

Stony Brook University



OFFICIAL COPY

The official electronic file of this thesis or dissertation is maintained by the University Libraries on behalf of The Graduate School at Stony Brook University.

© All Rights Reserved by Author.

“The Cradle of Things”: Origins and Ontogenesis in the Late Landscapes of

Gustave Courbet

A Thesis Presented

by

Nicole Georgopoulos

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

Art History and Criticism

Stony Brook University

May 2016

Stony Brook University

The Graduate School

Nicole Georgopoulos

We, the thesis committee for the above candidate for the
Master of Arts degree, hereby recommend
acceptance of this thesis.

James H. Rubin
Professor of Art History and Criticism

David S. Mather
Assistant Professor of Art History and Criticism

This thesis is accepted by the Graduate School

Charles Taber
Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract of the Thesis

“The Cradle of Things”: Origins and Ontogenesis in the Late Landscapes of

Gustave Courbet

by

Nicole Georgopoulos

Master of Arts

in

Art History and Criticism

Stony Brook University

2016

In early 1864, Gustave Courbet returned to his home region of Franche-Comté and painted a series of landscapes that took as their subjects various natural points of origin: grottoes, caves, waterfalls, etc. Through his loose and expressive facture, Courbet renders visible in these landscapes the ongoing becoming of the world, investigating the nature of origination and evolution. Courbet’s interest in such subjects comes just two years after the publication of the French translation of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*, which irreversibly unsettled the traditional understanding of humankind’s position within the world. The early years of evolutionary biology made clear the human body’s implication in the history of the earth: no longer could the body be understood in isolation from its environment; rather, it was embedded within a geological history that tied it irrevocably to the earth itself through a common point of origin.

This thesis situates these natal or ontogenetic landscapes within the context of the wider dialogue concerning the nature and origins of the body in mid-nineteenth-century France, extending from evolutionary biology to proto-phenomenology, and culminating in Henri Bergson’s notion of creative becoming. Seen through a phenomenological lens informed by the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Elizabeth Grosz, it becomes evident that though Courbet’s landscapes do not take the body itself as their immediate subject, they constitute a reimagining of corporeality as both an epistemological and ontological category, a reordering of the understanding of the body’s place in the world.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Courbet at Home: Origins at Ornans.....	7
3. <i>Transformisme</i> and the Body Transformed.....	12
4. Merleau-Ponty's Magical Theory of Painterly Vision.....	21
5. The Invisible Made Visible: Speaking in Silence.....	26
6. Coda.....	36
7. Bibliography.....	38
8. Figures.....	42

List of Figures

1. Gustave Courbet, *La Source de la Loue*, 1864.
2. Gustave Courbet, *La Grotte de Sarrazine près de Nains-sous-Sainte Anne*, 1864.
3. Gustave Courbet, *La Grotte de la Loue*, 1864.
4. Nodier and Taylor, “Source de la Loue.” *Voyages pittoresques, Franche-Comté*, 1825.
5. Nodier and Taylor, “Vue intérieure de la Glacière.” *Voyages pittoresques, Franche-Comté*, 1825.
6. Nodier and Taylor, “Grotte sur les bords des bassins du Doubs.” *Voyages pittoresques, Franche-Comté*, 1825.
7. Nodier and Taylor, “Les Grottes d’Osselles.” *Voyages pittoresques, Franche-Comté*, 1825.
8. Detail, Gustave Courbet, *La Grotte de Sarrazine près de Nains-sous-Sainte Anne*, 1864.
9. Detail, Gustave Courbet, *La Grotte de Sarrazine près de Nains-sous-Sainte Anne*, 1864.
10. Detail, Gustave Courbet, *La Grotte de la Loue*, 1864.
11. Salle 20, Musée d’Orsay.
12. Gustave Courbet, *L’Origine du monde*, 1866.
13. Gustave Courbet, *Le Ruisseau noir*, 1865.
14. Gustave Courbet, *La Source*, 1868.

“The moon had risen, but a large tree hid her completely; she riddled its dark foliage with a million little luminous holes... Silence, filled with sounds and stifled sighs, was heard throughout the garden... I was blended with the nature that surrounded me; I felt myself quiver with the foliage, glisten with the water, shine with the ray, expand with the flower; I was not myself more than the trees, the water, and the great night-shade.”

Théophile Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*

“I am not the spectator, I am involved.”

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*

“As for me, I take my convictions from nature, and for me the totality of men and things is nature.”

Gustave Courbet, Letter to Champfleury, June 1863

Introduction

A rush of air emanates from a dark fissure in the cliff (fig. 1). Damp wood creaks under the ceaseless strain of the river’s flow. Leaves quiver as a splash of water breaks over the rocks, its echo rebounding throughout the cavernous space. The smell of waterlogged moss intermingles with the cool breath of the earth, a heady, primordial scent that carries with it the secrets of the terrain and its prehistoric origins. Our encounter with Gustave Courbet’s *La Source de la Loue* is characterized by overwhelming synesthesia, an interpolation into its world that brings us bodily into the scene. Its assault upon our senses allows us – forces us – to plunge into a world seemingly separate from our own; we are, at once, both *here* and *there*, both *now* and *then*.

Our entrance into the landscape is not achieved through a flight of imagination, an act of a disembodied mind; it is through our sensing bodies, our raw, corporeal perception that we are thrust into it, the karstic spring appearing before us in its full dynamism: “Perception is initiation

into the world.”¹ It is by virtue of the very nature of our being-in-the-world that our bodies are caught up in Courbet’s painting, a being that is characterized by encroachment and promiscuity, an openness to the world around that is, in fact, less a *being* than it is a *becoming*. Our becoming is one of excess – of *ekstase* – as we exceed ourselves through our indivisibility with our perceptual field, in which we are indelibly embedded. A cohort in the shared flesh-of-the-world, Courbet’s painting takes us up in simultaneous movement. We enter into it by attuning ourselves to its rhythm; we move into it by moving *with* it, “a movement by vibration and radiation.”² Our ability to encroach upon the painting is indicative of its openness to us; it cannot be hermetically sealed, a wholly unified world of its own. In order for us to join the world of the painting, there must be gaps through which we enter, fissures that invite our bodies into the sensuous flesh of the canvas.

Movement by vibration is a movement of dissonance and disruption, of gap-creation; Théophile Gautier’s narrator in *Mademoiselle de Maupin* feels himself in unity with the world only by virtue of its kaleidoscopic gaps in the night: the broken streams of moonlight coming through the trees, the breaks in the surface of the shimmering water, the silent breath of the flowers.³ Nature quakes, its subtle vibration creating openings through which we may enter it – the world has “fissures and gaps into which subjectivities slip and lodge themselves.”⁴ Such is the movement of painting: its movement in place, its quivering, allows for our insertion into it. This mutual vibration of nature and painting is symptomatic of a shared flesh between them that

¹ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*, 1945. Trans. Colin Smith. London: Routledge, 2002. 300. All references to this text will be abbreviated “PP.”

² Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. “Eye and Mind.” 1961. *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*. Ed. Galen A. Johnson. Trans. Michael B. Smith. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1993. 144. All references to this text will be abbreviated “EM.”

³ Gautier, Théophile. *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. 1835. Trans. Helen Constantine. London: Penguin Classics, 2006. 104.

⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *PP* 389.

allows us to feel these frequencies in unison with one another. And so it is with Courbet's *Source de la Loue*: it is through the breaks in the paint, Courbet's brusque slashes of the palette knife, his proto-abstraction, that we are able to slip into the landscape.

Painted in 1864 in his home county of Franche-Comté, *La Source de la Loue* is one of a series of landscapes undertaken by Courbet in the spring and summer of that year. After having endured a particularly harsh critical reception at that year's Salon, Courbet returned home from Paris and, over the course of the next year, enjoyed a highly productive period while living in Ornans. Of the dozens of landscapes he painted during his time at home (in fact, he would write to a fellow painter that he had "just done thirty landscapes from nature"⁵), a considerable number of them take up a common motif: that of sources and origins. The resultant paintings are some of his finest, not only for their artistic ingenuity, but also for their haunting, synesthetic effects that interpolate the viewer into the scenes themselves. The earth seems to breathe through the canvases, the sounds of nature emanating from a dark and hidden source, a phantasmal refrain. That the viewer undergoes such a corporeal experience in the face of these landscapes makes them particularly ripe for a phenomenological interpretation, particularly one informed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the ontological nature of painting. Like the human experience itself, for Merleau-Ponty, a painting is not so much a being as it is ongoing becoming, inaugurated by the artist and continued in the encounter with the viewer throughout the ages.

The sources of the Loue and Lison rivers, the wooded valley of the Puits-Noir, the caves of the Jura Mountains – Courbet's return home seems to have inspired in him a search for another kind of return, a return to the earth in its most primordial, natal forms. As Petra ten-

⁵ Courbet, Gustave. Letter to Alfred Verwee, August 1864. *Letters of Gustave Courbet*. Ed. and trans. Petra ten-Doesschate Chu. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992. 244. All letters by Courbet refer to this edition, referencing recipient, date, and page number.

Doesschate Chu writes of them, “Devoid of picturesque trappings, these grottoes are presented as entries into the inner depth of the earth, where the answers to its primordial beginnings may be found.”⁶ Gorges, grottoes, caves, waterfalls, groves: Courbet’s subjects in 1864 are joined by a theme of origination. His long-established, intimate relationship with the region and its geological and paleontological roots comes to a head in these paintings, as he discovers his personal origins concomitantly with those of the earth itself. Seen through the lens of Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of painting, Courbet’s source paintings constitute explorations of a primordiality that haunts painterly vision. Searching for the ciphers of visibility, the Merleau-Pontian artist concerns herself with the world’s ontogenesis, as she renders its unfolding upon her canvas, attending to its autfiguration. The common task of all painters, Merleau-Ponty tells us, is “the breaking of the ‘skin of things’ to show how things become things, how the world becomes world.”⁷ In the case of the 1864 landscapes, Courbet takes this search for origin and becoming quite literally; by looking to *La Source de la Loue* and other canvases from the same series, such as *La Grotte de Sarrazine près de Nains-sous-Sainte-Anne* (fig. 2) and *La Grotte de la Loue* (fig. 3) we are able to see this painterly excursion as an investigation into the primordial roots of the world, the ground from which we all emanate.⁸

⁶ Chu, Petra ten-Doesschate. ““It Took Millions of Years to Compose That Picture.”” *Courbet Reconsidered*. Ed. Sarah Faunce and Linda Nochlin. New Haven: Yale UP, 1988. 64.

⁷ Merleau-Ponty, EM 141.

⁸ Traditionally treated as mediocre and without much import within the context of his oeuvre at large, Courbet’s landscapes have emerged as a subject of seriously scholarly consideration only in recent years. Anne Wagner’s 1981 essay “Courbet’s Landscapes and Their Market” (*Art History* 4.4 [Dec. 1981]: 410-31) describes them in terms of their marketability, and Courbet’s willingness to paint for the sake of his collectors’ desires, effectively reducing them to kitsch moneymakers. Since that time, revisions have been made by Klaus Herding (“Equality and Authority in Courbet’s Landscape Painting,” in his *To Venture Independence* [trans. John William Gabriel, New Haven: Yale UP, 1991]); Linda Nochlin (“Courbet and His Territory: How Landscape Means” in her *Courbet* [New York: Thames & Hudson, 2007]); and the catalogue for the 2007 exhibition at the J. Paul Getty Museum, *Courbet and the Modern*

But the question must be asked: what is it about Courbet's paintings that make them particularly ripe for phenomenological interpretation? While Merleau-Ponty's ontology of painting could ostensibly be applied to any given body of work, that primordially and origination occupy such a central place in Courbet's work in the mid-1860s creates a certain resonance between his work and Merleau-Ponty's ontogenetic aesthetics. That Courbet takes an interest in such topics is anything but coincidental; the 1860s witnessed a prolonged upheaval of the nature of origination in realms both philosophical and scientific. Indeed, in 1862, just two years before Courbet's intensive production of ontogenetic landscapes began, Clémence Royer published the French translation of Charles Darwin's 1859 *On the Origin of Species*, irreversibly unsettling the traditional understanding of humankind's position within the world.⁹ Darwin's

Landscape (ed. Mary Morton and Charlotte Eyerman [Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2007]), among others. Though the landscapes have received more critical attention (and have been the subject of monographic exhibitions) in recent years, a holistic treatment has yet to be attempted.

The exception here is Paul Galvez's doctoral dissertation, *Gustave Courbet and the Origins of Modern Painting 1862-1870* (Diss., Columbia University, 2008). Galvez takes up the late landscapes as his primary subject, and describes them in phenomenological terms similar to those used herein; the source paintings alone constitute the subject of his second chapter, "Courbet's Sources." While the subjects and methodological approaches between the current paper and that of Galvez run parallel to one another, that latter is more concerned with situating the landscapes within an art historical lineage, particularly as pertains to Courbet's break with the traditional primacy of form over material, effectively positioning the painter at the birth of Modernism. While Galvez attends to what is called here the ontogenetic nature of these landscapes (that is, their concern with origins and becoming), his analysis does not particularly depend upon it; his engagement with Courbet's relationship to the natural sciences comes further along in his third chapter, "When Landscape Became Language," when he discusses *La Roche Pourrie* in relation to the friendship between the painter and Jules Marcou (which will be further discussed below). Moreover, his formal reading of the *La Grotte de la Loue* has a few key divergences with that currently put forth; for instance, Galvez refers to the grotto itself as "forever vacant" (Galvez, 60), whereas, as will later be explored, it is here treated as a full, fecund space, albeit one that is hidden. Small differences such as this, however, do not preclude the sympathy between the two projects; they are, rather, complementary.

⁹ The subject of Darwinism's influence on the humanities, and the visual arts in particular, has been the subject of much excellent recent scholarship. That the intersection between Darwin's theories and the cultural material that followed after him should be a renewed object of interest is

work was not, however, an anomaly, but rather a product of its time, the culmination of the early years of evolutionary biology and, in France, the exploration of the idea of *transformisme*.

Darwin and his predecessors, notably Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, made clear the human body's implication in the history of the earth: no longer could the body be understood in isolation from its environment; rather, it was embedded in a geological history that tied it irrevocably to the earth itself through a common point of origin. In this light, though Courbet's landscapes do not take the human body itself as their immediate subject (though, in some cases a human figure is present), they constitute a reimagining of corporeality as both an epistemological and ontological category, a reordering of the understanding of the body's place in the world. Courbet's paintings contribute to what Elizabeth Grosz refers to as *a humanities beyond the human*, one that recognizes the inextricability of what we consider to be "human" from that which is nonhuman or animal – life before, after, and beyond the human.¹⁰ The landscapes of the mid-1860s do just that: by investigating the geological origins of the earth, the painter reimagines the body as part

doubtless due in no small part to the attention paid in the last twenty years (if not more) to the inflection of art, science, and philosophy upon one another. See in particular Diane Donald and Jane Munro's *Endless Forms: Charles Darwin, Natural Science and the Visual Arts* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2009), the catalogue for the 2009 exhibition of the same name at the Yale Center for British Art and the Fitzwilliam Museum; Barbara Larson's two collections of essays *The Art of Evolution: Darwin, Darwinisms, and Visual Culture* (Hanover: Dartmouth, 2009) and *Darwin and Theories of Aesthetics and Cultural History* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), the latter coedited with Sabine Flack; and John C. Greene's remarkably prescient *The Death of Adam: Evolution and Its Impact on Western Thought* (Ames: Iowa State UP, 1959). The groundwork laid by these authors and their interlocutors provided invaluable background and a broader scope of understanding of evolutionary thought's effects beyond the sciences for the current paper.

¹⁰ Grosz places Darwin at the heart of her concept of the inhuman in the humanities, asserting that Darwin's legacy makes clear the inevitable collision of scientific accounts of the world with the humanities, and calls for the foundation of a "new humanities." As she writes, "We need a humanities in which the human is no longer the norm, rule, or object, but instead life itself, in its open multiplicity, comes to provide the object of analysis and poses its questions about man's – and woman's – specificity as a species, as a social collective, as a political order or economic structure. [...] A new humanities becomes possible once the human is placed in its properly inhuman context." Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art* (Durham: Duke UP, 2011), 16-21.

of a larger history, one that extends beyond the human species into its nonhuman forbears. Such an exploration was the direct result of the cultural climate of the 1860s, in which evolutionary biology experienced a renewed period of interest; to contemplate the geological and paleontological origins of the natural world, for Courbet and his contemporaries, was to rethink the body's position within that world.¹¹

Courbet at Home: Origins at Ornans

That Franche-Comté held a particularly potent place within Courbet's artistic imagination and personal identity has been much discussed by scholars and critics alike since his lifetime and into the present day.¹² Courbet returned again and again to the countryside of his boyhood to seek inspiration not only in nature, but also in the *franc-comtois* people.¹³ The spirit of Franche-Comté was one of defiant independence, a fierce local pride that was rooted in the land itself. As Klaus Herding as described, the Jura Cliffs became symbols of provincial resistance to the Second Empire monarchy, towering reminders of the region's history of political independence

¹¹ For reasons of brevity, the discussion herein will restrict itself to three canvases from this group of landscapes (fig. 1-3), though there are many others that would have made fine exemplars. A further exploration of other ontogenetic landscapes in the future would also ideally include an analysis of Courbet's many seascapes, which are also, regrettably, excluded here due to length.

¹² An early example of this association comes from the poet Max Buchon, whose first poem in his collection *Poésies franc-comtoises, tableaux domestiques et champêtres* (Salins: Duvernois et Billet, 1862), "La Loue," names Courbet directly. In more recent scholarship, see Klaus Herding, *Courbet: To Venture Independence* (*op. cit.*). The central argument of Herding's fourth chapter, "Equality and Authority in Courbet's Landscape Painting," is that Courbet's landscapes were, in fact, politically charged statements of his republicanism and egalitarianism, which he sees as inextricable from the political history of Franche-Comté itself (Franche-Comté, of course, translating literally to "Free County"). See also the exhibition catalogue *Courbet and the Modern Landscape*, ed. Mary Morton and Charlotte Eyerman (*op. cit.*). Morton's essay ("To Create a Living Art: Rethinking Courbet's Landscape Painting") in particular takes up this question.

¹³ Courbet's large-scale figure compositions, for which he is most well known, often put the *franc-comtois* at the heart of his artistic practice. Prominent examples include *Un Enterrement à Ornans* (1849-50), *Les Paysans de Flagey* (1850), *Les Demoiselles de village* (1851), and *Les Cribleuses de blé* (1855), among others.

from the central French government.¹⁴ As James H. Rubin writes in his chapter on the personal dimensions of Courbet's landscapes, the staggering *Le Chêne de Flagey* (1864, Musée Gustave Courbet), later to bear the full title *Le Chêne de Flagey, appelé Chêne de Vercingétorix, camp de César près d'Alésia, Franche-Comté*, stood as a visual declaration of an inviolable and timeless spirit of freedom from authority, as Courbet conjured the ancient past of the region by paying homage to the defeat of the Gauls by Julius Caesar.¹⁵ The critic and novelist Champfleury, an early defender of Courbet, wrote that the landscapes of Courbet stood metonymically for all of the region, in all of its strength of character: "Les paysages représentent presque tous des environs de Besançon, des montagnes et des roches qui ressemblent à des forteresses, paysages solides à couper au couteau. [...] ils ont la qualité suprême de l'horreur de la composition. Courbet, avant peu d'années, sera un de nos plus grands artistes."¹⁶

In her essay "It Took a Million Years to Compose That Picture," Chu describes the relationship between Courbet's landscapes and his personal ties to the geographic and political history of the department of Doubs, demonstrating the ways in which the painter was deeply invested in the land in ways both economic and emotional. Descended from a line of agricultural laborers, Courbet's family history provided a rich background that cultivated in him a sense of loyalty not only to his hometown of Ornans, but also to the region at large.¹⁷ The grandson of a farmworker, Courbet's childhood was one shaped by the land around him. The painter's father,

¹⁴ Herding, 79.

¹⁵ Rubin, James H. *Courbet*. London: Phaidon, 1997. 238-42.

¹⁶ Champfleury. *Souvenirs et portraits de jeunesse*. 1872. Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1970. 173. Champfleury is here citing his own, earlier sentiments on the painter, thinking back to the Salon of 1849.

¹⁷ Chu, 56-60. Though she does not write specifically about the late landscapes as beacons of origin and ontogenesis, Chu's reading of Courbet's landscape practice and his interest in geology provided incomparable food for thought for the current paper. For this analysis, and for her primary research into Courbet's connections to local figures in the natural sciences in Doubs at the time, the author is deeply indebted.

Régis Courbet, was active throughout his life in myriad kinds of agricultural activity from viticulture to animal husbandry, a man that Chu aptly describes as a “self-styled agronomist.”¹⁸ Courbet’s own interest in hunting and fishing was matched by his sense of allegiance to the peasants and tenant farmers who worked the land, leading to his reputation as a “worker-painter.”¹⁹ Taking after his patrilineal line, Courbet was invested in the landscape of Doubs as both a means of economic gain as well as personal comfort.

So too was there a distinct visual culture native to Courbet’s homeland that played a significant role in his artistic imagination. The influence of popular imagery on Courbet’s work has long been documented and commented upon (starting with Meyer Schapiro’s landmark essay of 1941, “Courbet and Popular Imagery,”²⁰), and one need not look far to find a source in nineteenth-century visual culture for Courbet’s *franc-comtois* landscapes. In 1825, Charles Nodier and Baron Isidore Justin Taylor published the Franche-Comté edition of their popular series of guidebooks, *Voyages pittoresques*. Pairing illustrative plates with somewhat florid, literary description, Nodier and Taylor lent a poetic voice to the various regions of France, readily and cheaply available to the literate public. That Courbet would have been familiar with

¹⁸ Chu, 56.

¹⁹ For more on Courbet’s hunting scenes, see Gilbert Titeux’s “L’inquiétante étrangeté de certaines chasses franc-comtoises” in *Courbet à neuf!*, ed. Mathilde Arnoux, Dominique de Font-Réaulx, et. al. (Paris: Maison des sciences de l’homme, 2010), 259-76. See also Shao-Chien Tseng, “Contested Terrain: Gustave Courbet’s Hunting Scenes,” *Art Bulletin* 90.2 (June 2008): 218-234. For an investigation into the concept of the worker-painter, particularly as pertaining to Courbet’s relationship to Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, see James H. Rubin, *Realism and Social Vision in Courbet and Proudhon* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980), particularly the introductory chapter, “Courbet as a Worker-Painter.”

²⁰ Schapiro, Meyer. “Courbet and Popular Imagery.” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 4 (1941). Looking primarily to Courbet’s figure compositions, Schapiro reveals the extent to which Courbet looked to *images d’épinal* found in seventeenth-century folk art as direct sources for his own work, drawing out the political implications of such artistic associations.

this publication is evident in his own representations of the same landscapes.²¹ This is not to say that Courbet's paintings merely bear a compositional resemblance to the equivalent lithographs of Nodier and Taylor – that would be fairly unremarkable, considering that they were, after all, before the same motif. Rather than a direct correspondence, in fact, Courbet's paintings amalgamate different views from around Franche-Comté as represented in *Voyages pittoresques*. While *La Source de la Loue* (fig. 1) looks unsurprisingly like its Nodier and Taylor equivalent (fig. 4) (though with a few key divergences),²² Courbet's *La Grotte de Sarrazine* (fig. 2) bears a striking resemblance to Plates 112 and 124, *Vue intérieure de la Glacière* (fig. 5) and the generically titled *Grotte sur les bords des bassins du Doubs* (fig. 6) respectively. The double arches of *La Grotte de la Loue* (fig. 3) recall the forms of *Les Grottes d'Osselles* (fig. 7) the outstretched gesture of Courbet's figure echoing those of Nodier and Taylor's group of bourgeois travelers, suggesting that Courbet's engagement with the prints was more than merely imitative. That Courbet was looking at these lithographs further demonstrates his dedication to the popular imagery associated with Franche-Comté. But it is not only Nodier and Taylor's prints that are intriguing; so too do they engage in a rhetoric that specifically emphasizes the ancient roots of the region, referring to Franche-Comté as “la partie de l'ancienne France dans laquelle nous portons maintenant nos recherches,” promising their readers a glimpse into

²¹ Linda Nochlin also identifies the Nodier and Taylor edition as a source for Courbet's landscapes, as well as various keepsake picture postcards that followed after it. See “Courbet and His Territory: How Landscape Means” (*op. cit.*), 191.

²² Notice, for example, how Courbet seems to enlarge the mouth of the cave opening, increasing its height and, in effect, its depth. Furthermore, unlike the Nodier and Taylor lithograph, Courbet's painting gives no suggestion of the availability of light from above; while in the lithograph the source is crowned with a concave arrangement of rocks that allows for sunlight to stream in, Courbet's space is stubbornly seals itself off, underscoring the dark, hidden character of the area.

“l’archéologie pittoresque” in the pages within.²³ That Courbet’s homeland was steeped in ancient history that was to be located in the terrain itself was part of the popular imagination of the mid-nineteenth century, a point of pride for the region in which Courbet would have doubtless shared.

That Courbet returned again and again to the landscapes of Doubs throughout his adult life, both seeking refuge from the pressures of Paris and artistic inspiration, is demonstrative of the poetic nature of his attachment to the land that went beyond his familial ties. Chu ascribes this connection to the many physical encounters with the natural world that Courbet experienced throughout his life, whether through boyhood exploration, or later excursions for fishing and hiking. His membership in the Société d’émulation du Doubs, an organization dedicated to furthering scientific research in the region through geology, zoology, and other natural sciences, suggests that Courbet was aware of a burgeoning effort to trace the prehistoric roots of his home.²⁴ Looking in particular to his documented relationship with Jules Marcou, a leading French geo-paleontologist, Chu has traced out how the scientific theories and concepts put forth in the Société’s annual publication, the *Mémoires de la Société d’émulation du Doubs*,

²³ Nodier, Charles and Baron Isidore Justin Taylor. *Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l’ancienne France: Franche-Comté*. Paris: J. Didot L’Ainé, 1825. 11-13. The discourse of ancient history appears throughout the *Franche-Comté* edition, both in Nodier’s introduction and the descriptions of the individual sites. Their text emphasizes a continuous history of the terrain, tracing its roots from the prehistoric to the ancient Greek and Roman occupations, through the Byzantine, the Renaissance, and the eighteenth century. This monumental history was clearly leveraged as a selling point for tourism in Franche-Comté, manifesting itself in their selection of not only natural points of interest, but also castles, monasteries, and other architectural sites that illustrate the profound history of the area.

²⁴ *Mémoires de la Société libre d’émulation du Doubs*. Second series, vol. 4. 1853. Besançon: Imprimerie d’Outhenin-Chalandre fils, 1854. 129. Although Courbet was only a registered member for one year, many of his friends and colleagues continued their membership, including Urbain Cuenot and Léon Isabey. Furthermore, Max Buchon, Francis Wey, and Jules Marcou all numbered among the members of the equivalent organization for the neighboring department of Jura (see Chu, 57).

influenced Courbet both as a thinker and, in turn, as a painter.²⁵ Such ideas share in common a strain of thought popular to the French scientific community at large: *transformisme*.

Transformisme and the Body Transformed

Observer la nature, étudier ses productions, rechercher les rapports généraux et particuliers qu'elle a imprimés dans leurs caractères, enfin essayer de saisir l'ordre qu'elle fait exister partout, ainsi que sa marche, ses lois et les moyens infiniment variés qu'elle emploie pour donner lieu à cet ordre ; c'est, à mon avis, se mettre dans le cas d'acquérir les seules connaissances positives qui soient à notre disposition, les seules, en outre, qui puissent nous être véritablement utiles.²⁶

The opening lines of the “Discours préliminaire” of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck’s *Philosophie Zoologique* set the tone for the remainder of his magnum opus, focusing, as it does, on the physical attributes of animals in nature and how they are formed in relation to the world around them. Credited with developing the first, fully coherent theory of evolution, Lamarck’s reputation is often overshadowed by the correctives offered by Charles Darwin later in the century. Indeed, many histories of the reception of Darwinism indicate that the overwhelming reaction among both the French scientific community and the public at large was fairly banal. Robert E. Stebbins has described how internal conflicts within the scientific community thirty years prior to the publication of *On the Origin of Species* foreclosed upon the possibility of a real “Darwinian revolution” with the 1862 publication of Clémence Royer’s translation, writing, “To a Frenchman, even in the 1880s, ‘Darwinism’ and ‘evolution’ were still basically foreign terms.

²⁵ Chu looks specifically to a series of sketches in the Louvre sketchbook (RF 29234) of rock formations throughout various sites in the region (including the source of the Lison, the Grotte de Sarrazine, and other sites with which the current paper concerns itself), as well as to *La Roche pourrie* (1864, Salins-les-Bains Town Hall), an oil painting commissioned by Marcou himself and first exhibited under the title *Etude géologique* (see Chu, 58).

²⁶ Lamarck, Jean-Baptiste. *Philosophie zoologique, ou Exposition des considérations relatives à l’histoire naturelle des animaux*, vol. I. 1809. Paris: Librairie F. Savy, 1873. 21.

The preferred French word was *transformisme*.²⁷ The battle over *transformisme* occurred in 1830 when Georges Cuvier, a famed paleontologist, ridiculed the work of Lamarck and Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, a fellow naturalist and defender of Lamarck.²⁸ Their dramatic – and often public – disagreements put *transformisme* front and center as an issue in contemporary scientific thought. “Evolution,” Stebbins writes, “even when accepted, was usually not a Darwinian evolution,” eventually concluding definitively, “There was no ‘Darwinian Revolution’ in France.”²⁹ Pietro Corsi, however, in a recent article, criticizes the historiographical treatment of evolutionary theory both in France and elsewhere. As he writes:

Long before Darwin, people (especially in France, Germany, Italy, etc.) had started to tackle the important issue of the structure and history of life – far more seriously than the current Anglo-American accounts suggest. Hence, we do have a revolution, but whether it was a *Darwinian* Revolution may be questioned. [...] What happened after 1859 had much to do with theoretical concerns and choices elaborated well before the publication of the *Origin of Species*. [...] Lack of consideration of the complex European scientific scene from the late eighteenth century to the mid decades of the nineteenth has produced partial and often biased reconstructions of priorities, worries, implicit and explicit philosophical and at times political agendas characterizing the early debates on species.³⁰

Historians of science have increasingly come to agree with Corsi’s assessment. Peter J. Bowler’s *The Non-Darwinian Revolution*, for example, works to dismantle the myth constructed throughout historiography and reinscribe the emergence of Darwin’s theories in the wider history of scientific and philosophical thought throughout the nineteenth century. One effect of this historical revision is a renewed ability to situate the cultural material produced in the early

²⁷ Stebbins, Robert E. “France.” *The Comparative Reception of Darwinism*. Ed. Thomas F. Glick. Austin: U of Texas P, 1972. 117.

²⁸ For more on the history of biology in France particularly as it pertains to the precursors to Darwinism, see Tony Appel’s *The Cuvier-Geoffroy Debate: French Biology in the Decades Before Darwin* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 161-63. See also John C. Greene, *The Death of Adam: Evolution and Its Impact on Western Thought* (Ames: Iowa State UP, 1959), particularly chapter 5.

³⁰ Corsi, Pietro. “Before Darwin: Transformist Concepts in European Natural History.” *Journal of the History of Biology* 38.1 (March 2005): 1-14. 2.

nineteenth century – that is, after Lamarck, but preceding and concomitant with the emergence of Darwinian theories – within a collective imaginary that includes evolutionary (or, more appropriately, *transformiste*) thought.

Turning to the writings of Courbet, one need not look far to come across several declarations of his personal philosophy of art to find points of resonance between the painter and Lamarck’s methodological declaration from “Discours préliminaire”; from the so-called “Letter to Young Artists”: “L’art en peinture ne saurait consister que dans la représentation des objets visibles et tangibles pour l’artiste.”³¹ Earlier still, from the pamphlet published in concert with his exhibition at the 1855 Pavillon du réalisme: “Savoir pour pouvoir, telle fut ma pensée.”³² The discourse of realism within the realm of the arts both visual and literary emerged with Courbet as a heroic figurehead, described by the writer and critic Fernand Desnoyers in a December 1855 edition of *L’Artiste*, a journal of art and literature:

Le Réalisme est la peinture vraie des objets. Il n’y a pas de peintre *vraie* sans couleur, sans esprit, sans vie ou animation, sans physionomie ou sentiment. [...] Le paysagiste qui ne sait pas remplir d’air son tableau, et qui n’a la force que de rendre exactement la couleur, n’est non-seulement pas un peintre réaliste, mais même un peintre; car *la physionomie, l’esprit, la vie* d’un paysage, c’est l’air.³³

That Courbet’s realism and Lamarck’s *transformisme* share a similar rhetorical turn is hardly incidental; as Chu rightly remarks, the ideas put forth in the studies and theories published in the *Mémoires de la Société d’émulation du Doubs* dominated by “an awareness of landscape as a

³¹ Courbet, Gustave. Letter published in *Le Courrier du dimanche*, December 25, 1861. Reproduced in Joseph Guichard, *Doctrines de M. Gustave Courbet, maître peintre* (Paris: Poulet-Malassis, 1862), 7.

³² Courbet, Gustave. “Le Réalisme.” *Exhibition et vente de 38 tableaux et 4 dessins de l’oeuvre de M. Gustave Courbet, Avenue Montaigne, 7, Champs-Élysées*. Paris: Raçon, 1855.

³³ Desnoyers, Fernand. “Le Réalisme.” December 9, 1855. *L’Artiste : Beaux-arts et belles-lettres*, 5th series, vol. 16. Paris: *L’Artiste*, 1856. 197.

dynamic entity, subject to change from the operation of natural and human forces.”³⁴ Articles from the *Mémoires* in the 1840s and 1850s, the period during which Courbet would have come into contact with the publication, often took up topics of natural history, paleontology, botany, and geology, all with the spirit of *transformisme* as a theoretical backdrop.³⁵ Though perhaps not a scientist himself, Courbet would thus have been exposed to the *transformiste* ideas of his contemporaries. His idea of nature was one that was vital, dynamic, and constantly shifting over millions of years. Time and tide collide in the late landscapes of Courbet; as he wrote in an 1864 letter to Victor Hugo during the writer’s exile in Germany:

In your sympathetic retreat I will contemplate the spectacle of your sea. The viewpoints of our mountains also offer us the limitless spectacle of immensity. The unfillable void has a calming effect. I confess, poet, I love terra firma and the orchestration of the countless herds that inhabit our mountains. The sea! The sea with its charms saddens me. In its joyful moods, it makes me think of a laughing tiger; in its sad moods it recalls the crocodile’s tears, and in its fury, the caged monster that cannot swallow me up.³⁶

Courbet’s concept of nature is one that pulled him bodily into the landscape, an ongoing swelling, a dialogic exchange, at times, nearly a battle. His response to its “immensity” was one in which he sensed the intricate interconnectedness of all living things: the sea and the crocodile, even the tiger, the mountains and the animals that live off of the land. And he, the artist, found himself in the midst of it all, fully immersed as he allowed himself, brush in hand, to realize his *own* inextricability from it.

³⁴ Chu, 58.

³⁵ Chu points to an article from 1856, “Traité des rochers, considérées au point de vue de leur origine, de leur composition, de leur gisement de leurs applications à la géologie et à l’industrie,” by H. Coquand (*Mémoires de la Société d’émulation du Doubs*, third series, vol. I, Besançon: Imprimerie d’Outhenin-Chalandre fils, 1856).

³⁶ Courbet, letter to Victor Hugo, November 28, 1864, 249.

With a renewed understanding of Courbet's concept of nature as one informed by *transformiste* thought, we find ourselves open to a rereading of his late landscapes. Though theories of evolution had been percolating in France throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, negating the myth of a sudden, Darwinian revolution, the publication of Clémence Royer's translation of *On the Origin of Species* in 1862 would certainly not have gone unnoticed among French scientists, particularly those who were interested in establishing a prehistoric lineage in the geological record of France, such as the members of the Société d'émulation du Doubs. Considering that in the years immediately following Royer's publication Courbet was regularly returning home, as well as exchanging letters (and no doubt ideas) with the geopaleontologist Jules Marcou, it is not a far stretch to imagine that he would have been made aware of the new text.³⁷ His turn to sources and points of origin in his landscape practice of the mid- to late-1860s, therefore, participates in a cultural dialogue about the nature and origin of life itself. These origins, and the paintings done by Courbet in examination of them, are dynamic rather than stuck in time gone by; *transformisme* and Darwinian evolution alike make apparent the past's persistence in the present, and make clear the on-going transformation of life and matter by means of what Elizabeth Grosz calls their "temporal and durational entwinements." As she describes the relationship of matter and life in the work of Darwin and later Henri Bergson,

³⁷ Indeed, Royer's preface to the first edition, which made somewhat of a splash in its own right, is brimming with rhetoric that is resonant with the ideas exchanged between Courbet and Proudhon on the idea of progress and the role of art. She opens the 50-page preface, "Oui, je crois à la révélation, mais à une révélation permanente de l'homme à lui-même et par lui-même, à une révélation rationnelle qui n'est que la résultante des progrès de la science et de la conscience contemporaines, à une révélation toujours partielle et relative qui s'effectue par l'acquisition de vérités nouvelles et plus encore par l'élimination d'anciennes erreurs." Clémence Royer, "Préface de la première édition de l'*Origine des espèces* de Charles Darwin," 1862. Reprinted in Geneviève Fraisse, *Clémence Royer, philosophe et femme de sciences* (Paris: La Découverte, 1985), 127.

“Matter and life become, and become undone. They transform and are transformed.”³⁸ Courbet’s landscapes render visible the on-going becoming inaugurated by the points of origins that he represents, beacons of a new ontology that unfolds before us.³⁹

How does the painter take up the theme of ontogenesis? How can a seemingly static object, a fixed representation in space, possibly represent a diachronic and continuous becoming? It is by giving herself over to the visible world, by recognizing her indivisibility from it, that the artist is able to achieve such dynamism. In her interrogation of the visible world, the artist enters into dialogue with it, engaging in a dialectical exchange via a shared flesh-of-the-world, a primordial depth that makes present “a certain indissoluble link between things and [the self].”⁴⁰ Such is the nature of Courbet’s immersion in the landscape, his paintings constituting investigations into the consequences of a *transformiste*-Darwinian understanding of nature, one in which the human body is not over and above the primordial history of the earth, but instead deeply embedded within it. The post-Darwinian body – yet another outcome of a prolonged series of transformations – is one that has lost its myth of spontaneous creation, and that is instead not only the product of change, but also one that is constantly *undergoing* change. As Darwin writes at the close of *On the Origin of Species*, “There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this plane has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning *endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being,*

³⁸ Grosz, 5.

³⁹ “Darwin has, in effect, produced a new ontology, an ontology of the relentless operations of difference, whose implications we are still unraveling.” *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *PP* 298.

evolved.”⁴¹ No longer singular, the human body is eternally incomplete, beholden to its environment, from which it can never be fully extricated.⁴²

This is the body taken up nearly a century later by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his essay “Eye and Mind.” The Merleau-Pontian body is *lived*, which is to say, reckoned via sensation, caught up in the world around it, always open and prone to its environment:

Visible and mobile my body is a thing among things; it is one of them. It is caught in the fabric of the world, and its cohesion is that of a thing. But because it sees and moves itself, it holds things in a circle around itself. Things are an annex or prolongation of my body; they are incrustated in its flesh, they are part of its full definition; *the world is made of the very stuff of the body.*⁴³

The body’s being – rather, its on-going becoming – is one that is contingent upon its indivisibility from the world exterior to it. This is the body of the painter in nature; before his motif, Courbet realizes his inextricability with that which is not-self, dissolving the line between subject and object, see-er and seen, thus gaining access to what Merleau-Ponty refers to as a “visible to the second power,”⁴⁴ a lining of invisibility that draws the world in its heterogeneity together into a unified flesh. Look, for example, to *La Grotte de Sarrazine* (fig. 2): Courbet’s sensuous brushwork makes his body and its movements evident in the painting’s rendering. Standing before the great, cavernous overhang, Courbet immerses himself in the prehistoric scene, attuning himself to the vibration of the air throughout the cave, to the way the rocks seem

⁴¹ Darwin, Charles. *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*. 1859. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2006. Emphasis added.

⁴² Martha Lucy’s excellent dissertation, *The Evolutionary Body: Refiguring the Nude in Post-Darwinian French Art* (Diss., Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 2004) elegantly describes the effects of the Darwinian Revolution on the visual culture of fin-de-siècle French nudes, looking particularly to the work of Edgar Degas, Odilon Redon, Paul Gauguin, and Fernand Cormon. Though her work takes up figure paintings rather than landscapes (and, furthermore, with artists who followed Courbet by a generation), her analysis was a cornerstone in thinking through the current issues at hand.

⁴³ Merleau-Ponty, EM 124-25. Emphasis added.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 126.

to creak and sigh in their resting place. Courbet takes up nature's movements, and in his transfiguration of them into paint, leaves evidence of his own movement in turn: the rough handling at the left recalls brusque gestures laying on thick swaths of three tones of green to suggest the heavy weight of the water-logged moss growing upon the rock. At right, violent, parallel slashes of the palette knife seem carved into the cliff face itself (fig. 8) – a truly responsive, dialogical mode of representation. Merleau-Ponty goes so far as to liken this exchange to one of respiration, writing, “We speak of ‘inspiration,’ and the word should be taken literally. There really is inspiration and expiration of Being, respiration in Being, action and passion so slightly discernable that it becomes impossible to distinguish between who sees and who is seen, who paints and who is painted.”⁴⁵ The body of the painter thus becomes immersed in the landscape, part of the very subject to which he turns his attention. Courbet's *Grotte de Sarrazine* is haunted by the primordial history to which the body of the painter himself is party. That *La Grotte de Sarrazine* has been described as hauntingly anthropomorphic – some critics have likened it to an esophagus – is hardly surprising. In fact, many of Courbet's geological landscapes have been characterized as resembling parts of the human body, from faces to teeth, from mouths to pelvic bones.⁴⁶ The body of the artist, though not plainly visible, is overwhelmingly present.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Michael Fried's eponymous, final chapter in *Courbet's Realism* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992). Speaking specifically to *La Grotte de Sarrazine* (fig. 2), James H. Rubin has noted the cave's resemblance to the shape of an ear, adding yet another dimension of synesthesia to the experience of encountering these late landscapes. See Rubin, “Gustave Courbet and Music,” in *Rival Sisters: Art and Music at the Birth of Modernism, 1815-1915*, ed. James H. Rubin and Olivia Mattis (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 125.

⁴⁷ At this point, it is imperative to distinguish what is being attempted in the current paper from the earlier work of Michael Fried, as much of the same vocabulary is common between them, though it is mobilized in different ways, and to different ends. *Courbet's Realism* (*op. cit.*), Fried's major monograph of 1992, is very much tied up with his earlier work, namely,

Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and the Beholder in the Age of Diderot (Berkeley: U California P, 1980), in which he lays the groundwork for what would become the matrix through which he interprets the paintings of Courbet. As elaborated in these two books, along with various articles, Fried's primary purpose is to trace out what he refers to as the "anti-theatricality" of French painting developed in the late-eighteenth century, and continuing into the nineteenth century with Courbet, whose paintings allow the "beholder" to merge with them due to the unselfconscious nature of their representation (for a full account of these two terms, see the abovementioned sources).

Fried positions Courbet as an inheritor of the "painter-beholder" tradition, describing what he terms Courbet's "project of quasi-corporeal merger," which would seem to go hand-in-hand with the mutual becoming of the painter and the viewer described herein. Key divergences, however, vastly divide the two interpretations. Firstly, Fried's absorption is imagined in almost entirely subject-based terms; it is the reader absorbed in his book, the woman sleeping on the bank that allows for the possibility of absorption. He pays little attention (if at all) to the formal qualities that might invite bodily engagement with a painting; as described above, it is Courbet's sensuous brushwork, his self-evident mark-making, that allows the viewer to realize her entanglement with the painting itself. This is not to say that the subject has no bearing on this mutual entanglement; there can be no denying that the recesses and hidden spaces of the grottoes are particularly enticing for such an interaction, but that Fried does not recognize the extent to which it is facilitated by Courbet's facture is a major lacuna in his interpretation. This leads to yet another point of departure between the two readings; Fried's interpretations identify figures and objects in Courbet's paintings as *allegorical* self-portraits; they are *allegories* of absorption rather than actual sites of encounter between the viewer and the painting. As Paul Galvez points out, the body of the beholder is not, in fact, at the center of such an interaction; despite Fried's use of the term "corporeal merger," his is a body that is, in Galvez's terms, *ideated* (Galvez, 188). Though he invokes the work of Merleau-Ponty, Fried's understanding of embodied viewership is much more akin to Sartrean – which is to say, disembodied – imagination. Fried reads Courbet's figure compositions as self-portraits not because of an inherent indivisibility between subject and object, painter and painted, but because of the symbolic content of the subject.

Moreover, Fried's overreliance on a language of *penetration* is anathema to the current paper's assertion that Courbet's paintings facilitate the realization of such indivisibility between see-er and seen, between subject and object. In his reading of *La Source de la Loue* in "Courbet's 'Femininity: Chiefly Paintings of Women a, for instance, Fried identifies a potential movement-inward of the beholder into the cavernous space, and a reciprocal movement-outward, effected by the stream's directional force. The beholder enters and exits the landscape, though without any indication of truly joining with it, without any experience of transformation. Fried thus reinforces the very dualism that his framework would seek to undo; the beholder is always hermetically sealed up within his – and it is, indeed, a pointedly male subject – body, never open to the material of the canvas itself – it is always the beholder who penetrates, but is never *penetrated* by the painting. Though the verbiage of penetration may be used herein, it is always a *mutual* penetration, an exchange via the very materiality of Courbet's execution. Finally, Fried's model of penetration inevitably reduces the relationship between a given work and the painter-beholder to an erotic exercise. Falling prey to the tired trope of reading the female body into the landscape, Fried seems incapable of going beyond an erotic interpretation of the paintings

Merleau-Ponty's Magical Theory of Painterly Vision

The dialogue between painter and world is one achieved only by virtue of movement, or rather, a constellation of movements that culminate in painterly vision: the movement of the world, the movement of the gaze in the world, and, finally, the movement of the artist *into* the world, her total immersion. Whether moving by total displacement or by vibration in place, the physical world is shot through with energetic mobility. *La Source de la Loue* (fig. 1) depicts such movement in nature: the rush of the river from its loamy source, the rustle of branches and leaves in the wind that sweeps across the face of the cliff, the hidden movements of the local fauna. Even the rocks, seemingly still, buzz as their atoms churn, their surfaces assaulted and battered by the forthcoming water. The earth itself calls to the artist in its vital dynamism. The central position occupied by movement in the painting of Courbet gestures yet again to his investigation of ontogenesis; movement overcomes stasis, leaving evidence of the continuous fluctuation of the world. Any discussion of movement and change in the nineteenth century inevitably calls to mind the philosopher that, in Grosz's words, "extracts a truly philosophical concept of life from

themselves, drawing the fairly banal visual parallel between Courbet's caves and grottoes and female genitalia. That there is a striking and even significant resemblance cannot be denied, but this reduction fatally constricts the field of interpretation to the psychosexual, and a heteronormative sexuality at that. That is, Fried's reading forecloses upon further and more in-depth interpretation, despite his best efforts. Furthermore, it necessarily assumes a male beholder; despite his claim that Courbet's paintings illustrate his sympathy with and even adoption of the "female position," which is to say, the passive, possessed, lacking object of the gaze, he merely reifies and makes systematic a phallogocentric form of spectatorship. That Courbet's canvases, whether portraits or landscapes, are erotic cannot and should not be denied, but what is intriguing is not the superficial identification of the *subject* as erotic, but rather that Courbet's eroticism is symptomatic of the material itself – it is born from the extent to which Courbet's facture insinuates *touch*, which is erotic, but can remain gender neutral. As Brice Marden would come to describe Courbet's eroticism, "Courbet has painted flesh all the time." (Brice Marden, *Correspondances: Brice Marden/Gustave Courbet* [Paris: Argol/Musée d'Orsay, 2006], 32, cited in Galvez, 90).

the scientific endeavors of Darwin”⁴⁸: Henri Bergson. If one were to construct a teleology of French philosophical thought in the long nineteenth century, Bergson would certainly be its culmination, and, as Grosz suggests, his engagement with Darwinian evolution cannot be understated.⁴⁹ “Movement is reality itself,” Bergson tells us; our manner of being is dynamic, variable, and in perpetual motion.⁵⁰ By rendering visible the movement of the world as well as that of his own body, in the throes of the painterly gesture, Courbet enacts the very root of our being: “There is no feeling, no idea, no volition which is not undergoing change every moment,” Bergson writes in the opening pages of *Creative Evolution*; “The truth is that we change without ceasing, and that the state itself is nothing but change.”⁵¹ Our bodily evolution is a creative, productive one, and the creation of art is a perpetuation of that change.⁵²

⁴⁸ Grosz, 26.

⁴⁹ Looking back to the question of historical revision and the significance of pre-Darwinian theories of evolution in France, Serena Keshavjee refers to Bergson as “the best-known Neo-Lamarckian philosopher.” Serena Keshavjee, “Natural History, Cultural History, and the Art History of Elie Faure,” *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 8.2 (Autumn 2009), 3.

⁵⁰ Bergson, Henri. “The Perception of Change.” 1911. *Henri Bergson: Key Writings*. Ed. John Mullarkey and Keith Ansell Pearson. London: Bloomsbury, 2002. 301.

⁵¹ Bergson, Henri. *Creative Evolution*. 1907. Trans. Arthur Mitchell. New York: Random House, 1944. 3-4. Bergson’s understanding of change is inextricable with the idea for which he is most known, namely, that of duration, an extended, heterogeneous, lived time that depends upon change as its medium. As he writes in *Time and Free Will*, “Pure duration might well be nothing but a succession of qualitative changes, which melt into and permeate one another, without precise outlines, without any tendency to externalize themselves in relation to one another, without any affiliation with number: it would be pure heterogeneity.” (*Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. 1889. Trans. F.L. Pogson. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1910. 104). Though in the realm of art history he is mostly often brought into dialogue with the work of Paul Cézanne, a Bergsonian reading of Courbet’s paintings, particularly his landscapes that are so characterized by the heterogeneity of time and temporality, would surely be a fruitful endeavor, though one that is regrettably beyond the scope of the current paper.

⁵² “What is true of the production of a new species is also true of the production of a new individual, and, more generally, of any movement of any living form. [...] In this sense it might be said of life, as of consciousness, that at every moment it is creating something.” Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 33-34. Bergson refers here to the essay *La Génie dans l’art* by Gabriel Séailles (Paris: Ancienne librairie Germer Baillière et Cie., 1897), in which he posits that art is a

That, for Merleau-Ponty, movement is the means by which we realize and effect our indivisibility with the world is symptomatic of the extent to which his thought was informed by Bergsonian ontology. Bergson thus acts as the hinge between Darwin and Merleau-Ponty, a shared interest in ontology (and, for the latter, the ontological capacity of painting) joining them in a complex web with Courbet at the center. Turning back to the artist's dialogue with the world, it is the landscape itself that beckons to Courbet, inciting his movement into it. Merleau-Ponty alludes to such a beckoning in "Eye and Mind" in vague reference to Paul Cézanne's painterly excursions to Mont Sainte-Victoire, writing, "It is the mountain itself which from out there makes itself seen by the painter; it is the mountain that he interrogates with his gaze. What exactly does he ask of it? To unveil the means, visible and not otherwise, by which it makes itself mountain before our eyes."⁵³ Simultaneous with the movement of the earth itself, Courbet's gaze moves into the world, eagerly exploring the means of its visibility. The first hints of the see-er's commingling with the seen are to be found here, in the eye of the former, particularly as formulated in Merleau-Ponty's discussion of color in *Phenomenology of Perception*: "According as I fix my eyes on an object or allow them to wander [...] I feel [a color] in my eye as a *vibration of my gaze*; or finally it may *pass on to my body a similar manner of being, fully pervading me*, so that it is no longer entitled to be called a color."⁵⁴ The vibration of the see-er's gaze begins to join in harmony with the vibration of the seen, coming together in such a way that they become indivisible in their mutual interweaving. The artist "goes out through the eyes to wander among objects,"⁵⁵ discovering their secret ciphers of visibility.

continuation of nature, an extension of life's creative, productive capacities (see *Creative Evolution*, 34n1).

⁵³ Merleau-Ponty, EM 128.

⁵⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *PP* 264. Emphasis mine.

⁵⁵ Merleau-Ponty, EM 128.

Merleau-Ponty's "magical theory of vision" culminates in the artist's total, bodily immersion into the world, a mutual subtension, an *ek-stase*: the "active transcendence between the subject and the world."⁵⁶ The crossing over of the painter into the world, and their resulting shared movement, is then rendered into paint on canvas. Looking once again to *La Source de la Loue* (fig. 1), such movement-in-unison is strikingly evident. Courbet's magnificently rendered stream sparkles with movement – one cannot help but favor the French *étinceller* here for its onomatopoeic value – his hatched brushstrokes combatting each other as the water breaks over the rocks. The rivulets coming up over the larger rocks in the right foreground are particularly dynamic, making the viewer catch her breath as it seems the paint might flow right off the canvas and soak her shoes. But what is it, exactly, that this co-movement accesses? What are its means, its materials? What has been here called Merleau-Ponty's "shared flesh-of-the-world" appears in many forms and configurations throughout his considerable body of work: It is a "texture of Being" which envelops the painter, allowing her access to that which is "beyond the visual givens."⁵⁷ It is a "semantic thickness," a "signifying soil" that undergirds the language of painting.⁵⁸ A "lining of invisibility," a "primary layer" of sense experience, a thickness: the flesh-of-the-world is that which envelops all things and creatures in the world, inexorably immersing us in a phantasmic depth, haunted by things unseen, unheard, unknown, and yet imminently accessible to us. Merleau-Ponty's flesh-of-the-world is an inexhaustible reserve of

⁵⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *PP* 499.

⁵⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *EM* 127. He later adds to this description, describing it as an incendiary, "immemorial depth of the visible," in which "something has moved, caught fire, which engulfs [the painter's] body; everything he paints is in answer to this incitement." (147.)

⁵⁸ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence," 1951. *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, *ibid.* 112. All references to this text will be abbreviated "ILVS."

enigma, and yet none of its contents are beyond our body's reach.⁵⁹ We are not to look up to the heavens for some unknowable, divine unity; rather, we are to look below, to trans-descend; this is the gift of Darwinian evolution, which allows us to understand the human body within its earthly context, in all of its fullness. Merleau-Ponty makes this point most elegantly in "Interrogation and Intuition," writing, "No longer are there essences above us, like positive objects, offered to a spiritual eye; but there is an essence beneath us, a common nervure of the signifying and the signified, adherence in and reversibility of one another - as the visible things are the secret folds of our flesh, and yet our body is one of the visible things."⁶⁰

Delving into the nature of the flesh-of-the-world, what emerges is its *primordial* character – it is a "brute being, which is as it were the umbilical cord of our knowledge and the source of meaning for us."⁶¹ The enigma of the world's unfolding lives in this depth, and so the painter must put herself "back in contact" with it. Such an extension of the painterly body, however, does not simply amount to the artist's personal experience in the act of painting; rather, her venturing into the shared flesh-of-the-world reverberates into the work of art itself. An act of

⁵⁹ This departure from positivism is at the heart of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, and will be further discussed in the following section.

⁶⁰ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "Interrogation and Intuition." *The Visible and the Invisible*, Ed. Claude Lefort. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1968. 117-18. In considering Merleau-Ponty's flesh-of-the-world in the context of the history of science, one is reminded of Antoine Lavoisier's concept of the conservation of matter, in which nothing is ever destroyed nor created, but simply transformed, resulting in a shared, material origin. Lavoisier's discoveries are clearly important precursors to the theories of Lamarck and Darwin, and are thus yet another point of intersection between science and philosophy. That Merleau-Ponty's understanding of painting as an act of "transubstantiation," in which the artist lends his body to the world that she "changes the world into paintings" ("Eye and Mind," 123-24) may also be related to Lavoisier's conservation and transformation of matter is, again, an intriguing point of intersection, but one that is unfortunately beyond the scope of the current paper.

⁶¹ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "Preobjective Being – The Solipsist World." *The Visible and the Invisible*, *ibid.* 157.

ontogenesis all its own, the work “transforms *itself* and *becomes* what follows.”⁶² Painting becomes an autofigurative act in Merleau-Ponty’s reckoning, as the artist, in giving herself over to the world, draws upon the pre-existing, rich reserves of the “essence below us.” Courbet’s facture in the 1864 landscapes gives evidence to this ecstatic becoming: the loose, layered swaths of color in the upper-right-hand corner of *La Grotte de Sarrazine* (fig. 9) suggest a loss of control on the part of the artist. Frenzied and frenetic, his hand dances across the canvas, applying pressure in such a way that the daubs of paint seem barely anchored to the surface. The dramatic contrast between heavy and light application of paint creates a sense that the swaths of cream and beige would float right off the surface had they not been anchored by a few, well-placed points of thicker paint. In giving himself over to the act of painting in the face of this ancient rock formation, Courbet transcends his bodily limits, his paint constituting a second flesh – a further extension of the shared flesh-of-the-world – as it takes shape beneath his hand. Every painting, in this light, is an inauguration, a birth of flesh into the world by the artist, stirred by the world’s fecundity – an ontogenesis.

The Invisible Made Visible: Speaking in Silence

How can a painting’s mobile becoming-in-the-world be accessible to the viewer? How does the viewer enter the painting *bodily*, and not simply through the eye – in other words, how does the viewer go out through the eye to wander about the painting?⁶³ In confronting the third painting of the series here addressed, *La Grotte de la Loue* (fig. 3), it becomes clear that the Merleau-Pontian model of spectatorship (though, the word “spectator” seems to imply a sort of

⁶² *Ibid.*, 139.

⁶³ “The [artist’s] mind goes out through the eyes to wander among objects; for he never ceases adjusting his clairvoyance to them.” (Merleau-Ponty, EM 128.)

distance that is inappropriate) is wholly corporeal, and entirely synesthetic. It bears returning to the above-cited passage on color from *Phenomenology of Perception*, now in its entirety:

According as I fix my eyes on an object or allow them to wander [...] I feel [a color] in my eye as a vibration of my gaze; or finally it may pass on to my body a similar manner of being, fully pervading me, so that it is no longer entitled to be called a color. Similarly there is an objective sound which reverberates outside me in the instrument, an atmospheric sound which is *between* the object and my body, a sound which vibrates in me [...] permeating my whole body. [...] Synesthetic perception is the rule, and we are unaware of it only because scientific knowledge shifts the centre of gravity of experience, so that we have unlearned how to see, hear, and generally speaking, feel.⁶⁴

Courbet's painting amounts to an assault upon the senses – all of the senses, not simply vision. In fact, as Merleau-Ponty demonstrates above, the division of perception into five, distinct senses is an entirely superficial and learned behavior. By submerging ourselves in the shared flesh-of-the-world in our encounter with paintings such as those of Courbet, we may learn how to un-learn this division, and instead experience our confrontation with them with our fully sensate body, wholly intact. *La Grotte de la Loue* lends itself not only to an experience of vision, but of perception entire: our skin prickles with the cool air that the earth exhales through its ancient orifices, the distinct smell of the cave recalling to us an ancient origin of which we were previously unaware. We hear the sound of the water breaking over the rocks at right, to be sure, but what truly haunts us is its echo throughout the cave. The crash of the waves rebounds about the cavernous walls, but in its reverberation, it reaches our ears no longer alone – it carries with it the sounds of the earth's fissure, the hum of millions of years of air, water, and life teeming through this natal space. Most hauntingly of all, we hear ourselves resonated, the echo of our own quivering breath merging with the sounds of the scene, a sign of our bodily intertwining with the canvas.

⁶⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *PP* 264-66.

How does the body hear an echo? Rather, how does an echo enter the body? Upon approaching the rocky overhangs and jagged cliffs at the source of the Loue, the waters relatively quiet from a low summer tide, what would Courbet have heard?⁶⁵ The Jurassic caverns would surely have been filled with the sounds of the earth, as if it were exhaling through this ancient crevice. But in attuning himself to the aural phenomena, so too would Courbet have heard the sound of his own being rebounding back upon him. And here also is the experience of the viewer upon our encounter with Courbet's rendering of the scene: our breath, his breath, joins with that of the earth itself. The echo that enters our body is not simply the sounds of the natural world around us – the gurgling of the stream, the chirping of the birds, the hidden drips of water in the cave – but those sounds commingled with our own. As Theodor Adorno would come to write, echo reconciles;⁶⁶ echo blends together our being with that of the world, as it returns to us as inextricably commingled. Merleau-Ponty takes up the echo not simply as an aural experience, but as an emblem for our perceptual immersion in the world: "I am able to touch effectively only if the phenomenon finds an echo within me."⁶⁷ The echo's rejoining with our bodies is the sign of the world's "internal equivalent" within us, a "carnal formula of [its] presence."⁶⁸ Courbet hears his breath caught up in the breath of the earth emanating from the source of the Loue; so

⁶⁵ Courbet's letters indicate that he completed at least two of the Loue canvases in either July or August of 1864 (see, for example, Courbet, letter to Jules Luquet, July or August [?] 1864, 243). While summer months are typically the period of high river flow, due to the melting of snow, the source of the Loue River is a karstic spring, meaning that it has a complex subterranean drainage system. According to data collected by the Ministère de l'écologie, du développement durable et de l'énergie, July and August are historically the months with the lowest average flow. See "SYNTHESE : données hydrologiques de synthèse (1957 – 2013), La Loue [totale] à Parcey (Station U2654010)," *Banque Hydro*. Accessed January 20, 2016. <http://www.hydro.eaufrance.fr/selection.php>.

⁶⁶ Adorno, Theodor. *Aesthetic Theory*. 1970. Ed. and trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997. 124.

⁶⁷ Merleau-Ponty, PP 369.

⁶⁸ Merleau-Ponty, EM 126.

too does the viewer, in her interpolation into painting, hear the evidence of her presence resound amongst the rocks. It should here be reiterated that this phenomenon is not limited to an aural experience – it is entirely bodily: “Quality, light, color, depth, which are there before us, are there only because they awaken an echo *in our bodies* and because the body welcomes them.”⁶⁹

The shared flesh-of-the-world is haunted by the invisible, the silent. Painting grants us access to this silence, as “the painter reaches us across the silent world of lines and colors,”⁷⁰ and painting *speaks in silence*.⁷¹ This silence, however, is not a void, an absence of sound or language. In Merleau-Pontian terms, the “lining of invisibility” that makes up the flesh-of-the-world is haunted by phantoms of the visible – ever-present in their fecundity, and just on the other side of our reach. The voices of silence – the echoes – are present to us only if we attune ourselves to them via our body’s commingling with the world: “Everything comes to pass as though *my power to reach the world and my power to entrench myself in phantasms* only came one with the other.”⁷² The ontogenesis inaugurated by *La Grotte de la Loue* (as well as its serial sisters) takes up our bodies in their synesthetic forms, immersing us in the invisible and the unheard, the hidden phantasms of the world. At first glance, this might seem to be anathema to Courbet’s stalwart realism, his dedication to painting the world that is visible and tangible to the painter.⁷³ Yet, as James H. Rubin has pointed out, Courbet’s realism is less akin to strict

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁷⁰ Merleau-Ponty, ILVS 82.

⁷¹ “The voices of painting are the voices of silence.” (*ibid.*, 117.)

⁷² Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. “Reflection and Interrogation.” *The Visible and the Invisible*, *ibid.* 8. Emphasis mine.

⁷³ In fact, Mary Morton draws a direct correlation between the landscapes and the French positivist movement, writing, “Courbet’s landscapes and the critical response to them correspond to the philosophical movement of positivism, which peaked in the 1860s. Defined against philosophical spiritualism and idealism, positivism asserted that knowledge was based on the data of empirical experience, to the exclusion of a priori or metaphysical speculation.” Morton, “To Create a Living Art,” (*op. cit.*) 12.

positivism than it is to what he refers to as positive metaphysics, an idealist movement that emerged as a reaction to Auguste Comte's positive philosophy. Indeed, as Rubin points out, Courbet's close friend and interlocutor Pierre-Joseph Proudhon compared the painter's work to the philosophy of Etienne Vacherot, whose most important work, *La Métaphysique et la science* (1858) attempted to reconcile science and metaphysics.⁷⁴

The idealist movement attempted to compensate for what they saw as a dangerously limited account of the world; as Alfred Fouillée wrote in the 1896 introduction to his *Le Mouvement idéaliste et la réaction contre la science positive*, “les sciences positives laissent subsister un fonds d'indétermination radicale échappant à la connaissance.”⁷⁵ It comes as little surprise that the primary thinkers of the idealist movement – Victor Cousin, Félix Ravaisson, and Jules Lachelier – are credited with establishing a school of proto-phenomenology.⁷⁶ Bergson, of course, followed soon after, paving the way for Merleau-Ponty and, even later in the historical lineage of phenomenology, Gilles Deleuze.⁷⁷ Finally, for further confirmation of the resonance between Merleau-Ponty and the thinkers of Courbet's time, one need look no further than the former's own work. In the scholastic year of 1947-48, Merleau-Ponty gave a series of lectures at the Ecole Normale Supérieure that were later collected and published under the title *L'Union de l'âme et du corps chez Malebranche, Biran et Bergson*, in which he fleshes out the ontologies of

⁷⁴ Rubin, James H. “Courbet's Materialism and Positive Metaphysics.” *Gustave Courbet*, exh. cat. Basel: Fondation Beyler, 2014. 60.

⁷⁵ Fouillée, Alfred. *Le Mouvement idéaliste et la réaction contre la science positive*. Paris: Ancienne librairie Germer Baillièrre et Cie., 1896. xxiii.

⁷⁶ Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer has written briefly on this historical turn in relation to both Paul Cézanne and Claude Monet. See chapter four of her *Cézanne and Provence: The Painter in His Culture* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003) and “Le Grand Tout: Monet on Belle-Ile and the Impulse toward Unity,” *Art Bulletin* 97.3 (September 2015): 323-341.

⁷⁷ Grosz explores at length the direct lineage between Darwin, Bergson (as previously discussed), and Deleuze. See, in particular, chapter three of *Becoming Undone*, “Bergson, Deleuze, and Difference.”

François-Pierre-Gonthier Maine de Biran and Bergson, who much admired his forebear.⁷⁸ The roots of Merleau-Pontian phenomenology, therefore, can be located a century prior, contemporaneous with Courbet and those who the thinkers with whom the painter shared a cultural imagination.⁷⁹

The objection of the mid-nineteenth-century idealists to the positive science of Comte was that it could not account for the hidden forces that, while retrievable for the human body, lurk just below our profane field of visibility.⁸⁰ This hiddenness is a native characteristic of Being,⁸¹ but its contents are not lost to us, irretrievable; in realizing our place within the shared flesh-of-the-world, we find the secret ciphers of the world and their accessibility to us. Painting acts, for Merleau-Ponty, as a point of entry into this phantasmic lining: “Between the alleged colors and visibles, we would find anew the tissue that lines them, sustains them, nourishes them, and which for its part is not a thing, but a possibility, a latency, and a *flesh* of things.”⁸² We slip through the gaps and the fissures of the painting in order to realize our embeddedness within it. The nature of our viewership, our immersion, is of this order of the invisible, of the silent: “The perceiving subject, as a tacit, silent Being-at (*Etre-à*).”⁸³ Courbet’s paintings possess a “mute

⁷⁸ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *L’Union de l’âme et du corps chez Malebranche, Biran et Bergson*. Ed. Jean Deprun. Paris: J. Vrin, 1968. Both Bergson and Merleau-Ponty were influenced in large part by Maine de Biran’s concept of the lived body, as were Cousin and his contemporaries.

⁷⁹ For a thorough history of the idealist movement as both a reaction to Comtean positivism as well as a precursor to Merleau-Pontian phenomenology, see Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy, Vol. IX: Maine de Biran to Sartre* (New York: Newman Press, 1975). See also Bernard Baertschi, *L’Ontologie de Maine de Biran* (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1982).

⁸⁰ This departs from the Cartesian model of mind-body dualism, to which Merleau-Ponty strongly objects throughout his writing, most notably in “Eye and Mind.”

⁸¹ “If Being is hidden, this is itself a characteristic of Being.” (“Interrogation and Intuition,” 122.)

⁸² Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. “The Intertwining – The Chiasm.” *The Visible and the Invisible, ibid.* 132-33.

⁸³ Merleau-Ponty, “Working Notes,” 201.

radiance”⁸⁴ to which we attend in our interpolation into them, attuning ourselves to their internal – but shared – vibrations. The sources in the 1864 paintings represent not holes, but *hollows* – fecund abysses that echo back to us rather than swallowing our presence into irretrievability. They too share in the flesh-of-the-world, haunted as they are by primordial phantoms.

Of course, there is a *visible* body co-present with ours in Courbet’s *La Grotte de la Loue* (fig. 10). Courbet places a slight, anonymous figure at the center foreground; reaching into the darkness of the cavern, he signals the scene’s threat to dwarf us. Its primordially, its longevity, its prehistoricity nearly overwhelms us along with the figure. The full weight of the past is upon him. Upon closer examination, however, the figure is indivisible from the atmosphere that surrounds him – rather than allowing himself to be dominated by the landscape, he *joins with it*. Here, Courbet’s figure recalls the words of Darwin himself:

The whole history of the world, at present known, although of a length quite incomprehensible by us, will hereafter be recognised as a mere fragment of time, compared with the ages which have elapsed since the first creature, the progenitor of innumerable extinct and living descendants, was created. In the distant future I see open fields for far more important researches. [...] Light will be thrown on the origin of man and his history.⁸⁵

His right hand, extended, bleeds into the darkness; his left foot, counterbalancing his upper body’s extension, equally dissipates into the obscurity of the landscape. At its outermost limits, its furthest extensions, his body exceeds itself, at once giving itself over to the world and allowing itself to be penetrated by the world in return. Even the figure’s head is fairly indecipherable from the earthen tones of Courbet’s source; the body, as Merleau-Ponty says, is “always involved in matters which go beyond it.”⁸⁶ His dehiscence, however, does not constitute an incompleteness; rather, the figure’s commingling with the world allows him to realize his own

⁸⁴ Merleau-Ponty, ILVS 115.

⁸⁵ Darwin, 306.

⁸⁶ Merleau-Ponty, “Interrogation and Intuition,” 120.

fullness: “By encroachment I *complete* my visible body, I prolong my being-seen beyond my being-visible for myself.”⁸⁷ Giving oneself over to the shared flesh-of-the-world, allowing oneself to be penetrated by the not-self, results in a plenum previously untapped. Merleau-Ponty comes to describe this intertwining, this mutual encroachment, as a chiasm: “Like the natural man, we situate ourselves in ourselves *and* in the things, in ourselves *and* in the other, at the point where, by a sort of *chiasm*, we become the others and we become world.”⁸⁸

Like Courbet’s figure, we as viewers become embedded within the world of Franche-Comté; as the painting unfolds before us, our own becoming is prolonged within it – this is the nature of our unity with the painting: “The body unites us directly with the things through its own ontogenesis [...] It is the body and it alone [...] that can bring us to the things themselves, which are themselves not flat beings but beings in depth.”⁸⁹ Flesh is the element of this shared becoming, common between the viewer and the painting, an “inexhaustible depth” that “makes it able to be open to visions other than our own.”⁹⁰ It is our very flesh that allows for our transcendence into the painting, and into the world at large. This horizontal-transcendence-by-flesh is reckoned entirely through movement in time; timely – or, more appropriately, *timeful* – and mobile, our movement constitutes our own ontogenesis, our constant unfolding in the world and our openness to it.⁹¹ For Merleau-Ponty, it is the ontogenetic power of our movement that ties us to painting:

Through the action of culture, I take up my dwelling in lives which are not mine. [...] I make them co-possible in an order of truth, I make myself responsible for all of them, and

⁸⁷ Merleau-Ponty, “Working Notes,” 202. Emphasis mine.

⁸⁸ Merleau-Ponty, “Preobjective Being,” 160.

⁸⁹ Merleau-Ponty, “The Intertwining – The Chiasm,” 136.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁹¹ “I am not in space and time, nor do I conceive space and time; I belong to them, my body combines with them and includes them. [...] It is the body which ‘catches’ and ‘comprehends’ movement.” Merleau-Ponty, *PP* 162-65.

I create a universal life, just as by the thick and living presence of my body, in one fell swoop I take up my dwelling in space. [...] [The work of art] dwells and makes us dwell in a world we do not have the key to, the work of art teaches us to see [...] the work of art works and will always work upon us.⁹²

Born from movement in time, painting is *of* movement and time. Never crystallized in a fixed space, painting takes up movement by vibration, a radiant pulsation which creates a rhythm all its own, generating gaps and fissures, inviting our bodies to participate in that rhythm: “Aesthetic perception too opens up a new spatiality [...] the picture as a work of art is not in the space which it inhabits as a physical thing and as a colored canvas.”⁹³ Courbet’s landscapes are open to us, interpolating our bodies, allowing us to enter these new spaces which are shot through with movement; the stream of water in *La Source de la Loue* (fig. 1) seems to surpass the limits of the canvas; the enigmatic cavern in *La Grotte de Sarrazine* (fig. 2) seems to beckon to us, inciting what is nearly a sense of vertigo as we approach the canvas. For Merleau-Ponty, our bodies are so readily embedded in painting precisely because of this shared movement – our radiance is not unlike the vibration-in-place of the work of art. Indeed, it is only by virtue of our movement, which creates gaps, breaks, and fissures in the world – “that gap which we ourselves are”⁹⁴ – that we – just as Courbet’s figure in *La Grotte de la Loue* (fig. 3) – are able to unfold into it, to exceed the very limits of our bodies.

Courbet’s *La Source de la Loue* buzzes and hums with movement. The air, the water, the creaking wooden structure, the slow settling of the cliffs into the earth all vibrate at such a frequency that seems to emanate from a primordial ground. It is the sound of the earth, exhaling through the limestone fissures, and, subsequently, through Courbet’s brushwork. At times nearing total abstraction, Courbet lays bare the lining of invisibility that is constantly present

⁹² Merleau-Ponty, “Interrogation and Intuition,” 112-15.

⁹³ Merleau-Ponty, *PP* 335n73.

⁹⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *PP* 241.

within the visible. It is through its breaks, its chiasmic contradictions – its simultaneous *hereness* and *thereness*, *nowness* and *thenness* – that we are able to enter into it. Such is the nature of the chiasm: it is “an exchange between me and the world, between the phenomenal body and the ‘objective’ body, between the perceiving and the perceived.”⁹⁵ The painting – like the world at large – beckons to us, and our movement into it is a dialogic response. But it is a *silent* dialogue, an “inarticulate cry.”⁹⁶ This cry is one set forth by Courbet himself, as he draws on the essential, primordial ground that unifies the world in shared flesh. Through these landscapes, he participates in a cultural dialogue concerning the nature of the body, a body whose place in the larger history of the world was gradually coming into focus. The work of Lamarck, Darwin, and their confreres irreparably disrupted the understanding of the human body in relation to its surroundings; anticipating the fascination with the ontological power of art found in the writings of Merleau-Ponty, Courbet’s paintings take up the origins of the earth – now known to be inseparable from the origins of humankind – and render visible their on-going unfolding in time and space.

Here and there, now and then, self and not-self, see-er and seen, subject and object, painter and painted: Courbet’s geological landscapes, in their interpolation of his body and our own, “scramble all our categories.”⁹⁷ The representation of the coexistence and intertwining of that which seems impossible: this is the task of the painter, and the effect of her art. As Merleau-Ponty writes in his “Working Notes,” an emblem of a text never to be written, “The aesthetic world to be described as a space of transcendence, a space of impossibilities, of

⁹⁵ Merleau-Ponty, “Working Notes,” 215.

⁹⁶ Merleau-Ponty, EM 142.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 130.

explosion, of dehiscence, and not as objective-immanent space.”⁹⁸ Paintings such as Courbet’s geological landscapes reify Merleau-Ponty’s ontogenetic understanding of the power of art. These canvases came about by a sequence of births and rebirths: the source is the natal space of the stream, a fecund fissure through which the water perpetually emanates; in giving his body over to the Jura Mountains, to its rivers, its trees, its ancient air, Courbet experiences his own Merleau-Pontian birth into the world, and comes to inaugurate the life of his paintings; and finally, their setting forth, their perpetual unfolding, even 150 years after completion, allows for our rebirth into world, in all of its hidden plenitude, through our immersion in the scene – an endless becoming.

Coda

A windy Monday afternoon in January, it is unusually quiet in Salle 20 of the Musée d’Orsay (fig. 11). A translucent red chair is stunningly out of place amongst the earthen browns, hunter greens, and storm-gray blues that populate the canvases that hang on the warm eggplant walls. And yet the glaring crimson plastic, sticking out like a sore thumb, somehow perfectly matches the mood of the gallery. Despite its stature, a painting of a fairly modest size screams from the north wall, creams and whites colliding with a shock of brown, Courbet’s command of light and the sensuous surface in full effect. *L’Origine du monde* (fig. 12), relentlessly demanding of the museumgoers’ attention as it might be, is perfectly situated among the other canvases. At its immediate right, a trout gapes openmouthed, tossed upon the rocks. Further along, *Le Ruisseau Noir* (fig. 13) sparkles tantalizingly, a seemingly peaceful glimpse of the shaded banks of the stream. And yet, prolonged looking at the *Ruisseau Noir* reveals that there is more than immediately meets the eye. Dark pockets rendered in the rock faces are stubbornly

⁹⁸ Merleau-Ponty, “Working Notes,” 216.

unyielding to an investigatory gaze, as if the earth itself were determined to keep its own secrets. Directly across from the landscape is a stunning nude in a similar setting, reclining on the rocks, letting a stream of water trickle through the fingers of her outstretched hand (fig. 14). The nude's title – *La Source* – may not, in any other gallery, cause an eyebrow or the corner of a mouth to go up, as a small cascade fills the pool in which the figure bathes. And yet, juxtaposed with *L'Origine du monde*, one is left to wonder: does the title refer only to the small stream of water? Or is there, perhaps, a double meaning at play?

That Courbet executed these three paintings – *L'Origine du monde*, *Le Ruisseau Noir*, and *La Source* – in the few years following his prolonged investigation into the natural points of origin in the Jura cliffs might suggest that he had not fully resolved the question of origin and ontogenesis by the last decade of his life. That his *Origine* has always felt incomplete – a riddle unsolved, a codex un-cracked – due to its mysterious provenance, its *own* origins, as well as to the literal incompleteness of the subject's body, is thus perfectly fitting. Courbet's masterpiece of origination, his homage to the intricate, inextricable relationship between the human body and the primordial origins of the world, will never be resolved; it is caught in a state of on-going becoming, inaugurated by his sensuous brushwork, his painterly gestures visible on the surface of the canvas. *L'Origine du monde* and *Le Ruisseau Noir*, upon further interrogation, appear to have the same composition: an open, apparently inviting scene, flanked by enticing framing elements that seem to protect a hidden space at the center. A space of enigmatic origins, the secret, earthly “cradle of things”⁹⁹ beckons to the viewer, inviting her to realize her own participation, her own inextricability with the painting, the painter, and the world itself.

⁹⁹ “The painter recaptures and converts into visible objects that would, without him, remain walled up in the separate life of each consciousness: the vibration of appearances which is the

Bibliography

- Adorno, Theodor. *Aesthetic Theory*. 1970. Ed. and trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997.
- Appel, Tony. *The Cuvier-Geoffroy Debate: French Biology in the Decades Before Darwin*. New York: Oxford UP, 1987.
- Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, Nina. *Cézanne and Provence: The Painter in His Culture*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003.
- “*Le Grand Tout: Monet on Belle-Ile and the Impulse toward Unity.*” *Art Bulletin* 97.3 (September 2015): 323-341.
- Baertschi, Bernard. *L’Ontologie de Maine de Biran*. Fribourg: Editions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1982.
- Bedell, Rebecca. *The Anatomy of Nature: Geology and American Landscape Painting, 1825-1875*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001.
- Bergson, Henri. *Creative Evolution*. 1907. Trans. Arthur Mitchell. New York: Random House, 1944.
- “The Perception of Change.” 1911. *Henri Bergson: Key Writings*. Ed. John Mullarkey and Keith Ansell Pearson. London: Bloomsbury, 2002.
- *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. 1889. Trans. F.L. Pogson. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1910.
- Bowler, Peter J. *Evolution: The History of an Idea*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2003.
- The Non-Darwinian Revolution: Reinterpreting a Historical Myth*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1992.
- Buchon, Max. *Poésies franc-comtoises, tableaux domestiques et champêtres*. Salins: Duvernois et Billet, 1862.
- Champfleury. *Souvenirs et portraits de jeunesse*. 1872. Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1970.
- Copleston, Frederick. *A History of Philosophy, Vol. IX: Maine de Biran to Sartre*. New York: Newman Press, 1975.
- Corsi, Pietro. “Before Darwin: Transformist Concepts in European Natural History.” *Journal of the History of Biology* 38.1 (March 2005): 1-14.
- Courbet, Gustave. *Letters of Gustave Courbet*. Ed. and trans. Petra ten-Doesschate Chu. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992.
-
- cradle of things.” Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. “Cézanne’s Doubt.” *Sense and Non-Sense*. Ed. and trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1964. 18.

- “Le Réalisme.” *Exhibition et vente de 38 tableaux et 4 dessins de l’oeuvre de M. Gustave Courbet, Avenue Montaigne, 7, Champs-Élysées*. Paris: Raçon, 1855.
- Chu, Petra ten-Doesschate. “It Took Millions of Years to Compose That Picture.” *Courbet Reconsidered*, exh. cat. Ed. Sarah Faunce and Linda Nochlin. New Haven: Yale UP, 1988.
- Darwin, Charles. *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*. 1859. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2006.
- Desnoyers, Fernand. “Le Réalisme.” December 9, 1855. *L’Artiste : Beaux-arts et belles-lettres*, 5th series, vol. 16. Paris: *L’Artiste*, 1856.
- Donald, Diane and Jane Munro, ed. *Endless Forms: Charles Darwin, Natural Science and the Visual Arts*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2009.
- Fouillée, Alfred. *Le Mouvement idéaliste et la réaction contre la science positive*. Paris: Ancienne librairie Germer Baillière et Cie., 1896.
- Fraisse, Geneviève. *Clémence Royer, philosophe et femme de sciences*. Paris: La Découverte, 1985.
- Fried, Michael. *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and the Beholder in the Age of Diderot*. Berkeley: U California P, 1980.
- Courbet’s Realism*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992.
- Galvez, Paul. *Gustave Courbet and the Origins of Modern Painting 1862-1870*. Diss., Columbia University, 2008.
- Gautier, Théophile. *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. 1835. Trans. Helen Constantine. London: Penguin Classics, 2006.
- Glick, Thomas F., ed. *The Comparative Reception of Darwinism*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1972.
- Greene, John C. *The Death of Adam: Evolution and Its Impact on Western Thought*. Ames: Iowa State UP, 1959.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art*. Durham: Duke UP, 2011.
- Guichard, Joseph. *Doctrines de M. Gustave Courbet, maître peintre*. Paris: Poulet-Malassis, 1862.
- Harvey, Joy. “Almost a Man of Genius”: *Clémence Royer, Feminism, and Nineteenth-Century Science*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1997.

- Herding, Klaus. *Courbet: To Venture Independence*. Trans. John William Gabriel. New Haven: Yale UP, 1991.
- Hull, David. *Darwin and His Critics: The Reception of Darwin's Theory of Evolution by the Scientific Community*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1973.
- Keshavjee, Serena. "Natural History, Cultural History, and the Art History of Elie Faure." *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 8.2 (Autumn 2009).
- Kohn, David. *The Darwinian Heritage*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2014.
- Lamarck, Jean-Baptiste. *Philosophie zoologique, ou Exposition des considérations relatives à l'histoire naturelle des animaux*, vol. I. 1809. Paris: Librairie F. Savy, 1873.
- Larson, Barbara, ed. *The Art of Evolution: Darwin, Darwinisms, and Visual Culture*. Hanover: Dartmouth, 2009.
- Larson, Barbara and Sabine Flack, ed. *Darwin and Theories of Aesthetics and Cultural History*. Surrey: Ashgate, 2013.
- Lucy, Martha. *The Evolutionary Body: Refiguring the Nude in Post-Darwinian French Art*. Diss., Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 2004.
- Marden, Brice. *Correspondances: Brice Marden/Gustave Courbet*. Paris: Argol/Musée d'Orsay, 2006.
- Mémoires de la Société libre d'émulation du Doubs*. Second series, vol. 4. 1853. Besançon: Imprimerie d'Outhenin-Chalandre fils, 1854.
—Third series, vol. 1. Besançon: Imprimerie d'Outhenin-Chalandre fils, 1856.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*. Ed. Galen A. Johnson. Trans. Michael B. Smith. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1993.
—*Phenomenology of Perception*, 1945. Trans. Colin Smith. London: Routledge, 2002.
—*Sense and Non-Sense*. Ed. and trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1964.
—*L'Union de l'âme et du corps chez Malebranche, Biran et Bergson*. Ed. Jean Deprun. Paris: J. Vrin, 1968.
—*The Visible and the Invisible*. Ed. Claude Lefort. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1968.
- Morton, Mary and Charlotte Eyerman, ed. *Courbet and the Modern Landscape*, exh. cat. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2007
- Nochlin, Linda. "Courbet and His Territory: How Landscape Means." *Courbet*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2007.
—"Introduction: The Darwin Effect." *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 2.1 (Spring 2003).

- Nodier, Charles and Baron Isidore Justin Taylor. *Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'ancienne France: Franche-Comté*. Paris: J. Didot L'Ainé, 1825.
- Rubin, James H. *Courbet*. London: Phaidon, 1997.
- “Courbet’s Materialism and Positive Metaphysics.” *Gustave Courbet*, exh. cat. Basel: Fondation Beyler, 2014.
- “Gustave Courbet and Music.” *Rival Sisters: Art and Music at the Birth of Modernism, 1815-1915*. Ed. James H. Rubin and Olivia Mattis. Surrey: Ashgate, 2014.
- Realism and Social Vision in Courbet and Proudhon*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980.
- Schapiro, Meyer. “Courbet and Popular Imagery.” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 4 (1941).
- Séailles, Gabriel. *La Génie dans l’art*. Paris: Ancienne librairie Germer Baillière et Cie., 1897.
- Simpson, George G. *The Meaning of Evolution: A Study of the History of Life and of its Significance for Man*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1967.
- “SYNTHESE : données hydrologiques de synthèse (1957 – 2013), La Loue [totale] à Parcey (Station U2654010),” *Banque Hydro*. Accessed January 20, 2016.
<http://www.hydro.eaufrance.fr/selection.php>.
- Titeux, Gilbert. “L’inquiétante étrangeté de certaines chasses franc-comtoises.” *Courbet à neuf!* Ed. Mathilde Arnoux, Dominique de Font-Réaulx, et. al. Paris: Maison des sciences de l’homme, 2010.
- Tseng, Shao-Chien. “Contested Terrain: Gustave Courbet’s Hunting Scenes,” *Art Bulletin* 90.2 (June 2008): 218-234.
- Wagner, Anne. “Courbet’s Landscapes and Their Market.” *Art History* 4.4 (Dec. 1981): 410-31.

Figures



Fig. 1 Gustave Courbet, *La Source de la Loue*, 1864. Oil on canvas, 39 ¼ x 56 in. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Fig. 2 Gustave Courbet, *La Grotte de Sarrazine près de Nains-sous-Sainte-Anne*, 1864. Oil on canvas, 38 ³/₄ x 52 in. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.



Fig. 3 Gustave Courbet, *La Grotte de la Loue*, 1864. Oil on canvas, 38 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 51 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

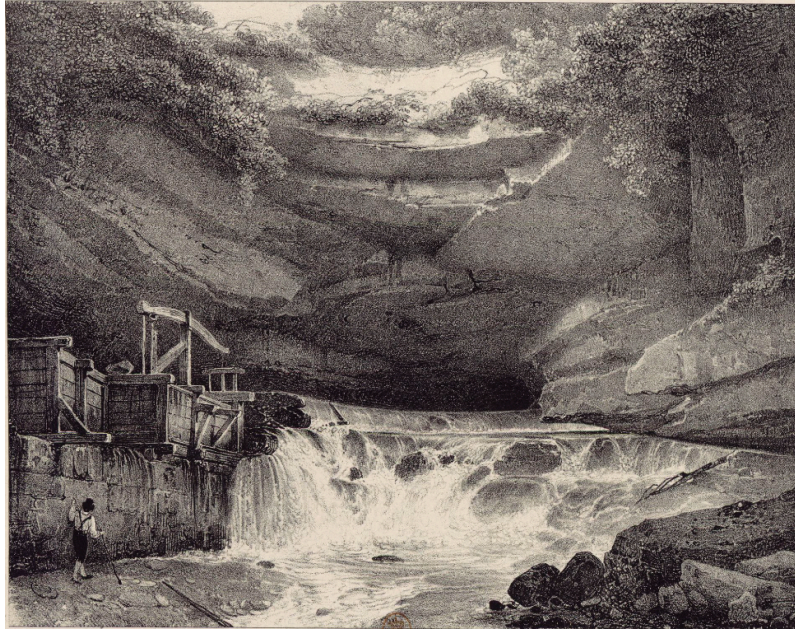


Fig. 4 Nodier and Taylor, “Source de la Loue.” Plate CXVIII, *Voyages pittoresques, Franche-Comté*, 1825.

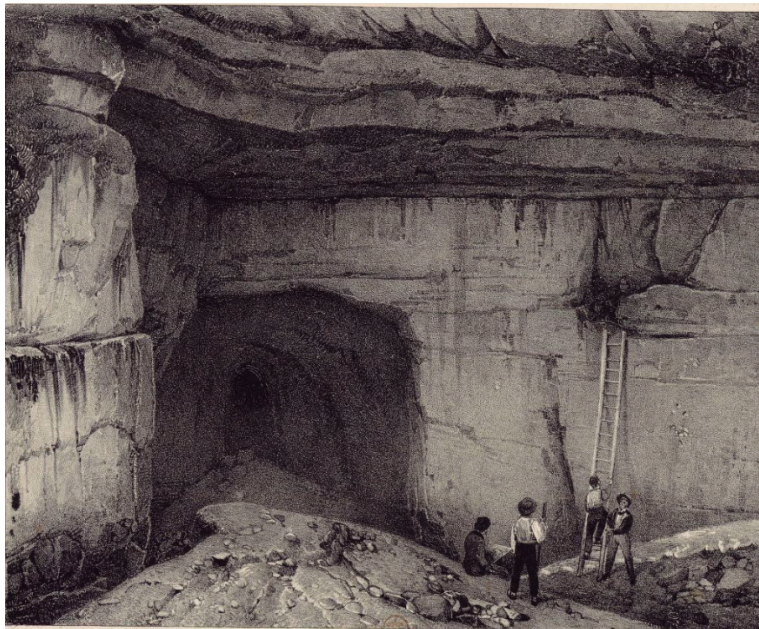


Fig. 5 Nodier and Taylor, “Vue intérieure de la Glacière.” Plate CXII, *Voyages pittoresques, Franche-Comté*, 1825.



Fig. 6 Nodier and Taylor, “Grotte sur les bords des bassins du Doubs.” Plate CXXIV, *Voyages pittoresques, Franche-Comté*, 1825.



Fig. 7 Nodier and Taylor, “Les Grotte d’Osselles.” Plate CXIII, *Voyages pittoresques, Franche-Comté*, 1825.



g



Fig. 8-9 Details, Gustave Courbet, *La Grotte de Sarrazine près de Nains-sous-Sainte-Anne*, 1864.



Fig. 10 Detail, Gustave Courbet, *La Grotte de la Loue*, 1864.



Fig. 11 Salle 20, Musée d'Orsay. Photo from the collection of the author.

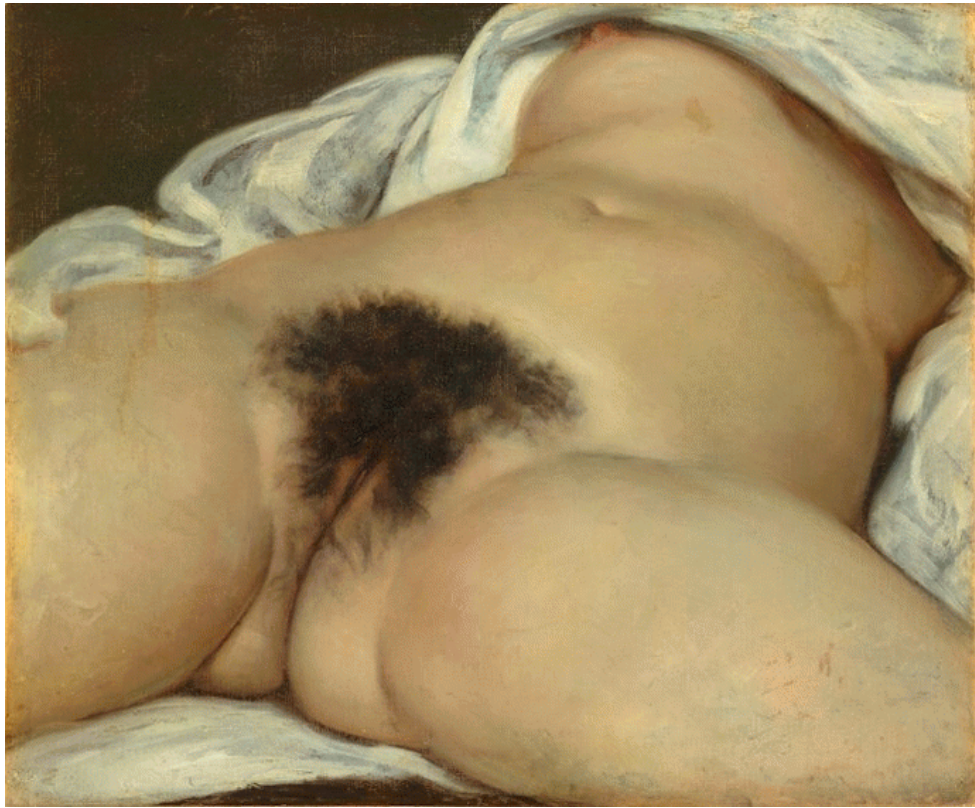


Fig. 12 Gustave Courbet, *L'Origine du monde*, 1866. Oil on canvas, 46.3 x 55.4 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Fig. 13 Gustave Courbet, *Le ruisseau noir*, 1865. Oil on canvas, 93.5 x 131.5 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Fig. 14 Gustave Courbet, *La Source*, 1868. Oil on canvas, 128 x 97.5 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.