for what good it can reveal. Shakespeare, says Ruskin, was a naturalist.[17]

Naturalism involves, then, the lowly, the everyday, the real, but in such a way that has been assembled by the painter or poet into a characterisation of felt truth. Particularity and something like universality actually collide, or crash into one another, here. "If the next painter who desires to illustrate the character of Homer's Achilles", Ruskin writes, "would represent him cutting pork chops for Ulysses, he would enable the public to understand the Homeric ideal better than they have done for several centuries." At work in this imagery from the *Iliad* is both a highly discriminating and insightful imaginative power, and a grasp of the sheer particular facts of reality as it is lived – those empirical pork chops. "Achilles must be represented cutting pork chops, because that was one of the things which the nature of Achilles involved his doing: he could not be shown wholly as Achilles, if he were not shown doing that."[18] This idea gets a further complicated elaboration, because, says Ruskin, a naturalist just paints what he sees. But the seeing, the vision, can be both literal and imaginative: "whether in their mind's eye, or in bodily fact, does not matter".[19] This way, not just pork chops, but imaginary beings, like centaurs, can be real, can be painted or portrayed naturalistically. Of Homer's successor in medieval Italy, Ruskin writes, then, "the real living centaur actually trotted across Dante's brain, and he saw him do it".[20] Imagination can supersede

15 Ibid., 104.

16 Ibid., 111.

17 Ibid., 112.

18 Ibid., 113.

19 Ibid., 114.

20 Ibid., 115.

reality without in the least compromising naturalism, and will rather deepen and concretise poetic vision.

One of the oddities of all this is that not only does Ruskin have to reach for literary rather than pictorial examples at certain key moments, but, furthermore, he doesn't much mention Turner in these pages, although it is in some sense all about this particular painter and Turner's apprehension of truth via imagination and invention, his blending of history and poetry, and his revelation of nature via intensity of felt human emotions. It is ultimately implied, though, that Ruskin is evoking Turner here as a naturalist, of the very first-rate kind. I might add, however, that Ruskin's reasoning at one point enables him to give agency not to the naturalist artist, but to art itself – or rather to the vision that is visited upon the artist, setting in motion the need to paint. And so the naturalist is at one point said to be but a "scribe", transcribing not a perfect imitation of the world before him, but a record of a dream that contains some truth about reality.[21] We could say the agency of Turner gets lost in this key section in *Modern Painters* beneath a series of arresting provocations drawing on post-Romantic aesthetics all combining together as, in effect, an emergent concept of realism. The art historian – as so often happens, in even the very best interpretations – overrides the individuality of the artist.

While Turner's agency as an imaginative realist capable of depicting both mountain truth and human truth will be fully on show in the fourth volume, where I will be turning next, these same passages also exhibit Ruskin's own subjectivity at work, conceiving, even creating, Turner's realism. At the same time these passages stand as compelling and convincing written interpretations of Turner's art, in which time emerges as a crucial element in Turner's achievement.

II. The Road: *Modern Painters*, Volume 4

Ruskin's particularly close analysis of a Turner watercolour in *Modern Painters*, volume 4 (1856) exhibits the issues at play in the sections above analysed in *Modern Painters*, volume 3 and develops things into an intriguing presentation of something like Turner's phenomenological realism. In the second chapter of the fourth volume of *Modern Painters, Of Turnerian Topography*, Ruskin sets out to explain and justify how and why Turner has changed the "things" – trees and mountains – if not quite into "what they are *not*" (in the words of *Blackwood's*) then at least into something else, in order to convey a "truth", surpassing the factual, about the "spirit of the place" (in the words of Ruskin's chapter).[22] That is, going a step

21
Ibid., 118.

22
John Ruskin, Modern Painters, vol. 4, in: Cook and Wedderburn, The Works of John Ruskin, vol. 6, London 1904, 36.

further than his preface, Ruskin is demonstrating here how Turner's imagination transformed things into what they really are. To further his analysis, Ruskin uses two illustrations depicting the valley and mountains at "the Pass of Faido", etched by Ruskin himself for publication, the first apparently representing the scene as it exists, the second revealing Turner's embellishments by way of comparison.[23] The first illustration is a simplified "topographical outline of the scene" (ca. 1856) [Fig. 2] depicting in clear, sparse, and sometimes jagged single and grouped lines a sharp rocky foreground, a precarious bridge on spindly legs in thin, close single lines in the middle ground and the huge mountains, in fainter lines and small, almost hairy touches and curls, which rise vertiginously upward beyond the top of the plate. The effect is diagrammatic and a little wooden. The second etched illustration (ca. 1856), a simplification of Turner's rendering of the scene [Fig. 3], is a much more complex image of geological drama covered in quite thick wrinkled lines and even patches of near black. The undulations of the rocks in the foreground seem to evoke the rocks' liquid solidity and magmatic frozenness. The middle ground opens onto a spikey field, wider than in the first engraving, strewn with debris, down onto which, in the distance, the mountains seem to smash thunderously. The distant mountain curves impossibly round to form a hollow, leading into which there is dark shading. Diagonal ink marks suggesting wind, cloud, and perhaps rain contribute to the effect of wild, stormy grandeur. This second illustration is a "reduced outline" of a watercolour by Turner, *The Pass of Saint Gotthard, Near Faido* (1843) [Fig. 4] which Ruskin commissioned, worked up by Turner from his "memorandum" or "sketch" which Ruskin thought Turner had made at the location (1842–1843) and which is now in Tate (in fact this earlier watercolour with its lighter tones, thinner surface, and appearance of rapid execution was probably finished later by Turner inside).[24] Ruskin asks the reader to notice in his two illustrations how Turner has changed the scene in scale and elevated it "to the general majesty of the higher forms of the Alps". The reader is directed to see how Turner "gives the rock a height of about a thousand feet" even though it is shorter. All the mountains are raised further, with "three or four ranges instead of one", and Turner "fells" the trees. The bridge is too slender for "the aspect of violence

23
See Edward Tyas Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (eds.), *The Works of John Ruskin*, 39 vols., vol. 38, *Bibliography, Catalogue of Ruskin's Drawings, Addenda et Corrigenda*, London 1912, 250; Cook and Wedderburn point out that the etchings were executed by Ruskin himself, Modern Painters, vol. 4, xi.

24
Robert Hewison, Ian Warrell, and Stephen Wildman, *Ruskin, Turner and the Pre-Raphaelites*, London 2000, 77; see 76–79 for discussion of these and related drawings. See Cook and Wedderburn, vol. 6, Modern Painters, vol. 4, xxv–xxvii; John Ruskin, Catalogue of the Turner Sketches in The National Gallery, Part 1 [1857], in: Cook and Wedderburn, The Works of John Ruskin, vol. 13: *Turner, The Harbours of England, Catalogue and Notes*, London 1904, 206–207, where Ruskin lists Turner's 1842 drawing (number 40); and John Ruskin, Notes by Mr Ruskin on his Drawings by the late J. M. W. Turner, R. A. [1878] in: Cook and Wedderburn, The Works of John Ruskin, vol. 13, 456, where Ruskin lists Turner's 1843 drawing, commissioned by Ruskin (number 66).

in the torrent", "so he strikes down the nearer bridge, and restores the one farther off".[25] This almost God-like reconstruction of the Saint Gotthard Pass is very apparent when comparing Turner's watercolour commissioned by Ruskin itself [Fig. 4] with Turner's earlier watercolour. In the commissioned version, huge blue and grey mists waft over the foreground and the golden, shimmering mountain to the left dominates the vertically compressed view. This watercolour is a tempestuous swirling of blues, blue greens, ambers and yellows and touches of purple in the top-left sky, depicting an almost impossibly gigantic rocky plateau traversed, in the distance, by a thin white bridge in front of the ominous hollow, whose shadows have been darkened and thickened. In his 1857 catalogue of Turner's works Ruskin adds that "a piece of road is introduced from a study of Turner's, made on the Saint Gothard [sic] at least thirty years previously".[26]

In Ruskin's convincing interpretation of Turner, it is not social or academic conventions that dictate Turner's changes to the observed topography. Nor is it the specificities of the medium that determine the changes wrought by the artist, not on their own. We might say Ruskin shows the chief mediator in realist representation is, in fact, time. To capture the scene, "the spirit" of the place, Turner has compressed expanses of experience into his static images. Based on Turner's experience of the place over time, his changes to the topography are wrought by memory. Imagining Turner at work on his watercolour at the scene Ruskin says the painter "reduces" the valley "nearly to such a chasm as that which he had just passed through above, so as to unite the expression of this ravine with that of the stony valley". In Ruskin's description the landscape becomes associated with the effort and sublimity of the preceding climb, of having "come by the road", and though the people-less storm was wild, the road built by and for people was the real marvel: "but the most wonderful thing of all was how we ourselves [...] ever got here": "[o]ne of the great elements of sensation, all the day long, has been that extraordinary road", winding "under avalanches of stones, and among insanities of torrents, and overhangings of precipices", says Ruskin. "[S]till the marvellous road persists in going on." However, adds Ruskin:

> it is not merely great diligences, going in a caravannish manner, with whole teams of horses, that can traverse it, but little postchaises with small postboys, and a pair of ponies. And the dream declared that the full essence and soul of the scene, and consummation of all the wonderfulness of the torrents and Alps, lay in a postchaise with small ponies

[25] Ruskin, Modern Painters, vol. 4, 36–38.

[26] Id., Catalogue, Turner, 206–207.

[Fig. 2]
John Ruskin, *The Pass of Faido: 1st, Simple Topography*, ca. 1856, etching, reproduced as Plate 20, Cook and Wedderburn, vol. 6, Modern Painters, vol. 4 [1856].

[Fig. 3]
John Ruskin after J. M. W. Turner, *The Pass of Faido: 2nd, Turnerian Topography*, ca. 1856, etching, reproduced as Plate 21, Cook and Wedderburn, vol. 6, Modern Painters, vol. 4 [1856].

[Fig. 4]
J. M. W. Turner, *The Pass of Saint Gotthard, near Faido*, 1843, watercolour over graphite on paper, 30 × 47 cm, Thaw Collection, Morgan Library & Museum, 2006.52, photographic credit: The Morgan Library & Museum, New York.

> and post-boy, which accordingly it insisted upon Turner's inserting, whether he liked it or not, at the turn of the road.[27]

Turner is visited by a "dream", which insists he realise these memories. It directs him to paint in the little postchaise and ponies, just visible to the right, above a shadowy rock face – solid "actual facts", analogous, we might say, to Achilles's pork chops. Whereas a feebler imagination might have painted the majestically winding progress of the cavalcade or desolate sublimity of figure-less precipice, the "dream" of memory paints rickety, trudging humanity amidst the epic scene.[28] The dream comes to Turner, inexplicably enters his head and like Dante's centaur it is as if the ponies actually trot across his brain.

As a "general attitude", wrote Raymond Williams, realism "is distinguished from Romanticism or from Imaginary or Mythical subjects; things not of the real world". As the literary historian René Wellek puts it, realism is ideologically opposed to Romanticism in its rejection of "the fantastic [...] the allegorical and the symbolic, the highly stylized"; realism, he says, wants "no myth", "no world of dreams".[29] But the commitment in Ruskin to "real events" and "actual facts", to the Trojan War and pork chops and long journeys in a storm along an Alpine road, this commitment all works through and by imagination – it has to – and in this way Ruskin's nascent version of realism evades such broad-brush distinctions in the periodisation of art movements and ideologies. Furthermore, critics and historians have long debated where precisely to place Ruskin within Victorian culture's negotiation of its Romantic inheritance.[30] I suggest we can see this negotiation playing out at the level of realism. For Ruskin, realism is the conversion of a landscape by the imagination into what the landscape really is, really is to wondering human eyes and weary human feet (as well as pony hooves). While Ruskin's "realism" here *is* of things of the real world, over the mountain, in the final volume of *Modern Painters*, there be dragons.

There are numerous other chapters we might consider in *Modern Painters*, volume 4 to further unpack this Turnerian realism, to fit it into the more abstract theorising in the preceding volume. However, my focus here is on temporality, and it is worth staying a bit longer with Ruskin's fabulous characterisation of the work of memory in realist artistic creativity, this being, I would add, a key

27
Ruskin, Modern Painters, vol. 4, 37–39.

28
Ibid.

29
Williams, Keywords, 256, emphasis Williams's; René Wellek, The Concept of Realism in Literary Scholarship, in: id., *Concepts in Criticism*, New Haven, CT/London 1969, 222–255, here 241.

30
For a concise view of Ruskin's and also Walter Pater's regeneration of Romanticism, see Kenneth Daley, *The Rescue of Romanticism. Walter Pater and John Ruskin*, Athens, OH 2001.

step in the argument about Turner. "Imagine", says Ruskin, speaking of great artists like Turner:

> all that any of these men had seen or heard in the whole course of their lives, laid up accurately in their memories as in vast storehouses, extending [...] with the painters, down to minute folds of drapery, and shapes of leaves or stones; and over all this unindexed and immeasurable mass of treasure, the imagination brooding and wandering, but dream-gifted, so as to summon at any moment exactly such groups of ideas as shall justly fit each other: this I conceive to be the real nature of the imaginative mind.[31]

Ruskin describes the realist imagination as an itinerant and inspired archivist who goes "brooding and wandering, but dream-gifted" through an endless "storehouse" of recollections, selecting and arranging them. Turner's painting then communicates this aestheticised memory, an arrangement of "higher and deeper truth of mental vision, rather than that of the physical facts", to "the far-away beholder's mind", conveying: "precisely the impression which the reality would have produced [...] had he verily descended into the valley from the gorges of Airolo".[32] A little bit before, Ruskin defines the task of the imaginative painter clearly. "First, [the painter] receives a true impression from the place itself [...] and then he sets himself as far as possible to reproduce that impression on the mind of the spectator of his picture."[33] Here Ruskin is partly developing his stance in relation to the popular theory of associationism by which objects' perceived beauty was understood to be generated by a chain of associative thoughts in the perceiver.[34] But Ruskin is doing something else rather interesting here, as well. In the passage just quoted, communication to the viewer is conveyed by that word "impression". The word suggests printing – engraving and etching (engraving was the umbrella term current at the time). That is, Ruskin is describing human memory in terms of engraving. Ruskin's etched illustrations are the products of a complicated sequence of pictures made at different times. Turner made a draw-

31
Ruskin, Modern Painters, vol. 4, 42.

32
Ibid., 35–36.

33
Ibid., 33.

34
For Ruskin's refutation of associationism and subsequent warming to the theory, see Garratt, Victorian Empiricism, esp. 97f. See also Francis G. Townsend, *Ruskin and the Landscape Feeling. A Critical Analysis of His Thought During the Crucial Years of His Life, 1843–1856*, Champaign, IL/Urbana, IL 1951. See also George L. Hersey, *High Victorian Gothic. A Study in Associationism*, Baltimore, MD/London 1972. Ruskin's handling of these issues, drawing on English literature and British thought, might be productively contrasted with André Dombrowski's discussion of the situation across the Channel, *Monet's Minutes. Impressionism and the Industrialisation of Time*, New Haven, CT/ London 2023.

ing at the scene in 1842. Ruskin commissioned the watercolour from that in 1843. Two years later Ruskin returned to the scene, considering Turner's selections and inventions in the 1842–1843 works, and produced drawings of which two are known to survive (1845) [Fig. 5]. Ruskin again visited the place, perhaps in 1852 and again in 1858, quite possibly making further drawings.[35] All of these visits and drawings are present somewhere behind the lines of Ruskin's "topographical" and "reduced outline" etchings. It seems significant that Ruskin etched these himself because he usually commissioned professional engravers for his illustrations. The engraving and publishing of the many other illustrations in this volume were undertaken with great care and expense. Ruskin also himself drew, in watercolour, the distant passage depicting the misty route between the mighty mountains in Turner's 1843 watercolour [Fig. 6] and had it engraved by J. Cousen and printed as the volume's frontispiece, entitled *The Gates of the Hills* [Fig. 7].[36] In order for Ruskin to appreciate Turner's "impression" of "imaginative truth", and then convey his own "impression" of this appreciation, then, Ruskin has had to commission a finished drawing from Turner from the original drawing, revisit and draw the scene himself over many years, and distil discoveries from these drawings into etchings for publication in 1856. The question remains whether Ruskin's conviction, maintained over so many volumes, that Turner communicated "imaginative truth" is convincing when Ruskin has to go and find it for himself. As Paul Walton points out, the other drawing made by Ruskin at the scene in 1845, while more "restrained and precise" than Ruskin's drawing after Turner, exhibits a "rhythmic animation" and "jagged expressiveness of line", suggesting that Ruskin retrospectively tightens up and clarifies forms in the "Simple Topography" etching, straightening it out further.[37]

What was the real truth of the pass that Ruskin saw and drew? It is as though the "impression" that Ruskin has theorised overburdens Turner's commissioned watercolour. Ruskin pours onto it too much experience and memory, which it cannot contain, and they seep from the paper. Ruskin's etchings, and to some extent Cousen's engraving of Ruskin's drawing, are attempts to counter this effect, exact incisions, or magnifications, various strategic approaches, attempts from different angles to contain and comprehend the memory imbued in and emitted from Turner's almost-singular art

35
Hewison, Warrell, and Wildman, Ruskin, Turner and the Pre-Raphaelites, 78–79. They suggest Ruskin drew two drawings on 15 August 1845 and that one is untraced; however, contemporaneously Paul Walton identifies the second in *Master Drawings by John Ruskin*, London 2000, 45. Cook and Wedderburn list one preliminary drawing for each etched plate (38.250) but, in the sense I am describing, there may have been many more.

36
See Cook and Wedderburn, vol. 6, Modern Painters, vol. 4, xxvi–xxvii, xi.

37
Walton, Master Drawings, 51.

[Fig. 5]
John Ruskin, *The Pass of Faido*, 1845, brown ink, watercolor, graphite, white gouache on cream wove paper, darkened to brown, 27 × 35 cm, Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Gift of friends and former pupils of Professor C. H. Moore in recognition of his service

[Fig. 6]
John Ruskin after J. M. W. Turner, *The Gates of the Hills, detail from The Pass of Saint Gothard, near Faido, after Turner*, 1855, watercolour, 29 × 26 cm, Collection of the Guild of St George, Sheffield Museums.

[Fig. 7]
J. Cousen after J. M. W. Turner, *The Gates of the Hills*, engraving, reproduced as frontispiece of Cook and Wedderburn, vol. 6, Modern Painters, vol. 4 [1856].

work. Then the etched and engraved plates of simplified lines are printed as countless impressions for the readers of *Modern Painters*.

Ruskin's etchings are cross-sections of remembrance. Of course, their clarity is beguiling. Intensely refined and yet collectively diffuse, persistent and evasive, it is as though they catch bits of the memory seeping from Turner's watercolour and flatten them out on the page, to be glimpsed, just, by the reader, with Ruskin's guidance in prose. And it takes a lot of guidance – five volumes. With Levine's formulation in mind, the sheer work of Ruskin's elaborate examination of Turner's landscape painting almost defies comprehension: it was an enormous effort, a huge labour, years of work and travelling, looking, drawing and writing, every bit as demanding, in its way, as the treacherous climb up the endless road. We might surmise that Ruskin here conceives of the paradox of realism and demonstrates it to his readers. Reality is dispersed among a closely related network of nevertheless distinct representations of a scene, each with their own mnemonically wrought perspective, their own phenomenological reality that extends "before" and even "after" the deceptively static image contained within. The individuality of perspective is fully acknowledged, while communication between subjects – between Ruskin and Turner, between Ruskin and reader – is imaginatively conveyed along impressions of reality. Curious distortions of time take place in this process. Immediacy of sensation is stored for a later date, whereupon it is reworked according to experience, though an effect of the immediate impression is in due course conveyed to the reader instantly. Ruskin's own, highly unconventional interpretation of Turner's realism, quite ingeniously, comes about as close as possible to defining realism while at the same time demonstrating the impossibility of ever grasping a definition, and how the definition is always slipping from the grasp into proliferating versions of reality. Ruskin suggests all this via an analogy between a technology of artistic reproduction and human memory. In doing so, he pinpoints something at the heart of the paradox of realism concerning time.

III. The Valley: *Modern Painters*, Volume 5

As I have said, there are countless other places in *Modern Painters* we could turn to next in examining Ruskin's nascent theory of realism, not least the chapters in volume 4 that explore Turner's "mystery" or infamous "indistinctness" – which Ruskin justifies according to the phenomenological truth that the human eye has limits to its vision, and the ecological truth, that it is foggy in England! Or, we might turn to the chapters exploring real geological formations, such as mountains of "compact crystallines" (Chapter 8), of "slaty crystallines" (Chapter 9), or resulting forms of aiguilles (Chapter 14), crests (Chapter 15), and precipices (Chapter 16), so that we might better see their representation in painting. However, it is by turning to the concluding chapters of *Modern Painters*, volume 5 that we fully appreciate how, as *Modern Painters* has progressed, Ruskin reorients the

interpretation laterally, as it were – reaching outwards into the social world, rather than vertically down into the mental world of stored images and memories. In this respect Ruskin ends up aligning, albeit eccentrically, with the more classic definition of realism that views it as an attempt to represent the individual's contradictory relations with the social and historical environment, a definition of realist literature proffered by Georg Lukács.[38]

For Ruskin, history is made up of patterns and repetitions, making the past available in the present, making Gothic Venice a model for Victorian society, and the Renaissance a premonition of modern decadence. Arguably, in his narratives of cultural history, Ruskin stages, over and over again, recurring encounters with modernity. He repeatedly narrates a moment when culture gives way and "corruption", in his word, ensues. This happens in Ruskin's treatment of two large paintings by Turner toward the end of the last volume of *Modern Painters*, a volume that is often singled out for its extraordinarily dark vision. In what follows I will be discussing how Turner's realism evokes the temporality of culture's repetitions and self-destructions for Ruskin.

In *The Goddess of Discord Choosing the Apple of Contention in the Garden of the Hesperides* (exhibited 1810), the eponymous deity is being presented with a choice of apples, initiating events that will culminate in the Trojan War. For Ruskin, Turner's treatment of this myth essentially represents the coming ruin of industrial-capitalist England. Behind this fateful scene, along the top of the mountainous rock, lies a dragon, he "may be, perhaps, three-quarters of a mile long"; at its tail, it is more "serpent" than dragon.[39] In the rest of this chapter and the next Ruskin peppers his discussion with the words "truth", "fact", and "real", calling to mind the passages in the previous volumes on naturalism and realism. The version of realism we are presented with here, at the end of volume 5, however, is rather closer than those earlier passages to Wellek's and Williams's more conventional sense: Turner is painting his contemporary social reality, says Ruskin, albeit seen through the prism of cultural process, as the extremely elaborate concatenations of myth. England is a discordant garden presided over by the dragon-serpent of evil wealth, the "demon of covetousness" (Ruskin engraved the dragon too [Fig. 8]).[40] Destruction perhaps greater than Troy's awaits the people of Leeds, Newcastle, and London. This nineteenth-century destruction is, for Ruskin, manifestly an ecological one: defilement of the Earth in the pursuit of Mammon.

[38] Georg Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, transl. by John and Necke Mander, London 1963, e.g. p. 20, quoted by Levine, Visual Labour, 74.

[39] John Ruskin, Modern Painters, vol. 5, in: Cook and Wedderburn, The Works of John Ruskin, vol. 7, London 1907, 401–402.

[40] Ibid., 402.

[Fig. 8]
John Ruskin after J. M. W. Turner, *Quivi Trovammo*, ca. 1860, engraving, reproduced as Plate 78, Cook and Wedderburn, vol. 7, Modern Painters, vol. 5 [1860].

In the next chapter, "The Hesperid Æglé", Ruskin turns to Turner's *Apollo and the Python* (exhibited 1811). A nude, glowing Apollo – who is, in Ruskin's interpretation, also in some sense Saint George – has just shot a huge, hideous serpent-like dragon, which slithers and coils over the fallen tree trunk and disappears into shadow. The "mere colossal worm", a lowly vastness or vast lowliness, is "the treasure-destroyer, – where moth and rust doth corrupt – the worm of eternal decay".[41] The allegory, if it is allegory, is layered. At a more fundamental – perhaps a more naturalistic – level, the dragon-serpent-worm also represents the sheer fact of change and decay in the world.

Conceptual clarity and coherence, however, are not Ruskin's strong suits. Or rather, clarity and coherence are less important to Ruskin than pulling his readers into a kind of intellectual wildness where clashing, impassioned arguments conflict with emotional tumult in an attempt to shake you out of the illusions of received ideas and to make you face up to art, nature, and reality.[42] In *Apollo and Python* the allegorical serpent-worm is gravely wounded. Its side has split open and it "melts to pieces" exposing livid serpent-flesh and a string, like entrails, but in fact spawn or "a smaller serpent-worm rising out of his blood" (its head and tail seem to be still within the progenitor's body).[43] The disgusting emergence of the smaller worm from the Python in its "death-pang", says Ruskin, confirms the perpetual persistence of decay as a force in the world – a force of history as much as of nature – and this is the ultimate terrible discovery of Turner's realism. "Alas, for Turner! This smaller serpent-worm, it seemed, he could not conceive to be slain. In the midst of all the power and beauty of nature, he still saw this death-worm writhing among the weeds."[44] It is true that Turner was the greatest painter of the "rose", "[t]hat is to say, of this vision of the loveliness and kindness of Nature". If only they had "helped Turner, listened to him, believed in him, he had done it wholly for them", cries out Ruskin. But the great British public disdained Turner's brilliant truths, "they cried out for Python, and Python came". Turner's "realism" paints the "rose", but with the rose, then, the "death-worm":

41
Ibid., 420.

42
For a psychoanalytically informed account of Ruskin's attempts to make his readers face reality, see David James Russell, How to Face Reality. Ruskin, Freud, Winnicott, in: *Raritan* 40/3, 2021, 119–139. See also Jeremy Melius's take on Ruskin's "iconology gone wild" in adjacent passages in *Modern Painters*: Ruskin's Double Plots, in: *Oxford Art Journal* 48/1, March 2025, 131–148, here 143.

43
Ruskin, Modern Painters, vol. 5, 420.

44
Ibid., 409, 420.

> the loveliness of nature, with the worm at its root: Rose and cankerworm,—both with his utmost strength; the one *never* separate from the other.
> In which his work was the true image of his own mind.[45]

The absolute reality of this vision of the blooming rose and the worm at its root cannot be underestimated. For Ruskin, this is real, and if already real in 1860 how much more real, when modernity had "progressed" almost another two decades, in 1878. Something else important flows from this. Ruskin also underscores art's power to transform, though only in theory in this case, since the public turned away from Turner's rose:

> One fair dawn or sunset, obediently beheld, would have set them right; and shown that Turner was indeed the only true speaker concerning such things that ever yet had appeared in the world. They would neither look nor hear;—only shouted continuously, "Perish Apollo. Bring us back Python".

What is so important to grasp is that, in the next paragraph, Ruskin unpacks "the real meaning of this cry", the public's cry for covetous Python. The real meaning for Ruskin is not economic but aesthetic, it is the modern blindness to colour: "herein rests not merely the question of the great right or wrong in Turner's life, but the question of the right or wrong of all painting".[46] For in one important sense, *Modern Painters* begins and ends as simply a close visual analysis of Turner's oil painting and watercolour. Turner's colour, which is Earth's colour, could have changed the human world. A commitment to, and a conviction in, art's ability to transform reality therefore drives, at this point, the whole thrust of Ruskin's nascent concept of realism in Turner.

But the power of art to transform reality is faded in *Modern Painters*, volume 5: that is Ruskin's real diagnosis of modernity's sickness. The world is turning its back on true art. There is a further paradox lurking here. At certain, astonishing moments in Ruskin, despite his Pre-Raphaelite and theological assertions that proper art should prostrate itself before nature, now and then Ruskin will seem to deny there is any ontological distinction between "art" and "nature" at all. An instance of this shocking profanity on Ruskin's part forms the basis of his nascent theory of realism: it is the undeniable fact which roots Turner's art so deeply in the modern world, which made his art so bleakly prophetic in the years gone by. And now, just as Turner foresaw, the worm gnaws away at art itself. Turner's own art grows dim and shadowy, though, says Ruskin, "that shadow is more than other men's sunlight; it is the scarlet shade, shade of the Rose". But

[45] Ibid., 422.

[46] Ibid., 412.

the worm is there from the start: "all the perfectest beauty and conquest which Turner wrought is already withered", "[w]recked, and faded, and defiled".[47] The snake-worm is everywhere in Turner's art, lurking under the thistles and "writhing among the weeds".

Temporality is, once more, quite complicated here. In a further sense offered up by Ruskin's text, Turner's painting is perpetually fading, or half-faded from the start, a rose shade – never fully disappeared, or colourless. Arguably we see here that in Ruskin's worldview, history is suspended as a perpetual dusk, at the moment of modernity's arrival. Python-worship will destroy art and England, and perhaps this was after all inevitable. Tellingly, in the preface to this fifth volume Ruskin tends to the late-Turner's drawings stored in the bowels of the National Gallery where he finds them in poor condition, mildewed, "worm-eaten", "mouse-eaten".[48] "Worm-eaten": the worm is at work beneath Trafalgar Square, consuming canvas and paper, leaving behind only painful fragments. Bookending his treatise's concluding volume, realism dwells with the worm and seems to find little left for modern painters to do than to catalogue decline.

This profound conservatism colours everything in Ruskin's writing about Turner's realism, and is part of what makes Ruskin's realism such a distinctive case. Yet this cannot detract from what is so striking in Ruskin's examination of Turner, particularly the implication that "social" and "historical" realities cannot be abstracted from phenomenological realities amidst a living, breathing and fragile world – a world that, if things go on like this, Ruskin seems to say, will not be breathing very well for much longer. Reading *Modern Painters*, though, one is left feeling oddly uncertain whether we are indeed at the end, or actually at the beginning. As if imagining the smaller worm extracting itself from the mother carcass and slithering away to invade Turner's other paintings, Ruskin intersperses his doom-laden conclusion by pointing to the worm's presence in Turner's later, sun-drenched pictures, *The Bay of Baiae, with Apollo and the Sybil* (exhibited 1823), "the serpent beneath the thistle and the wild thorn", and *The Golden Bough* (exhibited 1834).[49] Nature and change: the one never separate from the other. Change, yes, but nature, too. Reading *Modern Painters*, as one's horror at the vile serpent subsides, you are left, I suggest, your mind is filled, with the fading colour of rose; with Turner as "scarlet shade", bloodied yet shockingly beautiful. If this is allegory, if it is dialectic, it is also in some sense realism.

As I have more or less already pointed out, there are questions about how coherent a project *Modern Painters* really is. On the one hand it obviously runs far beyond its originally conceived track, wreathing and meandering around and, again and again, returning

47 Ibid., 422.

48 Ibid., 4.

49 Ibid., 421.

to its core issues in a different light over the magnificent course of the five volumes. Yet, it does precisely that: returns. All sorts of continuous, accumulative investments run through *Modern Painters*. One of these, I have been suggesting, is the nascent concept of Turner's realism. In the years up to 1856 Ruskin evidently had hopes that the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood might take up Turner's realist mantle, might be able to further the cause of the rose. The pessimism of volumes 4 and 5 might partly be put down to the Brotherhood's disintegration and Ruskin's disappointment with Millais's and Rossetti's evolving directions as artists.[50] At the same time as all of this, it is clear that the darkness of *Modern Painters*, volume 5 arises not only from the lateral view; that is, it is not only a convincingly social and ecological vision alone but rather derives from a darkness found vertically, as it were, in the imagined or sensed depths of Turner's subjectivity – and in those of Ruskin's own. The ways realism not merely skims but penetrates such psychic depths is another question raised by Ruskin's extraordinary and tortured project on Turner, one to be taken up again in another place.

Yet there is so much of the delightsome mess of *Modern Painters* which seems to be deeply rooted in the force of art and a belief that art can remake the world. Ruskin generates, along the way, a nascent and therefore open-ended theory of pictorial realism that has proven, it hardly needs saying, prescient of an awful lot.

The Turner presented in *Modern Painters* is a selective one with many gaps – the political, aesthetic and emotional motives driving that selectivity are often worn by Ruskin on his sleeve. What is perhaps a more deeply buried and productive force within Ruskin's unfolding writing is the possibility, entertained with growing conviction, that Turner was a thoroughly realist modern painter.

Thomas Hughes's research focuses on nineteenth-century art and aesthetics. He has published widely on John Ruskin, and also Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Walter Pater and Marcel Proust. His work has particularly focused on queerness and representations of nature. Other writing considers subjectivity and language in Michael Baxandall and T. J. Clark.

50
For an outstanding interpretation of Millais's work which counters commonplace opinions about Millais's decline after the 1850s and sees Millais's late painting in relation to a late nineteenth-century aesthetics of the "fragile, evanescent moment" (p. 201) see Paul Barlow, *Time Present and Time Past. The Art of John Everett Millais*, Aldershot/Burlington, VT 2005. Barlow compares Millais with Ruskin's Turner, particularly as presented in *Modern Painters*, vol. 2 – although I have been showing, especially in subsequent volumes, how Ruskin finds in Turner rather less than, and therefore more than, an "image of timeless bliss", as Barlow puts it (37).

GROSSBERG'S REALISM

ART, INDUSTRY, AND THE NEW PROCESSES OF LIFE

Joe Bucciero

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
6/3, 2025, 369–406

https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2025.3.113436

ABSTRACT

The German artist Carl Grossberg produced pictures of machinery and architecture from the 1910s until his death in 1940. Precise, realist, yet often dreamlike, his pictures – associated with the *Neue Sachlichkeit* – are presented here as dynamic responses not only to recent artistic developments but also to key questions about manual and intellectual labor in an environment increasingly given to technological rationalization. Because Grossberg's detailed pictures rarely portray humans, his work has been said to affirm the prerogatives of Weimar-era capital and to simply catalogue its dehumanizing effects. But he instead reveals the inadequacy of such critical analytics, crafting a realism based on an unstable synthesis of old and new techniques, of human and technological capacities.

KEYWORDS

Carl Grossberg; Neue Sachlichkeit; Realism; Objectivity; Weimar; Rationalization.

It was in Germany, said Alfred North Whitehead, that one could first apprehend "the boundless possibilities of technological advance".[1] The year of Whitehead's statement, 1925, was the year of *Die Neue Sachlichkeit*, a watershed exhibition mapping a recent wave of German figurative painting that many observers viewed as a response to the subjective excess of Expressionism. Curated by Gustav F. Hartlaub, the exhibition opened that June in Mannheim, "a city of work and art", in the words of its soon-to-be mayor Hermann Heimerich.[2] Mannheim would have proven exemplary for Whitehead: its rapid growth during the Weimar period depended on the continuous expansion of its machine and electrical industries. At first, the expansion left the city's "cultural traditions [...] relatively sparse", Hartlaub observed. He aimed, in turn, to establish "a cultural tradition oriented toward the future with fresh daring".[3] *Neue Sachlichkeit* represented one pillar of this cultural foundation; its dynamic pictures of urban personnel (by artists such as George Grosz) alongside demure genre scenes (à la Georg Schrimpf) together broadcast the diverse social content and painterly approaches of the day.

Another pillar would have been the functionalist art and design on display in *Typen neuer Baukunst* at the Kunsthalle later that year, which communicated narrowing formal and material gaps between artworks and commodities. To apprehend the gaps, Hartlaub suggested, was a task of not just local but also national importance, with not just economic but also existential stakes. Due to "advanced industrialization", he wrote in the second exhibition's booklet, Germany was now "deeply coerced into the new, monstrous processes of life".[4] One after the other, *Neue Sachlichkeit* and *Typen neuer Baukunst* outlined cultural traditions at once invested in and distinct from these processes, accepting new (even if monstrous) conditions while conserving vital aspects of the "old". Hartlaub had concluded *Neue Sachlichkeit*'s catalogue by lamenting the ongoing chaos of the period; in the wake of mechanized war, revolutions, and inflation, fine art, he claimed, proved at once timely and timeless. It could confirm "what is most immediate, certain, and durable: truth and

1
Alfred North Whitehead, *Science in the Modern World*, New York 1925, 96.

2
Quoted and translated in Ulrike Lorenz, "Constructing the World" in the "City of Work and Art", in: *Constructing the World. Art and Economy 1919–1939* (exh. cat. Mannheim, Kunsthalle Mannheim), ed. by ead. and Eckhart J. Gillen, Mannheim 2018, 13–17, here 15.

3
Quoted and translated in ibid., 15.

4
Ibid., 16. Translation altered; see G. F. Hartlaub, Die Aufgabe, in: *Ausstellung Typen neuer Baukunst*, Mannheim 1925, 2–6, here 3.

craft".[5] This paper asks how Hartlaub's temporal contradiction – art as both tradition- and future-oriented, as engaged with both persisting processes of craft and nascent processes of rationalization – animated the work of artists affiliated with the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, above all Carl Grossberg.[6] In content and form, Grossberg incorporated recent developments in art and technology into his work while retaining signs of the vitality that those same developments threatened to sap.

Based mostly outside of Würzburg, Grossberg is often framed as the preeminent *Neue Sachlichkeit* painter of machinery and the built environment. From around 1923 until his death in 1940, he produced paintings, drawings, and prints showcasing machines, factory interiors, and other human-made things with hard-edged precision: a stark mimesis defined by attention to outline and surface detail, though not always naturalistic color or shading. Few Grossberg works feature human figures; in those that do, they are mostly small and non-descript. Although he portrayed spaces of contemporary labor, his images do not seem motivated by the social commentaries of earlier French and German Realists, like Gustave Courbet and Wilhelm Leibl; of contemporary Socialist Realists such as Otto Griebel and Otto Nagel, whose pictures honored the subjectivities of blue-collar workers (and whose activities included political organizing); or of erstwhile Dadaists such as Grosz and Georg Scholz, who satirized industrial bigwigs and the German middle classes. Critics of the time, in turn, may have argued that Grossberg's Realism presents a naïve or cynical view of social relations as always already reified – an objective reality that forecloses subjective expression. At times, Grossberg's attitude toward technology indeed sounded affirmative, even utopian. In a 1934 letter, for example, he rebuffed the "people who transfer their fundamental aversion to any kind of technology to my painting" and found that "the tremendous wealth of new forms in the world of technology has also fundamentally changed the themes of art".[7]

Responsive to technology, his statements nonetheless insert a separation between it and his work. As his commitment to the slow process of painterly representation – as opposed to the functionalism on view in *Typen neuer Baukunst*, more commensurate with the conventional forms and temporalities of modernity – might suggest, technological development, to Grossberg, did not represent an unequivocal good. In 1932 he expressed some doubt about its

5
G. F. Hartlaub, Zum Geleit, in: *Ausstellung "Neue Sachlichkeit"*. Deutsche Malerei seit dem Expressionismus, Mannheim 1925, n.p.

6
Grossberg was not in the Mannheim exhibition but became associated with the tendency quickly through shows like *Neue Sachlichkeit* at Karl Nierendorf's Berlin gallery in 1927.

7
Quoted in Hans-Werner Schmidt, Carl Grossberg. Bilder eines "ganz modernen Menschen", 1920–1935, in: *Carl Grossberg. Retrospektive zum 100. Geburtstag* (exh. cat. Wuppertal, Von der Heydt Museum), ed. by Sabine Fehlemann, Cologne 1994, 65–79, here 76.

spread. "I've always been interested in technology's advances," he told a collector, "but I have felt that we have lost some important things in this progress."[8] Just as the rationalizing environment gave him a subject, it conditioned his work as an artist and his sense of what shaped reality in the years preceding that statement. This paper considers how it did, what it meant for the Realism that Grossberg elaborated, and what "important things" may have been lost in the process.

I. The Head, the Heart, and the Hand

Midsize cities like Mannheim owed their mid-1920s development to intersecting factors. World War I had driven factories to expand and diversify their outputs and workforces; the Republic supported lavish spending and cartelization; in 1924, the Dawes Plan alleviated Germany's reparation payments and helped to fortify US influence on German culture and business, including processes of rationalization. While the meaning of rationalization remains debated, and although the extent of its institution is often overstated in art-historical literature on the period, it proved significant, in theory and practice, in industrial settings as well as in cultural discourse. Drawing on precepts from Frederick W. Taylor, Henry Ford, and Wilhelmine industry, rationalization emboldened the intellectual capacities of the few (management, engineers) and threatened to denigrate the intellectual and physical capacities of the many.[9] German workers of the period thus fought for legal, technical, and symbolic protections against perceived and actual losses in jobs, rights, and skills.[10] To modernist observers, varied art forms provided analogues to workplace rationalization: functionalism, photography, the readymade – anything that seemed to stem more from ideas or technological apparatuses than old and slow techniques like painting and drawing. The temporality of the factory was uniform, that of the studio disjointed.

A concern of workers and artists, rationalization became an issue, too, for critics on the left and the right who saw it as a figure for capital's scientistic disregard for humanity. With rationalization, wrote Georg Lukács in 1923, "a man's own activity, his own labor becomes something objective and independent of him". What follows is the "progressive elimination of the qualitative, human and

8
Quoted and translated in Melissa Venator, Technology's World of Forms. Carl Grossberg's Industrial Art, in: *Carl Grossberg. Works in the Merrill C. Berman Collection*, Cambridge, MA 2018, 12–34, here 14.

9
For key summaries of the rationalization discourse, see Joan Campbell, *Joy in Work, German Work. The National Debate, 1800–1945*, Princeton, NJ 1989, and Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity. American Business and the Modernization of Germany*, New York 1994.

10
On deskilling in the period, see Anson Rabinbach, *The Eclipse of the Utopias of Labor*, New York 2018, 12–20.

individual attributes of the worker".[11] In Weimar factories, scientific management transformed labor into an "abstract, rational, specialized" practice. Workers lacked the relations to and the knowledge of the finished product they would have possessed in earlier stages of development. For Lukács, this dynamic heralded both objective and subjective effects: objective, insofar as a new "world of objects and relations between things springs into being (the world of commodities and their movements on the market)"; and subjective, because the worker's separation from and dependence upon "non-human objectivity" (the entrenched social forces that shape a consumer economy) started to condition their "psychological attributes".[12] With their skills, social relations, even personalities transformed practically and symbolically into quantities, the worker in the age of rationalization, in effect, became a thing: no longer a human as such. Lukács's account of this phenomenon – what he termed reification – proved decisive in period discourse. Béla Balázs extrapolated the analysis as a critique of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, which he derided as "the aesthetic of the production line". To produce art that followed the scientific precept of "objectivity" was to present as real a bourgeois illusion. "Facts", Balázs claimed, "do not amount to the truth."[13]

For left-wing modernists like Balázs, the arts still had the ability, even the prerogative, to reveal truth. But artists could not merely depict contemporary social phenomena, objects, and modes of production, as did many affiliated with the *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Rather, they should engage these conditions on critical and material registers. Balázs posited film as the most truthful medium due to its collaborative nature. Film "excludes the possibility of absolute individualism", he argued, whereas "[w]riting, painting or composing music are all solitary pursuits".[14] His disavowal of painting pointed not just to structural and ideological concerns but technological and temporal ones as well. Just as some socialists hoped that machine-powered rationalization might liberate rather than alienate the worker, making their jobs easier and securing them more leisure time, proponents of the avant-garde advocated for the use of new media in art to help its producers and consumers keep pace with modern life. "The visual image has been expanded and even the modern lens is no longer tied to the narrow limits of our eye", wrote László Moholy-Nagy, then teaching at the Bauhaus; "no manual means of representation (pencil, brush, etc.) is capable of

11
Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* [1923], transl. by Rodney Livingstone, Cambridge, MA 1971, 87–88.

12
Ibid.

13
Béla Balázs, Ideological Remarks [1924], in: Erica Carter (ed.), *Early Film Theory. Visible Man and the Spirit of Film*, New York 2011, 211–230, here 222–223.

14
Ibid., 212.

arresting fragments of the world seen like this".[15] Moholy suggests a belief that new technologies, in altering the visual environment, have reconstituted human perceptual capacities, and that art should support this "new vision".

Yet new technologies and processes rarely altered human life and labor to the degree that Moholy suggested.[16] Transformation of the human via technology, in the early-to-mid 1920s, presented more a theoretical than a material problem; either way, its possible solutions filtered through the vibrant critical and historical discourses of modern art. In 1925 the socialist critic Lu Märten posited that artists and intellectuals could aid the proletarian's cause by helping to "restore to labor the content that has been stripped from it by the machines". To Märten, this meant not the abandonment of mental labor or technology but reconfiguring human relationships to the latter: "by recognizing machines as the given means of production, by retaining dictatorial control over them, and by acknowledging their specific truth to materials, an aspect they share with earlier craftsmanship".[17] If improving the worker's material conditions, Märten concluded, was more important "than understanding [what] a picture is", art provided a heuristic structure for evaluating work writ large. In 1903 she had already drawn on John Ruskin, who, after the first industrial revolution, analyzed labor in formal terms and venerated the undivided work of the artist-craftsperson. Märten echoes what Ruskin "hoped for all work", she writes: "that it be of the head, the heart, and the hand".[18] Märten did not harbor a romantic view of a world without machines; instead, she imagined a system where labor might exist in reciprocity with technology, helping humans to shape their environment as it shaped them. Art served her as a model for humanized labor, for its objects register the subjects who made them, their skills, their identities. Theorized in the Wilhelmine era, this analytic gained perceived necessity during Germany's so-called "rationalization boom" of the mid-1920s, when machines increased in prominence.[19]

15
László Moholy-Nagy, *Painting Photography Film* [1925], transl. by Janet Seligman, London 1967, 7.

16
On the uneven development of rationalization, see Moritz Föllmer, Which Crisis? Which Modernity? New Perspectives on Weimar Germany, in: Jochen Hung, Godela Weiss-Sussex, and Geoff Wilkes (eds.), *Beyond Glitter and Doom. The Contingency of the Weimar Republic*, Munich, 2012, 19–30.

17
Lu Märten, Kunst und Proletariat, in: *Die Aktion* 15/12, 1925, 663–668, repub. as Art and Proletariat, in: *October* 178, 2021, 20–26, here 21.

18
Id., Die künstlerischen Momente der Arbeit in alter und neuer Zeit, in: *Die Zeit* 51, 1903, 800–804, repub. as Artistic Aspects of Labor in Old and New Times, in: *October* 178, 2021, 15–19, here 17.

19
The phrase "rationalization boom" is credited to Otto Bauer; see Nolan, Visions of Modernity, 132.

Märten felt that avant-garde art best advanced her argument, yet the relation of form to left politics remained central to debates of the postwar years. Communist critic Gertrud Alexander, by contrast, posited naturalism as a proper vessel for working-class consciousness despite its traditional bourgeois base, while the Cologne artist and unaffiliated leftist Franz W. Seiwert split the difference, advocating for a simplified, quasi-pictographic figuration that, he thought, could communicate itself as unalienated labor through facture – a legible index of the hand's work.[20] Grosz, when justifying his 1921 turn to more straightforward figuration, foreshadowed Seiwert's argument, positing painting as "manual labor, no different from any other".[21] His paintings from those years, like *Untitled* (1920), in the collection of the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, portray object-like figures as if to literalize the felt phenomena of reification. Whereas Grosz framed his vocation as subject to the stultifying conditions of the working class, Grossberg's images of rationalized spaces indicate instead that art secures for its producer some distinction. Not unlike for Märten or Seiwert, for Grossberg painting heralded symbolic liberation as an activity based upon manual and mental dexterity, as a matrix of outmoded and emergent skills that rationalization could abet but not replace. Rather than show labor as content, he addresses his pictures to its material frameworks, discursive fields, and structures of feeling. In other words, if he does not straightforwardly uplift work, he does not merely aestheticize it either, as did some of his contemporaries. In the catalogue for *Kunst und Technik* – a 1928 exhibition in Essen that included Grossberg – the curator Kurt Wilhelm-Kästner perceived a transfer between works of art, engineering, and manual labor, arguing that the "gap between working and artistic creation is thus bridged".[22] More than Wilhelm-Kästner's "unified artistic form of expression", Grossberg presents art in a lineage at once humanist and entwined with, but distinct from, the materialities and the temporalities of contemporary factory labor.

20
For Märten's debate with Alexander, see Manfred Brauneck (ed.), *Die Rote Fahne. Kritik, Theorie, Feuilleton 1918–1933*, Munich 1973, 121–128; see also Martin I. Gaughan, *The German Left and Aesthetic Politics. Cultural Politics between the Second and Third Internationals*, Leiden 2022. On Seiwert, see Lynette Roth, *Painting as a Weapon. Progressive Cologne 1920–1933. Seiwert–Hoerle–Arntz*, Cologne 2008.

21
George Grosz, Meine neuen Bilder, in: *Das Kunstblatt* 5/1, 1921, repub. as My New Pictures, in: Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds.), *Art in Theory 1900–1990*, Malden, MA 1992, 270–271, here 271.

22
Kurt Wilhelm-Kästner, Vorwort, in: *Kunst und Technik. Ausstellung anläßlich der Tagung des Vereins Deutscher Ingenieure* (exh. cat. Essen, Museum Folkwang), Essen 1928, 8–12, here 12.

II. The Exactitude of a Modern Ball Bearing

Grossberg was born Georg Carl Wilhelm Grandmontagne in 1894, in Elberfeld, a town known for its fabric industry and suspension railway.[23] (His father, a Catholic civil servant of French-Huguenot descent, Germanized the family name in 1914.) After two semesters at the Technischen Hochschule in Aachen, where he studied painting with the impressionist August von Brandis, Grossberg transferred to the Technische Hochschule in Darmstadt, in 1914, for a more expansive educational program, with courses in the sciences, architecture, and art history (the last of these, with the nationalist art historian Wilhelm Pinder). It was then and there, according to Dietlinde Hamburger, whose dissertation research forms the basis of my account, that Grossberg first engaged deeply with the techniques and iconography of the old masters. While he had come to Darmstadt to train as an architect, Grossberg's focus turned to fine art.[24] Yet, as in Aachen, his time in Darmstadt was brief, cut short by his service in World War I. Uncertain of his future after combat, he moved in late 1918 to Weimar, where he hoped to study at the local Hochschule für bildende Kunst. "I intend to devote myself to painting", Grossberg wrote in his application.[25]

The status of painting, in practice as in politics, fell into flux after the war (if it had not already). In April 1919, the school of fine art (*bildende Kunst*), where Grossberg had begun his program, merged with the local school of arts and crafts to form the Staatliches Bauhaus. While minimal evidence remains of Grossberg's time at the school, where he studied until 1921 under the tutelage of Lyonel Feininger, its practical lessons and theoretical precepts conditioned his production thereafter. In 1919 the Bauhaus published its first official "program", with text by Walter Gropius and a woodcut of a Gothic cathedral by Feininger. Gropius begins by diagnosing decline: "Today the arts exist in isolation."[26] The problem owed in large part to specialization and stratification in art's education, production, and circulation. Invoking a pre-capitalist Catholic past in his text, as Feininger does in his print, Gropius posits that different art practices "must be merged once more with the workshop". Such holistic, undivided modes of production would cultivate not

23
On Grossberg's upbringing, see Dietlinde Hamburger, *Carl Grossberg. Industrie und Imagination in der Malerei der Neuen Sachlichkeit*, PhD dissertation, Kassel 1990, and Eva Grossberg, Was bleibt, ist sein Werk, in: Fehlemann, Carl Grossberg, 8–31. On his life and work into the 1930s, see also a forthcoming catalogue: Adrian Sudhalter (ed.), *Carl Grossberg. New Forms in the World of Technology*, Munich 2025.

24
See Victor Dirksen, *Carl Grossberg. Sein Malschaffen 1920 bis 1940*, Dortmund 1942.

25
Quoted in Hamburger, Carl Grossberg, 28.

26
Walter Gropius, *Programm des Staatlichen Bauhauses*, Weimar 1919, repub. as Program of the Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar, in: Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (eds.), *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, Berkeley, CA 1994, 435–438, here 435.

just each artist's "skill" but their "joy in artistic creation" as well.[27] If Märten hoped this joy might be accessed by workers in the factories, Gropius retains a special place for the arts. While they deploy "craft", they are "not a 'profession'", he writes, and they are thus incompatible with modern approaches to instruction and organization. Gropius's pamphlet offered a preliminary program of topics that would cover "all practical and scientific areas of creative work".[28] And if instructors like Feininger deployed abstract forms in their own art, early lessons at the school gave credence to traditional methods of depiction by observation and copying (in drawing, more than painting). Students performed both semi-progressive drawing exercises ("free-hand sketching from memory and imagination") and traditional academic ones ("heads, live models, and animals [...] landscapes, figures, plants, and still lifes").[29]

Like his teacher Feininger, Grossberg produced semi-abstract woodcuts at the Bauhaus. To the modernist critic Paul Westheim, the medium offered a privileged means for German artists of the period to "return to a primitive style and to a manual craftsmanship" – a form of outmoded national handcraft that could nevertheless acknowledge the demands of mechanical (re)production.[30] Formally, Grossberg's pictures from these years adapt Feininger's take on cubism; a drawing, *Oberweimar* (1919) [Fig. 1], depicts fracturing architectural and geometric structures mapped by internally shaded grids. The younger artist elaborated this formal idiom in painting, in works like *Häuser, Turm und Gebirge* (1919–1920) [Fig. 2], where he casts an empty mountain town in vibrant, non-naturalistic light and color. More traditional in his painterly methods than Feininger was, Grossberg employed a version of Renaissance technique, layering resin and linseed oil on the surface of canvases to better grade the color.[31] Already, he seemed attached to the idea and practice of artisanal skill as applied to, and legible through, painting while also

27
Gropius's equation of "skill" and "joy" was common among reformist theorists of the period and, for better or worse, seems appealing to Grossberg as well; see Campbell, Joy in Work, 137–148.

28
Gropius, Program, 436. On the meaning of craft (*Handwerk*) to the early Bauhaus and its imbrication with liberal and reactionary politics dating to the mid-1800s, see John V. Maciuika, *Before the Bauhaus. Architecture, Politics, and the German State, 1890–1920*, New York 2005.

29
Gropius removed life drawing from the school's new plan of 1921, perhaps not coincidentally the year Grossberg left; see Howard Singerman, *Art Subjects. Making Artists in the American University*, Berkeley, CA 1999, 82.

30
Quoted and translated in Charles W. Haxthausen, Walter Gropius and Lyonel Feininger. Bauhaus Manifesto, 1919, in: *Bauhaus 1919-1933. Workshops for Modernity* (exh. cat. New York, The Museum of Modern Art), ed. by Barry Bergdoll, Leah Dickerman, and David Frankel, New York 2009, 64–67, here 64.

31
Hamburger, Carl Grossberg, 68. For Otto Dix, who used this process in the mid-to-late 1920s, it "was fastidious, if not tedious". Bruce F. Miller, Otto Dix and His Oil-Tempera Technique, in: *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 74, 1987, 332–355, here 332.

[Fig. 1]
Carl Grossberg, *Oberweimar*, 1920, pencil on paper, 33 × 29 cm, Rye, New York, the Merrill C. Berman Collection.

[Fig. 2]
Carl Grossberg, *Häuser, Turm und Gebirge*, 1919–1920, oil on canvas, 75.5 × 55 cm, location unknown, collection unknown.

commensurate with new developments in artistic (and non-artistic) production. So, too, did his peers associated with the term *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Westheim suggested in 1931, for example, that painters like Grosz and Otto Dix produced art "with a precise technique of drawing that in its line has something of the exactitude of a modern ball bearing".[32] From the Bauhaus onward, Grossberg mobilized this equivalence (the precision variously required of academic art and rationalized machinery) and, just the same, deferred its implications (that the one might be subsumed by the other).

III. The *Würzburger Sachliche*

In 1921 Grossberg left the Bauhaus, met the violinist Tilde Schwarz, and settled with her in Sommerhausen, a small town outside Würzburg. He would remain in occasional touch with Feininger and Gropius while cultivating an expanded art-world network that included the German-American precisionist Stefan Hirsch, the gallerist Karl Nierendorf, and the art historian Justus Bier, who lived in nearby Nuremberg.[33] Bier and Grossberg wrote to and visited each other often; together, they formed part of the Franconian "avant-garde" centered in Würzburg. The city had lacked a vibrant art scene before World War I. Without an arts academy, its "artistically ambitious people first learned a trade (e.g., stonemason, lime washer, lithographer)", writes Bettina Keß.[34] Some established artists maintained small workshops or operated private painting and drawing schools, but it was not until the early 1920s that local artists took training seriously. Artist associations soon formed (motivated more by social and professional opportunities than the revolutionary politics of some Berlin counterparts), and modern art appeared in venues such as the Neues Graphisches Kabinett. The city's new artistic culture represented "forward-thrusting youth" to the "old age" of what had prevailed, in the words of painter Heiner Dikreiter: "fresh air" to extant "mustiness".[35] In 1928, Dikreiter christened Grossberg and two Realist colleagues, Hans Otto Baumann and Fritz Mertens,

32
Quoted and translated in James A. van Dyke, *Franz Radziwill and the Contradictions of German Art History, 1919–45*, Ann Arbor, MI 2011, 22.

33
On Grossberg, Hirsch, and Bier, see Andrew Hemingway, *The Mysticism of Money. Precisionist Painting and Machine Age America*, London 2013, 84–95.

34
Bettina Keß, Konservative "Bildlesmalerei" gegen neue Ausdruckskunst. Kunstleben im Würzburg der Weimarer Republik, in: ead. and Beate Reese (eds.), *Tradition und Aufbruch. Würzburg und die Kunst der 1920er Jahre*, Würzburg 2003, 9–23, here 9–10.

35
Quoted in ibid., 9.

as the *Würzburger Sachliche*, a testament to the regional diffusion of *Neue Sachlichkeit*.[36]

In paintings of 1922 and 1923, Grossberg simplified his post-cubist style, rendering architectural objects as assembled geometric forms, their identities or functions indicated through basic details, like windows. At the same time, he had started to craft more rigorous drawings and prints of the built environment, leading to a series of drawings of the Würzburg printing press plant Koenig & Bauer in 1924. A pioneer in the production of steam-powered presses, Koenig & Bauer had grown consistently since its founding a century earlier; like many firms in the 1920s, it hired local artists to document its facilities.[37] Grossberg depicts its factory with fastidious outline and selective depth. In an image of the exterior, shadows cast a heavy mark across the building; there is formal variation absent from his Bauhaus-era work, like fluting at the top of the smokestack and modeled windows that position the architecture as material, not just surface [Fig. 3]. Inside the factory, Grossberg showcases various production technologies. Often, a machine occupies the center, with the background faded or left untouched. In *Maschinenhalle* (1924) [Fig. 4], he positions a large turbine in a corner. The back wall is faint, as if Grossberg's pencil barely touched the paper. Carefully shaded, thrust forward by steep perspective, and textured by its surrounding accoutrements, the picture functions as what the architectural historian Daniela Lamberini might call (in a Renaissance context) not a technical drawing but a "portrait", one that naturalizes, empowers, and abstracts its referent.[38] Viewing it, one could not build the machine but rather appreciate its look and imagine its power. As much as *Neue Sachlichkeit*, Grossberg evokes Franz Roh's concurrent term for a similar body of painting, "magical realism". In such art, Roh perceived magic, like a sort of subjectivity, emanating from real objects, reenchanting the rationalized world.[39]

Grossberg, too, signals what Westheim called the "machine romanticism" that guided aesthetic and technological thought of the 1920s and beyond.[40] Ernst Jünger, a reactionary modernist, claimed in 1929: "Ours is the first generation to begin to reconcile itself

36
Beate Reese, Die "Würzburger Sachlichen". Carl Grossberg, Hans Otto Baumann, Fritz Mertens, in: Keß and Reese, Tradition und Aufbruch, 75–99, here 75.

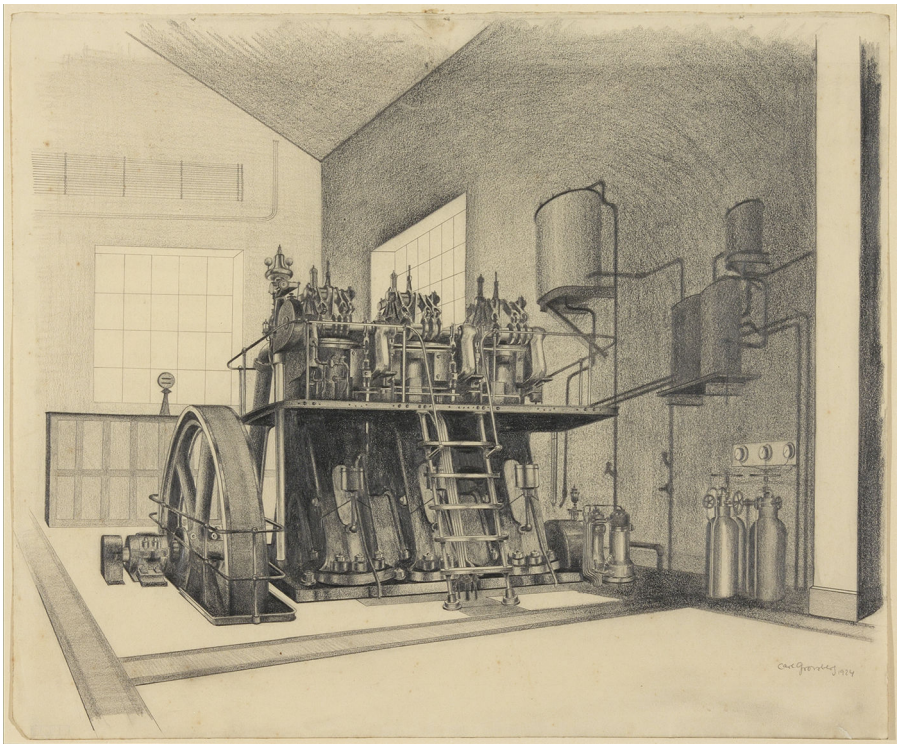
37
On Koenig & Bauer, see Hamburger, Carl Grossberg, 178, and the company website (December 28, 2022).

38
Daniela Lamberini, Machines in Perspective. Technical Drawings in Unpublished Treatises and Notebooks of the Italian Renaissance, in: *Studies in the History of Art* 59, 2003, 212–233, here 218–220.

39
Franz Roh, *Nach-Expressionismus – Magischer Realismus. Probleme der neuester Europäischen Malerei*, Leipzig 1925.

40
Paul Westheim, Maschinenromantik, in: *Das Kunstblatt* 1, 1923, 33–40.

[Fig. 3]
Carl Grossberg, *Industrieanlage mit Schornstein (Koenig & Bauer, Würzburg)*, 1924, graphite on paper, 49 × 40.8 cm, Munich, Galerie Michael Hasenclever.



[Fig. 4]
Carl Grossberg, *Maschinenhalle (Koenig & Bauer, Würzburg)*, 1924, graphite on paper, 48.6 × 63.5 cm, Rye, New York, the Merrill C. Berman Collection.

with the machine, and see in it not only the useful but the beautiful as well."[41] The liberal critic Fritz Stahl (the pen name of Siegfried Lilienthal) understood the machine and its industrial setting as not beautiful, per se, but *sachlich*, a term which had come to suggest a certain refinement – the absence, as Stahl writes, of "whim or randomness".[42] If Jünger's beauty dovetails with Roh's pulsating magic, for Stahl the machinic *Sachlichkeit* means that "[t]he realm of the fantastic is invisible, or at least no longer visible". Hidden from the surface, any trace of magic "lies in the work done, of which site photographs and drawings during construction give some idea".[43] The *Neue Sachlichkeit* pictures by artists involved with worker movements often portray labor not as fantastic but social and material; sympathetic modernists often translated economic and practical abstraction in the factory as artistic abstraction, as if illustrating the processes of mystification that underwrite industrial production. But Grossberg glances his subject from another angle. His machines are beautiful and abstract, lively but devoid of life. One never sees a worker, yet one still gets a sense, as Stahl thought, of "the work done" – only it is Grossberg's own work, in evidence through compositional choice and sometimes inconsistent draftsmanship. If, for Rudolf Hilferding, "Marxist method requires that in dealing with all social phenomena we should dissolve the fetishism of appearance by an analysis of reality", Grossberg may not dissolve but reconstitute the machine's fetishistic allure as integral to its real presentation.[44] He draws machines as he is drawn to them and they to him. While Balázs may have castigated Grossberg's approach, the two have similar aims in the end: to showcase that the artist "forms part of factual reality", a reality that includes "fantasies and dreams".[45]

In one of the first English-language accounts of Grossberg's work, Peter Selz wrote that the artist "accepted the technological world without criticism" and that this position would have perturbed critics on the left like Bertolt Brecht.[46] Although Grossberg

41
Quoted and translated in Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism. Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*, Cambridge 1986, 70.

42
Fritz Stahl, *Das Großkraftwerk Klingenberg*, Berlin 1928, 5–12, repub. as The Klingenberg Power Station at Berlin-Rummelsburg, in: Iain Boyd Whyte and David Frisby (eds.), *Metropolis Berlin 1880–1940*, Berkeley, CA 2012, 421–424, here 421.

43
Stahl, The Klingenberg Power Station, 424.

44
Rudolf Hilferding, Die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie in der Republik, in: *Rede auf dem Parteitag der SPD zu Kiel*, Berlin 1927, repub. as The Organized Economy, in: Kaes, Jay, and Dimendberg, *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 68–72, here 71.

45
Balázs, Ideological Remarks, 223.

46
Peter Selz, The Artist as Social Critic, in: Louise Lincoln (ed.), *German Realism of the Twenties. The Artist as Social Critic*, Minneapolis 1980, 29–40, here 40.

did not come under this sort of scrutiny during his life (at least in print), Brecht's critique of art that took industry as its subject resonates. "[T]he simple 'reproduction of reality' says less than ever about that reality", he argued. "A photograph of the Krupp works or the AEG reveals almost nothing about these institutions."[47] The images that Brecht had in mind acknowledge the impact of technological rationalization on human production, but rather than challenge perceived reification, they naturalize it. ("Reality as such," he added, "has slipped into the domain of the functional.") While Brecht did not specify an offender, his ire implicates photographers like Albert Renger-Patzsch, who produced pictures of industrial spaces and products *sans* laborers from the mid-1920s onwards. Walter Benjamin invoked the title of Renger-Patzsch's 1928 book, *Die Welt ist schön*, when adding metaphysical texture to Brecht's critique. A photograph "can endow any soup can with cosmic significance", wrote Benjamin, "but cannot grasp a single one of the human connections in which it exists".[48]

Precisely, for Renger-Patzsch, photography tokened universal access to technology. It was a "most reliable tool to render the impressions we experience" of not just nature but also the period's complex devices.[49] The critic Walter Petry adopted a similar position, arguing that the "purely objective element" of photography – its mediation of human agency – better established the quality of *Sachlichkeit* than painting did.[50] Painting, like any "art", "subjectivizes the object", Petry wrote, "and the limits of the respective subjectivity become the limits of the artistic depiction". Photography, of course, does not preclude the photographer's subjective decisions; it is not purely objective; it reveals materiality through its own kind of facture.[51] But many critics and practitioners in the 1920s thought otherwise, finding it suited to depicting the newest technology because it, itself, was a machinic process, seemingly automatic. In their shared attention to technological (and rarely to human)

47
Bertolt Brecht, *Der Dreigroschenprozess*, Berlin 1932, repub. as Threepenny Lawsuit, in: *Brecht on Film and Radio*, transl. by Marc Silberman, London 2000, 147–199, here 164.

48
Walter Benjamin, Kleine Geschichte der Photographie, in: *Die literarische Welt*, September/October 1931, repub. as Little History of Photography, in: Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (eds.), *Selected Writings*, 2 vols., Cambridge, MA 1999, vol. 2, 507–530, here 526. Megan Luke has recently issued an important corrective: "In order to see Renger's images as willing servants to the commodity fetish, Benjamin had to disavow the photographer's own labor in creating them", in: The Ghost and the Rock. Albert Renger-Patzsch and the Shape of Time, in: *Art History* 46, 2023, 125–153, here 133.

49
Albert Renger-Patzsch, Ziele, in: *Das Deutsche Lichtbild* 1, 1927, xviii, repub. as Aims, in: *The Absolute Realist. Collected Writings of Albert Renger-Patzsch*, ed. by Daniel H. Magilow, Los Angeles 2022, 104–106, here 104.

50
Quoted and translated in Sergiusz Michalski, *New Objectivity*, Cologne 1994, 182.

51
On photography's facture, see Ernö Kallai, Malerei und Fotografie, in: *i10* 1/4, 1927, 148–157, repub. as Painting and Photography, in: Christopher Phillips (ed.), *Photography in the Modern Era. European Documents and Critical Writings*, 1913–1940, New York 1989, 94–103.

forms, Grossberg and Renger-Patzsch may only reproduce photography's apparent affirmations. The artists' industrialized spaces appear as the determining forces that they were for Lukács: the physical "immediacy of [the worker's] existence", Lukács wrote, make it impossible for one to be "the subject of his own life".[52]

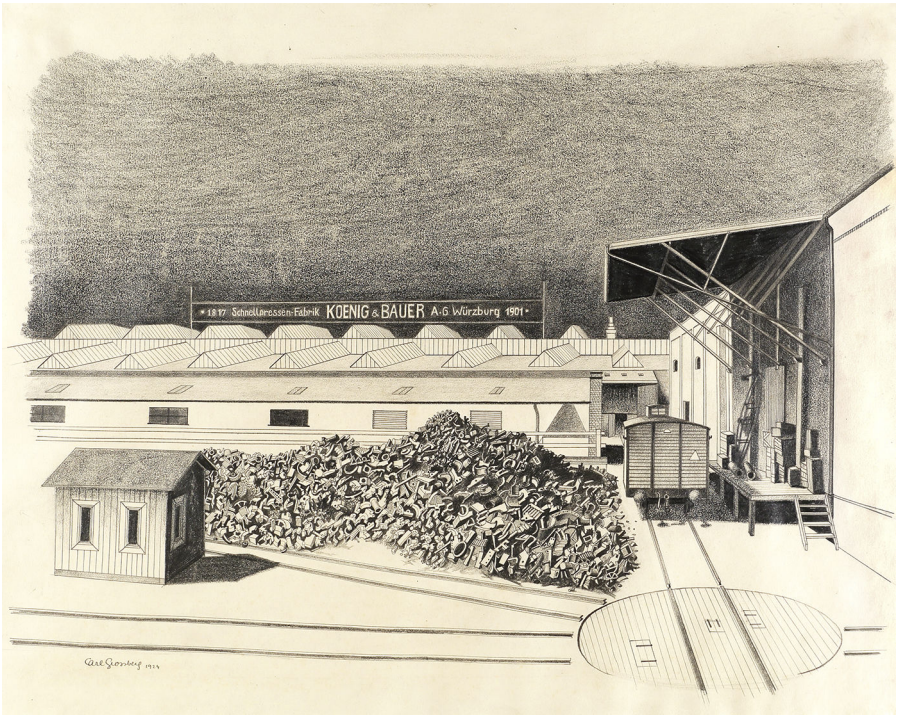
Still, Grossberg sets himself apart, if slightly, from Renger-Patzsch through the slower process of drawing and painting. The result is less veracity than a sort of abstraction entangled with naturalism and technical drawing. Grossberg renders details in sometimes selective and sometimes uniform focus in a way that the camera could not, and for all his precision, he leaves sections of drawings in bare outline – as if under construction – or cast in flat shading, as if out of time. Presenting the temporality of his craft in a manner more legible to period viewers than could Renger-Patzsch, Grossberg likewise implies a prevailing distinction, in scientific as well as artistic contexts, between drawing and photography: that the former suggested human interpretation and the latter, mere transcription. Drawing was widely understood, in the late nineteenth century, to supply excess material, that is, as a form of idealization, counter to the goals of Realist art and evidence-based science alike. As Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison have shown, though, by the 1920s German scientists broadly found artistic renderings, in fact, to be more believable than photographs, for they captured surface appearances while also generating an effect of human-powered "arealism" that broadcast a higher sort of accuracy.[53] Linking process to theme, Grossberg attends in multiple Koenig & Bauer drawings to excess material – unconstructed or cast-off objects in and around the factory (metal fragments, paper pulp) – as if testifying to the distended temporalities of artistic and industrial production and the human organization and interpretation that each still required. In a drawing of the plant's assembly hall, Grossberg shows a mound of parts, detailing many of them individually [Fig. 5]. As the pile nears the factory, however, each part fades into shadow, as if to suggest the building's capacity to flatten each product's (and producer's) individuality. The windows accordingly look two-dimensional and opaque, obscuring what takes place inside.

In form and in practice, then, Grossberg's drawings of Koenig & Bauer support Petry's claim for art's subjectivity as excess.[54] They broadcast the work as conditioned, limited, by its producer's faculties and material conditions: the artist's capacity, like the worker's,

52
Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, 166.

53
Peter Galison, Judgment against Objectivity, in: Caroline A. Jones and Peter Galison (eds.), *Picturing Science, Producing Art*, London 1998, 327–359, here 332. See also Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity*, New York 2007, 164.

54
Henri Focillon soon argued that artists separate themselves from machines through their capacity to apprehend and reproduce error, in: *The Life of Forms in Art* [1942], transl. by George Kubler, New York 1992, 182.



[Fig. 5]
Carl Grossberg, *Montagehalle mit Schrotthaufen (Koenig & Bauer, Würzburg)*, ca. 1924, pencil on paper, 38.5 × 48.3 cm, Rye, New York, the Merrill C. Berman Collection.

to organize and shape raw material more than merely register its existence. It is here that his images may surpass their function as documentation or the "type of reportage" that, Grossberg suggested in a letter of 1933, had preoccupied German depictions of technology. Earlier technical images, explains the curator Melissa Venator, displayed machines "without exploring their aesthetic or theoretical dimensions".[55] If Brecht concluded that art still had a vital role – so long as it was not merely "derived from experience" – Grossberg produces a Realism which, as it approximates industry's surface appearance, comments on one's incapacity to experience or describe advanced technologies and totalizing systems.[56] His "objectivity" is a sign of not so much unmediated observation as fluctuating registration.

IV. Not Only White, but Also Cold

In his painting of the mid-to-late 1920s, Grossberg in many ways developed the project that he had initiated with Koenig & Bauer, to foreground his mental faculties as an artist – design and measurement, artistic choice, and abstraction – in service of articulating his manual skill. Here he invokes but mostly evades the new principles of his former school, with whose director, Walter Gropius, Grossberg corresponded in 1923, a decisive year for the Bauhaus.[57] Craft would no longer serve as its theoretical bulwark against art's integration with capital; rather, learned skills would supply artists with the tools to work in a rationalized system. "Mechanized work is lifeless, proper only to the lifeless machine", Gropius wrote in a new program.[58] Not disavowing machine processes (or attendant economies), he posited technology as able to provide a "means of freeing the intellect from the burden of mechanical labor". As elsewhere, he placed the onus on the worker: it was the "individual's attitude toward his work" that guided the machine's integration with mental life – a matter "of decisive importance for new creative work". Grossberg, for his part, sought a tight correspondence between the individual and their work. But he sought, too, alternative methods of integration.

His most productive stretch as a freelance painter came during and just after a 1925 trip to Amsterdam that he took with the artist Gustav Decker. In this brief span, Grossberg refined his surfaces,

55
Venator, Technology's World of Forms, 12.

56
Brecht, Threepenny Lawsuit, 164.

57
Bauhaus Archiv, Berlin, BHA Gropius Papers II, folder 355, #1–2.

58
Walter Gropius, Idee und Aufbau des Staatlichen Bauhauses Weimar, Weimar 1923, repub. as The Theory and Organization of the Bauhaus, in: Herbert Bayer, Walter Gropius, and Ise Gropius (eds.), *Bauhaus, 1919–1928*, New York 1938, 22–31, here 22.

broadened his color palette, and began to consider more deeply the possibilities and limitations of painting.[59] His work of that year recalls some Dutch golden-age art in form (panel paintings with smooth surfaces and linear figuration) and in spirit, valorizing the independent artisan and the everyday scene. If vaguely redolent of this older model, Grossberg's art moved in 1925 toward something "new", the *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Justus Bier duly described the Amsterdam pictures in terms that variously summon 1925's key texts on figurative painting, namely Hartlaub's exhibition and Roh's book. Hartlaub defined painting of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* by its orientation to "positive palpable reality", and he and Roh, in different ways, believed that close attention to the surfaces of things could transmit truth between viewer and object.[60] For Bier, Grossberg's paintings show Dutch structures in a manner that is "architectonic and austere". Their sobriety allows the pictures to "confront" viewers "in a plastically clear way".[61]

Published in 1926, Bier's article – the only substantive one of the 1920s dedicated to Grossberg's painting – appraises the artist's recent work primarily as an exercise in the formal or spatial dynamics of the medium. Grossberg paints "old cities", Bier argues, "but completely unromantic".[62] Unromantic because objective, as it were: Grossberg's scenes of Amsterdam portray the city's neighborhoods and architecture in fine detail and with appropriate bursts of color. At the same time, "the task that preoccupies [Grossberg] the most", writes Bier, is less informational than formal: "to arrange bodies in space". In *Brouwersgracht* (1925), a line of buildings – nearly uniform in height – presses against the picture plane. While the bottom shows a sidewalk and water in front of the buildings, Grossberg does not model the foreground. It looks more or less coextensive with what is "behind" it, as if the whole picture were carved in shallow relief. The open windows of the red building increase one's sense of flatness; it is not altogether clear if they are opening in or out. In *Singelgracht* (1925) [Fig. 6], by contrast, Grossberg dramatizes the depth of the local architecture and planning. A curved bridge in the foreground siphons one's gaze into the street, where it is met with sloping perspective. Although Grossberg forms the window banks with proper modeling, the modeling indicates – like the blank sky – a skewed relationship to observed reality.

59
On links between Dutch golden-age painting, *Neue Sachlichkeit*, and capitalism, see Andrew Hemingway, Introduction. Realism Then and Now, in: Malcolm Baker and Andrew Hemingway (eds.), *Art as Worldmaking. Critical Essays on Realism and Naturalism*, Manchester 2018, 1–19, here 3, 13.

60
Quoted and translated in Fritz Schmalenbach, The Term *Neue Sachlichkeit*, in: *The Art Bulletin* 22/3, 1940, 161–165, here 161.

61
Justus Bier, Carl Großberg, in: *Der Cicerone*, 18/17, 1926, 561–565, here 565.

62
Ibid., 561.

[Fig. 6]
Carl Grossberg, *Amsterdam, Singelgracht*, 1925, oil on canvas, 71 × 61 cm, Sommerhausen, Germany, estate of the artist.

Shadows progress into the distance, yet a strange clarity follows. As details move further back, they remain in focus: crisp and colorful.

If Bier identified a quality of atmospheric or spatial indeterminacy in Grossberg, the art historian Alfred Neumeyer saw it in the *Neue Sachlichkeit* writ large a year later: an "over-clarity", he called it.[63] Neumeyer – who, like Bier and Roh, was a student of Heinrich Wölfflin – perceived in *Neue Sachlichkeit* painting not a stylistic coherence but a shared spatial orientation. Artists rendered each individual detail as if in "microscopic close-up and then assembled and presented at a normal viewing distance".[64] The effect was "confusing" and "extra-real". Rather than a realistic or measurable distance, depth in *Neue Sachlichkeit* painting is "an optical phenomenon", Neumeyer offered, a matter of "atmosphere".[65] The attention Bier and Neumeyer paid to the work's optical elements gives a sense of the images as abstract in a way, based more in the conventions of art than the contingencies of life. Roh, to this end, understood the new painting to mobilize forms and techniques from the past in a way that granted "magical insight into a piece of 'reality' (produced artificially)".[66] He viewed painting not as a material substrate so much as a vehicle for illusion and, in turn, perceived magical realism's smooth surfaces as signifying the "eradication" of the "work process".[67] Grossberg does not construct the scene in virtual tandem with the manual laborers on the ground, then, so much as he builds up an artificial reality, a second nature, forged among conflicting strata of time, space, and personnel.

For Lukács, second nature is "incomprehensible, unknowable in its real substance".[68] (Alfred Sohn-Rethel later articulated it as at once "the abstract time and space of capital", of exchange and not production, and yet a distinct "reality".)[69] In Grossberg's *Rokin* (1925) [Fig. 7], the buildings, made by man and formed by sharp outline, cast little to no shadow despite the wash of sun that lights the scene, separating them from the real world of human affairs.

63
Alfred Neumeyer, Zur Raumpsychologie der "neuen Sachlichkeit", in: *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst* 61, 1927/28, 66–72, repub. in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Klaus Lankheit, Munich 1977, 295–302, here 300.

64
Ibid.

65
Ibid., 296.

66
Roh, Nach-Expressionismus, 30.

67
Ibid., 119.

68
Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel* [1916], transl. by Anna Bostock, Cambridge 1971, 62.

69
Alfred Sohn-Rethel, Die Formcharaktere der zweiten Nature, in: Christoph Bezzel (ed.), *Das Unvermögen der Realität. Beiträge zu einer anderen materialistischen Ästhetik*, Berlin 1974, 185–207, repub. as The Formal Characteristics of Second Nature, transl. by Daniel Spaulding, in: *Selva*, July 20, 2019 (January 8, 2023).

[Fig. 7]
Carl Grossberg, *Amsterdam, Rokin*, 1925, tempera on canvas adhered to laminate wood structure, 50.5 × 60.5 cm, Rye, New York, the Merrill C. Berman Collection.

Shadow appears underneath the bridge and behind a chimney, figures that pale in dynamism compared to the barren tree left of center. It is the picture's central remnant of first nature, and it leaves a motile mark on the architecture that would otherwise threaten its existence (or at least continue to force its contortions). The basic flatness of the scene and the uniformity of its construction – consider the cool-colored piping that connects building to building – turns the reality that Grossberg has captured, or constructed, into a sort of stage set, a metaphor that Lukács deployed to characterize the modern world ("nature [...] becomes a background, a piece of scenery").[70] As sets, these pictures invite projection: of modern viewer into "old city" and, more to the point, of imagined space into a contained material setting.

Yet perhaps because, as Hamburger notes, Grossberg's paintings lack the compositional drama of contemporaneous cityscapes by artists like Franz Radziwill, they portray a somewhat evasive relationship to the viewer more than an inviting one, let alone the confrontation that Bier perceived.[71] Discounting the thrust of Bier's article, Stefan Hirsch wrote to Grossberg that his pictures emphasize not the form of their referents but their sensuous complexity. "The snow is not only white but also cold", Hirsch argued. "A person, an animal not only has this and that form, he also does something, lives, and is complicated."[72] It is this complexity that Grossberg seems to believe art could access, even produce, at a time when its processes were increasingly outsourced to, and flattened by, mental or mechanical faculties (and not both). His work thus invokes head, heart, and hand, texturing a measured precision with acknowledgment of the intellect's debt to the manual (and the spiritual). Hirsch uses examples from nature (snow, human, animal), but, in the end, Grossberg presents second nature with a proximate affect, constructing a reality that, if, or because, elusive, offers a sort of alienated recognition, a fugitive apprehension of the sense-receiving and -producing qualities of the things that humans create.[73]

70
Lukács, The Theory of the Novel, 63.

71
Hamburger, Carl Grossberg, 109.

72
Quoted and translated in Hemingway, The Mysticism of Money, 87.

73
It is with this analytic in mind that I adapt my title from Michael Fried, who sees Adolph Menzel's corporeal art as "evoking aspects of his subject matter that could not strictly or directly be seen but could only be intuited, inferred, or otherwise imagined", in: *Menzel's Realism. Art and Embodiment in Nineteenth-Century Berlin*, New Haven, CT 2002, 3. Märten prizes painting's "sensory affects" over its content, in: Art and Proletariat, 23.

V. A Sense of the Negative

In 1948 Siegfried Giedion "designate[d] the period between the two World Wars as the time of full mechanization".[74] Around 1920, mechanization "implanted itself more deeply" in the world of the human, argued Giedion (a student of both Wölfflin and the Bauhaus). "It impinged upon the very center of the human psyche, through all the senses." The effect stemmed from mechanization's entrance into not just the factory but also the "domestic sphere", naturalizing itself in both settings. The process of rationalization, Giedion wrote, turned the factory into a "synchronous organism".[75] But to impute the objects and processes with life might reinforce reification, denying life and sociality to the human worker whose subjectivity is fragmented, but not eliminated, by the divisions of the assembly line that animates the factory. Lukács perceives reification as the "subjugation of men's consciousness". "Rational mechanization", he adds, "extends right into the worker's 'soul'." Scientific management turns the soul into an object; "even his psychological attributes are separated from his total personality", Lukács writes, "and placed in opposition to it so as to facilitate their integration into specialized rational systems and their reduction to statistically viable concepts".[76]

Grossberg produced a series of what he called *Traumbilder* in the mid-to-late 1920s (and sparingly into the 1930s). Here he seems not only to foreground his artistic subjectivity, indeed the inner workings of his mind, but also to share the basic concerns underwriting Giedion and Lukács, if in different ways: the relations between mechanical processes and human interiority, and the constitution of the latter through skills and social life. Each shares compositional and thematic elements with Grossberg's other paintings of the 1920s: buildings and machines, rendered with precision but also abstraction, set within dramatic if disjointed perspectival space. The dream (*Traum*) signifiers take shape most often as animals that populate what, in his "lucid" pictures, would be spaces devoid of organic life. Grossberg copied the animals from nineteenth-century compendia such as *Naturgeschichte der Säugetiere* by Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert.[77] Flat, cartoonish, and mostly species foreign to Germany, though sometimes native to its former colonies, Grossberg's animals look unnatural, as if pasted into each picture. The unexpected juxtapositions of disparate species – in and of

74
Siegfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command. A Contribution to Anonymous History*, New York 1948, 41.

75
Ibid., 5.

76
Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, 88.

77
Schmidt, Carl Grossberg, 69.

themselves and with emblems of second nature, that is, buildings and machines – may endear the *Traumbilder* to surrealism, which developed around the same time. Bier avoided such comparisons, though, in his article, which reproduces one of the *Traumbilder*, *Maschinensaal II* (1925). Something, he writes, tethers these pictures closer to the "plastic". Grossberg's dreams are not immediate but halted, mediated through the learned signs and structures of waking life. This supports Grossberg's artistic goal, so far as he articulated it. In entering what he called the "spiritually distinct and abstract world of painting", he once wrote, artists could better see concrete reality.[78] More than surrealism, his comportment thus aligns with Roh, whose magical realism derived from concrete referents, or otherwise with Gropius's aim after 1923 to realize an "immaterial space" "in the material world, a realization which is accomplished by the brain and the hands".[79]

In *Maschinensaal I* (1925) [Fig. 8], a gorilla sits on a foreshortened printing press with a scroll of paper running through it. The ape is small, comparable to a medieval Madonna statue that rests a short distance behind it. A black-and-white globe hovers to the right. Upside-down with respect to the Earth's typical orientation, the globe is incomplete, missing the areas where Africa and Oceania should be. To Hamburger, the absence of Africa – the equatorial region of which, says Schubert's book, is where the gorilla was discovered in 1847[80] – does not indicate geographical chauvinism, nor does it suggest that "Grossberg is criticizing science's incomplete explanation of the world".[81] Instead, she writes, its missing elements mirror the absent materials elsewhere: in the sparsely populated workshop, at the back of the printing press, in the landscape viewable outside the window (a Franconian setting along the Main river).[82] Still, the missing African continent brings to mind Germany's failed colonial project and the forced redistribution, after World War I, of its territories in east and southwest Africa. The gorilla, an index of that project, looks strange in a German workshop, a disconnect that can read as critical, xenophobic, or

78
Quoted and translated in Venator, Technology's World of Forms, 13.

79
Gropius, Theory and Organization of the Bauhaus, 24. "In a work of art," he adds, "the laws of the physical world, the intellectual world, and the world of the spirit function and are expressed simultaneously."

80
G. H. von Schubert, *Naturgeschichte der Säugetiere*, Eßlingen 1886, 4.

81
Hamburger, Carl Grossberg, 188–189.

82
Ibid., 197.

[Fig. 8]
Carl Grossberg, *Maschinensaal I*, 1925, oil on canvas, 70 × 60 cm, Wuppertal, Von der Heydt Museum.

both, or a counter to the colonial revisionism that occupied mainstream German discourse in the 1920s.[83]

Contra Hamburger, Grossberg also addresses science's inability to describe the world, to map its physical complexity. The extreme linear composition of the room does not cohere with the perspective outside, instituting a disjunction between the subjective inner space and objective outer space of the picture. Grossberg emphasizes the split's temporality in addition to its spatial qualities. The manual press, the Madonna, and workshop environment place the room in some past epoch, while the railway outside brings the scene closer, at least, to the present. Together, the items, each at once simultaneous and attached to a particular moment of production, attest to what Wilhelm Pinder in 1926 called history's "multilayered reality".[84]

In suggesting the two spaces' separate temporalities, Grossberg maps less a coterminous than a developmental relation, one that mimics that of capital, shifting the machinic metonym from the printing press to the train. If the progressive rationalization of human labor threatened the hand and, in turn, the head, it was the evolution of the productive faculties of each that defined the human species in the first place. One cannot ignore, that is, "the part played by labor in the transition from ape to man", to borrow the title of an unfinished essay by Friedrich Engels. The path of human development is commensurate with the increasing dexterity of the hand, Engels argued, and the hand's capacities depend on the "ever new operations" required of it by changing modes of production. Moving toward the "mastery of nature", the hand becomes entangled with humankind's mental (or cultural) pursuits, allowing people to produce "the pictures of a Raphael, the statues of a Thorwaldsen, the music of a Paganini".[85] The gorilla in Grossberg's picture does not work the printing press but rather rests on it. If anything, it forms a part of it, a hybrid machine, as if to suggest capital's instrumentalization of animals. To many, rationalized practices seemed to instrumentalize the human in a resonant manner. Frederick W. Taylor hoped his methods would make work so simple that a worker "more nearly resembles in his mental make-up the ox than any other type".[86] Yet, against Charles Baudelaire's quip that "the majority

83
See Dominik J. Schaller, "Every Herero Will Be Shot". Genocide, Concentration Camps, and Slave Labor in German South-West Africa, in: René Lamarchand (ed.), *Forgotten Genocides. Oblivion, Denial, and Memory,* Philadelphia 2011, 51–70, here 52–53.

84
Wilhelm Pinder, *Das Problem der Generation in der Kunstgeschichte Europas*, Berlin 1926, 2.

85
Friedrich Engels, The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man [1876/1995], in: *marxists.org* (December 20, 2022).

86
Quoted in John Berger, Why Look at Animals?, in: id., *About Looking*, New York 1980, 3–28, here 13. Taylor understood rationalization from the beginning as applicable to even the "most complex" forms of labor, writes Harry Braverman. "[I]n fact it was in machine shops, bricklaying, and other such sites for the practice of well-developed crafts that [Taylor]

of artists are no more than highly skilled animals" – and in line with Marx's early contention that "[a]n animal produces only itself, while man reproduces the whole of nature" – Grossberg seems to distinguish himself from the ape by virtue of complex productive faculties.[87]

Grossberg's *Renaissance* (1929) [Fig. 9] has drawn comparison to the work of Giorgio de Chirico, not least because its setting resembles an Italian *piazza*. Like the rest of his paintings, it is more "linear" than "painterly", in Wölfflin's terms, where the former characterizes art of eras including the Renaissance. Again, the only living figures here are animals: birds, a frog, a fly, a squirrel monkey, a tamarin. They all crouch or hang at the front of what looks again like a stage, mingling with stray flora and a central, mysterious device with a circuit board and light bulbs affixed to it. The composition might imply the animals' advanced intelligence or reason – their ability to control the machine before them. But their positions could also confirm comparative incapacity. In 1928 Helmuth Plessner distinguished humans from animals on the grounds that the former possess "a sense of the negative".[88] Animals can produce things and can effect thought, Plessner speculated, but they cannot take things away, that is, cannot imagine things apart from the immediate context in which they are placed. Plessner frames the dynamic in spatial terms. The animal is "frontal", he argues, its "existence oriented toward the surrounding field of alien givenness".[89] Humans, by contrast, are "excentric", attuned to meanings or relations of things beyond their immediate presence. Not only do Grossberg's animals address themselves forwards, but they also accommodate themselves to the objects given, each creature (except the frog) touching a non-animal thing.

Renaissance likewise supports Plessner's post-Cartesian notion of the human as a being "that is no longer on the same plane as that inhabited by its own body" but rather experiences its body as a representation.[90] The content and structure of Grossberg's picture seem to help it, not unlike canonical paintings from its titular

and his immediate successors achieved their most striking results." Analyzing Taylor's program, Braverman sees the manual laborer as, in a way, not the subject of scientific management but the source. The worker, Braverman writes, "combined, in mind and body, the concepts and physical dexterities of the specialty: technique, understood in this way, is, as has often been observed, the predecessor and progenitor of science". *Labor and Monopoly Capital. The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, New York 1974, 108–109.

87
Charles Baudelaire, The Painter of Modern Life [1863], in: *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, transl. by Jonathan Mayne, London 1964, 1–41, here 15; Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, in: *marxists.org* (December 28, 2022).

88
Helmuth Plessner, *Levels of Organic Life and the Human. An Introduction to Philosophical Anthropology* [1928], transl. by Millay Hyatt, New York 2019, 250.

89
Ibid., 223. Wolfgang Köhler also understood animals (apes, namely) to possess manual skills but lack powers of abstraction, in: *The Mentality of Apes*, transl. by Ella Winter, London 1925.

90
Plessner, Levels of Organic Life, 213.

[Fig. 9]
Carl Grossberg, *Renaissance*, 1929, oil on laminate wood structure, 48 × 38 × 2.6 cm, Rye, New York, the Merrill C. Berman Collection.

period, to produce a (virtual) human subject in the space before the canvas. This subject visualizes a dynamic that, to Plessner, constitutes the root of humanity: the simultaneous experience of one's body "over there", in a particular place, and one's location in a general "here", which is to say nowhere. Unlike Plessner, Erwin Panofsky stressed the historicity of cognitive equivalence. Tracking art's adoption of linear perspective, Panofsky argued that, as a repeatable technique, it rendered one's cognition in mathematical terms, producing "an objectification of the subjective", as well as a rationalization of physical space.[91] In *Renaissance*, as elsewhere, Grossberg invokes Plessner and Panofsky: their insistence on the human's elevated perceptual and intellectual faculties (evidenced, for the latter, by the production of art). But the artist elides these contemporaries, too, in part because his confluence of religious, colonial, and mechanical icons thwarts their evolutionary logics and in part because, despite Grossberg's purported precision, his perspective is miscalculated. The buildings at right and left dictate vanishing points that lie at a great distance from one another (as in de Chirico). Against the homogeneous, subject-fixing space of a Renaissance picture, Grossberg constructs space particular to his own unstable projection, signified as a dream. The mental processes that support his subjectivity still require manual application – through a quasi-mechanical action, copying animal figures from books – but it is precisely this dual capacity that renders his labor (or his conception of it) distinct from that of animals or machines.[92]

VI. On the One Hand a Workshop, On the Other a Museum

Grossberg's *Dampfkessel mit Fledermaus* (1928) [Fig. 10] best outlines his personal and artistic concerns of the rationalization period. Two animals, a flying fox and a flying lemur bat, populate an otherwise lifeless industrial cavern. Observers have narrativized the picture, suggesting that the animals have taken the workers' jobs or that they have crept into the factory after hours.[93] The bat grips a pipe, the bases of which exist somewhere off the panel. The fox appears both afloat and flattened against a retreating ceiling. To the right of the animals sits a large broiler, less complicated in form and less

91
Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* [1927], transl. by Christopher S. Wood, New York 1997, 66.

92
Dual capacity defines the human against the animal for Marx, too: "what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax", in: *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*, transl. by Ben Fowkes, London 1976, 284. James van Dyke writes via Radziwill that it is not just "technical proficiency and art-historical reference" that define artistic labor but also "imaginative, idiosyncratic formal effects", in: Franz Radziwill, 41.

93
Wieland Schmied, Boiler with Bat, in: Lincoln, German Realism of the Twenties, 166; and Olaf Peters, Carl Grossberg and New Objectivity, in: *Carl Grossberg. Industry and Architecture*, Munich 2017, n.p.

[Fig. 10]
Carl Grossberg, *Dampfkessel mit Fledermaus*, 1928, oil on wood, 55 × 66 cm, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, private collection.

fastidious in rendering than most other Grossberg machines. The artist heightens its incapacity by keeping the broiler disconnected from the pipe and by placing it atop a palette and pedestal. In 1932 Ernst Jünger proposed a condition that Grossberg seems to have intuited. "We live in a world that resembles on the one hand a workshop, and on the other a museum", Jünger wrote. The two locales prescribe different modes of viewing: "while nobody is forced to see in a workshop anything more than a mere workshop, in a museum setting there is an atmosphere of edification taking on grotesque forms." If Jünger had earlier praised the aesthetics, even the magic, of machinery, here he notes some dangers of aestheticization. "We have arrived at a kind of historical fetishism," he offers, "standing in direct proportion to our lack of productive capacity."[94] Grossberg's broiler is an old model; one may well see it as a fetish, or as the sort of "outmoded" object which, to Walter Benjamin, animated surrealism and revealed the fractured rhythm of history.[95]

Grossberg painted *Dampfkessel* in 1928, on the four hundredth anniversary of Albrecht Dürer's death.[96] The composition cites the old master's famous print, *Melencolia I* (1514), in the placement of its two animals (the bat is a dog in the original). Like Dürer, *Melencolia* received attention in the 1920s, figuring in the writings of critics such as Benjamin and art historians such as Panofsky and Fritz Saxl.[97] For Panofsky and Saxl, the print documents Dürer's struggle to perfect and promote a rigorous, scientific art "based on measure, weight, and number", and on "mastery of technique".[98] Creative and scientific, Melencolia serves as a proxy for the artist-thinker himself, with the other details only confirming the link: dogs were typical companions in scholar portraits; the polyhedron marks the feat of perspectival construction.[99] Still, Melencolia's skills do not support her; Benjamin noticed that her "utensils of active life lie

94
Ernst Jünger, *The Worker. Dominion and Form* [1932], transl. by Bogdan Costea and Laurence Paul Hemming, Evanston, IL 2017, 127.

95
Peters, Carl Grossberg, n.p.; Walter Benjamin, Der Surrealismus. Die letzte Momentaufnahme der europäische Intelligenz, in: *Die Literarische Welt*, 1929, repub. as Surrealism. The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia, in: Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (eds.), *Selected Writings*, 2 vols., Cambridge, MA 1999, vol. 2, pt. 1, 207–221, here 210.

96
On the significance of this context to Grossberg, see Peters, Carl Grossberg, n.p.

97
Hartlaub became obsessed with it as well, writing several times to Panofsky about his interpretations; see Hartlaub, Gustav Friedrich, I, C–119, Deutsches Kunstarchiv, Nuremberg. In 1928 the curator organized an exhibition at the Kunsthalle that paired Dürer's prints with work by modern artists, including some that were featured in *Die Neue Sachlichkeit*. See G. F. Hartlaub, *Ausstellung Dürer und die Nachwelt*, Mannheim 1928.

98
Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy. Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art*, Nendeln 1979, 342.

99
Ibid., 322.

unused".[100] She feels powerless, Panofsky argues, like a "creative being reduced to despair".[101] If Dürer's faith in art could waver in 1514, as processes of mechanization first took hold, artists of the 1920s felt an acute crisis in the face of advancing new media, deskilling, and standardization.

Backward looking but knowingly contingent, much *Neue Sachlichkeit* art duly performs a kind of melancholy.[102] Beate Reese understands it in terms that recall Benjamin's diagnosis of writers associated with the *Neue Sachlichkeit* in 1931: a resigned "left-wing" affliction.[103] Even more, Reese attributes to artists like Grossberg the melancholy that Sigmund Freud articulated in 1917, in partial response to the traumas of World War I: melancholy as a "painful dejection, [a] cessation of interest in the outside world", resulting from the loss of an unknown "object". The melancholic figure "knows *whom* he has lost", Freud wrote, "but not *what* he has lost in him".[104] Grossberg, scarred by the war and an up-and-down career, indeed sensed something "lost" in the modern world. *Dampfkessel* suggests the loss as tied to the shared vulnerability of art, industry, and the worker tasked with reproducing either (or both). If the outside that one sees through the window in the painting has a horizon, the room does not; its vanishing lines meet at a vertical, securing the space as one for animals (in Plessner's conception) and one which cannot guarantee the human subject that linear perspective presupposes (in, say, Dürer's). At the same time, as in Dürer, the picture brings forth the human, namely the author. The disconnected broiler, having assumed Melencolia's position, could stand for Grossberg, reified and literally powerless – an emblem of the rational world, now overcome by the irrational forces of dreams, time, and capital (a dialectical inversion that would structure National Socialist ideology in the ensuing years, as critics like Ernst Bloch argued).[105]

Grossberg is best known for the pictures of factory interiors that he produced after the period discussed in this paper, that is,

100
Walter Benjamin, *Origin of the German Trauerspiel* [1928], transl. by Howard Eiland, Cambridge, MA 2019, 143.

101
Erwin Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, Princeton, NJ 1955, 168.

102
Beate Reese, *Melancholie in der Malerei der Neuen Sachlichkeit*, Frankfurt a. M. 1998.

103
Walter Benjamin, Linke Melancholie. Zu Erich Kästners neuem Gedichtbuch, in: *Die Gesellschaft* 8/1, 1931, 181–184, repub. as Left-Wing Melancholy, in: The Weimar Republic Sourcebook, 304–307.

104
Sigmund Freud, Mourning and Melancholia [1918], in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols., transl. by James Strachey, London 1964, vol. 14, 239–258, here 244, 245.

105
On Grossberg's vexed relationship to National Socialism and its official art, see Peters, Carl Grossberg.

after Germany's rationalization boom and then during the Third Reich. Many of his factory pictures were products of corporate commissions from businesses throughout Germany, although he produced some at the behest of his dealer, Nierendorf, and for individual patrons. The Hamburg-based Swedish consul August Brinckman commissioned at least five pictures from Grossberg, and the two maintained correspondence into the mid-1930s. Among these pieces was a copy, in 1932, of *Maschinensaal I*, prompting Grossberg to write the sentence that animated this paper: "I've always been interested in technology's advances, but I have felt that we have lost some important things in this progress." How better to figure the persistence of craft skill – an example of what Bloch called German "non-contemporaneity" – than to manually reproduce an idiosyncratic image that suggests, no less, the impending rise of mechanized labor?[106]

Frederic J. Schwartz has shown how Bloch's materialist concept derived loosely from the work of Wilhelm Pinder, who in the mid-1920s advanced a concept of stylistic succession based in the variable length of artists' lives.[107] "The time of [an artist's] birth", the art historian wrote, "determines the development of their nature." As noted above, this produced for Pinder a "multilayered reality", something that rhymes with a claim he had made about recent representational painting in 1922: that it implied history's "periodical rhythm".[108] Rooted partly in biological essentialism and congruent with the art historian's racist nationalism, Pinder's history forms lines, not points, in recognition that certain styles and methods pre- or postdate their documented relevance. By contrast, German proponents of rationalization aimed to fix labor's contingencies and subjectivities into points – to concretize categories like "the human" and "the worker", and to plot them along linear narratives of scientific and social progress. Grossberg played along, dependent upon rationalized systems for subject matter and their managers for sustenance while, like the generalized worker and artist, feeling their effects.[109] One can view his privileged individualism and distance from working-class organization as the type of melancholic resignation with which critics such as Benjamin

106
Ernst Bloch, Preface to the 1935 Edition, in: *Heritage of Our Times*, transl. by Neville Plaice and Stephen Plaice, Berkeley, CA 1990, 1–5. Hemingway may have had Grossberg in mind when writing how, in some *Neue Sachlichkeit* art, "the conjunction of techniques from fifteenth-century northern painting with machine age iconography produces an effect of calculated non-synchronicity", in: Introduction. Realism Then and Now, 13.

107
Frederic J. Schwartz, Ernst Bloch and Wilhelm Pinder. Out of Sync, in: *Grey Room* 3, 2001, 54–89.

108
Pinder, Das Problem der Generation, 16, 2; and Wilhelm Pinder, response in Ein neuer Naturalismus?? Eine Rundfrage des Kunstblatts, in: *Das Kunstblatt* 9, 1922, 370.

109
Corporate work supplemented his income in the face of a flagging market; he also went into business for himself as an interior designer in 1928. See Hamburger, Carl Grossberg, 234–353; and Justus Bier, Ein Wohnhausumbau, in: *Die Form* 6, 1931, 63–68, here 63.

charged the *Neue Sachlichkeit* and his pictures of frozen factories as, at best, a form of what Lukács called romantic anti-capitalism.[110] Valorizing artisanal work as a bulwark against what many perceived as capital's irreversible development, Grossberg imagined a world where those machines were no longer threatening. A version of this romanticism percolated into the Nazi period, when officials touted concepts like "joy in work" and "beauty of labor" to ameliorate working-class discontent without altering the workers' social and material positions.[111] But Grossberg's calculated engagement with techniques borne both of and against capital's emergent processes, coupled with his detailed yet abstract form of representation, produces some tension with accusations of romantic withdrawal. Bound to new forms, taken however with old ones, he worked through the conditions that shaped his own life and work, as if the results might reshape that of others.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks to Thomas Hughes and Rachel Stratton for including me in this issue and in the conference that preceded it; to Thomas, Rachel, Pujan Karambeigi, and the two reviewers for their comments on drafts of the present essay; to Devin Fore, Hal Foster, and Megan Luke for comments on related material; and to Merrill Berman, Adrian Sudhalter, Michael Hasenclever, and Elena Savenkova for graciously sharing insights, information, and images with me.

Joe Bucciero is a visiting assistant professor of modern and contemporary art history at Oberlin College. His research has received support from the DAAD and the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, and his writing has appeared or is forthcoming in publications including *The New York Review of Books*, *The Nation*, and *October*.

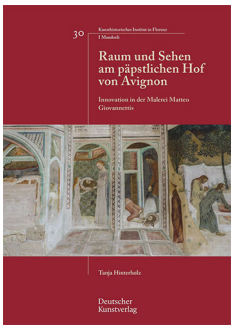
110
See Robert Sayre and Michael Löwy, Figures of Romantic Anti-Capitalism, in: *New German Critique* 32, 1984, 42–92. Romantic anticapitalism is connected but not identical to "realism", write Sayre and Löwy, as it can appear in art that is "fantastic" and "surrealist" (49).

111
On fascist appropriation of joy in work, see Campbell, Joy in Work, especially 28–30, 312–385; and on beauty of labor, see Anson Rabinbach, The Aesthetics of Production in the Third Reich, in: *Journal of Contemporary History*, 11/4, 1976, 43–74.

REVIEWS
REZENSIONEN

TANJA HINTERHOLZ, *RAUM UND SEHEN AM PÄPSTLICHEN HOF VON AVIGNON. INNOVATION IN DER MALEREI MATTEO GIOVANNETTIS*

Italienische Forschungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz, I Mandorli 30, Berlin/Boston: Deutscher Kunstverlag 2024, 337 pages with 130 color and 6 b/w ill., ISBN 978-3-422-98761-6 (Paperback).



Reviewed by
Serena Romano

Tanja Hinterholz's 2024 monograph is dedicated to Matteo Giovannetti's frescoes in Avignon. The author's doctoral thesis, supervised by Gottfried Kerscher at the University of Trier in 2018, it is published in *I mandorli*, the poetically titled series of *Italienische Forschungen* of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence.

The monograph fills the long-standing gap that followed the research of Enrico Castelnuovo, whose book *Un pittore italiano alla corte di Avignone* was published in 1962 and reissued in 1991, winning the Feltrinelli Prize.[1] Castelnuovo himself returned to the subject several times, but – as Hinterholz rightly points out – his authoritative interpretation, which might be termed "philological" or, more broadly, "cultural", seemed, if not to have exhausted the

1
Enrico Castelnuovo, *Un pittore italiano alla corte di Avignone. Matteo Giovanetti e la pittura in Provenza nel secolo XIV*, Torino 1991 [1962].

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
6/3, 2025, 409–414

https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2025.3.113440

subject, certainly to have sealed it in a way that might intimidate a beginner.

Hinterholz's volume has a specific focus, to which the author remains faithful throughout its dense pages. She concentrates on the relationship between spatial representation, narrative, and the perspective of the observer. When viewing Matteo Giovannetti's magnificent murals, the observer immediately realizes that what he is looking at is neither simple nor elementary, but rather constructed and deliberate. Giovannetti's painted spaces are provocative, ambitious, acrobatic: a challenge to earlier methodologies. This approach is not only important but necessary, and it is surprising that it has not previously been emphasized, given that scholars have clearly noted the inherently "bizarre" nature (I use the term in a historiographical sense, as does Hinterholz) of Giovannetti's painting, even though they never made it the focus of their research.

The analysis begins – contrary to the chronological order of Matteo Giovannetti's *oeuvre* – with the Audience Hall, whose pictorial program is almost entirely lost. It is used as a sort of threshold, in order to establish methodological approaches and benchmarks, before moving on to the book's core: the two chapels of St. Martial and St. John (both St. John the Baptist and the Evangelist) in the same palace, and the other dedicated to the two Saints John in the Charterhouse of Villeneuve-lès-Avignon, all decorated with narrative cycles.

The chapel of St. Martial, the subject that forms the book's *pièce de résistance*, underwent a beautiful restoration directed by Dominique Vingtain in 2013/2014, carried out by the Italian firm CBC and documented by Domenico Ventura's magnificent photographs. This restoration has so far not been exhaustively published, rendering all the more valuable Hinterholz's Chapter 5, illustrated by several of the aforementioned beautiful photographs.

The results of the cleaning are breathtaking. Giovannetti's deep blue – a luxurious pigment used unsparingly and with maximum saturation – now really breaks through the walls, transforming the chapel's spatial enclosure into an extraordinarily indefinable place, a hybrid context of natural and constructed landscapes, buildings seen from outside or inside and views over the countryside. All this hovers on a plinth depicted as a fictive loggia opening onto an impossibly blue sky. This blue is not merely a background, but a protagonist: despite having an obvious naturalistic referent, it is anything but atmospheric, and indeed looms solid and brilliant. It serves to either diminish or enhance the credibility of the projecting elements: on the east wall, for instance, the blue supports the figures planted on the frame of the third register, forming a sort of tunnel that guides the beholder's gaze to the tracery of the window; and in the vault the buildings that launch themselves acrobatically upwards are credible only because they are firmly inlaid on the blue cutouts of the sky.

In order to read and follow the stories, the viewer – as Hinterholz exhaustively demonstrates – must continually move, shift,

even turn 180 degrees, navigating between the real architectural lines of the chapel and the painted ones that use and transfigure the architecture itself, sometimes giving the viewer the illusion of looking into a painted environment from two different angles by exploiting a real wall edge. The narrative crosses two different axes: one is the unfolding of the *Vita* of St. Martial – whom Clement VI had just canonized – according to the text that just before 1320 Bernard Gui had compiled using the older version by Pseudo-Aurelian. To this sequence, which winds around the chapel starting from the vault and turning incessantly on the walls, are added further nuclei of meaning that in each wall are constructed on the basis of typological connections and symbolic and content correspondences. To follow this complex plot, Hinterholz provides very useful tables with sequential diagrams; equally valuable is the Appendix, which presents transcriptions of the tituli and the inscriptions which densely punctuate the paintings in St. Martial like all the other stages of Giovannetti's work in Avignon.

Hinterholz accepts and deepens the current interpretation of the chapel's program: it was the figurative weapon of a vast political project by which Clement VI, in canonizing Martial and making him a kind of apostle Peter in Gaul, legitimized the Avignon papacy and celebrated Avignon as the new Rome. The Avignonese project essentially attempted to do without the venerable but cumbersome precedent of Rome itself: in the chapel, the two emblematic Martyrdoms of Peter and Paul only superficially hint at the Roman landscape where the entire iconographic tradition located them, ultimately amputating its relevance. Nearby, meanwhile, Giovannetti portrays a highly detailed sacred topography of southern and central France punctuated by its thirteen most important churches, those founded by Martial in Aquitania. They thus form a crucial message: one might wonder whether the schematic nature of this view by chance reflects a literary or documentary model. To better frame it, it would have been helpful to recall not only, as Hinterholz does, the obvious case of Siena's territorial possessions painted in the Palazzo Pubblico, but also some medieval Roman precedents, such as the so-called Arch of Charlemagne at Tre Fontane or, closer in date, the cloister of Santa Scolastica in Subiaco.

Less rich, perhaps, are the chapters on the two chapels of St. John in the papal palace and at the Charterhouse, on which there are also good and very recent contributions. Hinterholz, however, offers interesting observations about the Carthusian Monastery chapel – especially in relation to the scene in which the pontiff, no longer Clement VI but Innocent VI, appears kneeling before the Virgin and Child, although he was already dead. Hinterholz rightly discusses the manifold qualities of Giovannetti's "illusionism" and notes the invasive strength of the fictive marble apparatuses and of the deceased pope's figure, this one represented as strongly alive. The scene seems to overflow into the viewer's space and trigger perceptual dynamics in which a kind of augmented reality, to use a term dear to current computer science, prevails. Hinterholz makes

a fair and useful distinction between the *trompe-l'oeil* genre and what she detects in Giovannetti's painting by calling them "special effects" (pp. 256–258): one cannot but agree, *trompe-l'oeil* having among other things a strongly moralistic meaning and being often a true *memento mori*, while Giovannetti wants above all to astonish and satisfy his very demanding audience with a display of technical skill and artistic bravura.

Hinterholz's work clearly demonstrates her passion for the subject treated. She has deeply immersed herself in trying to understand the tools and objectives of what had been judged, often negatively, as the painter's "bizarreness". She has certainly shown that this "bizarreness" underlies precise choices of an ideological, political, and communicative nature; and that therefore Giovannetti is not called the *pictor papae* by chance, he was the true interpreter – we could say, the spokesman – of the full Avignonese epoch. Very likely supported by a group of learned *concepteurs*, he grasped its important themes and expressed them figuratively. He worked for an absolute elite: the extreme complexity of his figural compositions, his direction of real and painted spaces, his control over the observer's gaze and mind would be incomprehensible otherwise. Lastly, the abundance of writing is perhaps unmatched in any other fourteenth-century pictorial project.

With this in mind, I found it perhaps a bit generically fashionable to speak of "Publikum" as the author does constantly. It is too broad a term to use for the restricted and highly cultured circle that would have had access to the rooms of the papal residence, whose key role in the liturgical and ceremonial routes of the court, obviously of very limited access, Hinterholz rightly emphasizes. She herself points out that St. Martial's and St. John's chapels form a unified functional and liturgical core with the halls of the Consistory and Conclave: routes for the pope, for the high ecclesiastical hierarchies, for some top officials of the court, all observers already predisposed to understanding since they were internal to that system of functions, values, and thought. They were the ones capable of reading the endless inscriptions guiding them through the tortuous narrative sequences, toward the celebratory shores of arrival of the Avignon papacy. To speak, as Hinterholz does on page 92, of "Besucherinnen und Besucher" as the audience of the frescoes – as well as, in another context on page 254, of "Künstlerinnen und Künstler im 14. Jahrhundert" – is anachronistic, and a concession to "political correctness", more relevant to modern universities and academies than fourteenth-century papal Avignon.

The book is useful and generous, and does the author credit. Perhaps, to make it more reader friendly, the necessary parts where Hinterholz explains the iconographic themes of the paintings in connection with the sources, and shows their disposition on the walls, could have been made less long-winded and oppressive. Especially on St. Martial, there are dozens and dozens of pages dedicated to this, and although these arrangements certainly represent an important stage in the author's reasoning, they could have

been hierarchized at least in typographical style and graphic layout to make their analytical nature immediately understandable.

In another vein, the full immersion could have tried to be a bit more open to the Italian and European pictorial context, only sparsely represented in Hinterholz's pages. It is true that the book presents itself as an analysis of *Raum und Sehen*, but after 350 dense pages it appears to aspire to be the modern monograph on Giovannetti and the successor of Castelnuovo. Yet it is too introverted and self-referential: in many places one misses solid contextual knowledge and references. This is most evident in the "Coda", which Hinterholz titles "Die Innovationen Giovannettis im europäischen Vergleich" and which contains some frankly poor, disorganized, and scarcely "European" observations. We find mentions of the Codex of St. George, something about Cimabue's *Virgin Enthroned* in the lower church in Assisi, the vault of the Spanish chapel in Santa Maria Novella, and finally Roberto d'Oderisio at the Incoronata in Naples and Broederlam; but all of them are referenced without any serious discussion or contextualization, and without due bibliographies. The chapter remains very scholastic, as if the author had to pay hock to some professorial demand, without really believing in it and measuring herself against too great a task.

Hinterholz takes refuge in concepts belonging to other critics, from Kemp to Büttner to Blume – always, invariably, German-speaking. And indeed, to this observation must be added another. With the exception of Castelnuovo's writings, which would obviously have been impossible to omit, Hinterholz seems to be quite uncomfortable with Italian studies and, in a more general way, with the non-Germanic bibliography, the German studies being relentlessly privileged even when they are unrepresentative or a byproduct of other foundational and more important studies. The whole thing is ultimately a bit annoying: one can be sure that on topics such as pictorial illusiveness, for example, Kemp, Blume, and Büttner will be celebrated and other authors – whom Hinterholz seems not to know or read well, and in any case to cite little – ignored. On Clement VI she does not cite Etienne Anheim's seminal thesis;[2] she seems not to know of Alessio Monciatti's volume on the papal palace in Rome,[3] an embarrassing absence given that Hinterholz's volume is about the papal palace in Avignon. On the Sancta Sanctorum she cites only Ingo Herklotz's brief article[4] but not the founda-

[2] Etienne Anheim, *La Forge de Babylone. Pouvoir pontifical et culture de cour sous le règne de Clément VI (1352–1352)*, Paris 2004.

[3] Alessio Monciatti, *Il Palazzo Vaticano nel Medioevo*, Florence 2005.

[4] Ingo Herklotz, Die Fresken von Sancta Sanctorum nach der Restaurierung. Überlegungen zum Ursprung der Trecentomalerei, in: Renate Luigina Colella, J. M. Gill and Alton Lawrence Jenkens (eds.), *Pratum Romanum. Richard Krautheimer zum 100. Geburtstag*, Wiesbaden 1997, 149–180.

tional volume published after the restoration.[5] She does not discuss the *Liber Regulae*, which has been attributed to Giovannetti exactly because of the representation of space in its miniatures (and quotes only Manzari's book on the Avignonese miniature and not, among the many, Tomei's monographic study).[6] Nor does she acknowledge Claudia Bolgia's recent and excellent contributions on Giovannetti.[7] On Giotto – and *his* relation to reality and illusion – the list of lacunae would be too long. Possibly the series *I mandorli* imposes limits on bibliographical citations in footnotes: but Hinterholz is, it seems, *plus royaliste que le Roi*, or – to remain in our context – more catholic than the pope. She seems to have been especially selective with regard to Italian researchers: of the 167 titles listed in the final bibliography, only fourteen are in Italian, six of them by Castelnuovo. Among the remaining eight, a 2006 article by Alfredo Saccoccio in the obscure periodical *Lazio ieri e oggi*[8] stands out – Hinterholz cites pages 358–359, yet the article consists of a single page (358), on which Saccoccio merely praises Castelnuovo's book. Surely something more representative could have been found?

These flaws are, in all likelihood, due largely to the author's young age. Nonetheless, credit must be given to Hinterholz's for a courageous and in many respects very useful work for further study. A translation, for example into English, would perhaps be one way to facilitate a wide and productive reading.

5
Sancta Sanctorum, Milan 1995. Ingo Herklotz reviewed the publication: id., Review of *Sancta Sanctorum*, in: *Kunstchronik* 50, 1997, 276–286.

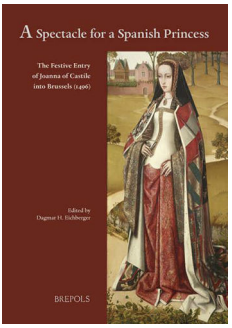
6
Alessandro Tomei, Un capolavoro poco noto della miniatura trecentesca. Il "Liber Regulae" dell'ordine degli ospetalieri di Santo Spirito, in: *Il Veltro* 46/1, 2002, 203–224.

7
Claudia Bolgia, Matteo Giovanetti pictor veronicarum. Circolazione di idee, opere e modelli nell'Europa del Trecento, in: Roberta Cerone and Manuela Gianandrea (eds.), *Medioevo europeo e mediterraneo. Scambi, circolazione e mobilità artistica*, Rome 2024, 195–214; ead., Patrons and Artists on the Move. New Light on Matteo Giovannetti between Avignon and Rome, in: *Papers of the British School at Rome* 88, 2020, 185–213; ead., Avignon as 'Nova Roma', in: *The Burlington Magazine* 166/1450, 2024, 5–15.

8
Alfredo Saccoccio, Matteo Giovannetti. Riscoperta di un pittore viterbese del XIV secolo, in: *Lazio ieri e oggi* 42/11, 2006, 358.

DAGMAR H. EICHBERGER (HG.), *A SPECTACLE FOR A SPANISH PRINCESS. THE FESTIVE ENTRY OF JOANNA OF CASTILE INTO BRUSSELS (1496)*

Burgundica 35, Turnhout: Brepols 2024, 440 Seiten mit 240 Farbabb., ISBN 978-2-503-59443-9 (Hardback).



Rezensiert von
Dietrich Erben

Bei der vorliegenden kritischen Edition eines spätmittelalterlichen Festberichts handelt es sich um die eindrucksvolle Forschungssynthese eines bereits ausführlich untersuchten Objekts. Die Arbeit an der illuminierten Handschrift haben nun wiederum VertreterInnen zahlreicher historischer Fachdisziplinen unter sich aufgeteilt, KunsthistorikerInnen und HistorikerInnen ebenso wie PhilologInnen, Theater- und MusikwissenschaftlerInnen. Diese unterschiedlichen fachlichen Zuständigkeiten sind für sich genommen ein ferner Spiegel des damaligen multimedialen Spektakels. Der wissenschaftliche Blick auf unterschiedliche Kulturräume verdankt sich darüber hinaus den ausgedehnten seinerzeitigen territorial-politischen und dynastischen Verflechtungen: Die festliche Entrée der Infantin Johanna von Kastilien in Brüssel erfolgte am 9. Dezember 1496, und dieses öffentliche Ereignis wird im Festbericht überliefert. Die Infantin, Tochter der Königin Isabella von Kastilien und des Königs Ferdinand von Aragon, befand sich auf Brautreise zu ihrem Ehemann Philipp von Burgund, dem Sohn König Maximilians I. von Habsburg und der Herzogin Maria von Burgund. Die Hochzeit zwischen Isabella und Philipp war Mitte

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
6/3, 2025, 415–419

https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2025.3.111941

Oktober, zwei Monate vor dem Brüsseler Einzug, im brabantischen Lier erfolgt. Sie besiegelte die dann Jahrhunderte währenden dynastischen Verbindungen zwischen den spanischen Königreichen, der Habsburgerdynastie und dem Alten Reich. Zusammen mit dieser geradezu weltpolitischen dynastischen Relevanz liegt die Bedeutung der Entrée von Johanna von Kastilien und damit auch der Bildhandschrift, die das Zeremoniell protokolliert, in der kommunalen Interessenpolitik der Stadt Brüssel, von der die neue Herrscherin in Empfang genommen wurde. Im Leben Johannas von Kastilien blieben die Ehe und der Brüsseler Aufenthalt letztlich eine frühe, zeitlich begrenzte Episode. Nach dem Tod des Gatten im Jahr 1506 wurde sie zurück nach Spanien beordert und politisch weitgehend kaltgestellt, ihr wurde der schmähende Beiname „die Wahnsinnige" auferlegt und sie verlebte die Witwenjahrzehnte bis zu ihrem Tod 1555 in Tordesillas.

Die vorliegende Publikation zum Festbericht beinhaltet mehrere Teile: Auf die zehn interpretierenden Studien folgen zwei beschreibende Abschnitte zum Kodex und zu dessen Miniaturen (Dagmar Eichberger, Helga Kaiser-Minn); die zweite Hälfte des Buches bietet die lateinische Transkription des Textes und dessen englische Übersetzung (Verena Demoed) sowie das Faksimile der gesamten Handschrift. Dem in Berlin aufbewahrten Manuskript (ms 78 D5), das 1884 aus englischem Privatbesitz für das Kupferstichkabinett erworben wurde, ist der Superlativ zu attestieren, dass es sich bei ihm um den ersten vollständig erhaltenen illustrierten Bericht des Einzugs einer Herrscherin handelt. Mit 64 Folia ist es im Umfang überschaubar. Darüber hinaus geben, so wird man sagen können, Text und Illustrationen keine besonderen Rätsel auf. Eher handelt es sich um ein Kompendium spätmittelalterlicher, für sich genommen je konventionalisierter Themen und Motive, in denen sich kommunale Repräsentation und Herrscherinnenlob verschränken – genau darin liegt, zusammen mit dem Erstlingsrang der Handschrift als Bericht der Entrata einer Herrscherin, die Bedeutung des Kodex.

Die Handschrift ist im Faksimile um etwa ein Drittel des Originals verkleinert, was der Lesbarkeit und der Pracht von Kalligraphie und Bildern aufgrund der großartigen Reproduktionsqualität keinerlei Abbruch tut. Auf den aufgeschlagenen Doppelseiten stehen sich verso die lateinischen, meist nur eine Handvoll Zeilen umfassenden Texterläuterungen und die Bilder gegenüber. Dies macht das Verständnis von Text und Bild eminent funktional und eingängig. Die übersichtliche inhaltliche Disposition des Kodex bildet direkt die ständischen Hierarchien im Zeremoniell der Entrée ab: Nach dem Eröffnungsbild mit dem Stadtheiligen, dem Erzengel Michael, folgt das Defilé der verschiedenen Klerikergruppen, die, so wird im Beitext verlautet, für die Bildung in der Stadt und für die fromme Verehrung der neuen Herrscherin einstehen; es folgt als Intermezzo eine exotische Burleskeninszenierung; dann geht es weiter mit dem Zug der städtischen Honoratioren und der Zünfte. Im zweiten Teil der Handschrift (ab fol. 31v) sind

insgesamt 28 *Tableaux vivants* erläutert und illustriert. Dargestellt sind die Schaugerüste jeweils in der Nahsicht auf die Bühne. Im unteren Teil der Bilder macht das Holzgerüst die Konstruktion sichtbar. Die Bühne darüber, auf der die SchauspielerInnen agieren, ist gleichförmig von Stoffbahnen und Vorhängen gerahmt, welche mit den Tituli die Szenen für die Betrachtenden identifizieren. Die *Tableaux* sind mit ihren Ikonographien ausdrücklich an die Herrscherin adressiert. Neun alttestamentliche Szenen verweisen auf die herrscherlichen Tugenden. In der sich anschließenden Szenefolge wechseln sich weitere alttestamentliche Szenen mit antikmythologischen Themen ab. Eingestreut sind zwei zeitgenössische Einzelszenen zur Reconquista in Spanien (fol. 42r) und zum Hochzeitsgemach, dem „Domus Delicie Et Iocunditatis" (fol. 58r). Ihren Abschluss findet die Szenenfolge mit der Darstellung des Evangelisten Lukas, der die Madonna malt, als offensichtlich selbstreferenzieller Verweis auf die kunstvolle und religiös begründete Herstellung der Handschrift selbst. Den Abschluss des Kodex bilden zwei Wappenseiten und eine Textbeschreibung des Brüsseler Rathauses.

Die einführenden Beiträge des vorliegenden Bandes eröffnen jeweils ausführlich und fundiert sehr verschiedene Deutungsperspektiven auf die Bilderhandschrift. Naturgemäß haben sich die Analysen stets auf zwei Ebenen zu bewegen, nämlich auf der Ebene der realhistorischen Situation, in der sich die Joyeuse Entrée abspielte, und auf der Ebene des Mediums, das sich dem Ereignis widmet. Zeitgeschichtlich ist von Belang, dass sich die Stadt Brüssel in Anbetracht der lange währenden Rebellionen gegen die fremden Herren der neuen Regentin als Ort der Stabilität zu präsentieren suchte und dass die Kommune zugleich den Standortvorteil der Stadt als Residenzort in Szene setzte. Die politische und soziale Ordnung, die über dem Zeremoniell der Entrée waltete und die sich auch in der Handschrift widerspiegelt, sollte diesen doppelten kommunalen Aspirationen Ausdruck verleihen (Raymond Fagel, Claire Billen und Chloé Deligne). Aus der Perspektive kommunaler Selbstdarstellung gewinnt auch die relativ ausführliche und außergewöhnliche Ekphrasis des Brüsseler Rathauses als baulicher Ausdruck der Ordnung am Ende der Handschrift ihren Sinn (Sascha Köhl). In weiteren Beiträgen des Bandes werden die intellektuellen Kontexte von Entrée und Handschrift im Umfeld spätmittelalterlicher und frühhumanistischer Gelehrsamkeit im Kreis der Rhetorikersozietäten erkundet (Remco Sleiderink und Amber Souleymane, Anne-Marie Legaré). Weiterhin nicht ganz eindeutig zu klären ist der Status des Kodex in Bezug auf Adressierung und Funktion. Für eine exklusive Adressierung an die Fürstin spricht angesichts der fehlenden Widmung und der insgesamt bescheidenen materiellen Aufmachung der Handschrift mit den auf Papier gemalten Aquarellen nichts. Am ehesten ist die Rolle der Handschrift als die eines kommunalen Erinnerungsbuches zu bestimmen. Zugleich bleibt wohl weiterhin nicht auszuschließen, dass der Kodex eine Umsetzung als Wiegendruck hätte finden sollen und damit ein breiterer bürgerlicher Leserkreis hätte erreicht werden können. Im Rahmen

der sachkundlichen Erschließung wartet ein Aufsatz mit der abenteuerlichen Geschichte des Verlustes der persönlichen kostbaren Besitztümer Johannas auf, war doch ein Gutteil der Brautausstattung verloren gegangen, als eines der Hauptschiffe der Flottille, mit der Johanna anreiste, vor der flandrischen Küste sank (Annemarie Jordan Gschwend).

Es versteht sich von selbst, dass diesen vielfältigen Kontextualisierungen die Beiträge zur Inhaltsdeutung von Entrée und Kodex ausführlich an die Seite treten (Wim Blockmans, Dagmar Eichberger, Laura Weigert). Herausgearbeitet werden dabei insbesondere die genderhistorischen Perspektiven der Würdigungen der Infantin und Herzogin auf den allegorischen Bühnen. Dies gilt insbesondere für die beiden topischen Themenkreise der *Neuf Preuses* und der alttestamentlichen Heldinnen, die in den *Tableaux vivants* szenisch vergegenwärtigt wurden. So stehen Judith und Thecuites als siegreiche Heldinnen oder die Königin von Saba sowie die Prophetin Deborah als Exempla für die weise Herrschaft der Fürstin ein. Ihnen treten die Amazonenköniginnen und mit Jeanne d'Arc, Isabella von Kastilien und Jacoba von Holland drei weibliche Exempla aus der Gegenwart und aus dem dynastischen Umfeld an die Seite. Die Idealisierung Johannas von Kastilien folgt damit dem Prinzip der rhetorischen Amplifikation, indem alttestamentliche, mythisch-antike und zeitgenössische Tugendvorbilder aufgerufen werden.

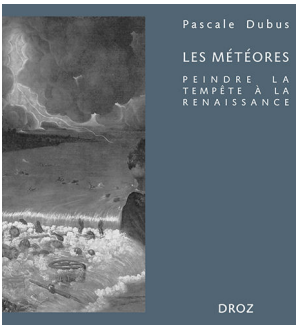
Weitere deutende Dimensionen werden in den meisten Essays schließlich im Hinblick auf die kunsttheoretischen Implikationen der die Bilder begleitenden Erläuterungstexte und in Bezug auf die synästhetischen Effekte der Entrée eruiert. In eindrücklicher Deutlichkeit und Vielzahl wird in den Texten das zeitgenössische Vokabular medialer Selbstauskunft aufgerufen. Produktionsästhetische Begriffe wie „libellum", „labris", „effigies", „scenis", „personagia", „titulus" und „argumentum" werden im zentralen Begriff der „Tropologie", also der Lehre von den sprachlich-bildlichen Stilmitteln, zur Synthese gebracht. Hinweise auf die Synästhesie der multimedialen Inszenierung werden vereinzelt sowohl in den entsprechenden Bildmotiven als auch in den Texten gegeben, so etwa mit den Kostümen der DarstellerInnen, den Illuminationen der *Tableaux* durch Fackeln und mit der musikalischen Begleitung des Zeremoniells – all dies steht, wie es in den ersten Zeilen der Texterläuterung heißt, im Dienst, „die Glückwünsche, den Beifall und die Freude des Publikums" (vgl. fol. 2r) hervorzurufen.

In der Summe der Deutungsansätze und im Text- und Bildgehalt des Kodex selbst stellt sich die Publikation als ein überaus instruktiver Beitrag zur visuellen Kommunikation im Epochenübergang von Spätmittealter und Renaissance und zur visuellen Kultur insgesamt dar. Mögen sich die beiden Begriffe, mit deren Erforschung sich auch diese Zeitschrift auseinandersetzt, erst im Zuge der bereits voll entfalteten Technisierung und der sukzessiven Digitalisierung des Bildes seit dem Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts durchgesetzt haben, so verweist doch bereits der Gegenstand, dem sich das „Spectacle for a Spanish Princess" widmet, auf die weit zurückrei-

chende Vorgeschichte. Wie einen das vorliegende Buch lehrt, besitzen beide Konzepte für ein vormodernes ästhetisch-gesellschaftliches Verbundsystem bereits ihr analytisches Anregungspotenzial.

PASCALE DUBUS, *LES MÉTÉORES. PEINDRE LA TEMPÊTE À LA RENAISSANCE*

Ars Longa 13, Geneva: Droz 2025, 264 pages with 66 b/w ill.,
ISBN 978-2-600-06549-8 (Paperback).



Reviewed by
Dominic-Alain Boariu

Let's play with branching narratives and imagine – at the risk of spoiling its beauty – a completely different ending to *Take Shelter* (dir. Jeff Nichols, 2011). Instead of harsh treatment Curtis (Michael Shannon) could be prescribed gentler cures, such as the reading of Pascale Dubus's latest book. To recall the plot briefly... haunted by the imminent approach of a catastrophic storm, Curtis seeks to protect his family by digging a bunker in the back of his garden. In so doing, he delves implicitly into the depths of his psyche tormented by apocalyptic omens, prodigies encrypted in the flight of birds and oily rains. From the psychological interior to the meteorological exterior, the film unsettles premonition – less that of the protagonist than that of the spectator held in thrall. With the storm itself, it raises the question of pure visuality and emotional reverberation. Truly sublime, the final scene suddenly transfigures the madman into a mosaic prophet. On the beach, with his back turned to the catastrophe, Curtis tenderly addresses his mute daughter: "What is it, honey?" At last, the storm appears as that inarticulable Real which triumphs over reason. It discloses itself through the mediation of sign language, but also by way of

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
6/3, 2025, 421–426

https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2025.3.113443

a specular detour, in the reflection of the windows and in the astonished gaze of his wife, who assents to the advent of the cataclysm.

The point here is not to engage in cheap psychoanalysis on the virtues of art therapy, but rather to underscore the metaphorical scope of the storm and its aesthetic challenges. To imagine a bookish remedy for Curtis's pathology is to become aware of a long-standing artistic and literary tradition that has obsessively questioned this impossible made possible: the storm as a subject in itself, and the cavalcade of painters launched in its assault, beginning with the legendary Apelles who – according to Pliny the Elder – "pinxit et quae pingi non possunt, tonitrua, fulgetra, fulguraque"[1].

Les météores. Peindre la tempête à la Renaissance is the latest book by Pascale Dubus (1959–2021), published posthumously. One must acknowledge here the care taken in compiling her articles and manuscripts into a coherent volume within the distinguished *Ars Longa* collection of the publisher Droz. This work was prepared by Thomas Golsenne with the loyal assistance of the author's colleagues and friends: Maurice Brock, Sylvain Dubus, Corinne Lucas Fiorato, and Catherine Vermorel. The book comprises eleven chapters divided into three parts, some already published, others still bearing the resonance of their oral delivery. It draws on the author's doctoral thesis, begun under Louis Marin and completed in 1997 under Yves Hersant, and develops further her research around two figures of the unrepresentable: death and the storm in the Cinquecento. Much of this research has already been published, as evidenced by the list of publications at the end of the volume. The author's premature passing certainly affected the structure of the book as it stands, yet it also grants the reader the privilege of following a thought at work. From one chapter to the next, variations, reprises, and reiterations gradually tighten the theory of the storm. Far from being a mere anthology of texts, *Les météores* is an indispensable synthesis that wins the reader's approval.

Let it be said from the outset, Pascale Dubus is a consummate connoisseur of Renaissance theoretical texts. Not only did she previously translate Paolo Pino's *Dialogo di pittura* into French (Honoré Champion, 2011), she also provides in appendices her own translation of the principal theoretical texts related to the storm in the Renaissance. It goes without saying that she is also familiar with the most significant contributions on the subject, having engaged in fruitful dialogue with her predecessors (Wolfgang Kemp, Hubert Damisch, Philip L. Sohm, Salvattore Settis, Alessandro Nova, Tanja Michalsky, and Hervé Brunon, to name but a few). The final index of names allows the reader to find their way with ease. Curiously confined to painting – and to painting only, whether easel or mural – the iconographic corpus remains impressive: some 209 works, classified chronologically into sacred (Old and New Testament, hagiography) and profane (mythology, allegories, portraits, land-

[1] Pliny, *Natural History*, vol. IX, transl. by H. Rackham, Cambridge 1952, 332–333.

scapes). Much to Diderot's dismay, other artists before Joseph Vernet already knew "how to gather storms, open a cataract in the sky and flood the earth"[2].

The book begins with this textual emphasis, establishing at once the theoretical framework. In the Renaissance, meteors referred, in Aristotelian terms, to atmospheric phenomena – rains, torrents, hail, squalls, lightning, clouds, winds, rainbows, comets, and so forth – a dizzying list, generically referred to by the ideal name "storm". Pascale Dubus scrutinizes them as they rise in literary mythology, biblical verses, and hagiographic exploits, in order to show how the motif, at first subjugated to the *storia*, gradually emancipates itself to invest narrative scenes for which nothing seems to justify so uncanny a presence.

These licenses lay the groundwork for an emerging landscape aesthetic, anticipating by far Burke's sublime. On this premise alone the reader is already caught in the eye of the cyclone that is the entire book. Crucial questions arise. What precisely in these works becomes the subject? How can *ekphrasis* keep pace with the meteorological onslaught? Can we divest the storm of its symbolic weight? According to what temporal rhythm can one pictorially articulate the chaos of the elements? And what narrative overlays do these storms bring to the *storia*? The central achievement of Pascale Dubus's book is above all to demonstrate the survival of the Plinian topos. Vasari's famous letter to Varchi (February 12, 1547) is just one piece of evidence among many. In extolling the excellence of painting in its capacity to "[contraffare] perfettamente" the meteors, he redefines the inimitable in terms of pictorial boldness, driven by a desire for the *cose difficile*. The true tour de force lies in pushing the limits of mimesis. Bound to their easels and scaffolding as to the mast of a ship, artists are compelled to seize the inconstancy of storms, to arrest their formlessness, to confront their sudden, excessive visuality, which wounds the eye as much as it delights it.

The second chapter dwells at length on the eminent figure of Leonardo and his singular fascination with atmospheric phenomena, manifested both in his theoretical writings and in his series of drawings at Windsor Castle. Indubitably, Leonardo alone bridges the supposed "chiasm between theory, the history of science, and artistic practice" (p. 2). His writings and sketches unfold as a veritable "figurative matrix" (p. 27), multiplying points of view and alternating between close and distant visions of the deluge, whose nature is not always discernible. The boundary between scientific pretext and the *impetus* of imagination is never clear. Pascale Dubus pays particular attention to the profusion of language, to the variation of verb tenses unsettling the syntax of theoretical precepts: "it is as if the theme of the deluge turned the text upside down" (p. 31). These scientific scruples later diminish in Sorte, and above all in

[2] *On Art and Artists. An Anthology of Diderot's Aesthetic Thought*, ed. by Jean Seznec, transl. by John S. D. Glaus, Dordrecht/Heidelberg/London/New York 2011, 92.

Lomazzo, where "the poetic model supplants the natural model in the representation of meteors" (p. 38). The absolute literary referent is now modern (Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, XLI), yet the complexity of the phenomena always seems to exceed language itself. It can be rendered only at the risk of pleonasm: "tempestose fortune di mare", writes Sorte in the *Osservazioni nella pittura* (1580).[3]

The third chapter opens the iconographic dossier proper. The evolution of the theme is structured into three ages of art (Trecento, Quattrocento, Cinquecento), each corresponding to emblematic works. First, Ambrogio Lorenzetti's lost fresco, the *Martyrdom of the Franciscans*; followed by Giotto's exemplary *Navicella*, which enjoyed a wide pictorial fortune; as well as Paolo Uccello's *Deluge* – a learned invention, geometrically audacious, granting primacy to the ravages inflicted on bodies in distress. These rainy preludes reach maturity in a single painting, which comes to impose itself as a prototype in the eyes of the *trattatisti*: Palma Vecchio's *Burrasca in mare*. Although mistaken about the true author and ignorant of the concrete subject of the canvas, Vasari nonetheless regarded it as a masterpiece. The conjunction of natural forces (winds, waves), physical ones (oars, arms), supernatural ones (saints), to which must be added the painter's own *furore*, in some sense fixes the figurative canon of the theme.

In order "to restore the polymorphous image of the storm in the Renaissance" (p. 66), the fourth chapter highlights the Aristotelian legacy in the comprehension of meteors. The editorial and critical fortune of the *Meteorologica* partly accounts for the proliferation of representations. Special emphasis is given to the rainbow, a veritable challenge posed to optics. Although far from strict scientific knowledge, certain works by Titian and Raphael contribute, in their own way, to a pre-Newtonian theory of color.

The inconstancy of meteors did not go unnoticed in the symbolic thought of the period. The instability of the winds, the caprice of the waves, the cycle of the tides, came to serve by analogy as attributes of the goddess Fortuna. The fifth chapter explores precisely this association – or rather the "iconic transcription of a linguistic fact" (p. 99) – by examining its multiple representations in emblematic treatises.

In the sixth chapter, Pascale Dubus highlights the possible parallels between the figuration of the biblical Deluge (in Michelangelo, Raphael, Lorenzo Lotto) and its secular grounding in the form of apocalyptic rumors and millenarian fears (the *Almanach Nova* of 1499).

Among the biblical subjects most fitting for the representation of meteors is the Crossing of the Red Sea, the theme of the seventh chapter. After recalling the exegetical issues, the author surveys the main narrative cycles (Cosimo Roselli, Bernardino Luini, Raphael, Bronzino, Titian), drawing attention both to the prominence given

[3] Cristoforo Sorte, *Osservationi nella pittura*, Venice, Girolamo Zenaro, 1580, 12v, reprinted in: *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento*, ed. by Paola Barocchi, vol. 1, Bari 1960, 292.

to the submersion of Pharaoh's army and to the narrative challenges the episode posed to artists.

Chapter 8 addresses lightning, considered as a synecdoche of the storm. Its scientific apprehension is scarcely discussed. Rather, the sudden flash with which its beam of lines slashes across the troubled skies belongs to the *invenzione* of the artist. For Tintoretto (*The Transport of Saint Mark*), it is an operative hierophanic power, whereas for Titian (*The Crucifixion at the Escorial*) the addition of the meteor falls within an "aesthetics of commotion" (p. 139), suggesting the very moment of Christ's death.

The third part of the book deals with enigmatic storms. In the final three chapters, Pascale Dubus probes the true meaning of these figurations, addressing in turn the Venetian landscape, sleeping female nudes, and – how else could it be? – Giorgione's enigmatic Tempest. She cautiously advances the hypothesis that these creations "proceed from an implicit or explicit demand of collectors and are the fruit of a predilection for landscape, instilled by an idealized conception of territory and catalyzed by the landscapes of the Northern Schools" (p. 177). It must be admitted that the question is a thorny one. If one limits oneself strictly to meteors, the issues of storia, of description, and implicitly of subject, here shift towards an aesthetics of reception. More than a landscape, Giorgione's *Tempest* is – as we all know – an unsinkable interpretative continent. Its paradox resides in the way a metonymic detail seizes the painting, a paesetto, as Marcantonio Michiel called it in 1530. It gave rise to a long debate opposing different methods in art history, beginning with the celebrated article by Creighton Gilbert (1952)[4] on the non-subject and the limits of iconology, and the equally famous book by Salvatore Settis (1978),[5] which posed, with a certain sharpness, the question of interpretative discourse (pp. 147–148). Conducted with great finesse, Pascale Dubus's pages avoid the pitfall of ambiguity. She dispenses with the anachronistic notion of the "non-subject", retaining instead the more reassuring categories of "landscape" or "figurative type", and rightly recalls that the omission of subject matter did not always trouble the viewer of the time. This aspect had already been broached at the end of the third chapter, where she affirmed:

> the understanding of the subject represented is not the condition of possibility for the reception of a work in the Renaissance. [...] A *storia* whose subject remains obscure to the viewer is not considered an anomalous work. On the contrary, the painting attains the rank of an exemplary work.

[4] Creighton Gilbert, On Subject and Not-Subject in Italian Renaissance Pictures, in: *The Art Bulletin* 34/3, 1952, 292–216.

[5] Salvatore Settis, *La «Tempesta» interpretata. Giorgione, i committenti, il soggetto*, Turin 1978.

> The omission of subject isolates what propels the work into masterpiece: the representation of the storm (p. 55).

The cruel and ravaging time did not allow Pascale Dubus to probe more deeply into what seems to be the very nerve of the theme, nor to refine her reflections in light of the contributions assembled by Alexander Nagel and Lorenzo Pericolo in *Subject as Aporia in Early Modern Art* (2010).[6] We are thus deprived of the unwritten sections of the book, such as the one intended for eclipses and clouds. What role do these protagonists of the *storia* play in the figure/ground dyad, as theorized by Matteo Burioni and, more recently, by David Young Kim? How much we would have wished to hear Pascale Dubus speak further of the storms rumbling in the backgrounds of portraits, as in Altobello Melone or Dosso Dossi, both recorded in the inventory at the end of the volume. One can only assume that Lucretius's verses (*Suave mari magno*...), so rich in meaning, could have prompted further reflection, precisely in order to untangle the complex knot between empathy and catharsis. On this subject she might have found support not only in the illuminating reading of Hans Blumenberg (cited on p. 22), but also in that of Michel Delon. The sacred dimension of storms, together with their baptismal value, would have merited a chapter devoted entirely to human destiny, torn between punishment and salvation, in relation to Tintoretto's *Saint Mark Saving a Saracen* (fig. 51). Clearly, these remarks cannot be laid at the author's door.

The only surprise lies in the resolutely Italian focus. Mentioned here and there, the northern painters appear only in a comparative role and are not examined in depth. Yet a single case suffices to demonstrate their contribution to this iconography. Thus, since Agrippa von Nettesheim evokes the link between meteors and human passions (p. 16), what astrological destiny, if not humoral allusion, should one read in the downpours in the background of Christoph Amberger's portrait of Matthäus Schwarz? These omissions detract nothing from the beauty of the book. Firmly grounded in the exploration of primary sources and offering an impressive corpus of works, *Peindre la tempête à la Renaissance* confronts with acuity essential methodological issues. The volume thus establishes itself as an indispensable synthesis, destined to nourish future research for years to come.

6 Alexander Nagel and Lorenzo Pericolo (eds.), *Subject as Aporia in Early Modern Art*, Aldershot 2010.

IRENE GLANZER & ANGELA MATYSSEK (EDS.), *PATINA. SPUREN DER VERGANGENHEIT IN DER KUNST DER GEGENWART*

Munich: Edition Metzel 2023, 218 pages, 50 ills.,
ISBN 978-3-88960-227-5 (Paperback).

Reviewed by
Hanna B. Hölling

Patina as Aesthetic, Epistemic and Political Agent in Contemporary Art. A Review of *Patina. Spuren der Vergangenheit in der Kunst der Gegenwart*

What is *patina*? Is it a valued aesthetic phenomenon – cherished for its relatedness to the past – or merely a byproduct of materials in perpetual transformation: the grime, dirt, and dust that accrues as an extraneous deposit, a veil separating the intended from the decayed? How do objects cross-temporally communicate with us through patina, and how does patina express time – not only the duration in which and as which it exists, but also as an index of how time materializes, non-mechanistically and non-sequentially? What positive or negative values does patina bear, for whom, and how do these values inform our understanding of authenticity, decay, and the agency of materials?

In his landmark essay *The Value of Age and Decay* (1994), cultural geographer David Lowenthal observed that the perceived worth of many buildings and artworks has often been amplified by the patina of age – particularly since the Romantic fascination with

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
6/3, 2025, 427–432

https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2025.3.113444

ruins and fragments.[1] What he calls "erosions and the incidents of age" can, however, stand in subtle tension with the historical, scientific and aesthetic criteria conventionally invoked to justify a work's status as heritage.

The essay collection *Patina. Spuren der Vergangenheit in der Kunst der Gegenwart*, edited by Irene Glanzer and Angela Matyssek, treads a careful path between the allure and the peril of patina. It responds to the urgency of mapping the various interpretations of patina in recent art – and to its long and prominent discussion in more traditional visual art genres. Having grown out of a symposium organized by the editors in December 2019 at the Hochschule der Künste Dresden in collaboration with the Doerner Institute, the collection brings together a range of perspectives in which the voices of art historians engage – at times harmoniously, at times in productive contradiction – with those of conservators, collection stewards, artists, and collectors.

Across these varied, whether philosophical-reflective, scientific, technical, story-driven or anecdotal contributions, patina, as a multivalent concept, pulses with meaning, including aesthetic, conceptual and structural transformations within artworks. For the editors, patina is a key lens through which to understand the relationship between art and time (p. 7). Yellowing varnish on paintings or verdigris on bronze may be taken as indicators of authenticity. Patina may thus be seen as a heterotopic space pointing to an "other time". As one of the many manifestations of decay, it may bring us closer to what Irene Glanzer describes as the "materiality of aging" (p. 71).

The book opens with a thoughtful essay on the evolving status of patina, not merely as a sign of material aging, but as an active participant in aesthetic, historical and conservation discourses. Tracing a trajectory from the seventeenth-century valorization of patina in art contexts and reflecting later foundational thinkers such as Walter Benjamin and Alois Riegl, the authors position patina in the tangled historical sedimentations as a culturally and ideologically charged phenomenon. The observation that artists have long manipulated the signs of age for effect adds nuance to the traditional dichotomy between the "natural" and the "artificial", authenticity and deception. Most compelling is the discussion of contemporary artistic practices that engage patina not only as a visual effect but as a conceptual tool. The authors convincingly assert that patina operates as an instrument of artistic research, opening pathways toward critical material practice.

Ursula Haller (Chapter 1) provides a comprehensive overview of the notion of patina within the context of conservation. The dictionary definitions aside, the essay truly shines when Haller draws upon her extensive research and wide-ranging scholarship

[1] David Lowenthal, The Value of Age and Decay, in: W. E. Krumbein, Peter Bimblecombe, D. E. Cosgrove, and S. Staniforth (eds.), *Durability and Change. The Science, Responsibility, and Cost of Sustaining Cultural Heritage*, London 1994, 39–49, here 39.

in the history and theory of conservation. This depth of insight is especially commendable given how rare such profound engagement is in much contemporary literature on conservation history. From Riegl, through George Dehlio, Cesare Brandi, and other key authors, Haller offers a tour de force of the understanding of patina in the field – a richly rewarding discussion well supported by relevant sources.

For Eva Kernbauer (Chapter 2), patina emerges as both a material and a metaphorical trace of time. The text weaves together three case studies – Eva Hesse, Tacita Dean, and Joachim Koester – to connect the physical aging of materials (as in Hesse's decomposing latex sculptures) with broader epistemological questions of historical presence and aesthetic meaning (as in Dean's analogue film or Koester's archival reactivations). Drawing on Walter Benjamin, Dan Karlholm, and Georges Didi-Huberman, the author situates the discussion within debates on contemporaneity, reproducibility, and the ontology of the artwork. While there are moments when theoretical frameworks take precedence, these are balanced by direct engagement with the artworks set against the backdrop of a historiographical shift – from linear, origin-based narratives toward models of after-historicism and temporal multiplicity.

Pia Gotschaller (Chapter 3) examines both visible and invisible traces in artworks – whether as damage, welcome signs of age, or deliberately integrated elements – in the work of Frank Auerbach, Lucian Freud, Liz Deschenes, Cy Twombly, and Christian Bonnefoi. In Auerbach's and Freud's late work, the progressive physical aging of the artists is thematically acknowledged and mirrored in their evolving painting techniques. Deschenes and Twombly employ materials and methods that visibly register the passage of time, while Bonnefoi revisits earlier themes and techniques in new configurations. Eschewing a strict grounding in philosophical traditions (for example, Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Merleau-Ponty), the essay instead argues for a distinction between temporality and material decay.

Irene Glanzer (Chapter 4) explores the material and conceptual implications of patina and aging in Maria Lassnig's painting *Spannungsfiguration* (1961), using the visible traces of time – craquelure, deformation, and fingerprints – as entry points into broader debates on authorship, authenticity, and conservation ethics. She shows how Lassnig's ambiguous position – valuing both the freshness of painterly surface and accepting material degradation – complicates strict aesthetic or historical readings of such traces as either damage or intrinsic value. Glanzer ultimately argues for a nuanced and context-sensitive conservation approach that acknowledges the cultural and artistic significance of aging processes, while questioning the limits of conservation in preserving or erasing them.

Christian Scheidemann's engagement with dirt and dust – two distinct yet related elements in art-historical and conservation discourse – mirrors the way "damaged" and "messy" are so often measured against their presumed opposites, "clean" or "pure"

(Chapter 6). A recognized, recently retired, authority on New York's conservation scene and an internationally active voice in the conservation of contemporary art, Scheidemann weaves vivid anecdotes about over-cleaned works and the ill-judged removal of dust or dirt. Dust, as Jorge Otero Pailos elsewhere demonstrates when peeling silicone skins from architectural structures, can carry both aesthetic and historical value.[2] As Scheidemann notes – somewhat recalling Lowenthal's reflections on the value of age and decay – dust is typically regarded as something superfluous, to be removed and discarded as pollution accumulated on objects.

Caroline Bohlmann (Chapter 7) offers eloquent insights into Joseph Beuys's three installations drawn from her extensive career as a conservator at Hamburger Banhof – Museum für Gegenwart Berlin. The text examines how patina operates not merely as a sign of material aging but as a conceptual layer that reveals the shifting identity and reception of artworks. It shows that conservation decisions affect not only the physical state of the works but also their historical and symbolic meanings, prompting fundamental questions about authenticity, temporality, and intention in the context of conservation.

For any performance-art connoisseur – or, more precisely, for a connoisseur of its material culture – Mareike Herbstreit's essay on the patina of performance (Chapter 8), explored through examples of Paul McCarthy's "action relics", is a feast. For Herbstreit, these remnants of past actions – confined to cases and suitcases – are at once banal and monstrous. They challenge the (Phelanian) view of performance as a purely ephemeral, disappearing act, while embodying what Herbstreit identifies as the patina of performance.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro's detailed insights into the making and remaking of art, and into the ways canonical American artists confront the "falsification of time" revealed through her conversations addressing, among others, refabrication (Chapter 9), resonate with Angela Matyssek (Chapter 10). Matyssek's essay examines the photographic effects and the varying degrees to which material-specific alterations are accepted – or resisted – within photography. She shows how yellowing and other forms of change in photographs often lead to remaking and reproduction. These processes, however, are fraught, particularly because photographic techniques have evolved significantly over time, resulting in new reproductions that differ in quality from their earlier counterparts.

Frederike Waentig and Andreas Weisser examine patina in plastics (Chapter 11) and media art (Chapter 12), respectively. Weisser's detailed, essential analysis of alteration processes frames patina as a constellation of "damage" phenomena in film and video, focusing on the functionality of playback devices and information

[2] Jorge Otero Pailos and Hanna Hölling, Materials, Objects, Transitions. Jorge Otero-Pailos in Conversation with Hanna Hölling, in: Hanna Hölling, Francesca Bewer, and Katharina Ammann (eds.), *The Explicit Material. Inquiries on the Intersection of Curatorial and Conservation Cultures*, Leiden 2019, 255–272, here 258–259.

carriers. What could be added here is that experimental minimalist filmmakers and media pioneers, such as, among others, Stan Brakhage or Nam June Paik, left us with altered analogue films or media apparatuses stripped of their active playback function that offer a fascinating and profound entry point into a wider discussion of patination in media art. Waentig, in a compelling reassessment of her earlier position in *Kunststoffe in der Kunst* (2004) – where she argued that plastics cannot develop a patina – demonstrates that all forms of plastic degradation, visible or hidden, ultimately lead to the material's and the work's demise. The romanticizing allure of patina aside, conserving works made from polyurethane or cellulose acetate remains impossible.

Several interviews further diversify the volume. Among them is a conversation with Martin Honert (Chapter 5), in which his realistic, memory-driven mise-en-scènes vibrate between the gloss and metaphorical "historical dust" – reminding of Monika Wagner's recent essay.[3] In another, Karin Sander (Chapter 13) responds to more than forty questions that, with varying degrees of detail and scrutiny, probe the meaning of patina in her work. Her simple, smiling "yes", leaves the space resonating with the stains and dirt on the printed page. Finally, a discussion with collector Egidio Marzona and conservators Scheidemann and Bernhart Schwenk (Chapter 14) reveals the fine line between traces of use, dirt and patina in collections, and the continuous effort by conservators to "manage change" by assessing alteration processes in artworks through comparison with an uncountable number of protocols and condition reports.

Patina emerges in this ambitious and intellectually rewarding book as an active component of meaning. One of the book's most appealing aspects, familiar from Matyssek's earlier anthologies such as *Wann stirbt ein Kunstwerk?* (*When does an artwork die?*, 2010), is its effort to loosen the rigid boundaries of art-historical theorization by inviting conservators, artists, and collection custodians to take a stance. The material literacy of the voices woven throughout this narrative is particularly compelling, and the resulting transdisciplinarity is its most exciting feature.

Perhaps as a side effect of the multidirectionality of the present contributions, the attempt to lift the concept of patina to a conceptual level – such as, potentially, through the palimsestic accretion of iterations of an installative or performative work, or by crosslinking with other concepts of patina from anthropology or archaeology, or even with alternative discussions in conservation – remains some-

[3] Monika Wagner, Staub und Glanz. Konzepte von Materialität und Dematerialisierung, in: Roger Fayet and Regula Krähenbühl (eds.), *Kunst und Material. Konzepte, Prozesse, Arbeitsteilungen*, Zurich 2022, 15–31.

what unrealized.[4] Of course, like every anthology, the book is comprehensive in certain areas and underrepresents others.

The book focuses on Western art history and conservation, with its apparatus reliant on the mainly European and US American artistic canon. While this is likely a deliberate editorial choice, it may also be interpreted as an omission of other perspectives. Like "dirt" (p. 104), patina carries culturally specific and nuanced meanings, raising the question of who holds the authority to determine what constitutes loss or valuable aging. Across geographies and chronologies, what one culture regards as beautiful wear deserving preservation, another may dismiss as damage requiring restoration.

Patina is never neutral – and especially in our conflict-troubled world marked by the long shadows of imperial and colonial pasts – it is entangled with colonial, economic and aesthetic biases. Bringing objects, practices, and perspectives from beyond the exclusivity of Western expertise and artistry would enhance the understanding of aging and decay. I am thinking here, for instance, of how the installations made of bottle caps and metal detritus by the Ghanaian sculptor El Anatsui that evoke both traditional craftsmanship and consumer waste carry multivalent patinas embedded in global, postcolonial narratives.

Patina today holds both epistemic and political functions. It can be read as evidence of a work's temporal, cultural and environmental history, and may be mobilized as a source of knowledge within the web of social relations. Crucially, it serves as a critical lens for reflecting on museological choices, conservation ethics, and the institutional framing of value. In this light, and as we learn from this rich anthology, patina becomes a discursive site – an index of decisions about what to conserve, what to display, and which histories to tell and by whom. The "traces of the past in contemporary art", as the book's German subtitle translates into English, surveys the notion of patina within its remit remarkably well – despite the aforementioned critique – and remains a recommended reading in art history, conservation studies, museology, and aesthetics.

[4] For an anthropological/profane-archeological account of patina, see Shannon Lee Dawdy, *Patina. A Profane Archaeology*, Chicago 2016. For patina as a way through which objects communicate with us, written by a conservator, see Sanchita Balachandran, Malignant Patina. A Love Story, in: *West 86th Journal* 27/1, 2020, 73–91.

eISSN 2701-1550