6 Industry in the changing landscape from Daubigny to Monet

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In communicating with his colleagues outside his own specialty the art historian is often guilty of mystification. By stressing the several components of pictorial structure (line, colour, shape, arrangement) he protects his profession by identifying it with a set of arcane mysteries that are hidden from the uninitiated. Historians not principally concerned with the visual arts are tempted to conclude that art really consists of these mysteries and either they exclude art from the evidence they use in their own work, or else, despairing of their role as outsiders, they merely use art as an embellishment. It is true that most art historians believe that they deal with history. They demonstrate that artist Y has borrowed a portion of his composition from the earlier artist X, and usually they deduce from this a causal relationship. However, this is often a false teleology. Simply by stating that one pattern has preceded another, the art historian feels that he has been engaged in 'history', when all he has done is to name a chronological sequence. Real historical analysis, which would tell us how Y's painting fits into his culture, is set aside in favour of the conviction that forms of art have their own teleology, independent of the cultures that gave them birth.

Two related assumptions support the false teleology that dominates art history, and both come from the hegemony of abstract art, apparent successor to the nineteenth century's art-for-art's-sake. One is the belief that art springs only from the subjectivity of the artist and therefore that the historian is free to ignore socio-cultural history. The other, already mentioned, is that the forms of art, to the extent that they are not purely subjective and idiosyncratic, are related principally to one another, as distinct from the society in which they have found existence.

These assumptions are often strengthened when the art historian sees others use art merely to illustrate historical events.
Such use, confined to the subject matter of art rather than to its complicated inner workings, convinces the art historian that he is right to separate art from social history. This is all the more true when the user is that kind of historian who begins with a critical event, say a revolution, and then goes out to find art that "illustrates" it. Such art frequently is not that which itself is revolutionary, not that which is the real bearer of a new pictorial language, but art which only represents socio-political events. An example would be the historian of late nineteenth-century France who shows us pictures of factories, strikes and political leaders rather than the landscapes of Monet or the café scenes of Manet and Degas.

The historian who uses art for its subject matter alone is just as remote from the history of art as the specialist who talks only of colour and composition. The historian who wishes to deal meaningfully with art must explain why its subject cannot be understood properly unless its structure is analysed. Pictorial structure interprets subject. Each is proper evidence for the cultural historian, but his work is incomplete unless he demonstrates their interdependence.

The first examples of paintings that I give offer a good introduction to the general theme of this essay. Corot's painting (Plate 2) and Sisley's (Plate 3) show the same road south-west of Paris. Corot (1796–1875) was a long generation older than Sisley (1839–99), and his view of the road, a fresh and new vision for his day, speaks for the values of the mid century. Although artfully contrived, it appears natural. Two rural persons are moving slowly along the road at a pre-industrial pace. The dirt road has slightly irregular edges, grass and foliage on both sides are abundant, and the view towards the outskirts of Paris is a deep one that contributes to a sense of expansiveness, in this serene meeting of countryside with city.

Sisley could have chosen a similar view, but instead takes us further down the same road, nearer to Paris. The increased traffic along such routes has led to the use of urban modes of road building. Along the edge of the road a cobblestone drain has been placed, and a curb erected. Relatively young trees, spaced with military precision and regularly trimmed, mark one side of the road in contrast to the more countrified aspect of Corot's roadside. In moving from one picture to the other, we have gone from country to suburb or, rather, from a relatively unmodernized
suburb to an urbanized one. We have entered the world of modern France, and we sense the presence here in Louveciennes of Baron Haussmann’s and Louis Napoleon’s imperial order. From Paris have been exported the canalized edges of the road and the implacable regularity of the trees, visible signs of the growing mainmise of Paris upon the nearby suburbs, and of the suburbs upon the countryside.

To this partial analysis both the historian and the art historian might object that the images Sisley painted were really there, and therefore that I have only identified subject matter. The first reply to such an objection is an obvious one. Sisley chose that view, and merely by doing so, he draws attention to the modernization of Louveciennes in preference to a more untouched rural road which he could easily have found in that vicinity. That his choice of view is an intentional one is indicated by the fact that the building whose wall shows to the right is none other than the famous château of Madame Du Barry. A conventional representation of this site by an earlier artist would have disclosed more of the château in order to evoke history more overtly. Sisley was an adherent of naturalism which in turn was the style of progressive bourgeois culture. Naturalism meant a facing towards the present, a turning of the back upon history, a rooting out of values, both pictorial and social, that attached to monarchy and theocracy. Into this banal view Sisley has introduced Madame Du Barry’s château in a matter-of-fact way that assimilates it by giving it a new modesty, a plainness that puts history in its place.

The second reply to the objection that I am dealing only with subject matter is to point to the intimate connection of Sisley’s pictorial structure to his subject. Considered simply as a piece of abstract organization, Sisley’s painting, compared to Corot’s, is a taut network of geometric forms. The road makes a truncated triangle whose abrupt termination emphasizes its rather flat shape. The ground to the right is a five-sided polyhedron; and to the left the regularity of the trees is reinforced by the block-like patches of sunlight along the road. Compared to the Corot, Sisley’s sharp perspective and the sudden plunge over the brow of the hill have an almost automotive speed. He seems to have absorbed the spirit of the imposition of order and regularity over nature which is more than a metaphor for the Second Empire’s alteration of the environs of Paris: it is its very embodiment. The forms of his art are in inextricable harmony with his subject, not because he consciously made them so, but because experience and instinct led him to a point of view and a pictorial organization that suited his endeavour.

Most artists of Corot’s generation had sought out relatively unaltered roadways and villages, despite the encroachments of the growing urban-industrial revolution, and they favoured a correspondingly softer, more irregular set of forms. It is no accident that the Barbizon artist Théodore Rousseau, painter of the villages on the fringe of Fontainebleau forest as well as of the forest’s exuberant growth, consistently fought the government’s piercing the forest with new macadamized highways. His love of the intertwined branches of forest and the thatched cottages of villages was also the love of a matching set of lines, colours and shapes. They would prevent him from seeing Sisley’s site as anything other than ugly.

Such comparisons of Impressionist and pre-Impressionist paintings are therefore instructive because they show us how to deal with the formal language of paintings as well as with their subjects. In providing the context for the study of forms, they deal with the two generations which witnessed the rapid suburbanization of the environs of Paris. Reactions of artists to these changes were not always predictable — far from it — and in the remainder of this essay I want to explore other comparisons of the two generations. I will take Monet as the exemplar of Impressionism, and for the preceding generation, an artist he knew well, Charles Daubigny (1817–78). The choice is not arbitrary, for Monet learned a great deal from Daubigny and he painted along the same riverbanks and the Norman coastline the older artist favoured.

Daubigny, known today principally as a painter, was also a prolific printmaker and illustrator. In both media he stands as one of the principal artists devoted to the suburbs and the countryside near Paris. As is true of many artists, his oils and prints display two different ranges of subject matter, and the contrast between them is illuminating. In making prints, whether or not illustrations to specific texts, Daubigny represented a relatively large number of topical subjects. Prints often embodied present concerns and, since they were serially reproduced and cheap, they shared in an active circulation of artistic and social ideas. When working in oils, however, Daubigny’s instinct was to choose more ‘permanent’ subjects suitable to the more disinterested mood that he and most others associated with painting. This contrast of the typical and the
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looking out over a broad landscape (Daubigny seems to have based it upon Le Havre). Two trains pass over a viaduct, and in the distance, maritime commerce is indicated in the plumes of smoke from two steam vessels. In his fable, Lachambeaudie has the father, fearful of the train, ask his son what it is that he sees, the child of Providence or of the Devil. The son replies that steam conquers natural obstacles by harnessing nature's own force for its purposes. By bridging chasms and rivers, and defeating time, it will bring products to remote places and join peoples heretofore separated. Myths of old will become reality:

Au nouvel Amphion, qu'à ta voix enchantée
Naisissent des monuments utiles, glorieux;
Poète, à la douleur que ton luth fasse trêve;
La vérité bientôt remplacera le rêve,
Et la réalité sera le merveilleux.

[To the new Amphion, at the sound of your enchanted voice
Monuments are brought forth, both useful and glorious;
Poet, may your lute call truce to pain;
Truth will soon supplant the dream,
And reality will be marvelled at.]

Lachambeaudie recognizes that industry transforms the countryside, and he is sensitive to the loss that nature (and the poet) must bear. In Les Deux Rivages (plate 5), Daubigny interprets the poet's most autobiographical and most bittersweet fable. Lachambeaudie writes that in his childhood in the country, both banks of the river were equally verdant. At age 16, when he was leaving home to seek his fortune, one riverbank was taken over by industry and new construction replaced the trees. Now old, the poet hopes that progress will not have removed the last plants of his ideal domain. The course of life has two banks. In youth, both are flowered, but later, need takes over one half of our illusions. The fable ends:

Heureux, quand la vieillesse arrive,
Si quelques fleurs encore restent sur l'autre Rive!
[There is happiness, when old age arrives,
If a few flowers remain still on the other Shore!]

Daubigny interprets the fable quite directly. Construction has taken over one bank while opposite, four washerwomen symbolize the traditional use of the river, whose banks they leave untouched.

Plate 4  Daubigny, La Vapeur

reflective was also the contrast of city activity and country solitude. Printmaking was more commonly a social enterprise than painting, which was a rather private activity associated with release from the city. Daubigny's friend Frédéric Henriet praised his paintings in 1857 because 'nous procurent-elles abondamment de ces illusions de repos, de liberté, de solitude, qui sont presque du bonheur'.

Daubigny's prints and illustrations include a number that deal with the industrialization of the countryside. Among them are those he provided for the 1851 edition of the Fables of Pierre Lachambeaudie (1807-72). Although commissioned works, the illustrations probably reflect Daubigny's sympathies with the author's Saint-Simonism. Daubigny was an ardent republican, and apparently friendly to the utopian ideals of the Fourierists and Saint-Simonists which appealed to so many artists who matured in the 1840s. Lachambeaudie's constant message is the need to accept industrialization and to overturn the royalists and landowners who oppose progress. Once radical, by 1851 this view was the spearpoint of entrepreneurial capitalism in France, and erstwhile Saint-Simonists began to enter the government of Louis Napoleon in increasing numbers. In La Vapeur (plate 4), Daubigny shows an old man and his son
The tree overhead divides the two worlds with its dead limbs to the left, a vine and live limbs to the right. The boy poet on the near bank leaves both worlds behind, but in Daubigny's spirit, if not Lachambeaudie's, he puts his back to industry and walks toward the world of nature and illusion.

For the two sides of Les Deux Rivages are the two realms of Daubigny's artistic activity. His prints frequently show the transformation of the countryside, but his oils represent instead the unsullied villages, meadows and riverbanks of France. Typical of his paintings is The Bridge between Persan and Beaumont-sur-Oise (plate 6). Avoiding the rail line along the bank to the left, and the small industrial centre of Persan, he painted the old road bridge and the village of Beaumont, precisely because they were unaltered. The women and the geese in the foreground are witnesses to the unchanging life he sought out, and the absence of any steam traffic on the river permits the water to reflect the illusions of timelessness. Daubigny hardly ever painted the steamboats along the Seine and the Oise, although we know that they were so common as to inspire the hatred of riverside innkeepers, ferrymen and towpath workers, rapidly being done out of their livelihood. In several etchings in his autobiographical album of 1861, Daubigny represents both steamboat and train. Le Départ (plate 7) shows the train which often took him back and forth to Paris, and the steam tugs which plied the rivers. The world of oil painting was a different, and an ideal realm. For Daubigny, as well as for Théodore Rousseau, Camille Corot and J. F. Millet, nature and the traditional village formed an ideal world in which they actually lived, but one that was carefully nurtured in their paintings, protected from the incursion of insistent modernity.

Daubigny's paintings are the chief witnesses to this retention of a pastoral ideal, but occasionally his letters are especially revealing. In September 1854, returning to Avalon to seek out a favoured site, he found it so changed by progress that he fled it immediately. To his friend Geoffroy Dechaume he wrote:

Mon vieux, décidément, j'ai du malheur. Tout ce que je voulais faire est rasé: arbres coupés, plus d'eau dans la rivière, maisons abattues! Aussi, en désespoir de cause, je me sauve et vais voir si le Père Eternel n'a pas dérangé les montagnes du Dauphiné. J'espère que non.

[Decidedly, old chap, I am unfortunate. Everything I wanted to paint has been torn down: trees cut, no more water in the river, houses knocked
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down. Therefore as a last resort I am clearing out and will see if the Eternal Father has not rearranged the mountains of the Dauphiné. I hope not."

A few days later, settled in the countryside not far from Lyon, he opposed the calm of nature to the international preoccupation over the Crimea. His anti-war republicanism shows in his references to Barbès, to the ‘ratapols’ (Daumier’s invented right-wing figure) and to Dupont, Lachambeaudie’s friend and fellow poète populaire:

Ce pauvre Barbès est donc sorti de prison? As-tu lu ce qu’il a dit sur la guerre? Ils sont ici plus ou moins ratapols, et les mots guerre et victoire ne sont pas épargnés. Quand on observe le grand calme de la nature, ‘les querelles vaines des cabinets européens’, comme dit Pierre Dupont, vous apparaissent bien davantage, et on se demande à quoi ça sert de tuer des gens qui ne sont pas las d’être vivants.

[So poor Barbès is really out of prison? Have you read what he has said about the war? Here they are more or less ratapols, and the words ‘war’ and ‘victory’ are not spared. When one observes the great calmness of nature, ‘the vain quarrels of European governments,’ as Pierre Dupont says, appear the vainer, and one asks oneself what it serves to kill people who are not tired of being alive.]

The contrast that Daubigny felt between the repose of nature and the cares of contemporary life continues the age-old yearning for release and tranquility that is a constant theme in western art and literature from Pliny to Van Gogh. It is none the less essential, when dealing with the cultural history of France in the third quarter of the century, to point to the awareness of both worlds, city and country, because neither was independent of the other. The rapid industrialization of France lay behind the rise of landscape, which is nothing other than its counter-image. The fact that Impressionism eventually replaced Renaissance art as the dominant world style is proof enough of the need to look into its origins.

Claude Monet (1840–1926), the greatest of Impressionist landscape painters, reveals the dichotomy of city and country in many aspects of his rich and varied work. His subjects range more widely than those of Daubigny, and they include many paintings of Paris as well as of a number of villages along the Seine and the Norman coast. Especially revealing and especially wonderful are his paintings at Argenteuil, where he lived from 1872 to 1878. Argenteuil
was a suburban village that bore the evidence of a wholesale transformation under the impact of the urban-industrial revolution. It is an especially good site for study because it was neither city nor country. Monet's paintings there give witness to the complicated pattern of change in a region that was indeed 'nature' and which lent itself to 'landscape,' but one which was neither Paris itself nor the relatively untouched villages favoured by Daubigny.

In his Railroad Bridge at Argenteuil (plate 8), Monet reveals his unstated ambition to be the painter of modern landscape. The contrast with Daubigny's bridge at Beaumont (plate 6) is striking in several regards. Because formal structure interprets subject, we might begin by noting the abruptness, bordering on harshness, with which Monet presents the bridge. Daubigny's bridge is woven into his composition by its environs of foliage and by the shapes of nearby buildings which echo its arches. We see both ends of the bridge, where one comes from and where one goes, and we sense the firm anchor it has on both banks. Not so Monet. His bridge hurries in from the left edge, unmediated by foliage, and it cuts sharply across the canvas. This harsh presentation suits the bridge, for it carries trains, not foot passengers, and this particular rail line was relatively new, cutting across the eastern side of Argenteuil to a new station on the edge of the older section of the village. The bridge is of new design, for the comforting arches still used in metal bridges of the 1850s have given way to a compound structure that is put together in units, then hoisted atop the piers.

In the foreground of Monet's picture, instead of Daubigny's restful grass, flowers and reeds, there is a homely pathway showing signs of the recent construction. Along its edge is a low barrier that retains the new embankment. It is of utilitarian design that makes no concession to traditional railings (to a modern eye it looks like a highway divider). It helps speed the eye along the near shore (we linger in the Daubigny), and makes all the more striking the rightward leap of the bridge. The spanning of the river is made the more dramatic by the way it dwarfs the figures below. That we are below the huge bridge is evident from the way Monet constructed the events on the ground plane. From the two men our eye passes to the near sailboat, then on to the other sailboat in an oblique line that reinforces, but does not parallel, the diagonal of bridge and piers. The alternating light and dark of the piers is repeated in the two sailboats and in the men's clothing, aiding the march of
our eye off to the right, and providing a rhythmic contrast and support for the straight thrust of the bridge above.

The two men are at a key spot in the whole network of crossing diagonals. They stand along the axis of the shore, an angle which their own shadows accentuate. The tops of their heads just touch the line of the opposite shore, another instance of Monet's artful organization. That shore is another of the slanting lines of this composition. The two men look out along the receding diagonal formed by the boats. Like the engineers or onlookers pictured in nineteenth-century books devoted to the marvels of modern construction, they are witnesses to the promethean triumphs of new industry. As though there were invisible strings in their hands, they stand within Monet's network of geometric forces, his organizing lines whose unflinching straightness is the very embodiment of modernity. This is because they record man's ability to surmount nature, to span her waterways and chasms, to defy her with the unyielding patterns that man imposes upon her for his own purposes. Their modernity, both in Monet's painting and in actuality, resides in their very unnaturalness.

The starkness of the bridge is somewhat relieved by the merging of the train's windblown smoke with the clouds above. They form a canopy of blues and whites that symbolizes the peaceful blending of man-made and natural vapours. The wind that blows the smoke also propels the sailboats below and they, too, soften the impact of the bridge, thanks to their association with natural pleasures. The near boat beats upwind as the other runs in front of the strong breeze. Although they move in opposite directions, their paths cross under the span, caught there along Monet's organizing diagonal.

Another picture of pleasure boating at Argenteuil (plate 9) shows the same bridge, this time from upstream. Its composition is not at all the same, and the differences are revealing. To the art historian, these differences are of vital importance even though, superficially, the subject is the same in both pictures. In this second painting, done about a year after the first, Monet has moved upstream along the same bank of the Seine, going under the bridge to arrive on the other side. This places the viewer perhaps 200 yards from the vantage point of the other painting. To our right is the talus of foliage-covered earth which supports the railroad tracks above. This artificial mound and its growth form a pictorial cushion for the bridge, giving it a different feeling from the abrupt geometry of the other canvas. In fact, the more we compare the two, the more we realize how unlike they are. It is true that in the fiction of the later picture, the bridge darts dramatically back into space to give us a sense of the movement of the train, but it is also true that the foliage at the right softens the juncture with the picture's edge. Our imaginary position is on this verdant bank, no longer on the scruffy embankment of the earlier painting, and so our associations are with the colourful natural growth here and on the shore opposite. This integrates the bridge with its setting at Argenteuil, as distinct from the stark separation it exhibited in the earlier painting (plate 8).

Nature, in other words, is arranged by the artist so as to enframe his dynamic bridge and train. The strong afternoon sun which comes from our right is seconded by the wind which pushes the train's smoke to the left. The sailboat is tacking against the wind, which must be fairly strong because it pushes the train's smoke sideways. By stressing that sun, wind and sailboat are all going along the axis of the river, at right angles to the bridge, Monet reinforces the symbolic confrontation of the boat, symbol of leisure, with the train. Together the boat and the railroad stand for the new Argenteuil: the modern suburb which has given up its agricultural role to the pressures of urban leisure and industry. Both boat and railroad represent the new forces that were radically altering Argenteuil, forces that disrupted traditional life in this village, creating wholesale changes in the use of the river and its shore, in land ownership and land use, in the types and numbers of local residents and in the work that they did.

A special word needs to be said about boating at Argenteuil, for the risk is that we do not recognize Monet's sailboats for what they really were: principal agents in the transformation of Argenteuil from country village to suburb. Before 1840 Argenteuil's economy depended upon several kinds of agricultural produce and scattered local industry, including the plaster called 'plaster of Paris'. A few people made their living taking care of towpath horses, maintaining riverside inns and the local ferry. All this changed with astonishing rapidity in response to the expanding population of Paris and its need for leisure. The Seine widens at Argenteuil and this makes it one of the best spots near Paris for sailing. Boating clubs were established there, and thanks to the railroad, the village was only fifteen minutes (nine kilometres) from the Gare St Lazare. Boat rental agencies took over some of
the shoreline, and renting villas to vacationers loomed ever larger in the local economy.

Monet's willingness to address himself to these alterations of riverside life did not, however, mean a wholesale adoption of the industry which was rapidly expanding at Argenteuil. It is true that artists of the preceding generation, such as Corot and Daubigny, could not bring themselves to paint pleasure boats nor new railroad bridges, which embodied changes they could not tolerate. By comparison with them, Monet seems more of a spokesman for the changes affecting the once-rural villages along the Seine. None the less, there is abundant evidence that at Argenteuil he screened out much of the rapidly growing local industry, showing factories only at a considerable distance, with few exceptions, or else avoiding them entirely. In the second of his bridge pictures discussed here, the whole truth about the site will reveal why his reconciliation of nature and railroad is a surprisingly complicated issue.

Were we able to stand where Monet places us in the Philadelphia picture (plate 9), we would realize how artful his choice of view was. Immediately behind us and to our left were several large factories, and along the shore just to our left were industrial warehouses and loading docks. The industrial uses of the river, which Monet uniformly avoids at Argenteuil, and the factories, which show only in a few pictures, are hardly hinted at in his painting of the bridge. Instead he literally put that all behind him, and shows us the sailboat, and the train as it leaves Argenteuil headed towards Paris. The excitement of the train, as it hurtled over his head, and the opposed movement of the sailboat, were the images that distilled his sense of modern Argenteuil and its relationship to Paris. In this distillation they stood for the reconciliation of city and country, of industry and leisure, of railroad and river, of metal bridge and green foliage, of industrial steam and natural wind. Steam and wind are forces which move things, and motion is the very essence of change.

The factories and docks which surrounded Monet as he painted this picture were embodiments of industry and therefore of change, but they were not easily reconciled with the river and with natural light and movement. Monet's break with Barbizon art was not a complete one, in other words. The natural light and wind, and the riverbank foliage which Daubigny and Corot had so loved, are still present in Monet's painting, even if accompanied by suburban boat and train. Strong effects of outdoors nature were Monet's link with the preceding generation, and permitted him to blend old and new. It is symptomatic that in the only painting at Argenteuil which shows factories in relatively large scale, Monet put them in mid distance rather than in the foreground, and represented them under the softening effects of snow.

In most cases, when Monet showed factories at Argenteuil, they were far off in the distance of his pictures, as in Sailboats on the Seine at Argenteuil (plate 10). In this view we are across the river from Argenteuil, looking over a group of moored sailboats toward the easternmost extension of the village, marked by two smoking factory chimneys. Monet probably painted this picture from his studio boat, a device he had borrowed from Daubigny. It permitted him a variety of views that would otherwise be difficult, as well as the convenience of a modestly equipped floating studio. In this painting we feel the intimacy that resulted from being on the water, so close to other boats that the nearest ones are cut off by the edge of the frame. The undulating reflections, like so many eels, seem to work their way right under our feet. In mid distance two sailboats are getting underway, their favourable wind made clear by the smoke from the distant chimneys. Once again industry and leisure are juxtaposed, and once again industry is peacefully absorbed, this time by integrating it with the river view. We see part of industrial Argenteuil across a broad reach of luminous water, as though it were some suburban Venice, purified by its exposure to brilliant light and air.

Other subjects that Monet painted at Argenteuil also reveal his conception of suburban life, even those which seem innocent of any contemporary references. Gladiolas (plate 11), for example, is one of a large number of paintings that show his wife in their richly flowered garden. Properly understood, it becomes a 'modern' picture that shows how Argenteuil reflected the impact of Paris. In fact, this painting reeks of the city dweller.

Thanks to the work of Rodolphe Walter, and Daniel Wildenstein's collaborators, we know a good deal about Monet's life at Argenteuil. From 1872 to 1874 he rented a house from a notable local landowner, Mme Aubry-Vitet. He transformed its garden into a flowery wonder and often painted his wife and child, in proper middle-class dress, surrounded by blossoming plants. From the first rented garden he could see a new house being built next door, on a portion of Mme Aubry-Vitet's land that had recently
been sold and subjected to lotissement. Its owner and builder was one Alexandre Flamet, an enterprising local carpenter and furniture maker. In 1874 Monet moved his family into Flamet's pavilion, becoming its first tenant. Once again he turned his passion for gardening to good account and filled his rented yard with all manner of flowering plants. Gladiolas shows his wife Camille in this second garden, one of a great many in which she appears, sometimes with their son or a friend.

In the preceding generation, most notably in paintings and drawings by J. F. Millet at Barbizon (plate 12), a village garden was presented as such: it had Brussels sprouts or cabbages, and chickens pecked among them. The most common flower was that of the fruit tree, whose produce is edible. Millet had rented his village house, as Monet did later, but through his paintings he associated himself and his family with traditional villagers. Monet,
by contrast, identifies himself with the transplanted city dweller who gets rid of the cabbages and chickens, and instead plants the flowers which transform the rented yard into a miniature estate. Despite his enormous debts — or perhaps because of them — Monet was living high off the hog (to use an anachronistic, small-town phrase), and he shows his wife as though she were the mistress of a château. The situation is a distillation of the suburbanization of Argenteuil. The local carpenter's land grows more valuable as Argenteuil expands, so he builds upon it a villa whose rental income is greater than he could obtain from the land itself. The city artist to whom he rents comes to Argenteuil to find suitable subjects to paint, not far from Paris where his market is located: dealers, exhibition galleries and clients.

The contrast between Millet's vegetable garden and Monet's flowers is that between a pre-modern village and a suburb. Millet's ideal was the rural community untainted by the modernization of urban life, which he had deliberately fled. Monet's ideal was that of the middle-class city dweller who thinks of the village as a place to build his domain, a garden of colour and beauty which will be a compensation for the need to work — and from which vegetables, those symbols of need and of work, will be excluded.

Some contemporaries lamented the conversion of such villages as Argenteuil to suburban extensions of Paris. Adolphe Joanne, the relatively sober author of guide books to the environs of Paris, could not hold back his opinion of the new suburban villas:

These habitations, more pretentious than picturesque, affect all forms and styles of architecture. Here is a garden of a few square metres, possessing a jet of water in a tiny basin, some statues, a gazebo and a greenhouse; it is called an English garden. There, the façades of houses are erected, some on the model of the Alhambra, others on that of Herculaneum or Pompeii.17

Fortunately Monet's taste was not that which Joanne deplored, but the flowers that he cultivated none the less stood for the bourgeois who surrounded himself with a garden of his own devising that contrasted with the traditional use of the land. Even an enclosed village garden of former days, managed by a typical resident, would have had vegetables and a few chickens. Élisée Reclus, the great geographer, in an essay of 1866, lamented the loss of these traditional village gardens with their farmyard aspect. 'For strollers walking down the muddy lanes of this make-believe countryside, nature is only represented by well-trimmed bushes and masses of flowers seen through the bars of fences.'18

We need not, in consequence, attack Monet for debasing village traditions. I have wanted instead to make evident the particular truth of his real, and his painted gardens. They represent the creation of an ideal environment, away from the city, released from immediate urban pressures, an environment shaped to his own liking as the recipient of natural light and air which, then, his artificial pigments could reconstruct.

Monet's rented villa was on the eastern side of Argenteuil, a district that had been undergoing drastic alteration since the Franco-Prussian war. The railroad used to end across the river, on the Paris side, but now it was brought across the new bridge — the one Monet painted (plates 8 and 9) — into the edge of the village, where a new station was erected. Monet's villa was diagonally across the street from the station.19 He often had to leave his flowered garden and take the train to Paris, in search of the money he constantly needed. His frequent use of the Gare St Lazare led him, in 1877, to paint his famous group of twelve pictures of the great train shed and its outlying tracks. To complete this review of industrial images in Impressionist painting, we should look at one of these paintings of the Gare St Lazare, and we should juxtapose it to the contemporary painting of his garden at Argenteuil. The truth of Impressionism is found in the juxtaposition, not in either picture alone. Like Daubigny's and Lachambreudie's Les Deux Rivages (plate 5), there are still two sides to Monet's pathway in 1877, one flowered and the other industrialized.

In order to paint the Gare St Lazare, Monet rented rooms nearby and frequently stayed there, although his wife and child remained in Argenteuil. His choice of subject was a daring one in 1877. Some courageous critics had called for paintings of modern buildings, but generally they were considered suitable only for commemorative pictures. A few artists however, including Édouard Manet and Gustave Caillebotte, had made paintings of the tracks and bridges near Gare St Lazare. Like these two artists, who were among his friends and supporters, Monet was committed to a form of naturalism which sought the characteristic truths of a scene or activity. For that reason he did not portray the façade of the station nor the great waiting hall which contemporary chroniclers made so much of. Instead he took the viewer out in the shed (plate 13), and even there, it is not just the train but the structure
Flachat, the engineer who had made of this shed one of the most daring of contemporary structures. Clever use of iron supports and overhead braces let Flachat construct a very wide span, which he pierced with those huge skylights. Monet lets the sunlight flood down from those skylights on to the tracks in the foreground, and he gives as much prominence to the geometric shadows of the overhead network as to the tracks. In fact, we come to understand this picture as a celebration of the moist outdoors sunlight which occupies the whole centre of the composition, the sunlight which penetrates the station. The smoke and steam which join outside with inside also join man's vapours with nature's atmosphere.

The whole picture is therefore an homage to modern engineering, and more particularly to Flachat's having overcome solid mass in favour of light and air. Is this not the very ambition of this gifted landscapist in his own art? When we think of the Impressionists, do we not think first of their denial of traditional sculptural mass and darkness in favour of light and air? And can we not recall that Louis Napoleon and Baron Haussmann had brought light and air into Paris by widening streets and creating new parks and squares? To carry these analogies one step further, we need only remember that one of the demands of progressive social forces in France, as in England, was for ridding cities of dark, fetid courtyards and streets, of dark, windowless factories and slums.

Lachambeaudie's enthusiasm for modern engineering in the preceding generation, was precisely because it could bring about more vital and healthier conditions of travel and work. Flachat himself had been a prominent Saint-Simonian - he was one of Enfantin's original group of disciples - and his rebuilding of the Gare St Lazare was the fruition of what had once been a utopian ideal. By Monet's day, progressive capitalists had adopted many of the Saint-Simonists' ideas. The railroad trains and bridges that Corot, Millet and Daubigny were unable to countenance, could now be assimilated into the poetics of painting. In the most profound sense, the light and air of Monet's railroad station were interwoven with social issues.

If the history of Monet's painting ended with the Gare St Lazare, the historian would have an easy job of it. His art had ranged sufficiently over city, suburb and country to encompass train station, railroad bridge, factories seen at a distance, seaports, pleasure boating, private gardens, village streets, meadows and
Industry in the changing landscape from Daubigny to Monet

In the work of Monet’s younger contemporary, Vincent van Gogh, there are instructive parallels. Van Gogh’s social mission and his art were interwoven in the early 1880s, when he drew and painted the peasants and townspeople of the Borinage. During his two years in Paris he learned the new palette of the Impressionists and painted a number of subjects similar to theirs. The tensions of living in the French capital were too great for him, and when he went to the south of France in 1888 it was in search of an ideal world in which cultivated fields and valleys were in sight of the small towns he preferred. The community of artists he hoped to establish in Arles would have re-established a society whose loss he regretted, a society devoted to the pre-industrial truths of town work and field labour, and to their celebration in art. His Japan, he called it, out of conviction that Japanese artists lived in cooperative communities; he also thought of it as a revival of seventeenth-century Holland, knit together by common beliefs.

Van Gogh’s utopian dream could not survive its abortive test in the presence of that egocentric bully Gauguin, and eventually Vincent was driven north to Auvers, where he could seek the help of Dr Gachet, artist, collector, friend of the Impressionists and specialist in mental disturbance. In Auvers Van Gogh tried to achieve balance, painting those magnificent last pictures of thatched cottages of Auvers, of its wheat fields and gently rolling countryside. He committed suicide out of awareness of the distance there was between reality and illusion.

When we are reminded of Van Gogh’s poignant odyssey, we are so drawn to its familiar, purely personal events that we are apt to forget how much it speaks for modern man. For in a larger sense, Van Gogh and Monet are alike. Industry and the suburbs enter prominently into their art, but tensions inherent in creating an ideal world in painting drive them away from images of railroad bridges and large cities. In flowering trees and haystacks, wheatfields and Norman villages, they chose images that would cleanse man of the effects of industrialization.

If the art of either painter had been entirely isolated from that of his fellows, we might be entitled to interpret it as purely subjective and purely idiosyncratic. This is not true, however, for Monet and Van Gogh shared a number of aspirations, and the effect of their art on subsequent generations is owing to their having touched a chord that vibrates deep within modern man. Moreover, in the paintings of Paul Cézanne and of Camille Pissarro, of Winslow
Homer and of Giovanni Segantini, early 'modern' art came to us peopled by peasants, fishermen and villagers.

It was still possible in the late nineteenth century to hold up such images to the face of industrialization as a world towards which to aspire. Despite the vitality of the rural communes of our day, and despite the attractions of living in Vermont by a wood stove, we no longer believe that we can return to a pre-industrial condition. It is unlikely that Monet believed he could, either. In the last decades of his life, dominated by his paintings of water gardens, he had to be aware of the degree to which his art was an illusion. In order to get from his house to the water gardens he had built (detouring a local stream for the purpose), he had to cross over the branch railway that bisected his estate. Although he never showed this rail line in his paintings of waterlilies, we must take it into account if we are to comprehend the inner meaning of his art.

Le cours de notre vie a toujours deux Rivages;
Tous deux, dans notre enfance, et fleuris et joyeux,
Sont pleins de doux pensers, de chants insensibles.
Plus tard, sur une Rive étendant leurs ravages,
L'intérêt, les besoins et les prévisions
Emporcent la moitié de nos illusions.
Heureux, quand la vieillesse arrive,
Si quelques fleurs encore restent sur l'autre Rive!

[The course of our life has always two Shores;
Both, in our childhood, are enfloured and joyous,
Full of gentle thoughts, of uncaring songs.
Later, over one Shore, ravages are spread by
Interest and need, and anticipated wants.
Take away half of our illusions.
There is happiness, when old age arrives,
If a few flowers remain still on the other Shore!]

7 Three faces of capitalism: women and work in French cities

Louise A. Tilly

French industrial capitalism developed later than that of England. We recognize both as species of capitalism because of their central confrontation: between holders of capital who increasingly made the binding decisions concerning the disposition of all factors of production, including labour, and workers who increasingly laboured for wages at means of production over which they exercised little or no control. The common features of the industrial phase of capitalism in both countries were increased division of labour, growth of large-scale production and distribution, supervised and disciplined work, the concept that E. P. Thompson calls 'time-thrift and ... a clear demarcation between "work" and "life"'. Those powerful features of industrial capitalism created a common ground of experience in France and England, for workers in manufacturing and non-manufacturing industries alike, for skilled and unskilled workers, for young and old, for men and women.

Yet there were differences, which matter because the context from which people came strongly affected the character of their encounter with industrial capitalism. The differences also matter because the differing experiences of industrial capitalism became the sources of contrasting responses to its demands, hardships and opportunities. For those reasons, it will not do to take the experiences of English, male, manufacturing workers as prototypes, and to imagine other encounters with industrial capitalism as incomplete replicas of the prototypical experience. This paper takes a deliberately contrary tack: it examines the varying experiences of women in three French cities – Paris, Lyon and Lille – in the strong hope of identifying features of those experiences that were specific to women's lives, but also with the aim of singling out the particularities of France's capitalism. The paper asks what factors shaped women's labour-force participation and what role