

# Handling Allegory

*A comparative analysis of Gustave Courbet's The Painter's Studio in New Art History*

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## Acknowledgments

*The silence of the polyglots:*

*Not speaking one's mother tongue. Living with resonances and reasoning that are cut off from the body's nocturnal memory, from the bittersweet slumber of childhood. Being within oneself a secret vault...cherished and useless- that language of the past the past that withers without ever leaving you. You have a feeling that the new language is a resurrection; new skin, new sex. But the illusion burst when you hear, upon listening to a recording, for instance, that the melody of your voice comes back to you as a peculiar sound, out of nowhere, closer to the old spluttering than today's code. Your awkwardness has its charm, they say, ... not to be outdone. No one point out your mistakes, and there are so many...*

*Being fooled is not what happens to you either. At the most, you are willing to go along, ready for all apprenticeship, at all ages, in order to reach- with that speech of others, imagined as being perfectly assimilated, some day- who knows what ideal beyond the implicit acknowledgement of a disappointment caused by the origin that did not keep its promise.*

*Thus, between two languages, your realm is silence.*

Extract from Julia Kristeva's *Strangers to our selves*<sup>1</sup>

Even this is a painful truth, following the example of Kristeva, I did not choose silence. This dissertation might have the traces of the awkwardness that the Bulgarian author mentions, but it is done with aim of learning, to expand my knowledge and also, and most importantly, to learn the limits of it.

Nothing of this last five years would have been possible without the love, patience and care that all of my Norwegian family and friends have given me. The support and openness that they have offered me is difficult to describe, not matter what language I use.

I am very grateful to my supervisor, Ina Blom for challenging me to reach further, for her knowledge and above all for her great advises. Thank you for you kindness and understanding.

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<sup>1</sup> Strangers to ourselves By Julia Kristeva, Leon S. Roudiez, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 15-16

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A Clelia Cavallo de Jaskowsky, por ser la persona que me abrió la puerta al conocimiento. Gracias por ser la mejor maestra (y abuela) una persona podría tener.

*Alea jacta est*, my father told me when I started the university in Norway. My dice were cast, and now I had to play my hand. My parents told me that I could do whatever I put my mind into. I do hope they see that, if it is true, it is only because of them. They gave the tools I needed to explore the world and the freedom to take different paths and, when they saw the complications, they stood by, offering everything a child -a person- could wish for: confidence, faith, and love.

My brother and sisters offered me great support in this journey. I have to confess that more than once I have gone to them and asked them to stop this crazy enterprise I set myself to do. But they have set their minds to something more difficult than a master's degree, they try to make this world a better place, and I have no doubt that it already is better because they are in it.

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# Contents

<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>6</b>
1.1 PRESENTATION OF THE ART HISTORIANS.....	8
1.2 THE PAINTER’S STUDIO, REAL ALLEGORY SUMMING UP SEVEN YEARS OF MY ARTISTIC AND MORAL LIFE (1855).....	12
1.3 ALLEGORY STUDIED .....	14
1.4 NEW THEORIES .....	16
1.5 COMPARING THE FOUR ART HISTORIANS.....	21
<b>2. LINDA NOCHLIN: REREADING <i>THE PAINTER’S STUDIO</i>.....</b>	<b>24</b>
2.1 FROM WORK TO TEXT.....	26
2.2 FEMINIST CRITICISM: READING AS A WOMAN AND THE CENTRALITY OF GENDER .....	27
2.3 GENDER-NEUTER ART HISTORIAN: THE MEANING OF CONTEXT.....	34
<b>3. JAMES H. RUBIN: REALISM AND SOCIAL VISION .....</b>	<b>38</b>
3.1 THE REAL ALLEGORY: LANDSCAPE AS A SOCIAL TOOL .....	40
3.2 TEXT WITHIN THE TEXT: LANDSCAPE AS SUPPLEMENT .....	42
3.3 TEXT WITHIN THE TEXT: LES PAYSANS AS OBJET (PETIT) A .....	44
<b>4. MICHAEL FRIED: REAL ALLEGORIES, ALLEGORIES OF REALISM.....</b>	<b>48</b>
4.1 ABSORPTION AND THEATRICALITY: THE EVOLUTION OF FRENCH PAINTING .....	50
4.2 COURBET’S ART: <i>ECRITURE -ABSORPTION AND THEATRICALITY AS A MODE OF WRITING</i> .....	52
4.3 RECONSIDERING REALISM .....	55
<b>5. PETRA CHU: SALON RHETORICS .....</b>	<b>62</b>

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5.1	THE SOCIOLOGY OF ART: BUT WHO CREATED THE CREATORS? .....	63
5.2	SALON RHETORIC: NINETEENTH-CENTURY USE OF THE TROPE AS A POLITICAL TOOL .....	68
5.3	THE REAL ALLEGORY ACCORDING TO BALZAC AND BAUDELAIRE:.....	74
	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>78</b>
	<b>ILLUSTRATIONS.....</b>	<b>83</b>

# 1. Introduction

This dissertation puts forward an interpretation of four studies of Gustave Courbet's *The Painter's Studio, A Real Allegory Summing up Seven Years of my Artistic and Moral Life* (1855) [Fig. 1] within New Art History. The main objective of this study is to compare how Linda Nochlin, James H. Rubin, Michael Fried and Petra ten-Doesschate Chu handle allegory.

My analysis of these texts goes beyond summarizing each essay in which the art historians discuss the painting. It is to show how, when a painting is treated as a text, language provides multiple possibilities to achieve understanding. The objective is not to reach the *one* truth about Courbet's painting, nor is it the aim to discover how narratives within *The Painter's Studio* map carefully onto the way in which events might have unfolded. However, it is my intention to understand the theories and methodologies that the art historians, whom I have chosen to study, use in order to *read* the *real* allegory.

The goal of this dissertation is to unveil the allegorical within *The Studio*. What is it about Courbet's allegory that has attracted some of the greatest art historians to analyze it? Which new art historical theories and methodologies are in use in their analysis? Why does this painting give them the opportunity to make use of these theories? How do the studies of the four art historians agree and where lies the differences?

To answer all these questions I have arranged this comparative analysis text by text. This will show how each art historian studies *The Studio* and the *Allegory*, and how I interpret the way they handle allegory. The tools I use for this are, as the title explains, those within new/critical art history.

The methodology I choose for each chapter is a reflection of "my role as a reader", that is, what I read in the text. I have interpreted their use of allegory, with means of structuralism, reader-response criticism, Marxist and socialist criticism, feminist criticism, semiotics, psychoanalytic criticism, sociology of art and deconstruction.

These theories are, at the same time, within the text. These art historians share, even in their great differences, a theoretical viewpoint - New art history. What they have in common is

that all of them started their studies within traditional art history. It was later in their careers that they progressively changed to the critical counterpart.

The four of them received their degrees in the 1950's and 60's. In that period formalism was the new theoretical model. Russian formalists like Viktor Shklovsky and Roman Jakobson insisted that poems were made out of words, not "poetic" subjects. Formalists held that the structural features of a work of art, and not its author, were what critics and historians should investigate. In the 1970's, it was common in art history departments to study Michelangelo with Neo-Platonism, Impressionism applying popular versions of science, and using Jungian psychology on Abstract Expressionism. With critics like Roland Barthes, whose works were translated to English in the late 60's and beginning of the 70's, things began to change.

Barthes essay "Myth Today" published in Paris in 1957 and translated to English in 1972, laid out the principles of the concept of "second signification": a culturally and historically contingent but nonetheless enormously powerful system of underlying meanings encoding into images, artefacts and practices.<sup>2</sup> "From Work to Text" (*De l' oeuvre au texte*, 1971) influenced the way the art historians in this dissertation handled artwork as a methodological field. Barthes reconceptualized the meaning of work - which was thought to be primary and essentially self-contained - and text which as a new object he characterized as: "Here then are these propositions; they concern methods, genres, signs, plurality, filiation, reading and pleasure."<sup>3</sup>

From France, apart of Barthes, came deconstruction. Deconstruction was Jacques Derrida's strategy of reading that pays attention to the sidelines, the framings, that through new contextualization allow fresh readings that at once become new writings.

By the 1970's and 80's, these new theories, a mixture of deconstruction, anthropology, psychology, linguistics, semiotics, philosophy among others, provided scholars with tools for opening subjects that previous art history had ignored.

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, *Art in theory: An anthology of changing ideas 1900-2000*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2006), 693.

<sup>3</sup> Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text" (1971), *Art in Theory* ed. Charles Harrison & Paul Wood (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2006), 965.

Critics and historians like T.J. Clark, Griselda Pollock, Lucy Lippard together with the group chosen for this dissertation, began to point out “holes” in traditional art history. Neo-Marxists, Feminists, and minorities started to ask questions about the social history of art, the reason why there were so few African American curators, professors or artists, and similar questions were asked by the feminists. Why have there been no great women artists?<sup>4</sup>

Working with these theories opened the field for a re-reading of the canon, acknowledging what was not there, and how materials that might have been obscure could be “read” in a new light.

## 1.1 Presentation of the art historians

### 1.1.1 Linda Nochlin: “Courbet’s Real Allegory: Rereading *The Painter’s Studio*” in Courbet

*“I have never been, and never will be, a dry objective scholar of Courbet, or any other artist or issue”<sup>5</sup>*

Chapter 2 is devoted to Linda Nochlin’s analysis of the Studio. She is considered a leading figure in feminist art history. Beside this, she is also known for her work on Realism, particularly on Courbet. Since the 1950’s, Nochlin has been attracted to Courbet’s art.

The political resonances in his paintings were in accordance with her context. The McCarthy period in The United States, with the persecution of the so-called subversives, was the backdrop when she researched the implication of the 1848 Revolution on art and artist. In the 1970’s, Nochlin added feminism, a new kind of political engagement, to her studies. This assumed with time a larger role in her research.

The change, or progression, from one political engagement to the other, is possible to follow in two analyses of *The Studio*. In 1968, the art historian wrote an essay called “*The Invention of the Avant-Garde*” where she interpreted this painting as a Fourierist allegory and debated

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<sup>4</sup> Linda Nochlin’s seminal essay written in 1971.

<sup>5</sup> Linda Nochlin, *Courbet* (London: Thames&Hudson, 2007), 6.



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the meaning and value of the utopian philosophy. Her context at the time, the student revolt of May 68', shaped her analysis. Twenty years later, Nochlin wrote "Courbet's Real Allegory: Rereading *The Painter's Studio*" a catalogue essay for exhibition "Courbet Reconsidered" that she curated together with Sarah Faunce. This will be analyzed in depth in the section of the second chapter: *Gender-neuter Art Historian: The meaning of Context*.

What does it mean to read as a woman? What does it mean, a feminist art history contra a neuter-gendered art history? It is important to note, that neuter is not neutral. Neutered art historian, is a castrated art historian, neutered-masculine as she calls it. It is essential to understand that this difference is what makes Nochlin's "neutral" reading above all a political one.

The neutered-masculine art historian analyses the painting through context. I will discuss this in three cases, two are the context of the painter, and the last is the context of the place this work is housed. What is the difference between *The Studio* at the Louvre and at the Musee d'Orsay?

### **1.1.2 James H. Rubin: "The Studio as History" "Real Allegory and Realism" in Realism and Social Vision in COURBET & PROUDHON**

*M. Courbet is the Proudhon of painting. M. Proudhon-M. Courbet, I should say-does democratic and social painting. God knows at what cost.*<sup>6</sup>

The third chapter is based in the relationship between Gustave Courbet and P.J Proudhon.

James Henry Rubin's area of study is the theory and criticism of the nineteenth century French art. The raison d'être of Rubin's book on Courbet was to fill a void in the literature of the artist. "THE need for a scholarly essay on Courbet and Proudhon has long been apparent."<sup>7</sup> According to Rubin, even though scholars have not written much about the

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<sup>6</sup> The critic L.Enault, reviewing the 1851 Salon in the *Cronique de Paris*, quoted in T.J Clark *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1973), 9.

<sup>7</sup> James Henry Rubin, *Realism and Social Vision in COURBET & PROUDHON*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), xiii.

relationship between Courbet and Proudhon, it was a crucial subject for those who wrote about the artist in his time.

Pierre Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865) was a native of Besançon, as was also the other social reformer, Charles Fourier. It was in 1838 when he arrived to Paris and in 1843, his first big work appeared, *De la création de l'ordre dans l'humanité*. The philosopher was a close friend of Courbet. Rubin attributes this relationship to their shared attitude toward men and their interrelations, an attitude grounded in the similar character and Franc-Comtois origins of the two men. Rubin stresses in his book that however obscure Proudhon seems today as an art theorist, in the 1850's he was more notorious than any radical thinker and more of a public figure than Courbet. Rubin acknowledges that his link between the artist and the anarchist's philosophy could be sometimes too exclusive, but it is a risk he takes to be able to show the influence of Proudhon in the art of Gustave Courbet.<sup>8</sup>

The main difference between Proudhon and social thinkers, such as Fourier and Marx, is that although he shares the faith in the imminent fulfillment of humanity in a new social future that animated so many mid-nineteenth-century thinkers, Proudhon offered a critique of utopian spiritualism that was appropriate to the disillusionment with their unrealistic schemes that followed the 1848 Revolution.

The art of Courbet, as we will see, takes a different path after 1855, that was not in accordance with Proudhon's view. However, according to Rubin, and as the study of the third chapter will show, this change was a subtler movement, but still within the social philosophy of Proudhon.

### **1.1.3 Michael Fried: "Real Allegories, Allegories of Realism" in Courbet's Realism**

*...Courbet enterprise...aspired to leave no world outside painting.*<sup>9</sup>

In the Chapter 4, Michael Fried's text *Real Allegories, Allegories of Realism* is analyzed.

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<sup>8</sup> James Henry Rubin, *Realism and Social Vision in COURBET & PROUDHON* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), 4.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Fried, *Courbet's Realism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), 263.

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Fried is an undisputed pillar in art history and art criticism of the twentieth century. He has long been engaged with questions of modernism, realism, theatricality, objecthood, self-portraiture and embodiedness.

Having Clement Greenberg as his inspiration and mentor the first years of his career, Fried departed from Greenbergian essentialism concentrating on the effects of painting and sculpture, and thus reintroducing consideration of spectatorship in Modern art.

*Courbet's Realism* together with *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and the beholder in the Age of Diderot*, proposes that the evolution of French art has to be studied not in terms of style and subject matter, but in terms of form and subject matter. "It is to suggest that the stylistic and iconographic diversity that we associate with the history of French painting between David and Manet was guided, and in large measure determined, by certain ontological preoccupations which first emerged as crucial to painting in the period treated in this study."<sup>10</sup>

I will also give an account of the art historian's need to defend himself against formalism. And how we can study through Roland Barthes (and see traces of the Russian Formalist) in the theoretical background in which it is possible to understand the removal of the differentiation of form and subject matter. I read the operative function of the allegory as an allegory to human communication, proposing that Courbet's allegory is a way of pointing to its ontological status.

#### **1.1.4 Petra ten-Doesschate Chu: "Salon Rhetoric" in *The Most Arrogant Man in France***

*...je suis l'homme le plus fier et les plus orgueilleux de France.*<sup>11</sup>

*The Most Arrogant Man in France* renders an innovative treatment of Courbet's context.

Petra ten Doesschate Chu has edited two important books about Courbet. The first, *Courbet*

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality painting and beholder in the age of Diderot* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988), 4.

<sup>11</sup> Gustave Courbet quoted in Petra ten- Doesschate Chu, *The Most Arrogant Man in France* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2007), epigraph.

*in Perspective* (1977), is a compilation of reviews and essays of Courbet's art from Castagnary and Champfleury to T.J. Clark and Werner Hofmann. In the second, *Letters of Gustave Courbet* (1992), she presents the extended correspondence of the artist with many of his contemporaries. The letters of Courbet are especially important, not only for the detailed explanation that the artist gave of his work, but also for his relation with society in general.

The modern artist strives to be independent of the public's taste and yet depends on the public for a living. Petra Chu argues that Gustave Courbet understood this dilemma perhaps better than any painter before him. In *The Most Arrogant Man in France*, Chu asserts that in the initial age of mass media and popular high art, the artist managed to achieve an unprecedented level of artistic and financial independence by promoting his work and himself through the popular press.

I will also follow Bourdieu's thesis of the "uncreated creator" to find that for him the most specific feature of the production value cannot be understood unless one takes into account simultaneously the space of producers and the space of consumers.

## 1.2 The Painter's Studio, Real Allegory Summing up Seven Years of my Artistic and Moral Life (1855)

*Je suis au milieu piegnant. A droite, tous les actionnaires...A gauche, l'autre...*<sup>12</sup>

In the last decades, there has been an enormous interest in the art of Gustave Courbet, and his intriguing and complex *The Painter's Studio* has attracted many interpretations that match Courbet's challenge: "*Devinera qui pourra!*"

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<sup>12</sup> Courbet's letter to Champfleury in James Henry Rubin, *Realism and Social Vision in COURBET & PROUDHON* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980) appendix I, 105.

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*[T]he scene is laid in my studio in Paris. The picture is divided into two parts. I am at the center painting; on the right are the “shareholders”, that is my friends, the workers, the art collectors. On the left the others, the world of trivialities: the common people, the destitute, the poor, the wealthy, the exploited, the exploiters; those who thrive on death. On the wall in the background hang *The Return from the Fair* and *The Bathers*...*<sup>13</sup>

This painting, refused by the Salon jury, was the highlight of the one-man exhibition organized by Courbet alongside the 1855 Universal Exhibition.

The first clues of the figures in the painting, were found in letters to his friend Champfleury (Jules François Felix Fleury-Husson) and patron Alfred Bruyas where he explained every figure, but he only named the character of the right side of the painting. “It’s the whole world coming to me to be painted”, declared Courbet to Champfleury “on the right are all the shareholders, by that I mean friends, fellow workers and art lovers. On the left is the other world of everyday life: the masses, wretchedness, poverty, the exploited and the exploiters, people thrive on death”. Courbet continues the letter to his friend enumerating the characters on the left, the Jew, the Irish beggar, the Curé, the Veteran, the Franc-Comtois peasant boy and we can also see in this side a guitar, a dagger and a hat, a mannequin and newspaper, a skull. The characters on the right were Alfred Proamyed, Alfred Bruyas, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Urbain Cuenot, Max Buchon, Champfleury, Jeanne Duval and Charles Baudelaire.

It is only the central group around the painting of the landscape that emerges into focus; and especially the proud (and arrogant as he described himself) pose of the artist, turning his back to the model, paying no attention to his visitors.

There are other figures that Courbet did not mention. However, the successful iconographical studies reached its culmination with Musée du Louvre curator, Hélène Toussaint’s hypothesis that not only the figures of the right, but also those on the left could be identified by name. After this study many interpretations have been constructed around the new identity of the characters. However, it is the fact that this painting is an allegory, and not only an

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<sup>13</sup> Gustave Courbet, Letter to Champfleury, January 1855 in Benedict Nicolson, *Courbet: The Studio of the Painter*, (London: Allen Lane, 1973), 13.

allegory but a real one, that attracts scholars, like the four that will be studied here, to *The Studio*.

### 1.3 Allegory studied

Allegory is a difficult concept to define. There are several influential works that analyse the concept, but it still provokes reactions of perplexity and discontent. It is a concept that both Jorge Luis Borges and Benedetto Croce condemned and it is difficult to approach allegorical art, whether it is seventeenth, nineteenth or twenty-first century art. The general problem that one encounters when set to research allegory is the definition we encounter in the dictionary. Allegory is not so straightforward as this type of definition suggests. In allegory, language is broken up, dispersed, in order to acquire a new and intensified meaning in its fragmentations.<sup>14</sup> This is what this dissertation proposes to do; to break up four texts and disperse them in order to obtain new and intensified meaning of Gustave Courbet's *Allégorie Réelle*.

In Courbet's allegory, one more problem is added to its already problematic nature, he called it a *real* allegory. The Real, in this study, changes according to the author who treats it. It is the goal of this dissertation to show how, in new art history, the *one true meaning* is not the aim of art historical research. The attention is redirected to the reader. The focus is less on the questions of the biography and on the intentions of the artist, but rather on questions of who the artist is for the each reader.

In order to understand more precisely what allegory comes to mean in this context, it is necessary to go back to some of the formulations as they appear in the writings of Walter Benjamin and Angus Fletcher, and also Craig Owens.

*The Origin of German Tragic Drama* was first published in German in 1928 as Walter Benjamin's doctoral thesis. Benjamin has been said to achieve the first really significant definition of allegory since Dante, by casting it in cultural and ontological terms. Indeed, following the path of Benjamin's examination, it is possible to encounter not only a new

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<sup>14</sup> Craig Owens, *Earthwords* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 43.

understanding of allegory, but a reconsideration of culture and ontology as well. In Benjamin's analysis, allegory is above all a kind of experience. It is the expression of intuition. But allegory is more than a form of expression, it is also the intuition. The form such an experience of the world takes, is fragmentary and enigmatic; in it the world ceases to be purely physical and becomes an aggregation of signs. Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things.<sup>15</sup> Allegory is a construction, and the perfect vision of this new phenomenon was the ruin.<sup>16</sup> For an appreciation of the transience of things, and the concern to rescue them from eternity, is one of the strongest impulses of allegory.<sup>17</sup>

Angus Fletcher linked the construction of the allegorical structure to obsessional neurosis. A characteristic of allegorical plot is that they preserve, on some level of literal meaning, a highly ordered sequence of events, which suggest that anxiety does not usually break through the unbroken surface of compulsive fictions. The anxiety is kept in bounds by rigid sequence of events leading to the miming guest. Allegory always demonstrates a degree of inner conflict, which is called ambivalence. Regarding other kinds of figures of speech, Fletcher compares analogy and allegory. It sometimes becomes possible to predict what is going to happen with allegories.<sup>18</sup> With analogy, he says, we learn to look afresh at the allegorical mode. In both cases, the author continues, we meet a language of taboo, of "antithetical primal words", in which the single term contains diametrically opposed meanings, [*real allegory*] allowing for paradoxes and ironies at the heart of the allegory. The presence of paradox is not always apparent. But the great allegories show no lack of irony.<sup>19</sup>

Allegory is not hermeneutics. It does not interpret, but as Craig Owens explains, it is a supplement, which indicates the reader the double text, the double temporality. It is a device that concerns itself with the projection of spatial, temporal structures. It stops the narrative in place, and offers a counter narrative, implicating both metonymy and metaphor.

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<sup>15</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London: NLB, 1977), 178.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Benjamin, 1977, 223.

<sup>18</sup> Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of the Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), 302.

The real allegory in Courbet's *Studio* is a device for the reader, the possibility that words can be used to signify their opposites, and this is in itself an allegorical perception. The allegory is the tool which we can use to resolve these contradictions faced by reader and her/his context. As we will see, allegory occurs when a text is doubled by another, it is its own commentary becoming the model for all commentaries insofar that these involve the rewriting of the first text. Allegory allows us to use the text as a methodological field where we find multiple meanings for multiple readers.

## 1.4 New theories

Accepting the fact that it is not possible to reach *a single* truthful meaning in a work of art is liberating the historian and opening the possibility of multiple meanings. The four new art historians discussed in this paper, Linda Nochlin, James H. Rubin, Michael Fried, and Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, search for a significant manner to interpret allegory.

### 1.4.1 Theory

Jonathan Culler “nicknamed” theory as an unbounded corpus of works “that succeed in challenging and reorienting thinking in domains other than those to which ostensibly belong because their analyses of language, mind, history, or culture offer novel and persuasive accounts of signification, make strange the familiar and perhaps persuade readers to conceive of their own thinking and the institutions to which it relates in new ways”<sup>20</sup> There are two important points within this definition. Firstly, theory is not just a sum of particular theories, but shows that a discourse only achieves the status of theory when it is taken up by readers from other fields. Secondly, that this formulation emphasizes that theory is, to some extent, to be defined in terms of practical effects. It is in a way what changes people's views.

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<sup>19</sup> Fletcher, 1970, 302-303.

<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Culler *What's the Point? The Point of Theory: Practices of Cultural Analysis*, ed. Mieke Bal and Inge E. Boer (New York: Continuum, 1994), 13.



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According to Culler, one of the problems with this definition is that it does not solve what is the relation between theory as particular sort of writing and theory as an activity.<sup>21</sup>

The problem with theory, Culler argue, is that it is in its nature the questioning of this presumed results and assumptions on which they are based. This nature of theory is to undo, through a contesting of premises and postulates, what you thought you knew, so that there may appear to be no real accumulation of knowledge and expertise.<sup>22</sup>

Theories now could be considered a practice of juxtaposition, as in this dissertation, where the point or goal is to put into question not only history of art, of Courbet's art or of Courbet's real allegory, but also to generate new understanding of cultural forms and activities by widening the range of the disciplines references and confronting the reader with influential discourses on diverse aspects of the phenomena which are studied. In this dissertation, theory has this double meaning.

But what happens when the explanation expands to theory in general, is that the answer turns more in a recommendation.

*All we can do is learn not to expect to have delineated, once and for all, the boundaries of our subject or to master the perspectives relevant to it, and thus learn to remember - though this will not make things feel much easier - that the intimidation we feel when confronted with discourses we don't know or understand is inseparable from the possibility of new understanding. If there is a general point, or a point to theory in general, this must be it.*<sup>23</sup>

In traditional art history, scholars have been reluctant to provide their own account of what history consists of, as it had a self-evident meaning. The methodology in use is that of accumulation of facts with the belief that this will get them closer to the historical moment. Critical art historians have recognized the importance of language and that history owes more to it than has been accounted for. Historians encounter the past only by means of linguistic representations.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>23</sup> Culler, 1994, 16-17.

*[T]he dialogue between past and present - dialogue that requires a subtle interplay between proximity and distance in the historian's relation to the "object" of study. This "dialogical" relation between the historian or the historical text and the "object" of study raises the question of the role of stylization... and polemic in the historian's own use of language - that is, the question of the ways in which the historian's use of language is mediated by critical factors that cannot be reduced to factual predication or direct authorial assertion about historical "reality."<sup>24</sup>*

For Dominick La Capra the past is always mediated by texts. The notion of textuality, according to La Capra, serves to point to the fact that one is "always already" implicated in problems of language use... and it raises the question of both the possibilities and the limits of meaning. For the historian, the very reconstruction of a "context" or a "reality" takes place on the basis of "textualized" remainders of the past.<sup>25</sup>

#### **1.4.2 Language and The Reader**

*I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object.<sup>26</sup>*

Of all the critical theories used in this paper; deconstruction's convincing exposure of the way in which language conveys a presence and absence of meaning and the way it creates *meaning effects* through a shifting system of signs allows one to reach a deep understanding of the texts analyzing *The Studio*. In two chapters of this dissertation, the role of language in the working of history is studied within the theories of deconstruction. LaCapra demonstrated that the production of knowledge has more to do with the manipulation of language than with direct access to the phenomenal world that the historian studies. Derrida showed that language is not capable of conveying the type of meaning that is usually ascribed to historical narratives. Linguistic signs, according to the French philosopher, are arbitrary constructs whose significance is impermanent and unstable.

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<sup>24</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts* (History and Theory, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Oct., 1980), pp. 245-276 Blackwell Publishing for Wesleyan University), 246-7

<sup>25</sup> LaCapra, 1980, 247.

<sup>26</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), 86.

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Reading, according to Jonathan Culler, establishes a good context for a discussion of deconstruction. Deconstruction was used as a strategy for reading and writing simultaneously, since reading pays special attention to the sidelines, the framings, that through new contextualization, allow fresh readings that at once become new readings.<sup>27</sup> This reveals the possibility of multiplicity of meanings and interpretations. It is the inevitable invasion of the other in the self, and it is therefore that deconstructing is not a destruction of the text; it is the re-writing of it but with a difference. Meaning depends of the process of *differance* that in Linda Nochlin's essay is exemplified with the reversal of the binary opposition of men and women. Meaning is always the trace of the effect of one of the binary opposition into the other. One cannot be exclude from the other. This trace of the men in women is defined by their difference. And as is possible to see both in the Nochlin and Rubin's study meaning is attainable when the binary opposition is reversed and for a moment the hierarchy too.

### 1.4.3 Context

As we will see in the studies of Nochlin, Rubin and Chu, context, con-text, are concepts that shape their studies and will allowed us to understand the way they handle allegory. Norman Bryson has investigated intensively art in context and developed the notion that the language of the interpreter shapes his or her account of the past and that the textuality of the historian's material blurs the distinctions between text and context in relation to art history. When a particular work of art is placed "in context" it is usually the case that a body of material is assembled and juxtaposed with the work in question in the hope that such a contextual material will reveal the determinants that make the work of art what it is. A number of assumptions operate in the word "context" itself which the term is rarely required to unpack or declare.<sup>28</sup>

The notion for Bryson that a text, in this case *The Painter's Studio*, is waiting for context to act upon it in order to transfer to the text its own certainties and determinations, is a mistaken one. He proposes to show this mistake with the help of semiotics. It is with this methodological tool, that "[c]ontext" can always be extended; it is subject to the same

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<sup>27</sup> Jacques Derrida *Of grammatology*; trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 42.

<sup>28</sup> Norman Bryson " Art In Context" *The Point of Theory: Practices of Cultural Analysis*, ed. Mieke Bal and Inge E. Boer ( New York: Continuum, 1994), 66.

process of mobility that is at work in the semiosis of the text or artwork that “context” is supposed to delimit and control.<sup>29</sup> This does not mean that one should abandon context as a working concept of analysis, but that it has to operate simultaneously with the concept of determination.

In Linda Nochlin’s essay, the text is studied in three different cases of context. In Rubin’s interpretation context equals his aim to show the philosophical adherence that *The Studio* bears. Chu will show allegory as a device of freedom from its repressive context.

Context and text have a hierarchical relation. It is usually assumed that “history stands prior to artifact”, and it is because of this relation that traditional studies of Courbet’s *Atelier* had been based on context producing its meaning. But it is the aim, not only of Bryson and Bal, but also of Jonathan Culler, to consider the study of an artwork in a Nietzschean “chronological reversal”<sup>30</sup>. This refers to the inversion of the chronology of a cause and effect. The artwork is studied from outside the work itself, by means of a rhetorical operation, as reversal, a metalepsis, that nonetheless purports to regard the work as having been produced by its contexts and not as producing it.<sup>31</sup>

It is in these types of cases, where elements of visual text migrate from text to context and vice versa, that the differentiation between context/text is possible to lose the “stroke” allowing the art historian to treat the “con-text” as a type of “text” and therefore to interpret with the semiological tools. Once launched in the world, as Bryson and Bal explained, the work of art is subject to all the vicissitudes of reception; as a work involving the sign, it encounters from the beginning the ineradicable fact of semiotic play.<sup>32</sup> Different viewers, from different or the same generation, bring their own visual and verbal discourses, and it is the study of the contextual aspects of the reception of *The Studio* that we will see within the texts of Nochlin, Rubin, Fried, and Chu.

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<sup>29</sup> Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson *Semiotics and Art History* The Art Bulletin, Vol.73, No. 2 (Jun., 1991), 177.

<sup>30</sup> <sup>30</sup> Norman Bryson " Art In Context" The Point of Theory: Practices of Cultural Analysis, ed. Mieke Bal and Inge E. Boer ( New York: Continuum, 1994), 70.

<sup>31</sup> Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson *Semiotics and Art History* The Art Bulletin, Vol.73, No. 2 (Jun., 1991), 178-9.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

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*The idea of “context” as that which will, in legislative sense, determine the contours of the work in question is therefore different from the idea of “context” that semiotics proposes: what the latter points to is, on the one hand, the unarrestable mobility of the signifier, and on the other, the construction of the work of art within always specific context of viewing.*<sup>33</sup>

## 1.5 Comparing the four art historians

In terms of context, Rubin and Chu have the most traditional approaches whereas Fried and Nochlin have fundamentally different approaches.

Rubin’s and Chu’s studies are based on an investigation of the context of the artist. Chu asserts that the allegorical in her essay is the translation of abstract ideas into art. This could also be said about Rubin. The difference between these two studies is which type of ideas the allegorical reveal. For Rubin, context and allegory meet in the philosophy of Proudhon. Rubin analyzes allegory as a social tool, while in Chu’s analysis, context and allegory meet due to the need of a device of liberation from the censorship of Napoleon III’s government. While Rubin analyzes the context from one viewpoint, one philosophy, Chu analyzes society, and from this broad perspective she narrows in on allegory. Chapter 3 and 5 shows that this leads to two very different results.

As mentioned, both Fried and Nochlin had a fundamentally different approach to context. Fried is not interested in the contextual, biographical facts of Courbet’s life or the painting. In Linda Nochlin text, we can find both the context of the artist and of the art historian. Both explicitly say that they approach *The Painter’s Studio* as a methodological field. In Chapter 2 and 4, I will discuss how their approach shapes their use of allegory in two particular ways depending on the choice of context, or choosing not to use it, and thus affirming that a text unity lies not in its origin, but in its destination.

In Nochlin’s study, her exegesis of the allegory is based on two theoretical models, Lacan’s study of the Oedipal complex and Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, she finds support for her analysis of the origin of art from the desire of the male artist. Deconstruction allows Nochlin to reverse the hierarchy of the men/women binary

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<sup>33</sup> Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson *Semiotics and Art History* The Art Bulletin, Vol.73, No. 2 (Jun., 1991), 180.

and do allegory with allegory. To unfold the Proudhonian ideology in the allegory in Rubin's text, I use the theory of ideology of Slavoj Žižek together with Lacanian psychoanalysis to identify what it is that we desire to know within the allegorical and how to reach this knowledge. To understand Rubin's analysis of the text within the text, I use Craig Owens' explication of how these temporalities can be the prefiguration of ideology in Courbet's painting. In the Chapter 2 and 3, I will discuss how Lacanian psychoanalysis helps to unfold, not only how humans are built, but also how society and ideology structure its subjects by the process of internalization.

Communication and allegory are found in the chapter of Fried and Chu. Chu views allegory as a device communicating what society and censorship would otherwise not allow. While Chu handles allegory as a device shaped by its context, I study how context can form these tools with the theories of Bourdieu, and how to use this device with the theories of Benjamin. Michael Fried interprets the allegory as an operation, a device of communication and uses it to show how form considered as human communication can become allegorical. In order to demonstrate this, I use Barthes' theory of *écriture* and Derrida's theory of the metaphor, in this case allegory, as communication. My aim is to show that allegory is not necessarily bound to only one mode of communication; I will do this by discussing two very different studies, that of Fried in Chapter 4 and that of Chu in Chapter 5.

It could be said that Rubin's aim is to show the allegorist as the interpreter of "reappropriated" cultural imagery that in his hands becomes something else. For Chu, as for Rubin, the aim of using the allegory is to reappropriate imagery, but in her study, it is in order to act as index for repression and freedom. Nochlin's aim is to show allegory as the model of textuality where the transgression of the Law is not effected in the body of women. Finally, Fried found in the allegory a commitment to perception, thus finding the authenticity *as painting* not only *in painting*.

My aim in the chapter about Rubin is to show through a work within the work that the ideology of the anarchist philosopher can be found in Courbet's landscapes as much as in *The Painter Studio*. In Nochlin's analysis, my goal is to understand how a woman, who happens to be an art historian reads, and by that writes new texts with deconstruction. In Chu's analysis, my goal is to show that society structures allegory and at the same time that

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the society is structured by it. The aim with the about Fried's analysis, is to understand how allegory's form becomes communication between creator and society.

## 2. Linda Nochlin: Rereading *The Painter's Studio*

Linda Nochlin divides her study “Courbet’s Real Allegory: Rereading *The Painter’s Studio*” in two main parts. In the first part she searches for a place where she can award meaning to the painting, assuming her femininity and taking over “as the creator of a discourse of gender from the raw material” offered by Gustave Courbet *The Painter’s Studio*. By this, she suggests that her commitment to feminism, both as a theory and as politics, has provided her with a vantage point of the Other. Feminist art history “reproblematizes” and reconstitutes the central issue of how meaning is produced within the artwork. She searches for a model of textuality that is not built by the laws of Oedipal construction, or, when it is erected by this law, a way of reversing it. In the second part of her study she assumes a “gender-neuter” voice taking into account the politic behind *The Studio* and the importance of context to reach its meaning. What “neuter” implies is that Nochlin’s reading is conducted as “sexless”. Gender-neuter refers to the castrated art historian, not to a gender-neutral art history.

Based on a wide range of models and methodologies – psychoanalytic theory, structuralism and poststructuralism, Marxism theory, literary criticism and aspects of traditional art history (formalism) – Nochlin re-studies Gustave Courbet’s *The Painter’s Studio: A Real Allegory Summing Up Seven Years of My Artistic and Moral Life*. Meaning, as she will show, is attainable as a result of the interaction between viewer and work. This is possible by changing the traditional formulation “Who is Gustave Courbet? What did he mean with his art?” to “Who is Gustave Courbet for Linda Nochlin?”. The *one* truth is provided for, in traditional art history, by identifying the iconography in a work of art and giving it a conventionally awarded meaning. Nochlin’s ambition is to guide the reader through different stages of an art historical investigation.

After the numerous studies of the painting since 1920, particularly those of the French Louvre curator Helene Toussaint and the German art historian Klaus Herding, an extensive iconographical work has been produced, making an accurate contextual description of both the painter and the painting possible. The painting characterized as a triptych is analysed, and each part indicates that the picture is not a simple atelier painting as those of Courbet’s contemporaries. The non-narrative scene and the inactivity of the members in the three parts help to recognize that the key to its interpretation lies outside the painting. Contemporaries



of the painter rejected the implications that the painting carried a hidden meaning, but since 1920, challenged by Courbet himself, historians have tried to decode the painting. In 1977, H el ene Toussaint's decisive study of the personifications on the left side opens a new chapter in the research of this painting. Each character was provided a name and a reason for being there, without making the real allegory less enigmatic.

Providing a formal description of the painting enables Linda Nochlin to show how this research tool cannot help the viewer to achieve a comprehensive understanding of its meaning. The differences between traditional and critical art history is what makes it possible to rephrase the question from who an artist is to who an artist is for each viewer. In traditional art history the object of art is already formed and there is radical differentiation between the object and the subject who observes. The theoretical approach to the object is the one of pure thought, limiting the spectator to describing the object as it is. The object is understood as a set of facts which the subject will approach in a passive manner.

Critical cultural studies are based on the idea that both object and subject are products of social praxis, socially preformed. The object is not waiting to be apprehended by a subject who is a simple recorder of reality. Both object and subject are the result of a complex social process. The task of Critical theory is to reflect upon the structures from which this social reality is constructed.

Jonathan Culler explains in his analysis of theory and criticism after structuralism, that the orientation of finding the reader/viewer in the text/painting is a phenomenon encouraged by structuralism and semiotics. The attempt to describe the structures and codes responsible for the production of meaning focuses attention on the reading process and its conditions of possibility. Roland Barthes writes that a structuralist poetics "will not teach us what meaning must definitively be attributed to a work; it will not provide or even discover a meaning but will describe the logic according to which meanings are engendered"<sup>34</sup>

Meaning is a response to questions posed by the reader in which the result will be a product of the experience generated by the text and the reader. To interpret a work is, according to

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<sup>34</sup> Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London: Routledge, 1994), 32.

Culler, to analyse the response of the reader in relation to the text. Within this analysis a question is raised about the nature of the reader. If the experience of interpretation of a work depends upon the qualities of the reader, one can ask what difference it makes whether the reader is a female or a male. If meaning of a work is the experience of the reader, what differences does it make that the reader is a woman?

Before answering this question it is important to shortly explain the term *Text* and its use in art history.

## 2.1 From Work to Text

*The painting is “figuratively and literally incomplete and unfinished—therefore, in Baudelaire terms, open to the infinite interpretative field of imagination. This encourages me – and all those who insist on enjoying art as a text rather than merely consuming it as a work, to borrow Ronald Barthes’s terms – to collaborate in the production of meaning in Courbet’s allegory.”*<sup>35</sup>

*We know now that the text is not a line of words releasing a single “theological” meaning (the ‘message’ of an Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writing, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture. There is a place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author... A text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination.*<sup>36</sup>

To enjoy art as text rather than consuming it as work means that Nochlin is changing direction in her relationship with the painting as a viewer/reader, reopening the possibility of new meaning in the work of Gustave Courbet.

Ronald Barthes explains the differences between work and text. While a work is a fragment or substance, occupying a part of the space of books (in a library for example), the text is a methodological field. The work can be seen; the text is a process of demonstration.<sup>37</sup> This is how Linda Nochlin approaches *The Studio of the Painter* as a process of demonstration, a

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<sup>35</sup> Linda Nochlin, *Courbet*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 161.

<sup>36</sup> Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London: Routledge, 1994), 32-33.

<sup>37</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 157.

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language, an activity of production, paradoxical, a plural structure, the death of author and the birth of reader, and the pleasure of consumption. *The Studio* becomes a Text, not the work hanging in the *Musée d'Orsay*, but a methodological field in which new art historians have room for new meanings.

## 2.2 Feminist Criticism: Reading as a Woman and The Centrality of Gender

What does it mean to read as a woman? Reading as a woman is not necessarily what occurs when a woman reads: women can read, and have read as men. Feminist readings are not produced by recording what happens in the mental life of a female reader... though they do rely heavily on the notion of the experience of a woman reader.<sup>38</sup> The problem is, according to feminist scholars, that reading is a learned activity.

In Lacanian psychoanalysis human beings are born organism and they become subjects by internalizing culture. We turn into subjects in the process of learning language, which means that we become capable of signifying. Language is irretrievably Other<sup>39</sup>. The Other is there before we are, exists outside us and does not belong to us. The figure who represents the Other is the Father, from whom we learn to obey the law and inherit a place in society. Lacan explains this with NON/NOM, in English no/name, referring to the forbidding Father and the legacy of his name.<sup>40</sup> "The name of the father" (NP) first appeared in Lacan's work, in the early 1950s and refers generally to the legislative and prohibitive function of the "symbolic father" as the one who lays down the taboo on incest in the Oedipus complex. The negation, *non*, is introduced by NP, which refers to a triple prohibition of desire: the prohibition of the child's desire of the mother; the mother's desire to be reunited with the child and the father's desire of the child. This third stage is fundamental in establishing the law that the Father transmits, and submits to it. He is the representation of its functioning by submitting to it.

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<sup>38</sup> Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London: Routledge, 1994), 49.

<sup>39</sup> Lacan uses a capital O to distinguish the Otherness of culture and language from the otherness of other people.

<sup>40</sup> The place of the Father as the symbolic order will be studied in the Oedipal triangle later in the chapter.

This prohibition of incest, or the Name-of-the-Father, can be called a law only because the signifier detached from the child who is its signified operates as a physical protection against the jouissance of the Other.<sup>41</sup>

Language and many of the learned activities are sex-coded and gender inflected. Consequently, women learn to identify themselves with the masculine experience, which is taught to be the human experience. The question then is, how is a woman supposed to read *The Studio*, *The Bathers*, *The Young Ladies of the Banks of the Seine* (1856-57), or any other artist's works, like *Olympia* (1863), *Odalisque* (1814), *Sleepers*, *Madonna* (1534-1540), *Lucretia*, *Bathsheba*, *Nudes*, *Woman I, II or III*.

Linda Nochlin asks which place she should take when she is reading *The Studio*. "Am I going to be one of the boys?" which will be as a voyeur, enjoying the work as an erotic stimulation, or should she be "one of the girls" which could be as the learned woman who watch this painting from the male authoritative perspective she has been taught, or rejecting this authority and identifying herself as the model. The author gives no answer, but she asks a pair of radical and difficult questions:

Why must transgression- social and artistic alike- always be enacted (by men) on the naked bodies of women?<sup>42</sup>

Is there a model of *textuality* possible that would not necessarily play out, in discourse, the eternal Oedipal drama of transgression of the Law- a drama which always ultimately ends up maintaining the latter?<sup>43</sup>

The last question, having been asked by Susan Suleiman, in her discussion of Bataille as a prime example of the notion of transgression in pornographic texts, was appropriated by Nochlin to construct her allegorical reading.

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<sup>41</sup> Judith Feher-Gurewich *A Lacanian approach to the logic of perversion* in *A Cambridge Companion to Lacan* ed. Jean- Michel Rabaté (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 196.

<sup>42</sup> Linda Nochlin, *Courbet*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 180.

<sup>43</sup> Susan Suleiman, quoted in Linda Nochlin, *Courbet*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 180.

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According to Jonathan Culler there are three moments of feminist criticism that can help to understand these questions.

### **2.2.1 The first moment of feminist criticism: The Irish beggar as the personification of castration**

*If an allegory is, as Benjamin has stated, in some sense a ruin, then the impoverished Irishwoman, emerging from the non finito of Courbet's composition, is the very epitome of allegory...*<sup>44</sup>

The first moment, the concept of a woman reader, leads to the assertion of continuity between women's experience of social and familial structures and their experience as readers.<sup>45</sup> This first kind of criticism is interested in the situation and the psychology of the female character and the investigation of attitudes toward women or toward the image of women in a work, author, genre and/or period. Linda Nochlin declares that her task as an interpreter of *The Studio of the Painter* is double; she is its prisoner, as described above, but also its creator. A creator because how she studies the women in the painting depends on who she is and where and when she is doing the interpretation. Because she is consciously reading as a woman she will study the painting by changing her focus from Courbet to the Irish beggar sitting at his left and by repositioning the women in the painting by changing their roles with the male characters. The Irish beggar nursing her child is the embodiment of lack both related to her gender and to her class. According to the author this is identifiable because of two signs; her legs in contrast to the painter's own, and her absorption in contrast to Charles Baudelaire's on the shareholders side.

The naked legs represent for Nochlin sexual allure. In the context of the beggar it signifies degradation, and in the context of the art historian the topos of modern city feelings of uneasiness and guilt. Within the text of the painting the legs signify the antithesis of Gustave Courbet's own legs. By the difference, then, between the legs of lack and the legs of mastery

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<sup>44</sup> Nochlin, 2007, 165.

<sup>45</sup> Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London: Routledge, 1994), 51.

and possession, the gender terms are established, underpinning the meanings generated by the painting as a whole.<sup>46</sup>

The second sign that Nochlin reads as a woman in relation to the Irish beggar, is Baudelaire; both are marked by the sign of melancholy, which is a sign of lack, and both of them constitute a vehicle connoting privatized absorption versus public demonstration. Lack is operative to everyone and the subject's ability to recognize the lack is, according to Lacan, by castration. Lacan has a different conceptual approach to both castration and phallus. Castration fear is an imaginary localization of a more pervasive and unnameable fear, caused by the fragmented body, which is a result of the mirror stage. Phallus is not an object; it is a signifier, eventually designating a binary difference. It signifies the opposite of completion, which is lack. It is what everybody wants, but nobody can have: A belief in unity, wholeness and autonomy. If the Irish beggar is the embodiment of lack, she is a phallic image, the personification of castration.

### **2.2.2 The second moment of feminist criticism: Transgression of the Oedipal law**

*Male artists have had that dual privilege for a long time: women's bodies have always served as allegorized objects of desire, of hatred, of elevation, of abasement- of everything, in short.*<sup>47</sup>

The second moment in feminist criticism undertakes, through the postulate of the woman reader, to bring about new experience of reading and to make readers – men and women – question literary and political assumptions on which their reading has been based.<sup>48</sup> The problem is that women have not been reading as women, as mentioned above; they have been led to identify themselves with male characters, and in order to change this, the second mode of criticism has to ask what they have to change to read as a woman. How does a woman read as a woman? Here is where Linda Nochlin analyzes transgression using Lacanian psychoanalysis.

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<sup>46</sup> Linda Nochlin, *Courbet*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 169.

<sup>47</sup> Nochlin, 2007, 172.

<sup>48</sup> Jonathan Culler, 1994, 51.

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Jacques Lacan read Freud in light of Saussure and Lévi-Strauss, combining psychoanalysis with structural linguistics. The latter is dedicated to the description of *la langue*, which is the social side of language, outside the individual who can never create or modify it by himself. It exists only by virtue of a sort of contract signed by the members of a community<sup>49</sup>.

Reading through psychoanalysis means that Nochlin interprets Courbet's unconscious design, which she finds is at the very heart of the "Allégorie réelle" which is the all-important lesson about gender rules governing the production of art...<sup>50</sup>

The sign Nochlin read in this case is the triangle formed by the artist, the model and the child in the centre of the painting, forming the Oedipal construction. It is clear, the author asserts, that Courbet is playing with the artist-father image, contrasting himself to the model-mother. He is male, active versus female passive. The pupil-son represents the next generation looking up to the artist, following the chain of male pupils looking up at the male artist before them, from whom he will inherit art and society rules and laws. He will also learn the lesson about the origin of art from male desire. Here is where Nochlin's answer to the second question emerges. Whereas the Irish beggar was the embodiment of lack, and thus could be read as the personification of castration, the naked model in Courbet's triangle stands for something else; she stands for transgression. It is clear, according to the author, that it is only by gender difference that a real allegory of the transgressive might be constructed.

The Oedipal complex, understood as a relationship between the child and the mother, is imagined in the infant's unconsciousness as something that was once self-contained and entirely satisfying, but has since been broken up. The post-break-up is in fact the child's beginning. In other words, the child's experience begins with a feeling of something having been lost. The symbol of this loss is like a third term that has come between the mother and the child—the father. Lacan calls this "third term" *the symbolic* because it "symbolizes" all relations. Symbolization works because we make imaginary identifications, which are based upon proximity and immediate experience. Symbolization thus acts as an introduction to the world which is at the same time an introduction of lack, as seen before with the Irish beggar.

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<sup>49</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Language: The Unknown. An Initiation into Linguistics*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 8.

The introduction of a meaningful element disrupts the perfect unity of the imaginary relation. The experience of lack is therefore the very thing that gives the sense that there was something to lack in the first place - it gives meaning to the partial relations and opens the experience to the other - which is not possible to experience at all. The child realizes that both he or she and the mother are marked by a lack. The mother is marked by lack, since she is seen to be incomplete; otherwise, she would not desire. The third term, the Father, is also marked by a lack, since he does not completely satisfy the mother's desire.

Desire is motivated by the loss of the real, which is not a fundamental sexual imperative. The real is the organic being outside signification, which we cannot know because of its lack of signifiers in the world of names. This is repressed and returns to disturb our engagement with reality, which we imagine we know. The effect is that the lack of the real generates a dissatisfaction we cannot specify. Desire is born from nothing nameable since it is unconscious and it has a perpetual condition since it is structured. It is also described by its longing to push the limits of the symbolic order.

The problem is how to symbolically represent 'lack' – something that by definition is not there. Lacan's solution is the idea of the 'veil'. The presence of the veil suggests that there is an object behind it, which it covers, although this is only a presumption on the part of the subject. Regarding the naked female body, beauty is a veil which covers and thus hide the unbearable feeling of lack i.e. castration. The naked body of Courbet's model is a paradigm, tromp l'oeil, which male artists due to desire and fascination will try to capture.

### **2.2.3 The third moment of feminist criticism: Writing as a woman**

*Rosa Bonheur now sits in the central position of The Painter's Studio. Courbet, nude, or rather partly draped, stands modestly behind her.*<sup>51</sup>

Jonathan Culler proposes a third moment in feminist criticism in which, instead of contesting the association of the male with the rational, feminist theory investigates the way our notions

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<sup>50</sup> Linda Nochlin, *Courbet*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 170.

<sup>51</sup> Nochlin, 2007, 180.



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of the rational are tied to or in complicity with the interests of the male<sup>52</sup>. The central point of this aspect is to investigate whether the assumptions and the goals of current criticism are in complicity with the preservation of the male authority, and to explore alternatives to the authority.

An alternative to Courbet's real allegory is Linda Nochlin's "real allegory of transgression" which references maternal rather than paternal relations and the woman situation and the experience of marginality. According to Culler, this has opened an altered mode of reading. The altered way of reading needs a new scenario that invokes gender reversal and denies Oedipus: This is why Nochlin tries to stop reading as a woman and to start writing as one in order to find this alternative model of textuality that Susan Suleiman urges us to search. To stop reading means that instead of having an interpretative attitude towards the text, Nochlin will have an active role in the construction of the meaning.

Deconstruction is the analysis of the inevitable invasion of the other into the self. This discipline has been variably presented as a philosophical position, a political or intellectual strategy, and a mode of reading. It will be used here as a method of interpretation.<sup>53</sup> Deconstructive reading pays special attention to the sidelines, the framings, through new contextualization, allowing fresh readings that at once become new writings. In a short paragraph, the author substitutes the male character by female artists deconstructing the studio to obtain meaning.<sup>54</sup>

In substituting women for men Nochlin is exposing western culture dependency on binary oppositions. Binaries are always hierarchic in the sense that one term in the binary opposition is generally privileged in relation to the other, for example speech over writing, men over

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<sup>52</sup> Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London: Routledge, 1994), 58.

<sup>53</sup> Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London: Routledge, 1994), 85.

<sup>54</sup> Rosa Bonheur takes Courbet's central position and he occupies the place of the model, the daughter pupil (being Mary Cassatt, Berthe Morisot or any woman artist available) asks, "Why are there no great women artist?" The women following the Irish beggar take over the stage, while the male character losing their names and their clothes transform themselves in naked male bodies.

women. These terms can never sustain the antithesis on which they depend because the meaning of each term depends on the trace of the other that inhabits its definition. Meaning is always the effect of the trace, of the other in the self. The term women cannot be excluded from the meaning of the term men; the meaning depends on their difference.

Deconstruction is not destruction, but repetition with a difference. *Differance* is a process, not an action we perform or undergo, neither active nor passive. It is the only source of meaning. But *differance* has no content; it does not name any kind of presence or transcendence. It is not a concept, not even a word. It is a “mute mark” that phonetically cannot be recognized. It is only a graphic, scriptural sign, questioning the subject of writing in relation to speech. The “a”, which Derrida puts into the term, can only be read. It sounds the same as the “e” would in this word in French. He claims that it is merely a comforting illusion to think that speech and writing are separate, and that writing is a fallen version of speech. Thus *differance* and deferral is inherent in language itself; each word mobilizes the play of language. Signs only has meaning through *differance*.

To deconstruct the opposition is above all, at a particular moment, to reverse the hierarchy.<sup>55</sup> This is what Linda Nochlin does; she reversed the hierarchy of men over women, and showed that this is only possible as an allegory. In the double temporality of the allegory it is possible to stop the rules and laws of the Oedipus and allow women for a moment to define desire, otherwise defined as what men want, which is absurd because what *men* want is what *is*; men’s want defines desire.<sup>56</sup> The answer to Susan Sulieman’s questions in this case will be that the real allegory is the model of textuality where the laws of the Oedipus will be not be sustained.

## 2.3 Gender-neuter Art Historian: The meaning of Context

In 1968 Linda Nochlin wrote an essay called “The Invention of the Avant-Garde” where she defined *The Studio of the Painter* as a Fourierist allegory. Fourierists were followers of

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<sup>55</sup> Jacques Derrida *Positions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 56-57.

<sup>56</sup> Linda Nochlin, *Courbet*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 181.

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Charles Fourier (1772-1837), an utopian socialist and visionary who imagined a totally liberated harmonious society organized into *phalansteries*, communes, in which basic human drives are freely expressed and cultivated. He held that all work can and must be made physically and mentally satisfying and that civilization should be measured by how much freedom women enjoy. This interpretation, together with those of Hofmann, Rubin, Nicolson and Bowness among others, is based on a more literal acceptance of the identity of the figures in the left hand of the painting, the “world of commonplace life”. After Toussaint and Herding in 1977 issued their interpretation of the left side of the painting, Nochlin revised the interpretation of the utopian allegory, admitting that her study has still something to offer to a much altered discursive field of art history.<sup>57</sup>

In the chapter “The politics of place, the place of hope” context is a central concept. In this study the author identifies the *real allegory* in different contexts. The first context is the year of its creation 1855, which was of pivotal importance because the Universal Exhibition was hosted in Paris in that year; the political environment of the Second Empire, the context of the public to which the *Studio* was directed, and lastly, the context of where the painting is hanging, first at the Louvre and now at Musee d’Orsay.

Context is a complicated concept because it is frequently oversimplified; it does not mean that the result of the opposition between an act and its context will be the meaning of the act. Context is not given but produced; what belongs to a context is determined by imperative strategies. Contexts are just as much in need of elucidation as events. The meaning of a context is determined by events.<sup>58</sup> Context is a text itself and it thus requires interpretation.

What we take to be positive knowledge is the product of an interpretative choice, which in an art historical production is the index pointing back to the art historian because she or he is always present in its construction. Any attempt on the part of an art historian to deal with the issue of art and politics must first engage with the politics of art history itself. And this politics, of course, has a history, which is replicated in the career of any single practitioner in

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<sup>57</sup> The identities of those on the left were a mystery until 1977, after this article was published and a century after the artists’ death. See H el ene Toussaint, *Gustave Courbet, 1819-1877*, Grand Palais, Paris, 1977.

<sup>58</sup> Jonathan Culler quoted in Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson *Semiotics and Art History* *The Art Bulletin*, Vol.73, No. 2 (Jun., 1991), 175.

the field<sup>59</sup>. This essay is a good example of the latter. When Nochlin read *The Studio* as the Fourierist allegory, it was in tune with the political context of the art historian herself. *The Invention of the Avant-Garde: France 1830-1880* was first published in 1968, the year of international student protests that launched an era marked by a resurgence of Marxist political and cultural criticism in academia. During the next two decades of feminist, anti-colonialist, and anti-formalist critique, the art historian debated the meaning and value of the utopian allegory in this newly revised essay. As it is shown here, context in New Art History is studied as effect and affect, and not as a product of a long gone period. When a particular work of art is placed “in context”, it is usually the case that a body of material is assembled and juxtaposed with the work in question in the hope that such contextual material will reveal the determinants that make the work of art what it is.<sup>60</sup>

There are different *real allegories* depending on the different contexts that Linda Nochlin chooses to read. But what they have in common is that they are analyzed under Marxism and Utopian Socialism theories. Even though Nochlin has changed focal point, the two readings of *The Studio* are in accordance with this.

1855 is the year in which *The Studio* was created and the year in which France held the Universal Exhibition. The French were prepared to show the world, and above all England, its technological progress and cultural achievements. Courbet’s *Studio* was submitted but not accepted at the Exhibition. Within this context, the painting can be read as a crucial and deflationary figuration of that hawking of commodities that was the ultimate point of the Exposition Universelle itself.<sup>61</sup> Courbet, by representing himself in the middle of the picture, surrounded by his past and his present pictorial production, created an allegory as a producer of cultural goods. This also is going to be studied in Chapter 5, where Petra Chu will explain this in depth.

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<sup>59</sup> Linda Nochlin, *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society*. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1989), xii.

<sup>60</sup> Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson *Semiotics and Art History* *The Art Bulletin*, Vol.73, No. 2 (Jun., 1991), 176-177.

<sup>61</sup> Linda Nochlin, *Courbet*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 183.

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Nochlin declares that the *real allegory* then, in the context of the Exposition Universelle of 1855, may be read as Courbet's production of himself as a counter-commodity - a free and self-determinate man producing objects of genuine value- for a new relative unfamiliar public<sup>62</sup>; the international public that will arrive in Paris for the Fair. This public will be able to see this work and ten others in the Pavillion du réalisme, which Courbet privately founded after being rejected at the official exhibition of French Art. In this context of the censorship of the Second Empire and Napoleon III, Courbet positioned himself, in the *real allegory*, as central as a vanguard artist.

The third way of reading the *real allegory* is related to the place where *The Studio* is housed. The moving of the painting from the Musée du Louvre to the Musée d'Orsay is important when one reads according to context. In the context of modernism and the vanguard of the future, the formal qualities of the painting, the pictorial practice, is what seems to allegorize the future of art and its – mostly unfulfilled - hopes of instrumentality in the production of revolutionary change.<sup>63</sup>

Through this analysis Linda Nochlin shows that even when the context is a clearly demarked moment of the past, it is important to remember that context has a dual referent: the context of its production and the context of its reading. What we take to be positive knowledge is the product of interpretative choice, which in an art historical production is the index pointing back to the art historian. This is always present in the construction which she or he produces. In this way, according to Bal and Bryson, it urges us to see how “we” are different from “them” and to use “context” not as a legislative idea but as a means that help “us” to locate ourselves instead of the bracketing out our own positionalities from the account we make.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>64</sup> Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson *Semiotics and Art History* The Art Bulletin, Vol.73, No. 2 (Jun., 1991), 180.

### 3. James H. Rubin: Realism and Social Vision

*Realism and Social Vision in COURBET & PROUDHON* is James Henry Rubin's book where he analyses *The Painter's Studio: A Real Allegory Summing Up Seven Years of My Artistic and Moral Life* [Fig. 1]. His thesis is to anticipate the limitations as well as measure the extent of the relationship that bound Gustave Courbet and Pierre- Joseph Proudhon together in their broader role as social prophets. Rubin states that his theme is not that Courbet's art simplistically and systematically embodies Proudhon's doctrine, which it does according to the author, but that the art created by the artist could only be measured accurately within the environment created by Proudhon. Proudhonian anarchism could be constructed to make Courbet's still romantically egocentric personal and artistic self-fulfilment an act of social commitment as well.<sup>65</sup>

For the art historian, *The Studio*, is the most important painting of the artist, a pictorial treatise of the self-conscious expression of Courbet's ideas. Ideas are what the work deals with above all other themes, not any idea, but specifically Proudhon's Philosophy. The painting evokes the literary function of allegory as a way of intensifying the discovery of a moral and historical truth. Although it is very clear, according to the author, that this painting is an allegory, it is not clear why it is a "real allegory". To bring some light into this complicated concept Rubin directs us toward the painting within the painting in *The Studio*.

"Real allegory" and Realism are the two main concerns in Rubin's work, and they are exemplified in the painting by the landscape in the easel in the middle of *The Studio*. There are two questions that the author asks within these concepts: Why did Courbet show himself at work at the easel? Why in a picture of such momentous portent as *The Studio*, has Courbet shown himself with a landscape on the easel? As seen above, for Rubin the only context in which these two questions could be answered is in light of Proudhonian philosophy.

In the context of anarchist philosophy, the "real allegory" meant simply "The Realist version" of the philosophical, social and historical truth. The painting dealt not only with a

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<sup>65</sup> James Henry Rubin, *Realism and Social Vision in COURBET & PROUDHON*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), 12.

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single point in time, but with a process of development over time. It refers to stages of social development. The artist preferred to construct allegory with elements from modern life. He shows society standing for itself rather than represented by arbitrary or conventional symbols. Courbet may have meant that no such substitutes needed designating by name or a title, since something that is real is self-evident without one.<sup>66</sup>

A critical point in Rubin's analysis is where he identifies the "real allegory" (and Realism) with the landscape in Courbet's easel. The first question that the author discusses beyond this point, deals with the concept of *work*. Self-portrait forms a very important category in Courbet's work, and this painting can also be seen as a self-portrait. It is in *The Studio* the first time that Courbet depicts himself in the act of painting/working.

Within Proudhon's philosophy, work is the first attribute, the essential characteristic of man. "Unlike other beings man's labour is the expression of his mind's ability to create: Man is a worker, that is to say, creator and poet".<sup>67</sup> It also allows them to liberate themselves from material existence in order to approach the spiritual. Labour is an expression of human virtue; an economic value has to be based on moral worth. The school where men will learn how to attain this freedom was the workshop. *Atelier* was an important word in nineteenth century French political thought. Its internal organization, the relationship with the stratified society, was a central and divisive issue for socio-economic thinkers of the period, who saw artists as vanguard figures in their manifestation toward social justice.<sup>68</sup>

Rubin declares that Courbet's *Studio* must take its meaning from an intersection between the socio-political meaning of *atelier* and the pictorial tradition of the "artist in their workshop" as seen in Velázquez, Rembrandt, and Goya, painters that Courbet knew and admired.

The year 1855 was still dominated by the romantic ideal of art as product of imaginative impulse. For realists, the function of the artist was to reveal that the reality of nature resided in its surfaces and physical substances. Whereas in the romantic ideal, where man dominated nature through

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>67</sup> James H Rubin, *Courbet*, (London: Phaidon, 1997), 148.

<sup>68</sup> It is important to note that when Proudhon uses man/men/he/his is not using the gender neutral pronouns and nouns, he is using the gendered ones. Proudhonian philosophy is, according to feminist art historian Linda Nochlin, a misogynist one.

creative reason, Courbet dominated nature physically shown in the materiality of his work. Thus, Courbet's pictures implicitly harbour a metaphysical statement that his *Studio* had tried to articulate on a conscious level through allegory.<sup>69</sup> Pure landscape painting is according to Rubin, the most telling metaphor for Courbet's entire Realist enterprise.

### 3.1 The Real Allegory: Landscape as a social tool

*The allegorist does not invent images but confiscates them.*<sup>70</sup>

According to Craig Owens' description (not definition) of allegory, which he gives in the essay *The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Post-Modernism*, allegory occurs whenever one text is doubled by another. Consequently, *The Studio* becomes allegorical when read as a prefiguration of the landscape. This description accounts for both allegory's origin and exegesis, as well as its continued affinity with them: ...the allegorical work tends to prescribe the direction of its own commentary.<sup>71</sup> The author asserts that, conceived in this way, the allegory becomes the model of all commentary, all critique, as long as they are involved in rewriting the primary text in terms of its figural meaning, and he continues with a central issue in this essay:

*I am interested, however, in what occurs when this relationship takes place within works of art, when it describes their structure. Allegorical imagery is appropriated imagery; the allegorist does not invent images but confiscates them. He lays claim to the culturally significant, poses as its interpreter. And in his hands the image becomes something other (allos = other + agoreuei = to speak).<sup>72</sup>*

According to this definition, for Rubin, Gustave Courbet appropriated imagery and posed as the interpreter of Proudhon's social theory. It does not matter how this relationship is reflected in the painting; in an allegorical structure a text is read through another, however short or fragmentary this relationship is. Allegory is consistently attracted to the fragmentary, the imperfect and the

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<sup>69</sup> Rubin, 1980, 73.

<sup>70</sup> Craig Owens, *The Allegorical Impulse: toward a Theory of Postmodernism*. (October, vol. 12 Spring 1980, pp. 67-86, MIT Press), 69.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.



incomplete. Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things.<sup>73</sup> This famous phrase by Walter Benjamin has a strong influence on this theoretical approach. The images in Courbet's *Studio* both proffer and refer meaning. Owens asserts that this characteristic of allegory frustrates our desire for a transparent signification. As a result they appear incomplete, fragments that have to be deciphered.

This characteristic of the unfinished has been a topic in Baudelaire's writings and also has been a subject of criticism by the Romantic painter Eugene Delacroix of Courbet's *Studio*. Baudelaire explains in "The Salon of 1845" the difference between *fini* and *fait* ...in general what is *complete* is not *finished*, and a thing that is highly *finished* needs not to be *complete* at all.<sup>74</sup> This quality of the unfinished possessed by *The Studio* is only made more evident by the background. Delacroix liked the powerful sculptural nature of Courbet's painting and his technique. However, Delacroix criticized Courbet's inspiration, and above all the Realist painter's lack of discernment. An example of this is the background of the painting at the easel in *The Studio*. He commented that the convincing naturalism of work was made ambiguous by the appearance of that looked like "a real sky in the middle of the painting".<sup>75</sup>

The painting in the background of the studio, is *The Peasants of Flagey Returning from the Fair* [Fig. 7] painted by Courbet in 1850. It is significant to note the importance of landscape within Realism, but first it is crucial to define what Realism was for Courbet.

Although the artist wrote the Realist Manifesto, it was not a Courbet trait to belong to any school. He declared that to imitate another artist was a form of suicide; the realist, according to Champfleury, should only recognize sincerity in art. Sincerity did not mean imitation, as nature was never to be copied so closely that art became a mechanical process. For Courbet, total submission to reality would merely have been to substitute one form of authority for another, whereas above all, he saw self-realization through art as a means of preserving individuality.<sup>76</sup> In his view morality

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<sup>73</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London: NLB, 1977), 175.

<sup>74</sup> ... que existe una gran diferencia entre una pieza *hecha* y una pieza *acabada*, que, en general, lo que está *hecho* no está *acabado*, y que una cosa muy *acabada* puede no estar *hecha* en absoluto – que el valor de una pincelada espiritual, importante y bien puesta es enorme... Charles Baudelaire, *Salones y otros escritos sobre arte* (Madrid: La Barca de la Medusa, 2005), 69-70.

<sup>75</sup> Rubin, 1980, 142.

<sup>76</sup> Rubin, 1980, 64.

and truth were concepts that concerned the individual. Only the latter would be able to re-establish for himself those roles of which external authority, government and religion had deprived him. Thus, morality and truth had to be sought within “the very substance of matter”. That is why art, which was itself a material object produced by manual labour, could eventually become its own significant subject matter, as we will see later in Michael Fried’s study of the painting.

This is, according to James Rubin, Courbet’s and Proudhon’s central concern in their dream of social justice. Art, like liberty, has as its subject man and things; as its object it has their reproduction, while at the same time it surpasses them, as its goal is justice.<sup>77</sup> For Proudhon this goal of art and justice was represented in many works by Courbet, but especially in *The Peasants of Flagey Returning from the Fair*. This painting together with the *Burial at Ornans* [Fig. 2], *The Bathers* and *The Preparation of the Dead Girl* and *The Stonebreakers* [Fig. 6] all partake in a Proudhonian vision of humanity. But it was *The Peasants* where the philosophy of social justice was demonstrated by showing social structures based not in the idealization of man, but derived from his natural character, fully grounded in time and place and fully engaged in a life determined by his physical existence.

The same must be true for the artists.<sup>78</sup> Rubin states that after 1855 there was a radical change in Courbet’s art. Before *The Studio*, Courbet’s Realism had generally addressed the social question through political subjects guided by Proudhon. After *The Studio*, Courbet withdraws toward landscape diverging from the social purpose that art should have, according to what is described above. But it is landscape, according to the art historian, that represents the “real allegory” in *The Studio*, landscape read as a subtler social tool.

### 3.2 Text within the Text: Landscape as Supplement

*The Studio becomes allegorical when read as a prefiguration of the landscape.*

Repeating Owens’ description that an allegory occurs whenever a text is doubled by another, it is possible to conclude that the theoretical signification of allegory comes from the reinter-

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<sup>77</sup> Proudhon, *Du principe de l’art*, quoted in Rubin, 1980, 66.

<sup>78</sup> Rubin, 1980, 70.

pretation of the primary text. This reinterpretation is not conducted through hermeneutics, but through supplement. A supplement is something that is conceived secondary, but comes to serve as an aid to something original or primary. Craig Owens asserts that if allegory is identified as a supplement, then it is also aligned with writing, insofar as writing is conceived as supplementary to speech.<sup>79</sup>

It is within the same philosophical tradition that subordinates writing to speech that subordinates allegory to the symbol that frames Owens' critical position of allegory within modernity and post-modernity. But concentrating on the fact that allegory is identified as a supplement is an important point for Courbet's *real allegory*.

Derrida declares "...the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of presence... The sign is always the supplement of the thing itself."<sup>80</sup> The supplement also substitutes, and this characteristic cannot be separated from the first. As substitute it determinates a place in the structure by the mark of an emptiness.<sup>81</sup> Like *differance* the expression *suppleer* is deliberately ambiguous. *Suppleer* in French can mean either 'to supplement' or 'to supplant'. As Jonathan Culler explains, a supplement is "something that completes and makes an addition"; this possibility of adding indicates incompleteness. The supplement is an inessential extra, added to something complete in itself, but the supplement is added in order to complete, to compensate for a lack in what was supposed to be complete in itself.<sup>82</sup>

In consequence, what occurs in an allegorical reading is that the second text can undermine or deconstruct the first reading. As described in Linda Nochlin's essay on this painting,

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<sup>79</sup> If supplementarity is a necessarily indefinite process, writing is the supplement par excellence since it proposes itself as the supplement of the supplement, sign of a sign, *taking the place of* a speech already significant: it displaces the *proper place* of the sentence, the unique time of the sentence pronounced *hic et nunc* by an irreplaceable subject, and in return enervates the voice. It marks the place of the initial doubling. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, (Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 281.

<sup>80</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, (Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 145.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>82</sup> Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London: Routledge, 1994), 103.

binaries are always hierarchic. One term is privileged over another term in culture, for example speech over writing, men over women. Similarly, within the history of art, as a social tool, history painting is privileged over landscape. These terms can never sustain the antithesis on which they depend because the meaning of each depends on the trace of the other that inhabits its definition. Meaning is always the effect of the trace, of the other in the self. To deconstruct the opposition is above all, at a particular moment, to reverse the hierarchy.<sup>83</sup>

Within James Rubin's study then, landscape (the second text) can deconstruct the first text *The Studio of the Painter*. This is possible by the reversal of the binary of hierarchy of artistic genres as social tools, landscape versus history painting. Allegory, Owens stressed above, tended to direct to its own commentary. Landscape as a supplement could be a commentary to art, social justice and truth. As Rubin concludes, Courbet's prescription of a return to nature, or to natural perception and to social structures grounded in man's oneness with the physical world, inevitably constitutes a refuge from a cure for society's present ills. The landscape reading the *Atelier* embodies man's paradoxical and painful duality as both natural and laboring being, as both object and subject of the world. Realist art was the key to transcending this condition: through art- to cite a term that both Courbet and Proudhon took from Hegel- a synthesis could be attained.<sup>84</sup>

### 3.3 Text within the Text: Les Paysans as Objet (petit) a

*The painting dealt with stages of social development. Allegory frustrates our desire for a transparent signification.*

*The Peasants of Flagey Returning from the Fair* is part of the triptych formed by *The Stonebreakers* and *The Burial at Ornans*. The subject matter of these paintings is discussed by T.J Clark in the *Image of the People*. T.J Clark declares that many events in the period of the production of these paintings were, so to speak, inflections of the pictures from Ornans; the

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<sup>83</sup> Jacques Derrida *Positions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 56-57.

<sup>84</sup> Rubin, 1980, 75.

meanings they evoke, but do not indicate. They are sometimes the matter, sometimes the intention; sometimes the context, sometimes the result of Courbet's paintings.<sup>85</sup>

This painting represents *peasantry* itself. It was in the period an accepted subject matter, but according to T.J. Clark, in Courbet's hands this was deformed, almost laughed at openly. All this was perfectly deliberate. What Courbet wanted was an effect which was logical as well as absurd: two spaces which seemed to fit, but jarred against each other with a genuine pictorial ugliness.<sup>86</sup> This ugliness is intentional; it intrudes both the picturesque and the perspective, spoiling the idyll. This picture, according to Clark, announces the nineteenth century.

If allegory is to be reinterpreted as through supplement, then it is possible to find in Lacanian psychoanalysis, a reading of *The Peasants* as object-cause desire. In Lacan's analysis the *objet petit a* comes from a supplementary place confronting something that is irremediably lost for human being; it is an objectification of a void. This is identifiable with a plus, a surplus, something more than itself.<sup>87</sup>

Slavoj Zizek asserts that the multitude of floating signifiers of proto-ideological elements is structured into a unified field through the intervention of a certain "nodal point" (the Lacanian *point de caption*), which "quilts" them, stops their sliding and fixes their meaning. Ideological space is made of non-bound, non-tied elements, "floating signifiers", whose very identity is open, overdetermined by their articulation in a chain with other elements- that is, their "literal" signification depends on their metaphorical surplus-signification.<sup>88</sup>

This "quilting" becomes parts of the structured network of meaning. What is at stake in the ideological struggle is which of the "nodal points" will totalize, will include in its series of equivalences the free-floating elements. Every element of a given ideological field is part of a series of equivalences: its metaphorical surplus, through which it is connected with all

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<sup>85</sup> T. J. Clark *Image of the People . Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 78.

<sup>86</sup> Clark, 1973, 84.

<sup>87</sup> This is a conversation that I had with Dr. Alejandra Chada where she explained supplement and *petit objet a*.

<sup>88</sup> Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, (London: Verso, 1999), 87.

other elements, determines retroactively its very identity.<sup>89</sup> But this enchainment is possible only on condition that a certain signifier, the Lacanian “One”, “quilts” the whole field and, by embodying it, effectuates identity.

The first task of an analysis in ideology is to isolate the particular struggle, which at the same time determinates the horizon of its totality. The *objet (petit) a* is the real- impossible correlative of the rigid designator, that is the point of caption as pure signifier. If the nodal point is a kind of knot of meanings, then it is rather the word which, *as word*, on the level of the signifier itself, unifies a given field, constitutes its identity: it is the word to which “things” themselves refer to recognize themselves in their unity.<sup>90</sup>

*The Studio* connotes a certain experienced image of the bourgeois, Paris and the ruling class. But the effect of the “quilting” occurs when a certain inversion takes place; it does not occur until the real France starts to identify itself with the image created by Courbet - until the peasant is experienced as the ruling class.

Thus, this can be read as *The Studio* - the ideological vision of society, and as the peasantry as the signifier. The point is that this vision of the ruling French class achieves its identity by identifying itself with the signifier, the peasant. If we ask what the peasant is for Proudhonian philosophy, the answer might be *the real thing*, the unattainable X, the object-cause desire.

“Object- cause of desire” in Lacanian psychoanalysis could be defined as, where *objet (petit) a* comes increasingly to acquire connotations of the real, although it never loses its imaginary status. The *object a* denotes the object which can never be attained, which is really the cause of desire rather than that which tends towards desire. *Objet (petit) a* is any object which sets desire in motion, especially partial objects which define drive. The drives do not seek to attain the *objet (petit) a* but rather circle around it.

What we gain for this inversion is that the surplus X, according to Lacanian formula, could suddenly turn into its opposite. The *real* allegory could be reinterpreted by *Les Paysans* as

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 95.

the possibility of the transition of the ruling class from the bourgeois to the peasantry. What Delacroix reacted to in the *Atelier* was the real sky which triggers the need to understand its meaning. In Lacanian psychoanalysis the enjoyment of meaning is not to reach the goal, but the process of signification.

The intentions of Gustave Courbet's art were socialist and working class, that is, they represented the deepest and most permanent opposition to the higher classes that had become the solid base of Napoleon III's power.<sup>91</sup> Courbet's art reflected the condition and frustration of the Second Empire politics. It referred to repeatedly, through a perfectly transparent code word, the name of his philosopher-friend, Proudhon.

The relationship between philosopher and artist is according to James Rubin inseparable at the confluence of romanticism and positive consciousness that led to modern art. The author thesis of the couple as social prophets is answered in this way: What the couple failed as social transformers to achieve for all of society, Courbet as modern artist did achieve for art. He used landscape and the studio as a refuge, a place where his ego could transcend the contradictions of the present world, the painter used them to strike out militantly against social and artistic repression.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Rubin, (1980), 100.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 101.

## 4. Michael Fried: Real Allegories, Allegories of Realism

*I don't think of my approach in this book (or in *Absorption and Theatricality*) as in any sense "formalist"... Basically, I understand formalism in art history or art criticism to imply an approach in which: 1) consideration on subject matter are systematically subordinated to considerations of form, and 2) the latter are understood as invariable or transhistorical in their significance... Now in contrast with to such an approach my concern with issues of absorption and theatricality involves taking subject matter seriously, or rather it involves effacing the distinction between subject matter and "form".<sup>93</sup>*

This defense against formalism is in response to one of the tenants of this theory in which "...the difference between literary and nonliterary had to be sought not in the subject matter, i.e. the sphere of reality dealt with by the writer, but in the mode of representation."<sup>94</sup>

Michael Fried explains that his study on Courbet expresses a strictly nonformalist attitude toward the question of *absorption* and *theatricality*; his account is entirely a historical one, although it marks a break with traditional histories of nineteenth-century French painting. His differentiation between the traditional histories and formalism is, as quoted in the epigraph, that Fried has erased the distinction between subject matter and form; to him to speak of *The Painter's Studio content* is to speak of *form*.

When handling allegory, it is important to Fried to study what happens when the mode of representation *is* the subject matter. But the main question in this essay is how it can be that a painting about painting is treated as an allegory.

We have seen before how Linda Nochlin and James H. Rubin dealt with the allegorical. In contrast to these authors Michael Fried does not study Courbet's work in a socio-political context. Fried criticizes Nochlin's re-allegorization as it amounts to very little innovation to her critique of Klaus Herding's conclusive reading of the *real* allegory. His main critique of

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<sup>93</sup> Michael Fried *Courbet's Realism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 47.

<sup>94</sup> Victor Elrich, *Russian Formalism* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol.34, No. 4 (Oct.-Dec., 1973), 628.



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Linda Nochlin is on the “farrago of quotations about allegory drawn from Walter Benjamin, Terry Eagleton, Northrop Frye, and Frederic Jameson”, which he finds beside the point.<sup>95</sup>

There is a very striking difference between how the previous studies dealt in a conscious manner with the ontology of allegory and how these art historians incorporate it into their studies of Courbet’s *Studio* [Fig. 1], opposing Michael Fried’s conception of the allegorical. The latter does not respond to the question of what is an allegory, why Courbet calls his painting “*allgorie reel*”, or even why he takes allegory, analogy and metaphor as synonyms; “...an insistence on reading Courbet’s paintings is by its nature an insistence on the primacy of metaphor or allegory in his art (these terms...will be used interchangeably along with another term, analogy)...”<sup>96</sup>

Quoting Kermit Champa “If *The Studio* is a real allegory, of what is allegorical?” Fried sets himself to define the allegory in a functional (if not formalist) manner.<sup>97</sup> His research neither sets himself and his context within the analysis, nor puts Courbet’s philosophical or political adherences into question. But as Linda Nochlin, Fried also considers that Courbet’s paintings reward if not invite to acts of readings or interpretation that according to him cut across the most incontrovertible-seeming distinctions of subject matter.

In *Courbet’s Realism*, Fried asserts that the artist belongs to the *antitheatrical* tradition, but that the strategies by which Courbet’s paintings seek to overcome the theatrical involve a radical change with respect to the values and affects of the dramatic as such. This radical change set him apart from the demand that Denis Diderot (1713-84) stated in the mid-eighteenth century. The French *philosophe’s* writings on drama and painting have at its core the demand for the achievement of a new and paradoxical relationship between the work of art and its audience. The task of the painter might thus be described, and in Diderot’s *Essais sur la peinture* (1766) actually was described, as one of establishing the aloneness of his figures relative to the beholder.<sup>98</sup> This Diderotian task, according to Fried, is what *The*

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<sup>95</sup> Michael Fried (1990), 324n. 17.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 358n. 80

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 1990, 7

*Studio* takes further. The latter achieves this as part of a triangle with *The Wheat Sifters* [Fig. 4] and *The Quarry* [Fig. 5]; they are what Fried calls *Allegories of Realism*.

## 4.1 Absorption and Theatricality: the evolution of French Painting

*Binary oppositions generally hint a moralizing distinction*

To answer the question about the allegorical within Courbet's Realism one must inquire about Fried's theory of *absorption* and *theatricality* and why the artist represents a drastic change within this tradition.

*Absorption and Theatricality* researches the eighteenth and nineteenth century relationship between the beholder and painting. At the centre of that tradition was the requirement, articulated by Diderot, that the figures in a painting appear to take no more notice of the beholder than if the latter did not exist. What this meant was that the represented figures had to be made to appear *absorbed* in their actions, feelings, and states of mind, and should the artist fail to show the characters oblivious to everything and especially to the beholder standing in front of the canvas, the consequence would be that those figures were seen as *theatrical*. Thus, the representation of absorption was valued as the privileged manner to establish the metaphysical illusion that the beholder did not exist. This was what Diderot and Fried, valued in art and it was what French artists of later generations tried to achieve.

As seen in Nochlin's chapter, binary oppositions generally hint at a moralizing distinction. But it is not possible to find an explanation to why art, which appeals to the presence of the viewer, is accordingly inferior to that antitheatrical in Fried's theory.

The claim that Diderot's achievements as a critic were central to the pictorial enterprise of his time, is refuted by Fried asserting that Diderot's theories were essential to the *evolution* of painting in France, and not only in those years, but in the decades that followed. Thus to examine the Diderotian project of painting and the beholder is to follow through the evolution of these painters who came to grips with the one primitive condition that their objects imply the presence of a beholder.

Michael Fried affirms that the art historical evolution of French Painting is traditionally discussed in terms of style and subject matter and presented “as sequence of ill-defined and disjunct epochs and movements - Neoclassicism, Romanticism, Realism, etc.- may be grasped as a single, self-renewing, in important respects dialectical undertaking.”<sup>99</sup> This is followed by calling to our awareness and to the revision of these traditional categories within the discipline describing them irrelevant to the study of the work of the absorptive artists. Fried suggests that the history of French art from David to Manet has to be guided and determined by “certain ontological preoccupations which first emerged as crucial to painting” in the period of Diderot.

As stated above, the author does not discuss the ontological preoccupations, for example of Gericault *Medusa*, Courbet’s *Studio*, and Manet’s *Déjeuner* under the social, economical and political reality of its time. The art historian asserts that instead of following the traditional way of his discipline, he sees the constitutive importance of the relationship between painting and beholder as laying the ground for a new understanding of how the “internal” development of the art of painting and the wider social and cultural reality of France were implicated and, so to speak, intertwined with one another. He is sceptical of taking into account the socio-historical context as fundamental to a work of art “in a way that the exigencies of painting are not”.<sup>100</sup>

This might explain the omission of the value of the theatrical which can be associated with that of the socio-historical context. A Marxist approach might explain that the evolution of the internal developments and their changes, in the theatrical art from Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Un Père de famille qui lit la Bible à ses enfants* (1755) to Jean-Francois Millet, *Le repas des moissonneurs* (1850), are attached to changes in the larger society. But as seen above, in Fried’s account, the evolution of art is a self-sufficient process.

Because of “what is thought of as the primordial convention - almost the transcendental convention - that all paintings are made to be beheld”, the Diderotian project was bound to

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<sup>99</sup> Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painter and the beholder in the age of Diderot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 4.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

fall short of its ultimate aim.<sup>101</sup> Like this Greuze, David, Gericault, Daumier and Millet had an unsuccessful attempt toward *absorption*. However effective their pictures might have been at a particular moment, according to Fried, as tastes changed and the original impact of the painting wore thin, some of the works of these artists came to appear *theatrical*. Only after the final collapse of the Davidian tradition, a tradition which itself epitomizes that shift of emphasis, will absorption return with a vengeance in the art of Courbet.<sup>102</sup>

## 4.2 Courbet's Art: *Ecriture -Absorption and Theatricality as a Mode of Writing*

*For Barthes's writing, with its prodigious variety of subjects, has finally one great subject: writing itself*<sup>103</sup>

In order to understand how Fried approaches Courbet's *real* allegory it is important to find the connection between mode of representation and subject matter. It is in Roland Barthes's theories on *Mode of Writing (Ecriture)* developed in *Writing Degree Zero* that it begins to be apparent what allegory represents in Michael Fried reading of *The Studio*.

Fried studies the real allegory as an operation that brings light to its own content and by this its form. The art historian devotes his attention only to the central group in the painting, a decision that would be analysed later on, and he asserts that the reason was:

*"... in order to analyze more closely than has previously been done Courbet's representation of the act, the immediate context, and the emerging artifact of representation; and by so doing to bring light to another allegory, one whose operative principle- not simply whose meaning- are altogether different from those presumed to be at work in the painting..."*<sup>104</sup>

This paragraph reveals how Fried interprets the operation as a material organization of the painting. The dictionary defines 'operation' as: an active process. Process, Susan Sontag tells

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<sup>101</sup> Michael Fried *Between Realism: From Derrida to Manet* (Chicago: The University Press of Chicago, Critical Inquiry, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Autumn, 1994), pp. 1-36), 6.

<sup>102</sup> Fried, 1988, 70.

<sup>103</sup> Susan Sontag ed., *A Roland Barthes Reader* (London: Vintage, 2000), vii.

<sup>104</sup> Fried, 1990, 158.

us in her preface to *Writing Degree Zero*, is how Barthes describes literature: as “process rather than as a static entity”.<sup>105</sup> The French author was in search of a medium of signification that would render rather than displace the real. In this way he protested against the idea that form was simply the container of meaning. Meaning is not the “message” that is extracted from the work, but it is the structured system, its form, thus the liberation of the obvious by its critic.

The French critic Roland Barthes constructed “writing as ideally complex form of consciousness [sic]”<sup>106</sup> He understood that literature was above all language; all of reality is represented in the form of language, and language, in its widest sense, was form.

To assert this is to assert that there is meaning in everything. The aim of literature, Barthes asserts, is to put “meaning” into the world but not “a meaning.”<sup>107</sup>

It is because of this distinction that he makes a clear division between writers that write *something* and those who do not write something but *write*. As the theories on the *Mode of Representation* by the Russian Formalist group *Opoyaz* (“The Society for the Study of Poetic Language”), Barthes was unwilling to “put the *differentia* in the poet rather than in the poem.”<sup>108</sup> It is not the commitment that writing makes to something outside itself that makes literature an instrument and subversive, but a certain practice of writing itself.

Barthes divides “formal reality” of literature in three different categories: notably, language, style and writing (*écriture*). Language is a corpus of prescriptions and habits, the critic asserts, which are common to all writers of a period. It is something he or she inherits, and it is the property of all men, not of writers, remaining outside literature. It is a social object by definition not by option.<sup>109</sup> Style, the vertical dimension of writing, is personal. Language and style are the data, they are the natural products of time, but the formal identity of the

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<sup>105</sup> Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), xix.

<sup>106</sup> Susan Sontag ed., *A Roland Barthes Reader* (London: Vintage, 2000), xviii.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, xi.

<sup>108</sup> Victor Elrich, *Russian Formalism* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol.34, No. 4 (Oct.-Dec., 1973), 628.

<sup>109</sup> Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 9.

writer is established outside; it is a choice of tone. Writing is where he commits, a mode of writing is a function: it is the relationship between creation and society...form considered as human intention.<sup>110</sup> With this in mind, we start to understand how the *painting about a painting* could be treated as an allegory.

Mode of writing, what Barthes calls *écriture*, refers to a consideration of the social use the writer has chosen for his form and the commitment to this choice; it is the *morality of the form*, it is a choice and the limits of it. It is within this theoretical approach that Fried's study of form, subject matter, could be understood. Like this, history and change are possible within the content of a painting. It is the history of a choice, the mode of writing, not history of the contextual and socio-political aspects of the content.

The mode of writing in the seventeenth and eighteenth century was both instrumental and ornamental, at the disposal of French society during the whole period when bourgeois ideology reigned. As with the art of this period, the art that Diderot will eventually react to, the instrumentality of the form was at the service of content. The ornamental qualities, the embellishment of the form with accidental features external to its function, were a tool in the service of persuasion used by the ruling class.

Jonathan Culler asserts that in the period from the mid-nineteenth century, Barthes noted a change, a confidence in the representational function of language. Where writers had previously assumed universality, now writing had to reflect upon itself. To write was to contend self-consciously with literature.<sup>111</sup> Theodore Gericault is an example of how things changed gradually. *The Raft of the Medusa* (1819) was an attestation to the accepted norm, the *écriture* of his period, which meant the study of the painter's context in a particular and thematic use of *language*, which no longer could be understood with reference to tradition, but in the light of its own existence. This is, according to Fried, what Courbet followed and championed.

Mastering the self-portraits in the period after 1840, the crucial turning in Courbet's art was the 1848 Revolution, in which he did not participate. The work of this time marks his

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<sup>110</sup> Roland Barthes, *A Roland Barthes Reader* (London: Vintage, 2000), 35.

<sup>111</sup> Jonathan Culler, *Barthes* (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1983), 29.

development both as a major painter and as a disruptive force in French cultural life. This disruptiveness, Fried asserts, owed much to the affront offered by Courbet's Realism to the prevailing canon of taste, most importantly to the classical tenet that art worth the name involved far more than the exact reproduction of nature. The notorious *Burial at Ornans* (1849-50) [Fig. 2] epitomizes that affront.

Roland Barthes continues his study on the changes of mode of writing with the enumeration of three important facts that came after the Revolution. In 1850s French society was divided into three mutually hostile classes, bringing the definitive ruin to liberal illusions. These circumstances put the bourgeois into a new historical situation. Until then, it was the bourgeois itself which gave the measure of the universal by fulfilling it unchallenged.<sup>112</sup> Now the bourgeois writer does not divide himself between social condition and his intellectual vocation, but he is free to choose his mode of writing. Now is the time when the modes of writing, the morality of form, start to proliferate. Each one is an attempt to find a solution to this Orphean problematic of modern Form: writers without Literature.<sup>113</sup>

## 4.3 Reconsidering Realism

### 4.3.1 Courbet's Realism: New approaches toward its subject matter

Fried affirms that previous attempts to construct *The Studio* in terms of a single syntagmatic structure have tended to keep invisible significant aspects of Courbet's Realism.

*... Courbet's Realism was, as I have tried to show, based on acts of quasi-corporeal identification, displacement, and transformation made his paintings potentially a privileged site for rethinking, even so to speak of seen through, the dominant mid-nineteenth century discourse of nature and the real as well as later, in fact still current, disciplinary discourse of art history itself.*<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Roland Barthes *Writing Degree Zero* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 60.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>114</sup> Fried, 1990, 258.

Fried's central point and aim in *Courbet's Realism* is to show the dramatic change that Courbet took that enabled him to accomplish absorption when other French artists failed. It is in this context that Fried declares that the Realist paintings of Courbet's enterprise are entirely different. He achieved absorption by a fusion in the act of painting; the painter conceived as the painting's first beholder, or what he calls *painter-beholder*, within the painting itself. The concept of painter-beholder is defined as the central or foreground figures that are depicted from the rear and are, in various respects, surrogates for the painter.

Moreover they evoke the possibility of *quasi-corporeal merger* between painter and beholder themselves. Like this the problem of beholder and that of eliminating beholder altogether is solved; there would be no one in front of the canvas looking on it. The beholder who had been there is now incorporated or disseminated by the work. Examples of this merging are found in his approach to Courbet's *The Stonebreakers* [Fig. 6], *After Dinner in Ornans* [Fig. 3], *Wheat Sifters* [Fig. 4], *The Quarry* [Fig. 5], *The Painters Studio* and many of his self-portraits. In the *Stonebreakers* (1849) Fried sees the young man depicted largely from the rear not only as a figure for or as personifying the painter-beholder's left hand holding a palette, but almost as continuous with that hand and the effort it put forth, just as the author sees the older man raising a hammer almost as continuous with the painter-beholder's right hand wielding the brush with which the picture was painted.

#### **4.3.2 The real allegories of Michael Fried Enterprise: The Sifters and The Quarry**

The *Wheat Sifters* depicts a rural subject. The sifting of grain in the bolting room that Michael Fried interprets is a representation of the act of painting. The subject matter of the *Sifters* can be read as an implicit instance of the actual production of the painting containing the "corporeal metaphors" for all three primary components that went into its making: pigment, canvas, stretcher. Allegorically, this painting could mean nothing else than a product of Courbet's antitheatricity. In *The Sifters* the central kneeling figure depicted from the rear as she sifts wheat onto canvas ground cloth may be read as embodying the actions and orientation of the painter-beholder as he deposited bits of pigments onto the stretched canvas before him. The sifter takes part as in a metaphoric or metonymic of the painter. She recalls the strength and energy needed and she also postures when the artist is seated in the chair before a painting. The seated woman to the left separating wheat from chaff is read as a



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version of the painter-beholder's left hand holding his palette, which is possible to do because of the analogous passivity that the activity involves.

Fried reads the little boy as a mode of visibility, suggesting the negation of beholding that would follow from the incorporation and dissemination of painter-beholder within his painting. The boy reflects or amplifies the status of the two sifters considered as surrogates of the painter-beholder. With this Fried goes deeper. He declares that the two women are not only representing but embodying the painter-beholder. In this way, the latter have a different relation to the activity of beholding, which shifts to identification. The boy looking into the tarare, an early mechanical device for cleaning grain, Fried reads as thematizing. The rectilinearity of the tarare suggests the analogy with that of the painting itself. Taking this further, Fried suggests that behind this mechanical device one can see an image d'Epinal, which would seem to reinforce a general theme of representation while looking forward to the depiction of an actual painting in *The Studio*.

*The Quarry* goes beyond *The Studio* and the Sifters in relation to Courbet's antitheatricity. *La Curée, chasse au chevreuil dans les forêts du Grand Jura* makes reference to what Fried defines as pre-theatrical, which is to say that the denial of the beholder is achieved by way of a temporal strategy that concedes the impossibility of indefinitely, like this, sustaining what Fried called that denial in the face of what is the primordial convention that paintings are made to be beheld.

The link between the theme of hunting and the act of self-representation of the artist is the hunter-painter's passivity contra the young Master of Hounds' activity. The author explains: the young man seems to put his whole being into the sounding of his horn, and in fact has been depicted with commensurate painterly vigor, coloristic brilliance and sculptural force. Fried reads the young master's half-seated pose as another of Courbet's displaced and allegorical representations of painting, as evoking the actual pose of the painter-beholder seated in front of the canvas. It is an act of self-division, self-multiplication that these pictures may be said to allegorize. There is an analogy that can be read between the relation of the piqueur (French name for the master of hounds) and the hunter. Their relation is similar to the two sifters and the little boy by the tarare, and also between the painter of the *Studio* and the model standing next to him, which leads to the conclusion: women and children represent the displacement.

This is what makes Courbet's absorption, which is the whole enterprise of his real allegory endure the changes of time. His absorption is indistinguishable from what the art historian calls the effects of reading, which involve the radical transformation of what, apparently self-evidently, is there to be beheld.

The *Wheat Sifters*, *The Studio*, and *The Quarry* limit the discussion to absorption and theatricality issues as they touch on depictions of human beings at work in the world. These paintings were in effect "painting", attempting somehow to capture such forms of the mind as their principal object and they were trying to demonstrate that forms of engaged, absorbed mind were still possible. The incorporation of the beholder into these paintings, whose subject matter was painting itself, is the drastic break that Courbet made with the past. Then the question will be, why an allegory?

### **4.3.3 Realism's *ontological illusionism***

Michael Fried calls for a fundamental revision of the term *Realism*. It is not possible to continue with the art historical tradition to view realist paintings of any period as if they were accurate transcriptions of a reality outside themselves. The author discusses... "at any rate as if their "reality effect" (Roland Barthes *effet reel* [sic]) were simply a function of the painter's skill in representing more or less exactly what lay or loomed before his eyes."<sup>115</sup> This has meant that commentaries on Courbet and on other realist painters have often been focused on questions of subject matter. In consequence this discussion has tended to proceed on the unexamined assumption that a realist is painting by all its intentions and purposes meant to represent an actual scene, and those figures which are perceived as curious and problematic, calling reflection and analysis, are either ignored or are attributed to reality. Fried declares that it is hard not to feel that realist paintings, such as *The Studio*, have been looked at less intensively than other kinds of pictures, precisely because their imagined causal dependence on reality- a sort of ontological illusionism- has made close scrutiny of what they offer to be seen to appear to be beside the point.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Fried, 1990, 3.

<sup>116</sup> Fried, 1990, 3.

Art tends to be regarded as historical rather than natural. The definition of art often looks for content behind the form, so that art is given an inner meaning, which is an inner intention expressing itself in the form of art. It was the aim of Michael Fried to show how Courbet's paintings sought new means by which to overcome the theatrical, and to be found in a *quasi-corporeal merger* with the painting. With this *merge*, Courbet also (unlike Millet) broke fundamentally with the dramatic norms of the antitheatrical tradition within French painting."<sup>117</sup> Courbet's merge accomplished absorption, but he still called his painting a real allegory.

#### **4.3.4 *Mise en abyme*: the implication of the defined within the definition**

##### *Real Allegories, Allegories of Realism*

Michael Fried reads *The Studio* in a complex way. Instead of the whole tripartite composition, the historian comprises his reading to the painter, the model, the child and the painting at the easel, as well as other items that in his opinion should at least be mentioned, like the white cat, the Irish beggar and plaster manikin. The central group is a distinct entity and Fried explores some of the connections that can be drawn between that group and other works in Courbet's oeuvre that will help to bring light to his enterprise of giving significance to the artist's realism. How do we have to read Fried's decision to do this? Is this a political reaction or is this his way to put temporality on hold to make us see that painting as painting is primary and all else is represented through this?

On the one hand the decision to focus away from *The Studio*'s left-right characters could be one of the most political readings of the painting. On the other hand it could be that Fried is directing his reading to where he finds Courbet's Realism, supporting his analysis of the group as a functional allegory that emphasizes the need to see "the portrait of Courbet in the central group as something other than photographically accurate depiction of himself at work on a painting." It is not the portrait of the painter at work; it is the portrait of the artist's chosen *écriture*.

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<sup>117</sup> Fried, 1990, 223

As seen at the beginning of this essay, the main question to Fried's study is, when handling allegory, what would happen when the mode of writing is the subject matter.

Fried starts his analysis with the self-portrait of the artist at work, where the physical proximity of Courbet to the painting in the easel is identified as corporeal merger (seen before as a characteristic of his Realism). He does not agree with readings that the position of Courbet is to expose his "Assyrian profile" but that his position is projected against and, as a consequence, comprehended by the landscape he is in the act of painting; he designed this to be perceived as a part of it.

Fried analyses the relation between model, painter and painting, affirming that the connection of the three figures is the river on the easel. The outward flow of water does not cease when it reaches the painter. It continues through the white sheet covering the model and, cascading to the floor, it reaches the cat, all this being visual metaphors for the outward flux of the waters whose source is the painting. Fried concludes that all this implies that the figure of the painter in the central group is as it were already immersed in the painting on which he is working. It is part of Fried's analysis to show how the artist overcomes the difficulty of physical boundaries between persons and things and how all the central figures are trapped in this materiality. The central group thus evokes a classical-seeming ideal of harmony between human figure and natural scene. But it must be stressed that in this instance the natural scene is manifestly a work of artifice. The author emphasizes then that one cannot consider Courbet doing anything else than representing the central group in *The Studio*. This *mise en abyme* is the artist's way of communicating the allegory of Realism through his real allegory.

To assign art the function of a medium is immediately to locate it within the semantic field of communication. Defining communication presents the problem that the definition assumes the meaning of communication, because the definition assumes the act of communication. All the problems of circularity in philosophy arise here. While meaning needs context for definition, context is never absolutely deterministic. Questioning the relationship between the two meanings of communication, the physical and the semio-linguistic, Jacques Derrida cautions against taking physical communication as primary or originary, and semio-linguistic as a metaphoric displacement. Culler asserts about this: "that to take communication as a transfer of a meaning cannot be explained through a recourse to metaphor; it is metaphor." Fried affirmed that Courbet's allegory will bring light to another

allegory, one whose operative principle- not simply whose meaning- are altogether different from those presumed to be at work in the painting...”

The Painter’s Studio is an allegory (analogy/metaphor) but on the basis of an allegory with human communication.

In conclusion the main characteristic of Courbet’s radical change toward absorption might be that whereas the painters before him sought to make paintings that would in effect be blind to or ignored the presence of the beholder, Courbet’s paintings “evoke the blindness of the painter-beholder”. The previous painters could not be absorptive; they could only theatrically pose as if they were, not because they were insincere or phony, but because the world had changed. Recognizing the value of Courbet’s absorption as his *écriture*- mode of writing, Michael Fried could tie painterly meaning not to the problems of perception, iconography or formal organization, but to the problem of “modes of being” of the art work itself. Like this The Studio might be said to communicate to us how to appreciate its ontological status. This is Fried’s achievement, to show how important these ontological dimensions are in the appreciation of Courbet’s work.

## 5. Petra Chu: Salon Rhetorics

*The modern artist strives to be independent of the public's taste and yet depends on the public for a living.*

In the *Most Arrogant Man in France*, Petra Chu studies the different periods in the work of Gustave Courbet in relation to his context and the use of rhetorical speech. In the nineteenth century, France's artists, journalists and writers suffered constant censorship by the government. Chu shows in the chapter *Salon Rhetoric* how *The Painter's Studio* [Fig. 1] is an example of the art of its time, conceiving the trope, irony and allegory as a device of freedom, independence and also denunciation.

As Michael Fried saw that the evolution within French art was to be found within the paintings themselves, Chu sees this evolution as a reflection of socio-political circumstances within the work of art. This is, to some degree, in accordance with Nochlin and Rubin, but in her study Chu also shows how Courbet's use of the *real allegory* was a tool for liberation. But Chu differs from the other art historians responding to Courbet's suggestion that the allegorical could read in Baudelaire.

Chu follows the structures of Bourdieu's sociology of art, and by doing so she sets Courbet's context as her primary subject of study. Reading Chu's handling of allegory, there are two questions that this essay will address.

The first question is how a work is shaped by its time. It is necessary to understand various concepts within Bourdieu's study in *Les Regles de L'Art* to be able to understand Chu's approach. Theory for Bourdieu "should be everywhere and nowhere-in the detour of a note, in the commentary on an old text, or in the very structure of interpretative discourse... Sometimes going as far as to conceal their own contribution within a creative interpretation of theories which are immanent in their object."<sup>118</sup> Theory also serves to revoke the tacit hierarchy of genres and by doing so transforms the social sciences by approaching the new theories. The new theories are nourished less by purely theoretical confrontation with the

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<sup>118</sup> Pierre Bourdieu *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1996), 178.

other theories than by confrontation with fresh empirical objects [*The Studio*] and concepts which have above all the function of designating [real allegory]. Thus, this is providing an ensemble of generative schemas of scientific practices which are epistemologically controlled. Bourdieu's notions of *habitus*, field, and *position* are examples of this, and they will be of help to understand how Chu analyses Courbet, his work, his period and above all his use of allegory.

The second question is how the *real allegory* operates as a rhetoric tool within *The Painter's Studio*. Here Chu searches in Courbet's education, indicating that the artist's knowledge of the use of tropes could have been acquired in the *Collège de Besançon* where his teacher, Charles Bénard, was an authority on Hegelian aesthetics. The fascination with irony, Chu says, was a direct effect of the contemporary interest in German philosophy that was introduced in France through Madame de Staël's *De l'Allemagne* in 1810 and was widely known in the 1830's. To some extent, the use of allegory as a device has been discussed in the previous chapters, but in Chu's research the trope as a device is used in the artistic field at large, by writers, poets, artists and the press, as well as being the preferred mode of communication within the Left Bank bohemia.

## 5.1 The Sociology of Art: But who created the creators?

*It is true that 'art imitates art', or, more precisely, that art is born of art, and usually the art with which it contrasts. Pierre Bourdieu<sup>119</sup>*

The way that Petra Chu researches *The Painter's Studio* in its context is not done in a reductionist manner. Her examination of the artistic field of the nineteenth century generates a bridge between art history and sociology, which according to Bourdieu is "as bad bed-fellows." Chu uses the concept of *field* and breaks the common opposition within the study of the work or art "between a formalism born of the codification of artistic practices which have achieved a high degree of autonomy, and a reductionism bent on bringing artistic forms directly back to social formations."<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "But Who Created the 'Creators'?" in *Sociology in Question* (London: Sage, 1993), 146.

<sup>120</sup> Bourdieu, 1996, 181.

A field (*champ*) is an autonomous socio-cultural space that, though closed, nonetheless is permeable; it tends to be homogenous but allows for a certain amount of heterogeneity as well as for the existence of several sub-fields.<sup>121</sup> The arts are among the main fields in modern societies, together with education, politics, law and economy. The importance of the field is that it allows us to escape the alternatives of internal interpretation and external explanation “by reminding us of the existence of social microcosms, separate and autonomous spaces, in which works are generated.”<sup>122</sup>

Pierre Bourdieu defines the artistic field of mid-nineteenth-century France as one in the process of formation.<sup>123</sup> There are two assumptions when an artistic field is studied through sociology. The first is the idea that sociology can give an account of cultural consumption but not of cultural production. The second assumption is that sociology - and its favoured instruments, statistics - belittles and crushes, flatten and trivialize artistic creation; that it sets the great and the small on the same footing, at all events fails to grasp what makes the genius of the greatest artists.<sup>124</sup> The problem with this, according to Bourdieu, is that sociology is left with the inferior especially as regards to its economic dimension - of intellectual and artistic life. But, he declares that he wishes to explore “the sacred space and a privileged treatment for the work of art and its uncreated creator.”<sup>125</sup>

### 5.1.1 The Origin of the Work of Art: Habitus and Position

In Bourdieu’s sociology of art, the field of production is inseparable from the field of consumption. The sociology has to overcome “one of the most harmful... ’paired concepts’ which, ...pervade the social sciences.”<sup>126</sup> The human sciences oscillate between two

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<sup>121</sup> Chu, 2007, 175 n.1.

<sup>122</sup> Bourdieu, 1996, 181.

<sup>123</sup> Chu, 2007, 1.

<sup>124</sup> Bourdieu, 1993, 138-9.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>126</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, Gisele Sapiro, Brian McHale, *First Lecture. Social Space and Symbolic Space: Introduction to a Japanese Reading of Distinction* in *Poetics Today*, Vol. 12, No. 4, National Literatures/Social Spaces (Winter, 1991), pp. 627-638, Published by: Duke University Press, 15.



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seemingly incompatible perspectives, *objectivism* and *subjectivism*. On the one hand objectivism (physicalism) “treats social facts as things” following the Durkheimian precept. On the other hand “it can reduce the social world to the representations that agents have of it” making the role of the discipline “an account on accounts.” Bourdieu first adapted the notion of *habitus* from Panofsky’s analysis of Gothic architecture. He used it in a more or less systematic way, in an attempt to resolve this antinomy of objectivism and subjectivism. This notion expresses above all a rejection of a series of alternatives into which he thought the social science was locked, that of the subject/object. The concept of *habitus* was, accordingly, the best one to signify that desire to escape from the philosophy of consciousness without annulling the agent in its true role of practical operator of constructions of the real.<sup>127</sup>

The origin of a work of art, within Bourdieu’s sociology, is neither in the individual artist nor in a social group but in the space of aesthetics and ethical positions. These are the products of a historical accumulation and a common system of references. What makes the unity of an epoch is not so much a common culture as the common set of problems, which is nothing other than the set of aesthetic/ethical positions attached to the set of positions marked out in the field.<sup>128</sup> The work of art bears the traces of the artist *habitus*, which refers to the social condition of his production as a social subject, i.e. family, and as a producer which indicates schooling and professional contacts. Creation is the encounter between the socially constructed *habitus* and a particular *position* that is already possible in the division of the labour of the cultural production (i.e. a position with a field). This position, which often exists prior to the artist and continues to exist after him, is characterized by the properties of the artistic life, for example tradition, attributes and *modes of expression*.

Bourdieu illustrates, in his essay “But who created the creator”, how the real key to the *artistic* project lies outside of the individual, the *artist*. It is important to understand this project in order to see how, for Petra Chu, Courbet’s project *lied outside himself*.

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<sup>127</sup> Bourdieu, 1996, 180.

<sup>128</sup> Bourdieu, 1993, 144.

In the objective relationship between, on the one hand, *habitus* shaped in certain social conditions and, on the other hand, a particular *position* in the field of artistic production, the artist *himself* is situated in a particular position in the field of the dominant class. Following Bourdieu's structure of the artist, it could be said that: we find Courbet's *position* in the division of artistic labour and therefore in the division of the work of domination.

We can turn back to the social conditions of production of the *habitus* and ask what Courbet had to be in order to occupy and simultaneously produce the *position* of "realist artist" and create the *Courbet position*. It is possible to establish the pertinent features of the social conditions of the production of "Gustave", for example the provincial bourgeois, which will enable us to understand how he was able to fulfil and make the *position* of "Courbet". Since Chu interprets *The Studio* as an object of sociology of art, this means that she studies the structure of two inseparable spaces: those of the products and the producers.

### 5.1.2 Dual Structure: Art and Money

Petra Chu's research shows how decisively French politics shaped the cultural milieu; it dominated, repressed and censored the press throughout the century and this influenced the outcome in visual and literary arts. Chu's analysis of the nineteenth century context reflects on the exaltation of money and profit and how they served the strategies of Napoleon III: "in order to secure the loyalty of the bureaucracy not yet fully converted to the "impostor", he rewards his supporters with the sumptuous emoluments and lavish gifts..."<sup>129</sup> He also increased the number of celebrations in which the most compliant and conformist representatives of the press- writers, journalists, editors and patrons and artists - served to his purpose.

The artists Gérôme and Cabanel rendered, in their *tableau vivant*, subjects borrowed from history and mythology, which helped to sustain the emperor's image. These paintings, when compared with Courbet's, help to identify the artist's venture of freedom and denunciation, applying, as mentioned above, the mixture of his provincialism and the salon rhetoric.

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<sup>129</sup> Bourdieu, 1996, 49.

After the disappearance of royal, aristocratic and church patronage after the French Revolution, visual artists who did not serve to the Emperor's enterprise had been in the search of financial independence since the introduction of public exhibitions – *Salons* - in the eighteenth century. Napoleon III and his family exercised a direct hold on the literary and artistic field, not only with censorship, but also with the admittance to the exhibits in the Salons, or the plays and music in theatres or concert halls. As a result of this, Bourdieu affirms, it will be a matter of an absolute “*structural subordination* which acts very unequally on different authors according to their position to the field.”<sup>130</sup>

This also meant an exchange between the different fields; different portions of the high society establishing relationship of patronage with artists. Some of them could use this as a way of imposing their vision on artists, thus inserting their political view onto them.

*Like the routes of domination, the routes of autonomy are complex, if not impenetrable. And the struggles at the heart of the political field... may indirectly serve the interest of the writers most concerned about their literary independence: under the protection of the powerful, the latter can obtain the material or institutional resources that they cannot expect from either the market... or, as they quickly understood after 1848, from the commissions monopolized by their most destitute competitors from bohemia.*<sup>131</sup>

Petra Chu shows how Courbet managed to achieve an unprecedented measure of, not only financial, but also artistic independence by promoting his work and himself through the popular press.

Courbet devised new ways to structure his oeuvre and developed a unique exhibition and marketing strategy. He was one of the first artists to recognize and take advantage of the publicity potential of newspapers, using them to create acceptance of his work and to spread an image of himself as a radical outsider. Courbet introduced the independent show by displaying his art in popular venues outside the Salon putting in play the “rhetoric of independence”, a strategy learned from his writer friends. This meant to assert a subversive autonomy positioned in such a way that it could be neither rejected nor accepted, but that it

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<sup>130</sup> Bourdieu, 1996, 49.

<sup>131</sup> Bourdieu, 1996,52.

was impossible to ignore (the bourgeois voyeurism into provincial life and vice versa.) For a time Courbet succeeded, achieving a rare freedom for a nineteenth-century French artist.

The achievement of this freedom is, according to Chu, a result of his use of the allegory as a rhetorical device.

## 5.2 Salon Rhetoric: Nineteenth-century use of the trope as a political tool

*“On a assez d’armes contre nous: nous n’en demandons qu’une, qui sera notre baïonnette”<sup>132</sup> Jules Valles*

By the nineteenth-century, the press, artist and writers were engaged in the use of rhetoric not only as a weapon against censorship, but also as a way to comment on it. Censorship did not only influence the content of the press and art, but also its literary form. In this way the trope, i.e. allegory, irony, metonymy, satire among others, became an index of government control.

This attitude reflected the artist’s political integrity and also attracted, as said before, thoughtful clientele and patrons. What Petra Chu explains about the press could be equally said about artists: “Discretion, suppleness of style, and above all, a mastery of rhetoric were the prerequisites for a successful journalistic career.”<sup>133</sup> Although all the rhetorical devices play an important role in “the goal of dissimulating dissident and subversion”, irony was the chief trope against the power of the censor. “Voilà [...] pourquoi j’aime toutes les formes de l’ironie, adoucies, violentes, polies, barbares. Elle ne fait peur qu’aux faibles, et elle est la leçon et l’honneur des forts.”<sup>134</sup> Irony was the bayonet that Vallès was asking for in his article in *Le Figaro*.

However, it was not only the powerful rhetorical device, but also a Romantic strategy within the bohemian world of the 1840s “to cope with the absence of norms and structure” and a

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<sup>132</sup> Chu, 2007, 196n 7.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>134</sup> Jacques Migozzi, Les portraits dans « L’Insurgé » : une alternative à la chronique historique ? (Romantisme, 1991, n°72. Panorama. pp. 75-85), 75.

way to approach modernity. Irony helped them to distance themselves from the platitude of modern life and to find for it a new aesthetic form.<sup>135</sup> Bohemians spoke a particular language among themselves, which was eclectic and paradoxical, combining “the rusticity of popular speech with the extravagant sentences that come from the same mould as the blustering speeches of Cyrano.”<sup>136</sup> This could be a description of Gustave Courbet and his art, and in a way it is.

### 5.2.1 Courbet’s art as ironic caricature of the contemporary scene

*There are those who are made for taking up ready-made positions and those who are made for making new positions.*<sup>137</sup>

In relation to class and art it is important to understand the effect that the *habitus* and the *position* have on the production of art. Bourdieu explains that the producer’s habitus is never entirely the product of his *position*. It is not possible to analyze the social characteristics of the artist- social origin- and directly understand the characteristics of his art. The reason is that the distinctiveness linked to a particular class - plebeian or bourgeois - may express itself in very different forms. In Courbet’s art, as seen before, it is possible to recognize characteristics of his social origin, but it would not be possible, according to this theory, to interpret his art solely as a result of that origin. He was also influenced not only by external factors like politics, economy and philosophy, but also by internal ones, like for example the place he was constructing for himself.

Courbet was the kind of artist who made new positions for himself. He did not belong to the Parisian society, and he used his provincial identity to conceal the “slipperiness” when choosing subject matters for his work. His proficient rhetorical techniques allowed Courbet not only to avoid censorship but also to win a medal at the Salon of 1849 for his *Après-midi en Ornans* (1848-49) [Fig. 3]. While Michael Fried studied this painting as the beginning of absorption in Courbet, Chu interprets this painting as the beginning of Courbet’s mastering of *the salon rhetoric*.

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<sup>135</sup> Chu, 2007, 76.

<sup>136</sup> Chu, 2007, 77.

*An afterdinner was accompanied by an inscription typical of historical painting that read: An afterdinner in Ornans- it was November, we were at the home of our friend Cuenot. Marlet returned from the hunt, and we asked Promayet to play the violin before my father.*<sup>138</sup>

This type of description was usually added to painting like *Virgil, Horace, and Varius at the Home of Maecenas* (1846) by Courbet's contemporary, Charles François Jalabert. The catalogue inscription that accompanied the latter painting said: "Virgil reads from the Georgics." Chu uses this painting to clarify Courbet's strategy and to show how irony was built within his work.

It is here we start to see how *habitus* and *position* influence in the process of art making. Courbet's *Afterdinner* was constructed in approximately the same size as Jalabert's history painting, claiming that contemporary genre painting could be depicted in these proportions. The author reads these peaceful gatherings as a representation of crucial moments in their own time. The meeting in Maecenas home may have evoked a turbulent time in ancient Rome, and Chu interprets Courbet's painting as an allusion to his own turbulent present and to what this type of rural gathering could have meant. Rural radicalism's main actors were at that table, just like the main actors of the consolidation of the Augustan Empire were at Jalabert's work. Courbet, Promayet and Cuenot, as the author demonstrates, were referred to as *rouges acharnés* and should "be feared for their *opinions démagogues*" by the Besançon police. The politicians of the time regarded these "rural gatherings" as problematic, characterising them as "clandestine gatherings, secret cabals in which one exchanged political news and discusses it."<sup>139</sup> Courbet's painting won a medal, was purchased by the government and placed, not in the Musée du Luxembourg as the artist believed, but in the provincial museum of Lille. This "banishment" was according to Chu a strategic move from the ministry.

"If Courbet's *Afterdinner* was ironic, it was so in a Socratic way" asserts Chu. This form of irony was enjoying a renewal of interest in this period, and consisted in both naïveté and

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<sup>137</sup> Bourdieu, 1993, 142.

<sup>138</sup> Chu, 2007, 80 Gustave Courbet intended this text to accompany the painting in the catalogue of the Paris Salon of 1849 and was rejected by the editors for being too trivial or as Chu suspects for being too radical?

<sup>139</sup> Chu, 2007, 81.

reflection, according to Schlegel “a conjunction of a perfectly instinctive and perfectly conscious philosophy.” These are qualities that Chu believes are represented in Courbet’s painting. Chu describes two ways of reading this irony; on the one hand the ingenuous rural autodidact painter who ignores genre’s hierarchy, on the other, a conscious subversion.

The dual reading in many of the artist’s works puzzled and even irritated the Salon goers, the jury and the critics. But Courbet enjoyed a kind of autonomy, which is described in the sociology of art by Bourdieu, as an *independence* that includes *dependence*. There are no literary and artistic revolutions, which overthrow the power relations within a field. This is only possible “in so far as those who import new dispositions and want to impose new positions find, for example, support outside the field, in the new audiences whose demands they both express and produce.”<sup>140</sup>

The Socratic irony in Courbet’s art faded away after winning a medal in the Salon for *An Afterdinner*. He had a clear entrance for the next exhibition. With *Un Enterrement à Ornans* (1849-50) [Fig. 2] he exploited this freedom and worked with irony in a more complex manner, which could also attract a new public.

### 5.2.2 The Romantic Irony: “Irony of Irony”

The Romantic irony, which Schlegel had called the irony of irony, is a self-reflective type of mode. Represented in the *Burial*, the first ironic move the artist creates is a monumental gallery of portraits of the provincial bourgeoisie and the peasants in his native village, presenting them as historical figures worthy of being remembered. Then, heaping irony on irony, he makes the bourgeois of Ornans “ugly”, thus distancing himself from the very figures he intends to aggrandize.<sup>141</sup> Courbet’s critics felt that his excessive irony, his scepticism and even cynicism, had led him down the path where all artistic, cultural, and moral standards had been annihilated.<sup>142</sup> But Champfleury defended his friend, asserting that irony was indispensable for “*un art nouveau*.” To him, irony was indispensable to the “new” painter

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<sup>140</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, " But Who Created the 'Creators'?" in *Sociology in Question* (London: Sage, 1993, 142.

<sup>141</sup> Chu, 2007, 86.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

whose subject, “the modern bourgeoisie” was inherently ironic in “its ridiculousness, its ugliness, and its beauty.”<sup>143</sup> Champfleury referred to the *Burial* as Courbet’s first scandal.

It is generally recognized that Schlegel was a discoverer rather than an inventor, that he derived his critical concept directly from Socratic irony, but found manifestations of irony in various periods of literary history. A simple definition of irony as understood by Friedrich Schlegel is, first of all, a more subtle application of irony than is understood in common usage. The writer means something different from what he appears to be saying. Although he does not mean simply the opposite of what he says, he is likely to mean at the same time both what he seems to be saying and the opposite. Antithesis lies at the very core of Friedrich Schlegel’s view of human existence, of communication, and of artistic creation.<sup>144</sup> Schlegel’s concept of irony, the author continues, further involves a conscious reference to literature within literature itself.

It is possible to recognize when treating irony, that the artist is aware of earlier models, literary traditions, and problems of form, medium, and style as he creates, and he strives to impart, this awareness to the recipient of his work. The latter, in turn, experiences a self-conscious enjoyment of the workings of this whole complex process in the individual literary work.<sup>145</sup>

The romantic irony is structured in three correlated types of irony. Subjective irony is the personal intervention of the author, whereas in objective irony the author is detached, but the latter describes the hero in an ironic milieu. Finally, naïve irony incorporates the author’s attitude toward the work as a whole, without regard to individual examples of irony. The naïve irony lies between the subjective and the objective, and it provides the general tone pervading the entire work. In order to speak of a work as ironic, reference should be made to this naïve quality; otherwise, there exist just so many particular examples, which do not necessarily render a work ironic. On the other hand, there exists a rapport between the

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>144</sup> Raymond Immerwahr, *Romantic Irony and Romantic Arabesque Prior to Romanticism* (The German Quarterly, Vol. 42, No. 4 (Nov., 1969), pp. 665-685), 665.

<sup>145</sup> Immerwahr, 666.



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general tone and the individual instances of irony, and for this reason a certain amount of overlapping is unavoidable.<sup>146</sup>

Chu's study places *The Burial at Ornans* in a clearer perspective in the course of Courbet's development as an artist. As Chu suggests it could be viewed as a portrait of the artist at the crossroads, from the *Afterdinner* towards *The Studio*. There is, however, a certain detachment on the part of the painter, which permits him to view this scene and his work in an ironic manner, as well as to parody himself or his native town. After *The Burial*, there can be no doubt as to which course Courbet will follow, regardless of the price in terms of wealth and acclaim. The end result of Baudelaire's determination to pursue his true course will be evident when the irony is transformed to allegory, and the painter's denunciation of the abuse of power is shown from within.

### 5.2.3 From irony to allegory

Courbet wrote to his patron, Alfred Bruyas in May 1854, referring to his ironic phase as a thing from the past. In the subsequent years the artist gradually shifted to other rhetorical modes. Allegory, like irony, was a form of rhetoric that continued to allow him to work within the indirect mode of expression.

The first way that we could read Chu's handling of the allegorical is considering it as something in between the two tropes. The caricaturesque in Chu's reading of *The Studio* derives from many examples of cartoons of the nineteenth century that could be compare to, but it is in Balzac's *Traité de la vie élégante*, published in 1853, where we can find that *great allegories show no lack of irony*.

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<sup>146</sup> Francis S. Heck *Baudelaire's Fanfarlo: An Example of Romantic Irony* (the French Review, Vol. 49, No. 3 (Feb., 1976), pp. 328-336 ), 334.

## 5.3 The Real Allegory according to Balzac and Baudelaire:

### 5.3.1 Balzac: L'homme qui travaille, L'homme qui pense, L'homme qui fait rien et qui se voue à la vie élégante

The study of *The Painter's Studio* for Chu represents the struggle artists endure in the reign of Napoleon III. The historian searches for a meaning of allegory in Angus Fletcher, as Linda Nochlin did. Although Chu agrees with the latter about the “allegorical fumble” in Courbet’s painting, asserting that it is the possible reason for the mysteriousness of the oeuvre, she returns to the irony to make a deeper approach of the real allegory. Enigma, according to Fletcher, is allegory’s most cherished function.<sup>147</sup> Chu affirms that the ironic *enigma* can serve “political and social purposes by the very fact that reigning authority (as police state) does not see... [its] secondary meaning.”<sup>148</sup> If *The Painter's Studio* indeed has an enigmatic function and supports a socio-political reading along the lines of Fletcher’s model, the art historian suggests that its “secondary” meaning is related to Courbet’s complex relationship with the imperial government of Napoleon III. In the context of the 1855 Universal Exposition, Courbet would have the whole world walking through his studio, as Napoleon III would have the world celebrating the first years of his reign. The irony that constructed *The Afterdinner* operates also within *The Studio*. The enigma that serves political and social purposes is by definition ironic. If *An Afterdinner* was an ironic rendering of the *Virgil*, *Horace*, and *Varius at the Home of Maecenas*, *The Painter's Studio* can be read as an ironic recast of Henri Valentin’s *The Opening Ceremony of the Universal Exposition* (May, 1855).

This painting depicted the emperor at the centre together with his son, prince impériale, flanked by his friends the courtiers to the right and the exotic foreigner dignitaries to the left, whereas in *The Studio*, Courbet is at the centre with his child, flanked by the men who work and the men who think showing how the artist dominates society.

“The artist is an expiation: his idleness is work, his work is rest; he is now elegant, then unkempt. At a whim, he puts on a worker’s blouse or a fashionable man’s suit. He does not

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<sup>147</sup> Chu, 2007, 106.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 106.

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follow laws. He imposes them. He is always the expression of a great thought and dominates society.”<sup>149</sup>

Allegory, thus generalized, derives its specific meaning from the accessories or “attributes” of the figure. The clothes serve as attributes that refine the meaning of the allegory.

Baudelaire, Angus Fletcher and Roland Barthes, in their own way, have all emphasized the importance of clothes and ornaments as signifiers of social, political and economic circumstances.<sup>150</sup>

### 5.3.2 Baudelaire: Tout pour moi devient allegorie

*As flâneurs, the intelligentsia came into the market-place. As they thought, to observe it- but in reality it was already to find a buyer.*<sup>151</sup>

Although the painting looks like an elaborate tableau vivant, Chu affirms that the intriguing reason why Courbet called this painting a real allegory may have been that it was meant to pursue a modern allegory. *The Painter's Studio* is for Chu the translation of abstract ideas into living art. To understand this, the author directs our attention to the letter to Champfleury in which the artist wrote “I have explained it to you quite badly, I should have begun with Baudelaire.”<sup>152</sup> The reason why Baudelaire was so important to the artist is, according to Chu, the poet’s importance within realism.

In 1846, Baudelaire wrote what is considered the first manifesto of realist painting, where he urged artists to paint the heroism and the beauty of modern life. The poet’s thesis is a way to advocate an allegorical approach to art in which attributes were to be the major carriers of meaning. It was the task of the modern artist to discover the epic, the heroic and the marvellous in the trivial, “the general in the particular, the eternal in the ephemeral, the allegory in reality.”<sup>153</sup> But it could be said that the poet was significant concerning this

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>150</sup> Chu, 2007, 99.

<sup>151</sup> Walter Benjamin, Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century (Perspecta, Vol. 12 (1969), pp. 165-172), 170.

<sup>152</sup> Chu, 2007, 105.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

painting, not only because of what Chu suggests, but also because of his importance as an allegorical figure of his time and, above all, of Paris.

Baudelaire's genius, which drew its nourishment from melancholy, was an allegorical one. With Baudelaire, Paris for the first time became the subject of lyrical poetry. This poetry is no local folklore; the allegorist's gaze which falls upon the city is rather the gaze of alienated man.<sup>154</sup> It is the gaze of the *flâneur*... still stood at the margins, of the great city as of the bourgeois class. Neither of them had yet overwhelmed him... He sought his asylum in the crowd... The crowd was the veil from behind which the familiar city as phantasmagoria beckoned to the *flâneur*. In it, the city was now landscape, now a room.<sup>155</sup>

According to Benjamin it was the *flâneur* who brought the intellectual to the market. Chu's main argument is that Courbet was one of the first to understand that market, and how to benefit from it. Following this reading the role of Baudelaire in *The Studio* could be seen as his relation with society, with the market and with art.

The uncertainty of Baudelaire's and Courbet's economic position corresponded with the uncertainty of the political situation. We have seen before that, in the painting, the studio was divided in two. On the right are the characters known as the *shareholders*, and on the left are the characters whom Courbet had called the world of the trivial life, *people who live off of death*. Chu reads the right/left characters and how their attributes represent the intention of Courbet's representation. Their attributes lend specificity to the figures and define their allegorical meaning.<sup>156</sup>

She provides as an example of the analogy, created by the clothes, a merchant who presides the group on the left and Champfleury. What Chu aims to show in her analogy between these figures is their common position within their own fields as "sellers of identity". The merchant sells clothes, and Champfleury, the modern realist writer-journalist together with the painter, *invest* reality meaning or *mutatis mutandis* to "dress" the idea and emotions of their time in contemporary garb. The novelty of these identities is not valued as a commod-

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<sup>154</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century* (Perspecta, Vol. 12 (1969), pp. 165-172), 169.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>156</sup> Chu, 2007, 104.

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ity, “but it is the source of illusion which belongs inalienably to the images which the collective unconscious engenders.”<sup>157</sup>

It is the quintessence of false consciousness, discusses Benjamin, of which fashion is the tireless agent. Just allegory became the canon of dialectical imagery in the 17th century, so in the 19th century did *nouveaute*, and it was Baudelaire who represented it.

*This illusion of novelty is reflected, like one mirror in another, in the illusion of infinite similarity...Art, which began to have doubts about its function, and ceased to be 'inseparable du l'utilite' (Baudelaire), was forced to make novelty its highest value. Its arbiter novarum rerum became the snob. He was for art what the dandy was for fashion.*<sup>158</sup>

In each epoch the view of history is different, because the forms of its course present themselves differently in each case. To the extent that allegory and history are connected, the form and function of allegory will in turn change. In 1850 the *heroic modernity* was associated with Baudelaire. He was a man of his time and his city but none of them represented a stable temporality. Paris was represented in his poetry together with death and women. His Paris was sunken, “*more submarine than subterranea*” and in ruins. Yet with Baudelaire, in the ‘death-loving idyll’ of the city, there is decidedly a social, and modern, sub-stratum. The modern is a main stress in his poetry.<sup>159</sup> And with this, Benjamin opens the double temporality of Baudelaire’s allegory. It is precisely the modern which always conjures prehistory. This is the heart of the allegorical way of seeing secular explanation of history as the Passion of the world; its importance resides solely in the stations of its decline.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Benjamin, 1969, 170.

<sup>158</sup> Benjamin, 1969, 170.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London: NLB, 1977), 166.

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## Illustrations

- Fig 1. Gustave Courbet, *The Painter's Studio Real Allegory Summing up a Seven-Year Phase of My Artistic and Moral Life*, 1885. Oil on canvas, 361 x 598 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.
- Fig 2. Gustave Courbet, *A Burial at Ornans*, 1849-50. Oil on canvas, 311.5 x 668 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.
- Fig 3. Gustave Courbet, *An Afterdinner at Ornans*, 1848-49. Oil on canvas, 195 x 257 cm. Palais des Beaux-Arts, Lille, France.
- Fig 4. Gustave Courbet, *The Wheat Sifters*, 1855. Oil on canvas, 131 x 167 cm. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nantes, France.
- Fig 5. Gustave Courbet, *The Quarry*, 1856. Oil on canvas, 210 x 184.5 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
- Fig 6. Gustave Courbet, *The Stonebreakers*, 1849. Oil on canvas, 190 x 300 cm. Formerly Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.
- Fig 7. Gustave Courbet, *Peasants of Flagey Returning from the Fair*, 1850. Oil on canvas, 208.5 x 275.5 cm. Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie, Besançon, France.
- Fig 8. Gustave Courbet, *Portrait of Alfred Bruyas*, 1854. Oil on canvas, 92 x 74 cm. Musée Fabre, Montpellier, France.
- Fig 9. Gustave Courbet, *Portrait of Charles Baudelaire*, 1847-48. Oil on canvas, 54 x 65.5 cm. Musée Fabre, Montpellier, France.
- Fig 10. Gustave Courbet, *Portrait of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in 1853*, 1865. Oil on canvas, 147 x 198 cm. Musée du Petit Palais, Paris.
- Fig 11. Gustave Courbet, *Portrait of Champfleury*, 1855. Oil on canvas, 46 x 38 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.