

DISJUNCTURE ON THE LEFT: PROUDHON, COURBET AND THE ANTWERP CONGRESS OF 1861

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In recent years, critics have taken a renewed interest in the relationship that linked the socio-political theorist P.-J. Proudhon with the realist painter Gustave Courbet. They have considered at length how the theorist and the painter related as persons and how they collaborated and influenced each other in their work. Quite obviously, these questions are of no small importance given the prime roles Proudhon and Courbet played in the intellectual and artistic life of their times. They must also be addressed in any comprehensive assessment of the careers of either figure. Their association spanned nearly two decades, beginning most probably in the summer of 1848 and ending at Proudhon's death on 19 January 1865, and joined them both so closely in the public eye that one seemed the perfect ideological complement to the other. 'M. Courbet est le *Proudhon* de la peinture . . .', wrote Louis Enault in his *Salon de 1851*, 'M. Proudhon — je voulais dire M. Courbet — fait de la peinture démocratique et sociale . . .'¹

In the following pages, we propose to take yet another look at Proudhon and Courbet's association, focusing our remarks largely on the part played by the social theorist and the painter in the art congress held in Antwerp, Belgium in August 1861. We believe that their involvement in this gathering will shed new light on the nature of the contacts they shared and the understanding they had of each other's work. But first, a succinct review of the key elements of their relationship.

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Many of today's critics have quite rightly insisted that the attraction Proudhon and Courbet felt for each other stemmed from a number of personal and philosophical similarities. Both were provincials from the Franche-Comté whose social background linked them to the common man and who displayed, as they pursued their careers in Paris, a self-conscious independence in their conduct and an unflinching determination to succeed. It is also evident that Proudhon and Courbet espoused essentially the same political and social principles. Both adhered to the liberal, democratic movement which the Great Revolution had spawned and adopted many of the progressive ideas for the restructuring of society proposed

by the utopian thinkers Saint-Simon and Fourier. Quite obviously, Proudhon and Courbet offered each other support in their efforts to reform — to modernize, in a sense — traditional bourgeois society and art, and did not hesitate to praise the achievements of the other before an often hostile public.

Courbet's admiration for Proudhon's writings — and his indebtedness to them — can hardly be overstated. The pronouncements Proudhon made on art and artists were particularly meaningful for Courbet, especially his injunctions that artists promote an 'art humanitaire' and that they strive in their works to teach and inspire their fellow men. In all likelihood, Courbet followed Proudhon's thinking from the early works of the 1840s, such as *De la création de l'ordre* and *Les Contradictions économiques*, through the posthumous *Du principe de l'art*, and found in it the philosophical underpinning of the new realist style he was attempting to introduce.² Proudhon's political, social and economic ideas had no less impact on Courbet. Indeed, in his book-length study of the artist's career through 1855, James Henry Rubin is able to argue compellingly that Courbet gave expression to fundamental concepts of the theorist — his notion of anarchy, mutualism, of work and the 'series' — in both his painting and in the conduct of his life.³

For his part, Proudhon recognized Courbet's exceptional talent as a painter, especially his ability faithfully to depict the life of his times, and commended his choice of common men and women as the preferred subjects for his canvases. Equally as important, Proudhon viewed Courbet as an educator. Thanks to the truths his canvases embodied and the message they conveyed, the artist offered moral and intellectual guidance to his contemporaries and sought to improve society as a whole.⁴ Not surprisingly, Proudhon appointed Courbet head of the realist school (or 'école critique', in his terms) and came willingly to the painter's defence in 1863, when the art establishment excluded his satirical canvas *Le Retour de la conférence* from both the official Salon and the 'Salon des refusés'. A long-standing target of imperial censorship and persecution himself, Proudhon began with alacrity the supposedly succinct justification of Courbet's style of painting which soon burgeoned into his famous treatise, *Du principe de l'art*.

Yet, despite all of this, Courbet and Proudhon's relationship is not marked by intimate, sustained friendship, by exact equality, or by a perfect meeting of the minds. The correspondences of the two men and the philosopher's diaries ('carnets') testify, in fact, to the paucity and impersonality of their contacts. All in all, Proudhon and Courbet seem to have written infrequently to each other — Proudhon's voluminous correspondence contains, for example, not even a single letter addressed to the painter⁵ — so infrequently as to undermine the accepted notion of the close working relationship which they supposedly developed over the course of their careers. Proudhon's *Carnets* offer, moreover, only scant observations on Courbet and sometimes no comment at all on a topic of some importance related to him.⁶ Even more significant, the few *Carnet* entries devoted to the painter are concise and matter-of-fact in tone; some are noticeably blunt and critical.⁷ Overall, they convey an impression of reserve on the part of an established social theorist seemingly intent on putting some distance between himself and a notorious bohemian artist, from whom, undeniably, he was separated by age, reputation and a puritanical life style.⁸

Such deliberate 'distancing' should not be construed, however, as lessening

the influence which Proudhon exerted on Courbet. Indeed, I believe that Proudhon's position as 'prophet' of the socialist revolution and the aloofness which attached to it are in no small measure responsible for the enormous impact of his ideas on the younger generation in the 1840s and 1850s. Writing to Proudhon in August 1848 as a spokesman of sorts for many of his friends, who quite certainly included Courbet, the poet Baudelaire struck the note of admiration and awe which the artist would subsequently make his own in references to Proudhon. In the period of political uncertainty following the June Days, Baudelaire felt compelled to warn the 'man who is especially precious to US' of an imminent plot against his life and asserted the willingness of his companions to 'march blindfolded behind you because of the assurances of knowledge he had given them'.⁹

With similar ardour, Courbet assessed the philosopher at his death as 'le sage de ce temps' and 'l'homme de génie', while during the heady days of the Commune he claimed unabashedly that 'les ouvriers sont [les] apôtres' of Paris in revolution, and 'Proudhon a été son Christ.'¹⁰ Despite his many boasts of intimacy and comradeship, one senses that Courbet's relationship with Proudhon was characterized in truth by the reverence of a would-be disciple for a somewhat remote and stand-offish hero. As confirmation of this view, we would point to the distant, enigmatic aura exuded by the likeness of Proudhon in *L'Atelier* and the solitary, heroic aspects of the *Portrait de P.-J. Proudhon*.

For his part, Proudhon never made a pretence of accepting Courbet as an equal or of counting him among his closest collaborators in the struggle to promote the socialist cause. As is well known, Proudhon cultivated a life-long disdain for artists and literati, against whom he railed vehemently in his *Carnets* and correspondence, while reserving confidential and serious exchanges of his thoughts for the men of a more positivistic bent he had befriended: the journalist Rolland, for example, or the lawyers and political activists, Gustave Chaudey and Madier-Montjau (whose relations with Proudhon we will discuss further in the pages below). In both private and public assessments of Courbet in particular, Proudhon did not hesitate to express serious reservations as to the artist's personality (his pretension and vanity), his intelligence (he was incapable of organizing his thoughts), and his understanding of art. It is apparent that the philosopher turned art critic was perturbed by the disquisitions on painting which Courbet chose to send him and stated flatly in *Du principe de l'art* that he had learned little from them.¹¹

As the last remarks suggest, Proudhon and Courbet's views on art do not converge as completely as is often assumed. In spite of Courbet's assertions that his painting reflected Proudhonian philosophy, it seems questionable to us that what they both chose to champion under the name of realism was one and the same doctrine. We doubt, for example, that realist painting as practised by Courbet was fully compatible with the socially-oriented art Proudhon advocated — an art, in the last instance, subservient to Justice and Truth and dedicated to the advancement of the Social and Democratic Revolution. More specifically, we doubt that Courbet's realism subscribed to the notion of the ideal which occupied a central place in Proudhon's aesthetics.

To illustrate more clearly the important divergencies which separated the philosopher from the artist, we now propose to turn to the Antwerp Congress of 1861.

The Antwerp Congress on art met for three days, from 19 to 21 August 1861. Organized by the city's 'Cercle artistique, littéraire et scientifique', it brought together leading philosophers, critics and artists who were charged with addressing a number of questions both practical (What measures should be taken to protect artists against fraudulent duplication of their works?) and theoretical (What are the connections between philosophy and art? What influence does 'l'esprit moderne' have on contemporary art?). As finally conceived, the congress served as the centrepiece of a longer programme of 'solennités artistiques et des fêtes' intended to celebrate the brilliant heritage of the city of Jordaens and Rubens. Indeed, numerous civic organizations had joined with the 'Cercle artistique' and the municipality in planning a score of festive events, including an official banquet for 1,200, concerts, fireworks, and an exhibition of modern painting.¹²

Impressed by the participants' credentials and by the trappings surrounding the congress, one local commentator viewed the gathering as the latest in a series of landmark conferences hosted by European cities to resolve significant issues of the day and, in this way, to move society as a whole forward on 'la route du progrès'.¹³ Although equally glowing in their reviews, French journalists in attendance tended to see the event as an expression of important political principles. Quite typically, they contended that the festivities illustrated the initiative of Antwerp's citizens, the vigour of municipal life in Belgium, whose various cities stood as a political and cultural counterweight to the capital Brussels, and the freedom which the entire country enjoyed. Such assertions were designed, of course, to encourage French readers to make the appropriate contrasts with the autocratic, centralized régime which Napoleon III's empire imposed on a less fortunate France.¹⁴

The festivities at Antwerp, most particularly the art exhibition, gave Courbet a golden opportunity to show off his painting in an international forum and before a Belgian audience which, over the years, had greeted his creations with enthusiasm. And in August 1861 the artist was badly in need of an expression of popular support. Earlier in the year the official art establishment in France had treated him rather shabbily: the jury of the annual Salon had seen fit to award him a mere second-class medal — despite the importance of his *envoi*, which included *Le Combat de cerfs* — and, according to rumours, the Emperor himself had struck his name from the list of candidates proposed to receive the Legion of Honour.¹⁵ Courbet could not have hoped for a better reception for his painting at Antwerp, nor a more gratifying one. It was precisely his *Combat de cerfs* which prompted widespread admiration among the general public¹⁶ and Paul Mantz, exhibition reviewer for the *Gazette des beaux-arts*, claimed that Courbet, with Troyon, had attracted the largest following of all the French participants. Overall, he had achieved 'un succès des plus vifs'.¹⁷

In keeping with his character, Courbet also revelled in the general merriment which took place around the congress meetings and the art exhibition.¹⁸ The artist had the chance, moreover, to engage in a bit of exhibitionism, another activity which appealed to this public figure who liked to perform in the limelight. As we will describe later in some detail, Courbet intervened rather dramatically in the congress discussions, delivering a stirring defence of realism before an audience composed of many detractors.

For his part — and here the differences begin — Proudhon, then in his third year of exile in Brussels, found distasteful the pomp and celebration in which his Belgian hosts, he believed, were wont to indulge. He also assumed that little of use would come out of the Antwerp gathering because questions too numerous and too difficult had been placed on the programme¹⁹ and, unlike Courbet, doubted that it would be receptive to his ideas. According to his reports, the congress would attract from all parts of Europe a crowd of Orleanists and supporters of the Holy Father who could be counted on, he opined to Chaudey, to turn the debates on art into a ‘petite manifestation catholique et quasi-légitimiste’.²⁰

Most importantly, the part of the proceedings which piqued Proudhon’s curiosity did not coincide with Courbet’s concerns. Proudhon expressed no interest at all in the art exhibition and was not much taken by the philosophical questions relating to art which he had officially been asked to address, specifically, ‘le rapport des idées nouvelles avec l’art’. On the contrary, Proudhon wanted with some urgency to participate in discussion of the more practical issues on the congress agenda regarding copyright legislation. For some time, as the theorist who had equated property with theft, he had combatted the notion of extending permanent property rights to creators and their heirs, which an earlier congress in Brussels had debated and rejected in 1858. He suspected that the organizers of the Antwerp festivities had convened their meeting, in conjunction with self-interested artists and sympathetic government officials, with the ‘pensée secrète’ of trying once again to secure endorsement of this extended copyright protection. Not one to be easily deflected from his objectives, Proudhon assured one of his correspondents that, were he to go to Antwerp, he would turn his remarks on the topic assigned him into a protest against ‘le mercantilisme littéraire’ and generally attempt to ‘faire avorter le complot *propriétaire*’.²¹

Proudhon’s interest in the Antwerp gathering differs so radically from Courbet’s that it is not surprising that the artist was completely absent from his protracted reflections on the event in the weeks preceding it. When Proudhon finally decided not to attend, largely for professional reasons, he did so in the knowledge that spokesmen representing his ideas would perform in his stead. Among the replacements he designated as such — Gustave Chaudey and Madier-Montjau — Courbet is not mentioned.²² True, when Proudhon penned his first reaction to the congress in his *Carnets*, he did identify the painter as one of the four friends whose participation in the debates was responsible for ‘foiling the intrigue in literary property’.²³ But this statement could only have represented Proudhon’s immediate reaction to events, based on preliminary and partial reports, and it included amongst his friends one Gabriel Hugelmann, a man of checkered and dubious background, whose allegiance to the philosopher lasted at best the length of the congress.²⁴

A glance at the daily accounts of the congress published by the *Précurseur* of Antwerp reveals that Chaudey, Madier-Montjau and Hugelmann all took an active part in the debates on literary and artistic property. Courbet, however, is not recorded as having contributed to the discussion of this topic and, in his famous defence of realism, he does not refer to it at all. Yet as Proudhon had intended to do, Chaudey, Madier-Montjau and Hugelmann obviously made property rights their main concern and seemingly pursued a common strategy in combatting the

two specific copyright proposals which came before the Congress: the prohibition of unauthorized reproduction of art works and the granting of a permanent copyright to artists and writers and their heirs.²⁵

After savouring the initial news of the defeat of these proposals,²⁶ Proudhon took time in September to review more thoroughly the congress proceedings and to draw up a final assessment. In an important letter to Chaudey dated 22 September, he gave special commendation to the efforts of his correspondent and to Madier-Montjau. The latter, upon his return to Brussels, where he was also living in exile, had discussed the Congress with Proudhon and had cited Chaudey's 'prouesses' in debate, dubbing him 'un confrère excellent', 'un vrai coreligionnaire'.²⁷ Moreover, Proudhon had read the account of the congress Chaudey had sent to the *Courrier de dimanche* and agreed with his assertion that it had advanced the principles of local initiative and decentralization and, more generally, of liberalism. Significantly enough, Proudhon did not recall the services of either Hugelmann or Courbet, even though Chaudey's article had dwelled at some length on the artist's spirited defence of realism, his 'petit manifeste esthétique qui a eu beaucoup de succès'.²⁸

As regards Courbet specifically, Proudhon's silence is all the more surprising in that the artist had delivered his manifesto more or less as a protégé of the great philosopher, informing the delegates that 'Je regrette que mon ami Proudhon, avec lequel je m'entends si bien, [. . .] ne soit pas ici pour venir soutenir ma thèse avec l'autorité de son talent.'²⁹ How then is one to explain a glaring oversight or a deliberate omission on Proudhon's part? We would suggest that Proudhon was not much impressed by Courbet's attempt to explain his artistic credo. Quite possibly, he felt annoyed at a would-be follower liberally borrowing from *his* ideas without understanding them and offering an incomplete summary of them. Indeed, Courbet's manifesto is a restatement of much of Proudhon's theorizing on art . . . but fails to treat adequately one key Proudhonian concept.

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Courbet made his speech on 20 August, the second day of the Congress, during a session of the third section devoted to the influence which 'l'esprit moderne' had on modern art. The artist found himself in a meeting dominated by traditionalists who were arguing a general philosophical position at odds with his. These adversaries maintained that the artist had to look beyond 'le monde de la matière' to 'l'idée de Dieu' for his inspiration and that art had its origins in his thought and sentiment, 'éléments supra-sensibles' completely distinct from the 'donnée objective' which he strove to render. Most openly rejected the suggestion that realism was the characteristic tendency of the times.³⁰ Personally attacked by the critics of realism, who, according to Chaudey, did not realize that the artist was present, Courbet felt compelled to defend the movement synonymous with his name and to challenge those conservatives in art who put God and the spiritual above man and his material world. His comments did therefore represent the 'profession de foi anti-mystique' with which Proudhon had credited him — and which the secretary of the third section summed up in these concise words: 'Il [Courbet] a fait consister le caractère de l'art moderne dans la négation de l'idéal.'³¹

Other than this general anti-mystical stand, Proudhon could have accepted as his own the subset of beliefs Courbet had presented to the assembly; namely, the precedence of thought over sentiment in the creative process, the democratic nature and purpose of art, the necessary freedom and independence of the artist. In fact, a well-read congress delegate would have found such notions expressed in the pages of *De la création de l'ordre*, *Les Contradictions économiques*, *Philosophie du progrès* and *De la justice*, and might easily have profited from his understanding of these Proudhonian volumes in interpreting Courbet's congress speech.

Problems arose, however, when Courbet stated his position on the ideal. Although his absolute negation of the ideal (as the defining feature of realism) obviously served to set his painting apart from that of his predecessors, which Proudhon similarly rejected, he seemed not to realize that it also represented a grave misreading of the philosopher's aesthetic doctrine. By such negation, Courbet effectively excluded from art the very quality which Proudhon found at its core: idealism. Part of his misunderstanding probably stemmed from the complexity of the term as the philosopher used it. Indeed, throughout his writings Proudhon gave 'ideal' two different meanings, generally without warning the reader of the ambiguity involved.

First, Proudhon used the term rather conventionally to designate the sublime or beautiful which the artist, he believed, should strive to capture in his paintings. To idealize, in this sense, involves the creation of an artistic form more perfect than the subject as it exists in nature or the combination of traits of numerous 'real' models into a figure which subsumes them all and surpasses them in perfection. But Proudhon also used the term to refer to the distinguishing feature or hallmark which characterizes a certain age and the works of art it produces. In this context, to idealize is to express the general spirit of the society in which one lives — an undertaking which Proudhon also found incumbent upon all *bona fide* artists.

Without realizing as much, Courbet essentially restricted his usage of the term to the second sense and, in so doing, managed to distort Proudhon's philosophy of art. When Courbet attacked the 'ideal' in his Antwerp speech, he was clearly referring to the ideal by which Proudhon characterized the civilizations of Ancient Greece and Medieval Europe. A brief synopsis of the philosopher's assessment of these civilizations will corroborate this point.

According to Proudhon, ancient Greece was typified by an 'idéisme idolâtrique'.³² He maintained that the Greeks strove to project all human qualities onto their gods and then surrendered themselves to a slavish adoration of them. Greek artists were called on to contribute to this cult of the divine and, by judicious selection of the features of their contemporaries, to give their deities the most noble and striking appearance conceivable. In other words, Greek art took as its goal the portrayal of flawless and absolute formal beauty.

Partially in reaction to this ideal of physical perfection, Christian art of the Middle Ages sought to render the beauty not of the body, but of the soul. Proudhon labelled the idealism of such art 'ascétique' and claimed that artists of the period endeavoured to express the inner spirituality of their chosen subjects and to convey the glories and mysteries of the faith in their painting and architecture. Despite their dissimilarities, Greek and Christian art derived their meaning from a divine, supra-terrestrial source — from a religious absolute: the pagan deities and the Judeo-

Christian God. Moreover, they reflected societies which were aristocratic and theocratic in structure, and whose values were rigid, immutable and eternal.

But not all societies harkened to such conservative ideals. As man progressed over the centuries in what Proudhon saw as his epic struggle to attain Justice, so too the various civilizations he fashioned espoused values of an ever higher idealism. In seventeenth-century Holland, Proudhon found a society more advanced than those of Ancient Greece and Medieval Europe, whose superior values prefigured those of his own, post-Revolutionary France. He praised the republicanism of the small Dutch nation which, in supplanting the socio-theocratic élitism of the past, had created a classless society affording equality to all its citizens. In Dutch protestantism, which encouraged critical analysis and personal interpretation, Proudhon saw man's reason at work rejecting the mythology of the Greeks and the dogma of the Catholic church. In sum, the Dutch had established the first man-centred order and, as regards the arts, had realized two major reforms: artists could now set aside the remote divinities of tradition and focus on the subjects they knew best — the average citizen of the republic, his daily activities and dress — and had the freedom to express themselves as they wished, since they were no longer bound by an aesthetic imposed by a religious absolute. Not surprisingly, Proudhon maintained that the unshackled Dutch artist, engaged in the portrayal of 'l'humanité industrieuse, savante, positive',³³ had conveyed a more meaningful ideal in his canvases than his predecessors and had created masterpieces which surpassed theirs.

It was this Dutch tradition that Proudhon expected artists of the nineteenth century to universalize in serving the 'Révolution démocratique et sociale'. This movement sprang directly from the events of 1789 which themselves harkened back to the egalitarian and humanitarian ideals of seventeenth-century Holland. Proudhon therefore summoned aspiring realists of his day to rekindle the ideal of the Dutch school — of this 'école humanitaire, rationnelle, progressive et définitive'³⁴ and, by proclaiming it in their works, to help ensure the victory of the new democratic order throughout Europe and the world.

As overly simplistic and dogmatic as they may seem today, the Proudhonian views outlined above enable us to elucidate key phrases of Courbet's Antwerp speech: 'Le fond du réalisme c'est la négation de l'idéal'.³⁵ By necessity realism, which mirrored nineteenth-century values, meant the rejection of the ideal — *the ideal enshrined in Greek and Christian art*:

En concluant à la négation de l'idéal et de tout ce qui s'ensuit j'arrive en plein à l'émancipation de la raison, à l'émancipation de l'individu, et finalement à la démocratie. Le réalisme est, par essence, l'art démocratique.³⁶

As noted above, Proudhon maintained that, by superseding the ideal of theocratic societies whose religions issued unquestionable dogma, nineteenth-century realists were developing an art which gave expression to man's reason, heralded individual rights and initiative and advanced egalitarian social principles. Realism was truly *democratic* art since, in both its subject matter and aims, it related directly to the life of the common man:

Ainsi, par le réalisme qui attend tout de l'individu et de son effort, nous

arrivons à reconnaître que le peuple doit être instruit puis qu'il doit tout tirer de lui-même; tandis qu'avec l'idéal, c'est-à-dire avec la révélation, et, comme conséquence, avec l'autorité et l'aristocratie, le peuple recevait tout d'en haut, tenait tout d'un autre que de lui-même et était fatalement voué à l'ignorance et à la résignation.³⁷

Given their democratic credo, the realists logically maintained that future social progress depended on the initiative of the people, the dominant class of the new age. But for the people to be able to better their lot and, in turn, move society forward, they first needed instruction and moral guidance themselves. In fact, Proudhon had often reminded contemporary artists that simply choosing the common man as the primary subject of their painting was not enough: they had also to assume a pedagogical role and seek to increase man's knowledge and refine his morality.

By contrast, in the theocratic societies of the past, the people enjoyed no prominence at all, alienated in an autocratic world order imposed on them by aristocratic élites and sanctioned by the gods. Indeed, all had been 'revealed' to the people from above and they were condemned to existences of resignation and ignorance:

L'art romantique comme l'école classique était l'art pour l'art. Aujourd'hui d'après la dernière expression de la philosophie on est obligé de raisonner même dans l'art et de ne jamais laisser vaincre la logique par le sentiment. La raison doit être en tout la dominante de l'homme. Mon expression d'art est la dernière parce qu'elle est la seule qui ait jusqu'à présent combiné tous ces éléments.³⁸

In this passage, Courbet repeats a preference for reason which Proudhon had preached with insistence from his first work to his last. According to Proudhon's theorizing — which Courbet names paraphrastically as 'la dernière expression de la philosophie' — reason enabled man to achieve justice, truth and morality — and thus ranked as the prime faculty of the human mind, superior to intuition and sentiment. As he did novelists and poets, Proudhon also expected artists to reason in their works, to appeal to the viewer's intellect by expressing a clear-cut message or moral. Painters who did not deign to communicate or to teach, who conveyed no substantive ideas in their canvases, produced flawed, incomplete works which could appeal only to the senses through their aesthetic impact. In other words, the beautiful and the sublime which constituted the basic elements of art still needed to be bolstered by extra-artistic principles such as justice, truth and morality. Yet, scorning the dictates of reason, both the Classicists and the Romantics neglected to fortify their production as Proudhon required. The former cultivated the formal beauty of the Ancient Greeks; the latter revived the spiritual beauties of Catholicism of the Middle Ages. Both celebrated outmoded idealisms of ages which were buried in the depths of history and were thus no longer of consequence to nineteenth-century Europe. They sinned as perpetrators of 'art for art's sake' — of an art which did not address the issues of the time and which offered no appropriate message to the citizens of an industrial and democratic age.

No question, in making his stirring 'profession de foi', Courbet paraphrased

so many key aspects of Proudhon's thought that his invocation of the philosopher's name seems fully appropriate. Yet his remarks do not do the Proudhonian model justice and reveal, upon closer examination, a partial and confused summary of it. Above all, Courbet fails to grasp the complexity of Proudhon's notion of the ideal. He seems completely unaware that the philosopher's ideal is twofold and that, by and large, he has considered only one aspect of the term in his speech. Except for touching on the ideal in its aesthetic sense in his comments on art for art's sake and on reason in the creative process, Courbet includes no serious discussion of it in his address.

More significantly, even within the limited framework of his remarks, the artist also misconstrues Proudhon's position. He clearly does not realize that his attack against ideals, if it is faithfully to reflect the philosopher's criticisms, can only relate to those which characterize *certain* societies of the past. It certainly cannot apply to the progressive ideals of seventeenth-century Holland nor, *a fortiori*, to the guiding principles of the new, revolutionary age which Proudhon called on his contemporaries in art and literature to fashion. To illustrate more forcefully just how far Courbet had gone astray, one need only observe that his categorical assertion, 'Le fond du réalisme est la négation de l'idéal', might well have led congress listeners to draw two conclusions which Proudhon would have been the first to deride as self-contradictory and absurd: (1) Realism as an artistic and philosophical movement manifests no overriding message or ideal; (2) Realism as an art form has no room for the poetry, the imagination or the beauty normally associated with art.

As regards the latter conclusion, we can surmise that many of the delegates present believed that such was indeed Courbet's position. Consider, for example, the assessment of the *Gazette des beaux-arts'* correspondent Paul Mantz. At the conclusion of a three-part retrospective of the artist's career composed shortly after his death, Mantz noted:

Le jour où [Courbet] est venu dire au congrès d'Anvers que l'élimination de l'idéal est la formule essentielle de l'art moderne, il nous a blessé au coeur. [...] Courbet a eu du talent; son oeuvre importe à l'histoire de l'école; mais la sympathie s'arrête, hésitante et comme froissée, devant un peintre assez ignorant des exigences de l'âme humaine pour avoir entrepris de décréter la suppression du rêve.³⁹

Significantly enough, when some delegates opined directly to Courbet that 'celles de ses oeuvres qui avaient le plus attiré l'attention étaient précisément celles où se faisait remarquer quelque chose de plus que l'imitation pure et simple de la nature', the artist is not recorded as having made any response.⁴⁰ Rather than offering a nuanced explanation more consonant with Proudhonian aesthetics, Courbet thus appeared to maintain his position of negator of the ideal, in defiance of those who had attacked realism as overly materialistic: painting could convey no idea or sentiment beyond observable nature.

Proudhon would never have supported this absolute negation of the ideal. On the contrary, he often insisted that creators use to the fullest the aesthetic potential of their given medium to go beyond mere reproduction of surface reality. He would not hesitate to assert in *Du principe*, for instance, that 'l'art n'est rien que par l'idéal, ne vaut que par l'idéal; s'il se borne à une simple imitation, copie ou contrefaçon

de la nature, . . . il ne fera qu'étaler sa propre insignifiance, en déshonorant les objets mêmes qu'il aurait imités.⁴¹ On other occasions, he claimed that we were all artists whose 'métier' was to 'élever en nos personnes, dans nos corps et dans nos âmes, une statue à la BEAUTE'; it was man's duty to strive to create 'en lui et hors de lui le sublime et le beau, en un mot, l'idéal'.⁴² Proudhon firmly believed that the artist had no choice *but* to idealize — to abstract what he chose to treat into its characteristic, representative forms, for it was only through an ideal form that he could communicate his particular message or vision to the viewer.

When, in the evening session following Courbet's speech, Section III continued its discussion of contemporary art, Madier-Montjau had to come to the artist's rescue. He obviously wanted to clear up the confusion surrounding Courbet's use of the term 'ideal' and to provide a statement which more accurately reflected Proudhon's thinking. Here is how the *Précurseur* of Antwerp reported his remarks:

. . . un orateur demande que la troisième section déclare qu'en proclamant la liberté comme l'élément de l'inspiration de l'artiste on reconnaisse en même temps l'existence d'un infini, source de l'art.

M. MADIER-MONTJAU s'oppose énergiquement à cette confusion de la liberté et de l'infini, prétendant au contraire que la liberté ne sera consacrée par l'art que lorsque l'art aura fait sa rupture définitive avec l'infini. Toute notion d'un infini proclamé, précisé et déterminé à l'avance par une école ou par une église est un écrasement de la conscience, c'est-à-dire de la conception de l'idéal par l'individu ou de l'idéal *subjectif* et libre. Cette seule observation suffit à écarter la critique de ceux qui prétendent que la vraie philosophie est exclusive de tout idéal.

M. DELAET, prenant la parole, demande à M. Madier-Montjau s'il entend exclure de l'art l'intervention de tout absolu, toute théogonie, comme ses amis MM. Proudhon et Courbet.

. De toute théogonie, répond M. Madier, de tout idéal *objectif*, assurément, sans que pour cela l'idéal *subjectif*, produit de la raison et de la liberté combinées, soit exclu de l'art nouveau et l'empêche d'élever, d'embellir et de poétiser la vie, la nature et la réalité humaines. Nous ne sommes donc rien moins que des *matérialistes* au sens grossier du mot comme vous l'entendez.⁴³

On behalf of his friends Proudhon and Courbet, Madier-Montjau clearly indicated the importance of the ideal for 'la vraie philosophie' and 'l'art nouveau' which was expected 'd'élever, d'embellir et de poétiser la vie, la nature et la réalité humaines'. Perhaps the artist was surprised to hear such a rehabilitation of the ideal; the philosopher certainly was not. In a judicious distinction between 'l'idéal subjectif' and 'l'idéal objectif', of which Proudhon would have approved, Madier was able to reject an ideal imposed by an absolute or infinite, which crushes man's conscience and initiative, and defend an ideal which the individual himself is to fashion from his combined reason and freedom. The former ideal clearly relates to the one which, in Proudhon's view of history, inspired the Greek and Christian artist; the latter, to the one which the independent and rational Dutch artist had first proclaimed in the seventeenth century.⁴⁴

Courbet's failure to make appropriate distinctions in his Antwerp speech and his unwillingness to recognize the importance of the ideal illustrate what Proudhon had long perceived to be a flawed understanding of art and the works the artist should produce. Over the years, in fact, Proudhon had repeatedly criticized Courbet for turning out canvases which seemed devoid of idealism. In a *Carnet* entry of 11 April 1851 which gave his first reaction to Courbet's painting, Proudhon formulated his primary objection quite clearly:

Courbet est l'auteur des tableaux, *Un Enterrement à Ornans, Les Casseurs de pierres, Retour de foire*, et son portrait. [. . .] Ce sont des tableaux de genre sur grande toile. C'est le laid au naturel, mais avec une grande vigueur. Ce n'est pas là l'issue de l'art.⁴⁵

In restricting himself to the reproduction of 'le laid au naturel', Courbet had failed to take full advantage of his artistic medium and convey the requisite ideal. Yet had he simply let his viewers perceive a 'fond de beauté' in his figures, he could have communicated an important message to his contemporaries: 'la dégradation de l'espèce humaine par le prolétariat'. Four years later, after visiting the celebrated exhibition of his works which Courbet had provocatively staged under the banner 'Réalisme', Proudhon noted dryly in his *Carnets*: 'artiste d'un grand talent, mais dépourvu, je crois, d'un vrai génie, et qui abonde trop dans l'admiration de lui-même'.⁴⁶ The philosopher is quick to concede that Courbet has 'un grand talent' in what we would claim to be his mastery of the technical or formal aspects of painting. But beyond his disdain for the vanity of the man, does not Proudhon's lack of enthusiasm for the *artist* lie precisely in Courbet's failure to understand the idealistic aim of art, in other words, to give proof of 'un vrai génie'?

A brief glance at *Du principe de l'art* will enable us to conclude this discussion. Proudhon wrote *Du principe* not only to defend Courbet and his painting, unjustly attacked by the art establishment of the day, but also to caution the painter and another would-be disciple, the critic Castagnary, against certain excesses. In fact, he here stated *publicly* that the principal exponent of realism in art and one of its leading apologists had gone astray — precisely on the issue of idealism. Both seemed to have fallen into the trap of overemphasizing the material side of things in their painting and theorizing. As Rubin has established, Proudhon had Castagnary specifically in mind when he commented as follows on the 'writers of the new school':

Dira-t-on enfin, avec les écrivains de la nouvelle école, que ces tableaux [de Courbet] sont de purs réalistes? Prenez garde, leur répondrai-je: votre réalisme compromettrait le vérité, que cependant vous faites profession de servir. Le réel n'est pas la même chose que le vrai; le premier s'entend plutôt de la matière, le second des lois qui la régissent.⁴⁷

Turning to the artists of the new school a few pages later, Proudhon opined that merely copying random scenes of daily life — a hut alongside a road, household utensils — was 'La GRANDE ERREUR, l'erreur des erreurs' which yielded, 'comme oeuvre d'art, néant'. And he explained exactly why:

Il n'y a pas, il ne peut pas y avoir d'art purement réaliste, par conséquent pas de genre ou d'école réaliste; le réalisme n'étant que la base

matérielle sur laquelle l'art travaille, est par lui-même au-dessous et en dehors de l'art. L'art est essentiellement idéaliste . . .⁴⁸

Yet, was not Courbet guilty of trying to create a purely realistic art, of portraying no more than 'le vrai au naturel' — and therefore of neglecting the idealistic imperative of art? Proudhon obviously feared as much and charged, in *Du principe*, that the artist simply misunderstood the real meaning of painting. Proudhon bluntly identified one of Courbet's principal shortcomings as 'quelque chose de choquant provenant, selon moi, de ce qu'il n'a pas la haute conscience de son art et de son principe'.⁴⁹ He also acknowledged, with hopes that the artist might mend his ways, that 'à l'heure qu'il est, il [Courbet] se cherche encore lui-même et ne se connait qu'à moitié.'⁵⁰ Granted, Courbet did stand out as potential head of the new realist school of art — or of 'l'école critique' as Proudhon preferred to call it — because he had taken up the challenge of painting his contemporaries, thus renewing the very subject matter of art. Proudhon enthusiastically praised this accomplishment and placed Courbet far above the innumerable academic painters who dutifully turned out their trite mythological and historical pieces. But the artist had far more to accomplish than this: he had to instruct and uplift his contemporaries by expressing an appropriate ideal — and Proudhon intended to remind Courbet of this additional obligation.

In our opinion, much of *Du principe* represents an attempt to *persuade* Courbet and others to create the type of art Proudhon expected from members of the 'école critique'. In statements which he himself would soon put into question, Proudhon went so far as to assert that, unbeknown even to the artist, Courbet was already 'dans son réalisme, un des plus puissants idéalisateurs que nous ayons, un peintre de la plus vive imagination'.⁵¹ One of Proudhon's principal claims now came to be that, without inventing anything, Courbet penetrated to the profound truth underlying surface reality; that he combined many observed realities into an ideal which transcended the real.⁵² In sum, Courbet's genius was precisely his ability to fuse these mutually reinforcing elements of realism and idealism in his artistic masterpieces.

Yet, rather than actual accomplishment, the painter's would-be marriage of realism and idealism represented only partially fulfilled hopes on the part of an art critic with very special expectations. In a candid passage of *Du principe*, Proudhon admitted that the various messages or ideals that he had extracted from Courbet's paintings were probably more his making than the artist's:

Courbet, plus artiste que philosophe, n'a pas pensé tout ce que je trouve [. . .]. Mais, en admettant que ce que j'ai cru voir dans ses figures soit de ma part illusion, la pensée existe; et comme l'art ne vaut que par ses effets, je n'hésite pas à l'interpréter à ma manière. Si j'exagère son importance comme penseur, il n'y a pas de mal: cela sert du moins à faire comprendre à mes lecteurs ce que je veux et ce que je cherche.⁵³

More than the average reader, Courbet was obviously expected to take heed of what Proudhon 'wanted' and what he was 'looking for'. The philosopher had pointed out the realistic and idealistic nature of *bona fide* art — had given Courbet the 'haute conscience' and principle of his painting — and enjoined him to pick

up the banner. 'Maintenant, il faut que Courbet le sache: il doit marcher, il n'a que faire de parler de lui davantage; on sait ce qu'il veut, où il va; on l'attend aux oeuvres!'⁵⁴

Did Courbet in fact hear the message of *Du principe* and come to realize the importance of the ideal in a realistic work of art? There is some slight evidence to suggest as much in the pronouncements he made during and after 1863, the year in which Proudhon began writing his volume. Prior to that date, Courbet's statements either avoid discussion of the ideal altogether or tend to reject it outright before the imperious demands of the real. His famous realist manifesto of 1855 falls into the first category. Besides his 'profession de foi' at Antwerp, two other pronouncements made in 1861 seem to be of the exclusionary variety. In an appreciation of *Le Combat de cerfs*, *Le Cerf forcé*, and *Le Piqueur* — paintings which were to have 'dans un sens différent, l'importance de *L'Enterrement*' — Courbet identified their uniqueness as not showing 'un liard d'idéal; dans leur valeur, ils sont exacts comme des mathématiques.'⁵⁵ Similarly, a few months after Antwerp, Courbet penned a lengthy reply to younger artists who wanted him to form a studio, in which he asserted that painting was an art 'essentiellement concret et ne peut consister que dans la représentation des choses réelles et existantes'. He continued:

Le beau est dans la nature, et se rencontre dans la réalité sous les formes les plus diverses. [...] Dès que le beau est réel et visible, il a en lui-même son expression artistique. Mais l'artifice n'a pas le droit d'amplifier cette expression.⁵⁶

Courbet has left so little to the creator's inspiration and initiative here that he obviously must forego the 'right' to amplify the beautiful as expressed in nature. Yet it is nothing less than amplification which Proudhon required of artists so that they might convey their own unique vision to the public.

By 1863, however, Courbet had begun to modify his stance and to recognize, at least implicitly, the legitimate place which the ideal occupied within the realm of art. Such is the case in the 'litanies' on art which Courbet sent to Proudhon as part of their alleged 'collaboration' on *Du principe*. One of his axioms listed here runs: 'Mettre le sentiment, l'imagination, l'esprit et l'idéal au service de la raison' — a genuinely Proudhonian reflection, if ever there was one, which acknowledges the existence of the ideal and makes it, along with related faculties, subservient to reason.

In later years, as Courbet looked back over his career, he tended to interpret his artistic creation in terms of the ideal he now claimed he had attempted to serve, as well as the ones he had combatted. The autobiographical sketch he provided Victor Frond in 1865 described his realist painting, for instance, as 'une conclusion humaine réveillant les forces propres de l'homme envers et contre le paganisme, l'art grec et romain, la Renaissance, le catholicisme, les demi-dieux, c'est-à-dire l'idéal conventionnel'.⁵⁷ His famous letter to 'Citoyen Vallès' in 1871, which presented his qualifications for election to the Commune, stated more succinctly: 'Reniant l'idéal faux et conventionnel, en 1848 j'arborai le drapeau du réalisme, qui seul met l'art au service de l'homme.'⁵⁸ In both texts, Courbet was careful to reject an ideal which he ascribed to the art of the past and which he labelled 'faux' and 'conventionnel'. He did not reject idealism *per se*. On the contrary, his

statements clearly suggest that in his painting he had laboured to express another ideal, more attuned to a century of social equality and economic progress. Proudhon would have approved these later ‘professions de foi’ which represented an important modification of the truculently anti-idealist position Courbet had staked out at Antwerp in 1861.

An assessment of the Antwerp congress which the Citizen Rolland sent to Proudhon shortly after its conclusion clearly viewed the artist in this light and, significantly, poked fun at his claim to speak as a representative of Proudhon. As we might expect, Rolland also mentioned the performance of Madier-Montjau who could more justifiably pretend to have spread the philosopher’s teaching on aesthetics. At the outset of his assessment, Rolland congratulated Proudhon on his good judgement in not attending the Antwerp Congress — in letting all that ‘racaille académico-jésuite barbotter à son aise’. He then asked sardonically:

Du reste que pouvez-vous regretter? Courbet n’a-t-il pas parlé pour vous? *Sileant omnes in conspectu ejus! Ego sum qui sum.* Je suis Courbet le réel! Je suis le vrai Courbet! Mais je plaisante mal à propos; car si quelqu’un estime le talent de Courbet comme il convient, c’est moi plus que personne. Seulement l’orateur ne vaut pas le peintre. *Cacatum non est pictum.* Quant à Madier, il s’est lancé dans le *subjectif* et l’*objectif*, comme un vrai disciple de Hegel. A quoi bon ce jargon philosophique quand on parle à des artistes? Il faut parler à ces gens-là une langue concrète comme leur esprit si l’on veut s’en faire entendre [. . .]. Je regrette que Madier ne l’ait pas compris. Je le regrette d’autant plus que j’approuve pleinement tout ce qu’il a dit.⁵⁹

Although Rolland has some reservations as to the way in which Madier-Montjau delivered his message, he clearly expresses his agreement with its substance, specifically the distinction made between the ‘subjective’ and the ‘objective’. As we should recall, it is precisely this distinction which, in a manner consonant with Proudhon’s thinking, allows Madier-Monthau to promote the (subjective) ideal as an essential aspect of artistic creation.

*

What principal conclusions does our discussion of the Antwerp Congress allow us to draw? First and foremost, the congress does underscore significant differences in general attitude and concerns, especially aesthetic, which distance Proudhon from Courbet and which compel us to re-evaluate the accepted view of their relationship. Although the congress proceedings may well have reinforced the contemporary public’s tendency to consider the philosopher and the artist as partners in a common cause, a probing glance behind the scenes shatters the ‘mirror image’ which observers such as Louis Enault claimed they cast of each other. Proudhon’s preliminary discussions of the congress, his résumé of its activities, and the debates themselves all reveal that these two representatives of the socialist left did not espouse identical values and objectives nor act together in a concerted fashion. Rather, the Antwerp Congress discloses that their would-be collaboration as reformers in politics and art belied the reality of a complex and nuanced relationship which,

beneath surface accord, was marked by discrepancies in principle, conflicting interests and an overall lack of true intimacy.

As an illustration of this lack of intimacy in their relations, the congress allows us to cast Courbet and Proudhon in the roles of 'disciple' and 'master' which we suggested earlier as a partial model of their conduct towards each other. In his speech, Courbet does seem eager to invoke Proudhon's name and friendship and to communicate the latter's teaching on a number of key aesthetic issues. He even goes so far as to concede that the artist must reason in his works in compliance with the requirements of the master's philosophy. By his absence and his willingness to act by proxy, Proudhon also assumes his role as the remote and somewhat elusive prophet of the Revolution. His encounters over the years with various leading figures of the Left (especially Marx in 1846) show that the philosopher was well aware of his exalted leadership status and generally wary of those who would be his associates in defending the socialist cause. In this light, Proudhon's glaring omission of any reference to Courbet in his review of Congress proceedings reflects his understandable reluctance to acknowledge a somewhat overzealous follower, whose exact motives were not clear and whose failure to comprehend a key aspect of his doctrine was disconcerting.

Proudhon may, in fact, have legitimately wondered whether Courbet's major misrepresentation of the ideal in his manifesto stemmed from ignorance on his part — an inability to understand — or rather a refusal to understand and to accept the consequences which the ideal imposed on artists. Two years after the congress, just as Proudhon began to draft *Du principe*, Courbet's famous letter to Buchon suggests that the artist spent some time extolling to the philosopher the virtues of a 'reality' which he contrasted with 'sentimentality'.⁶⁰ Proudhon might well have reacted to this praise with irritation, viewing it as a continued defence of a 'hard-core' realism which struck its roots in materialism and thus excluded the idealism he placed at the centre of art. Such a defence would have dovetailed perfectly with the artist's 'overly-realistic' painting which Proudhon had long criticized in his *Carnets* and would have helped to provoke the public warning he was about to issue on this subject in the very pages of *Du principe*.

Courbet's strong sense of artistic independence made it impossible for him to recognize a Proudhonian ideal which, as the expression of the spirit of the times, meant enforced service for contemporary artists in the socialist cause. True, Proudhon repeatedly assured artists that his philosophy guaranteed them freedom of expression. If we recall Madier-Montjau's words at Antwerp, they need only render a subjective ideal in their creations — an ideal which they themselves were to formulate by combining personal liberty with reason. Yet, in practice, Proudhonian reason always superseded individual prerogatives and dictated that the artist play his part in the epic of Revolutionary Justice as it unfolded over the centuries. In effect, it compelled artists to recognize the logic of historical evolution and to accept as the requisite ideal of their democratic, industrial age a progressive socio-political creed. And, as we know, Proudhon would remain firm in sanctioning as *bona fide* art only those works which, in form and content, promoted this designated creed.

Although basically a proponent of the principles in question, Courbet could not accept such strict regimentation of the artist and narrow channelling of his

creative drive. Thus, the importance of his strong reaffirmation of *his own* artistic independence as he concluded a manifesto which was more or less a summary of Proudhonian aesthetics. In the presence of such a declaration, we must reassess Courbet's pronouncements on the ideal. Whether knowingly or instinctively, he has managed blatantly to oversimplify and then dismiss altogether (or 'negate') the one major principle of Proudhonian doctrine which threatened the free, unimpeded practice of art he had always advocated. Perhaps we should conclude that Courbet may indeed have set out to spread key aspects of the philosopher's teaching at Antwerp — but only those which met with his approval and in such a fashion to serve his own needs.

One might pursue this line of reasoning and argue that the Antwerp Congress highlights an undercurrent of self-interest which, on more than one occasion, taints the dealings of these two alleged friends and collaborators. As we suggested earlier, Proudhon's defence of Courbet's painting in *Du principe de l'art* was not without ulterior motives, for the philosopher wanted not only to promote the artist's work, but to indoctrinate him on the nature and purpose of modern art and to bring him and the new realist school more securely into the political movement he championed — 'la Révolution démocratique et sociale'. On the other hand, as a younger, ambitious painter, Courbet quickly realized the value to his career — in terms of publicity and credibility — which would result from *perceived* collaboration with this leading figure of French socialism.

In his Antwerp realist manifesto, not only does Courbet expound Proudhonian doctrine in the most evident fashion, he also has the audacity to push his claim to friendship with Proudhon to the extent of suggesting that the philosopher, had he come to the congress, would have defended his (Courbet's!) artistic principles ('sa thèse'). Some of the painter's other references to Proudhon can also be read, at least in part, as attempts to ingratiate himself with the philosopher or to attach himself to the philosopher's star. Thus Courbet's rather deliberate paraphrasing of various of Proudhon's celebrated opinions in the 'litanies' he addressed to his would-be collaborator or his apparently fruitless attempt to solicit a letter of endorsement from Proudhon for a study by his friend Max Buchon, *Le Réalisme: Discussions esthétiques*. Courbet reported tellingly to Buchon that 'Nous avons parlé à Proudhon de [la brochure] que tu nous a envoyée dans l'espérance qu'il te réponde une lettre. Si cela pouvait réussir la fortune de cette brochure serait certaine comme publicité.'⁶¹ Courbet's most successful appeal of this sort was, of course, his request that Proudhon provide a brief note on his work for a forthcoming exhibition in England — a note originally viewed by the writer as a minor exercise in advertising not worthy of his signature⁶² which, to his own surprise, evolved into his principal statement on art and aesthetics. Deftly overlooking the philosopher's selfish intentions in drafting *Du principe* and the direct criticism it levelled against him, Courbet did not fail to take full advantage of the volume and the alleged collaboration. He informed his father that Proudhon and he had laboured together to 'synthétiser la société, l'un en philosophie, l'autre dans l'art'; and to a second correspondent he opined that 'C'est la chose la plus merveilleuse qu'il soit possible de voir, et c'est le plus grand bienfait et le plus grand honneur qu'un homme puisse désirer.'⁶³

Here, of course, beyond questions of self-interest, we must also be prepared

to recognize Courbet's penchant for exuberant overstatement — and his remarkable ability to ignore details which do not correspond to the desired interpretation of events. The brief assessment of the Antwerp Congress which he sent to Buchon humorously illustrates this facet of his character and we will let the artist have the final word. Given what we know of the complexity and inconclusiveness of the aesthetic debate which embroiled the congress delegates and the part played in it by Madier-Montjau as a spokesman for Proudhonian doctrine, Courbet's terse summary brings a smile to the lips: 'Je suis allé à Anvers où j'ai eu un succès monstre, et où l'on a conclu à ma manière de voir pour la philosophie de l'art.'⁶⁴

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APPENDIX

COURBET'S 'PROFESSION DE FOI' AT THE ANTWERP CONGRESS (*Le Précurseur* of Antwerp, 22 August 1861)

Le réalisme n'est bien connu d'aucun de ses adversaires; il n'est pas aussi ancien qu'on veut bien le dire et n'a rien de commun avec la querelle des réaux et des nominaux. Le fond du réalisme c'est la négation de l'idéal, à laquelle j'ai été amené depuis quinze ans par mes études et qu'aucun artiste n'avait jamais jusqu'à ce jour, osé affirmer catégoriquement.

Il ne suffit pas d'un nom ni d'un drapeau pour faire connaître une idée. Il faut savoir ce que contient le nom et le drapeau.

L'Enterrement d'Ornans a été en réalité l'enterrement du romantisme et n'a laissé de cette école de peinture que ce qui était une constatation de l'esprit humain, ce qui par conséquent avait le droit d'existence, c'est-à-dire les tableaux de Delacroix et de Rousseau.

L'art romantique comme l'école classique était l'art pour l'art. Aujourd'hui d'après la dernière expression de la philosophie on est obligé de raisonner même dans l'art et de ne jamais laisser vaincre la logique par le sentiment. La raison doit être en tout la dominante de l'homme. Mon expression d'art est la dernière parce qu'elle est la seule qui ait jusqu'à présent combiné tous ces éléments.

En concluant à la négation de l'idéal et de tout ce qui s'ensuit j'arrive en plein à l'émancipation de la raison, à l'émancipation de l'individu, et finalement à la démocratie.

Le réalisme est, par essence, l'art démocratique. Ainsi, par le réalisme qui attend tout de l'individu et de son effort, nous arrivons à reconnaître que le peuple doit être instruit puis qu'il doit tout tirer de lui-même; tandis qu'avec l'idéal, c'est-à-dire avec la révélation et, comme conséquence, avec l'autorité et l'aristocratie, le peuple recevait tout d'en haut, tenait tout d'un autre que de lui-même et était fatalement voué* à l'ignorance et à la résignation.

*'vain' appears in the text of *Le Précurseur*, an obvious misprint corrected to 'voué' by *Le Courrier du dimanche* of 1 September 1861 in its reprint of Courbet's 'profession de foi'.

Je regrette que mon ami Proudhon, avec lequel je m'entends si bien, quoique arrivé à des conclusions semblables par des voies différentes, ne soit pas ici pour venir soutenir ma thèse avec l'autorité de son talent et de sa haute raison. Je ne suis pas orateur; j'exprime mes idées avec mon pinceau; mais ici la philosophie et l'art se rencontrent et c'est une preuve de plus pour la bonté de mon cœur.

Je n'ai parlé que sur les instances de mes amis, et parce qu'il y avait dignité et devoir à ne pas cacher son drapeau en présence de trois orateurs qui m'ont personnellement attaqué. Je ne relève que de moi-même; je ne tiens pas école; par fidélité à mon système individualiste je refuse de former des élèves. Je ne sais si j'ai exprimé mon opinion assez clairement, mais je l'ai exprimée sincèrement avec la connaissance de ce qui m'a précédé, d'une tradition que j'ai étudiée pendant vingt-trois ans d'une application opiniâtre et je ne crains pas de dire que j'attends de l'avenir la pleine ratification de mes idées.

NOTES

I carried out the archival research reflected in these pages on several stays in Paris and Besançon. I want to thank the Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies of the University of Michigan for the generous financial support which made this research possible. I also want to thank the officials of various institutions for their assistance in consulting the collections under their supervision. On several occasions, Claude Bouret, conservateur at the Cabinet des estampes, Bibliothèque nationale, guided me with care through the seven boxes of documents which comprise the 'Papiers de Courbet'. Jean-Jacques Fernier, conservateur of the Musée Gustave Courbet, put all the pertinent manuscripts of his museum at my disposal and helped me in interpreting several of them. At the Bibliothèque municipale de Besançon, I was able to take full advantage of the Blondon papers thanks to the expertise of Mme O. Paris who also brought to my attention an important dossier of letters sent by the 'Citizen' Rolland to Proudhon. Mme Bacou, conservateur en chef of the Cabinet des dessins, Musée du Louvre, graciously allowed me to consult a series of unpublished 'Lettres de Courbet à Champfleury'. My thanks also go to the Stadsbibliotheek of Antwerp for providing me with photocopies of the accounts of the Congress of Antwerp of August 1861 which appeared in the *Précurseur d'Anvers*. And finally, I want to express my appreciation to Hélène Toussaint, 'commissaire' of the Courbet Centenary Exhibition, for her willingness to discuss my research on Courbet at length and for many insightful suggestions which have spurred my progress.

1 In *Chronique de Paris*, 16 February 1851 as cited by T.J. Clark, *Image of the People*, London, 1982, p. 170.

2 Proudhon's *Philosophie du progrès* of 1853 had a major impact on Courbet. In viewing the artist as a leader invested with the mission of reforming the social order and bettering mankind, this volume faithfully re-expressed a programme formulated by the Saint-Simonians and the Fourierists and gave Courbet incisive answers to his questions on the purpose of modern art and the role of the artist.

Courbet's decision to affix the date 1853 to his famous *Portrait de P.-J. Proudhon* — actually begun three years later, as Alan Bowness has established — clearly indicates the importance which the *Philosophie du progrès* held for the painter (see Bowness' article, 'Courbet's Proudhon', *Burlington Magazine*, March 1978, p. 126). In his introduction to the centenary exhibition catalogue (*Gustave Courbet: 1819-1877*, Paris, 1977), Bowness also suggests that Courbet's seemingly arbitrary dating of this portrait must single out 1853 as an especially

meaningful year — but without relating it to the publication of Proudhon's volume.

Significantly enough, in his article 'Sur M. Courbet', Champfleury discusses the *Philosophie* in such a way as to substantiate this connection. He relates key passages of the book to Courbet and speaks as if Proudhon had composed them as a direct commentary on the painter's career and canvases, especially *Les Baigneuses* (Champfleury, *Le Réalisme*, Paris, 1857, pp. 278, 285-5).

3 For a succinct statement of Rubin's position, see p. 11 of his *Realism and Social Vision in Courbet & Proudhon*, Princeton, 1980. In our opinion, the impact of Proudhon's ideology on Courbet is especially evident in the years 1870-1 when the painter eagerly took part in the revolutionary events following the collapse of the Second Empire. As president of two successive organizations of his colleagues, Courbet attempted to create an artists' cooperative of sorts along the lines of Proudhon's mutualism; as a member of the Commune, Courbet championed the

decentralization and federation which were cornerstones of the reformed society Proudhon advocated.

In common with many critics, Rubin also sees Proudhon at the origin of specific canvases undertaken by Courbet, notably *Les Baigneuses*, *Le Départ des pompiers courant à un incendie* and *Les Demoiselles de la Seine*. We can add two proposed works — both apparently left unexecuted — to the list.

In 1860–1, Courbet contemplated painting two canvases on war which probably took their inspiration from Proudhon's *La Guerre et la paix*, a widely-discussed volume completed in these very years. Like Proudhon's philosophical reflections, Courbet's paintings sprang directly from current events which had made headlines throughout Europe, namely Napoleon III's campaign of 1859 in Italy against the forces of the Austrian emperor, Franz Joseph I. Courbet intended his first piece to convey an anti-militaristic message, overtly critical of Napoleonic jingoism. As he explained to Champfleury, it was to depict, as its backdrop, the 'cemetery of Solferino', site of one of the bloodiest contests of the recent conflict, while in the foreground two French soldiers, a Turco and a Zouave, would be seen in appropriate battlefield action (unpublished, undated letter written at the end of 1860 or beginning of 1861 and contained in a collection of 'Lettres de Courbet à Champfleury', Cabinet des dessins, Musée du Louvre).

Having abandoned this project (as an overly direct challenge to Napoleonic *gloire*?) he moved on to a second one by the summer of 1861. His idea now, ostensibly, was to paint the noble, heroic aspects of combat and to support Proudhon in his highly controversial rehabilitation of warfare's rightful place in world history. Specifically, Courbet intended to paint a likeness of Hercules, the very symbol of physical prowess and valour, in what might be labelled a direct borrowing from the preface of *La Guerre et la paix*. Here Proudhon had retold certain of Hercules' mythological feats with the aim of previewing one of his main themes: the legitimacy of the 'right of force'. Writing to Proudhon on 31 July 1861, Rolland gave details of the painter's intentions — while sardonically describing 'maître Courbet' as 'un Hercule d'Ornans' — which clearly linked the projected canvas to *La Guerre et la paix* (unpublished letter, Bibliothèque municipale de Besançon, ms. Pr 64 [9]).

- 4 Klaus Herding suggests quite aptly, in our opinion, that for Proudhon Courbet became the champion of the modern art *he* wanted to promote and the chief adversary of the practitioners of art for art's sake, the corruptors, alongside romantic writers, of French society of the day. See his 'Proudhons *Carnets intimes* und

Courbets *Bildnis Proudhons im Familienkreis*', Courbet Coloquium, Stadel, 1979, p. 155.

- 5 Bowness comes to this conclusion in his 'Courbet's *Proudhon*' (p. 124) as part of a general overview of the correspondences of the philosopher and artist. Moreover, only four letters written by Courbet to Proudhon have come down to us; all seem to relate to *Du principe de l'art*. Three of these, dated 'Paris 25 mai 63', '3 juin 63', and 'Salins le 8 décembre 1864' appeared in vol. 21 (1958) of the *Bulletin des amis de Gustave Courbet*, pp. 5–7.

We believe that a fourth letter (undated), published in the *Bulletin* (vol 22., 1958, pp. 1–7) under the title 'Portrait de Courbet', was also addressed to Proudhon, and *not* Dr Blondin, as the same periodical claims in a later reprinting ('Lettre inédite de Courbet', vol. 57, 1977, pp. 13–16). The manuscript of this letter lists some thirty aphorisms on art and a wide range of other topics, which Courbet called 'quelques litanies de ma façon', and is annotated sparingly in the precise, well-defined strokes characteristic of Proudhon's handwriting. Moreover, the philosopher refers directly to this text in *Du principe* when he sets forth his reservation on the painter's 'maxims on art'. The opinions he takes issue with — Courbet's admonition to the artist not to work on command; his dismissal of the past as inappropriate subject matter for the artist; his affirmation of total artistic independence — all figure prominently in these 'litanies' (See *Du principe*, p. 223).

Undoubtedly, certain letters and notes which the two men exchanged have been lost, notably most of the correspondence occasioned by Proudhon's volume on art. More than once, in fact, Proudhon complained of the long letters with which Courbet was 'assassinating' him, to borrow an expression from his note of 24 August 1863 to Max Buchon, the author of 'realist' prose and poetry describing his native Franche-Comté, and Courbet's close friend of many years. In one of his subsequent replies to the philosopher (unpublished note appended to Courbet's letter to Proudhon of 8 December 1864, archives of the Musée Gustave Courbet), Buchon corroborates the existence of the texts on art which Courbet had written for Proudhon, suggesting, moreover, that the philosopher return them to the painter. According to Buchon, Courbet feared that, if they fell into the wrong hands, they might be used as a 'machine de guerre' against him.

The Courbet Papers in the Bibliothèque nationale (Cabinet des estampes) contain three pages of notes in pencil (incompletely transcribed by Courthion under the title 'Pourquoi la société ne connaît et ne voit pas l'art' in his *Courbet raconté par lui-même*, vol. II, 1950, pp. 64–5) which may well be a rough

draft of one of these letters intended for Proudhon. Conversely, the longer, more substantial text on 'governing the arts', also included in the Courbet Papers, was most probably *not* addressed to Proudhon, despite Courthion's assertion to the contrary (see his publication of two brief excerpts of this manuscript in *Courbet raconté par lui-même*, vol. II, p. 63). Both these documents in pencil are contained in Box I of the Courbet Papers, in a folder labelled 'Non datées. Lettres diverses'.

- 6 In fact, among the hundreds of pages covering the period 1851–1864, Bowness and Herding find a mere seven or possibly eight entries which discuss Courbet and his activities. See Bowness, 'Courbet's Proudhon', pp. 124–5 and Herding, 'Proudhons *Carnets intimes* . . .', pp. 153–4 et passim. Our research has yielded but one additional entry on the artist, which fits the pattern of the previously identified *Carnet* references. This entry, dated 4(?) April 1852, runs: 'Visite de Courbet, peintre. Il a placé un de ses tableaux chez M. de Morny, à 5000 frs. — Il a eu du succès en Allemagne, chez les p^{tres} allemands'.

Only approximately half of Proudhon's *Carnets* (vols. I–IX, covering the period 1843–51) have been published to date by Marcel Rivière. The entry cited here comes from the unpublished portion of the notebooks, specifically vol. IX, p. 394 (Cf. ms. NAF 14273, Département des manuscrits, Bibliothèque nationale). All subsequent references to Proudhon's *Carnets* or works are based on the Rivière critical edition, unless otherwise noted.

- 7 Herding points out ('Proudhons *Carnet intimes* . . .', pp. 163–6) one *Carnet* entry, dated 1 January 1855, which, by its length and intimacy, contrasts sharply with the other passages devoted to Courbet. In it, Proudhon pursues a three-page reflection on the advantages and disadvantages of marriage, at times in the frank tone of a personal confession. Since the 'friend' who elicited this reflection by asking Proudhon whether he regretted having married is not actually named, we cannot identify him conclusively as Courbet, despite the reasonableness of the claim. (Courbet's position that marriage was incompatible with the professional life of the artist is well known.) More importantly, Proudhon's entry suggests that his questioner got only a perfunctory and evasive response. The philosopher apparently noted that the friend's query was badly formulated and refused to reveal his 'sentiments secrets' on a delicate subject: these were reserved for the pages of his *Carnets*.
- 8 It is hard to imagine Proudhon, the stern moralist and *pater familias*, as an 'habitué' of the boisterous realist *cénacle* which Courbet presided over in the 1850s at the Brasserie Andler,

despite the assertions occasionally made to the contrary.

- 9 Quoted from Lois Hyslop, *Baudelaire, Man of His Time*, New Haven, 1980, p. 103. See also Claude Pichois and Jean Ziegler, *Baudelaire*, Paris, 1987, pp. 263–73, for a full account of Baudelaire's contacts with Proudhon.
- 10 See Courbet's letter to Castagnary of 20 January 1865 (in Courthion, vol. II, 103) and his untitled article in *Le Soir*, 6 April 1871.
- 11 *Du principe de l'art*, p. 221. Another glance at the 'litanies' on art which Courbet sent to Proudhon (vols. 22 and 57 of *Le Bulletin des amis de Gustave Courbet* — see our note 5) is instructive in this regard. Judging from his marginal notes, Proudhon read his would-be collaborator's opinions rather perfunctorily: on four pages of text, Proudhon jotted down only seven of the most laconic comments. And like the critique of these 'litanies' which he provided in *Du principe*, his annotations tend to sound neutral at best, sometimes negative. Beside one of Courbet's observations, he wrote down simply '? quid'; beside another, 'ne sait ce qu'il dit'.

We would also suggest that many of the views expressed by Courbet in his 'litanies' — especially those related to non-artistic topics like work, decentralization, and religion — are designed not to inform the socialist theorist but to curry his favour. By and large, Proudhon shared the views in question and had, in fact, established his reputation in earlier years by articulating some of them eloquently, and often provocatively. Consider, for instance, two of a series of four Courbet pronouncements on religion which are omitted from the 'litanies' as published by Les Amis de Gustave Courbet in both vols. 22 and 57 of their *Bulletin*: 'Le mot Dieu doit être proscrié du langage, et on doit s'éloigner des idées qui s'y rattachent'; 'La doctrine Empirique du Christ a fait cent fois plus de mal que de bien sur la terre' (.) These thoughts are faithful but pale reflexions of the 'antithéisme' — 'Dieu, c'est le mal' — with which, in 1864, Proudhon had stunned the readers of his *Contradictions économiques*.

- 12 Our information on the Antwerp Congress comes mainly from Paul Mantz's article 'L'Exposition et les fêtes d'Anvers' (*Gazette des beaux-arts*, September 1861, pp. 279–84), an unsigned piece in the *Revue universelle des arts*, entitled 'Ville d'Anvers . . . Congrès artistique' (vol. XIII, April–September 1861, pp. 127–34), and the series of accounts of the congress which appeared in *Le Précurseur* of Antwerp of 20 and 21 August, 22 August, and 23 August 1861.
- 13 Unsigned report on the congress, *Le Précurseur*, 20 and 21 August 1861, p. 1.
- 14 These opinions were offered by Gustave Chaudey ('Le Congrès d'Anvers' in *Le Courrier*

- du dimanche, 1 September 1861), Amédée Achard ('Congrès d'Anvers...' in *Journal des débats*, 27 August 1861) and Louis Pfau ('L'Exposition d'Anvers' in *Le Temps*, 1 September 1861), among others.
- 15 The undated letter that Courbet sent to Buchon after returning from the Antwerp congress indicates that the artist gave credence to these rumours. 'Mr Lempereur s'est chargé lui-même de me la retirer [i.e. la décoration] de sa propre main ... c'était pour lui avoir fait répondre en 1854 que son gouvernement n'était pas assez libre pour comporter un homme comme moi.' See Jean-Jacques Fernier, *Gustave Courbet: Correspondance*, Ornans, 1987, letter no. 9.
- 16 Georges Riat asserts that the exhibition goers' 'admiration se partagea, très ardente, entre le *Combat de cerfs* et la grande *Tondeuse de moutons* de Millet' (*Gustave Courbet, peintre*, Paris, 1906, p. 191).
- 17 Mantz also found Courbet's mark in the paintings of Belgian artists such as de Goux, Dubois d'Aissche and Henri de Braekeleer, and noted with a bit of humour: 'Tout cela est excellent; mais qui donc aurait pu prévoir que M. Courbet aurait un jour des adhérents dans le pays de Quentin Matsys?' See his 'L'Exposition et les fêtes d'Anvers', *Gazette des beaux-arts*, September 1861, pp. 283–4.
- 18 Shortly after the conclusion of the festivities, a local artist, Eugène Dubois, spoke fondly of the 'nuits délicieuses' he and other compatriots had spent in their *cercle*, where Courbet had sung 'en franc camarade', his original melodies of 'une grande et profonde poésie champêtre'. Letter to Courbet of 22 August 1861 (Courbet Papers, Cabinet des estampes, Box I, Bibliothèque nationale).
- 19 Letter to Chaudey of 5 August 1861 in *Correspondance de P.-J. Proudhon*, J.-A. Langlois, ed., Paris, 1875, vol. XI, pp. 155–6. Unless otherwise noted, all references to Proudhon's correspondence are based on this edition, published in 14 volumes in 1875.
- 20 Letter of 11 August 1861, *Correspondance*, vol. XI, p. 169.
- 21 Letter to Chaudey of 5 August 1861, *Correspondance*, vol. XI, pp. 156–7. Proudhon's reflections on the Antwerp Congress provide an excellent illustration of the conspiratorial vision which permeates the philosopher's later writings. In short, Proudhon viewed the congress as yet another manifestation of the conspiracy of conservative elements of society — of the throne, the altar and the money-box, as he once picturesquely put it — to enslave the working classes and to recast the Europe of the nineteenth century into a new feudal system dominated by capital. In an expanded attack against the principle of permanent literary and artistic property written two years after the congress, Proudhon noted characteristically:
- '... ce sont des majorats d'une nouvelle espèce, une aristocratie de l'intelligence qu'on veut établir, tout un système de corruption et de servitude organisé sous le nom de propriété' (*Les Majorats littéraires*, Paris, 1968, p. 84).
- 22 A lawyer and a journalist, Ange-Gustave Chaudey (1817–1871) contributed, over the course of his career, to *La Presse*, *Le Courrier du dimanche* and *Le Siècle*. From the mid 1840s until his death, he played an active role in French political life, where he earned a reputation as a staunch defender of the Republican movement and, more particularly, as a loyal collaborator of Proudhon, whose case he pleaded in 1858 when the government condemned *De la justice*. After the collapse of the Empire in September 1870, Chaudey served briefly as mayor of the nineteenth arrondissement and then as 'adjoint' to the mayor of Paris. For his part in suppressing the uprising of 22 January 1871 he was executed on the order of Raoul Rigault during the Commune.
- Chaudey was also on close terms with Courbet and obviously served as a common friend who helped link the painter to Proudhon. Most probably, Chaudey met Courbet in the 1850s and by the mid-60s their contacts had become more frequent. The painter called on Chaudey to represent him legally in his litigation with Lepel-Cointet (1866) and Andler (1868) and in his negotiations with the City of Paris over the fate of his exhibition hall at the Place de l'Alma (1868). When Chaudey was arrested by the Commune, Courbet protested publicly in his favour.
- Noël-François-Alfred Madier de Montjau (1814–1892) also devoted his career to the propagation of republican ideals, both as a lawyer and as a politician. He participated in the February Revolution of 1848 and, after the June Days, defended a number of insurgents, as well as Proudhon's paper *Le Peuple*, in the courts. Elected to the Legislative Assembly, Madier de Montjau allied himself with the Mountain and, on 2 December 1851, opposed Napoleon III's coup by force, subsequently having to flee for his safety to Belgium, where he spent many years in exile. In 1878 he returned to political activity in France and, as a deputy of the extreme left, supported the vast majority of measures proposed by radical republicans during the last decade of his life.
- 23 Entry dated 19–20 August 1861; vol. IX (*Carnet XI*), p. 594, of the unpublished ms. of Proudhon's notebooks, NAF 14275, Département des manuscrits, Bibliothèque nationale. The complete text of Proudhon's assessment is as follows: 'Succès. Quatre amis, Chaudey, Madier-Montjau, Courbet, Hugelmann, déjouent l'intrigue pour la ppé littéraire. — Les mêmes, moins Hugelmann, font une profession de foi, en mon nom, anti-

mystique.' See also Herding's discussion of this *Carnet* entry in his 'Proudhons *Carnets intimes* and Courbets *Bildnis Proudhons im Familienkreis*', p. 153.

- 24 A laconic note filed with various documents (dating from 1860–4) in the archives of the Musée Gustave Courbet may suggest, however, that Courbet had some advance knowledge of the role Madier-Montjau would play at the Congress and that he arrived in Antwerp with the intention of looking him up. The note is simply an address and covers a small sheet folded into two main sections: (first fold) 'Monsieur/ Madier-Montjau' (second fold) 'Madier-Montjau/ Rue des Neriens(?) 24/ boulevard Leopold/ Belgique *Anvers*'. But in the absence of any useful contextual information — no date or signature accompanies the note which, judging from the handwriting, was probably not written by Courbet — we do not know what precise significance to attach to it.

Jean-Marie-Gabriel Hugelmann (1828–1888?) made his mark in a number of callings: he was a political activist deported to Belle-Île for his part in the June Days of 1848; a self-proclaimed man of letters who wrote poetry and prose and served as editor of numerous papers and journals; a speculator on the stock exchange and in real estate whose questionable manoeuvres earned him an appearance before the 'Tribunal Correctionnel de la Seine' in March 1874 for 'escroqueries', 'tentative de chantage', and 'banqueroute simple,' among other charges (for which he was convicted). During the Second Empire, he was an outrageously ardent apologist for Napoleon III and the imperial family, who did not hesitate to switch allegiance after the events of 1870–1 and to serve Thiers and his government as a secret agent. Proudhon obviously had precious little in common with Hugelmann and, not surprisingly, we find no further references to this colourful 'chevalier d'industrie' in his letters or *Carnets* after the adjournment of the Antwerp Congress. For further details on Hugelmann, see Jacques Maitron, *Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier*, 1ère Partie (1789–1864), vol. II, pp. 357 and especially the Hugelmann file, Ba/1122, in the archives of the Préfecture de Police, Paris.

- 25 See the *Précurseur* of 20–21 August 1861 and also of 22 and 23 August. At the very outset of the congress, Madier-Montjau and Hugelmann attempted to modify the agenda in such a fashion as to exclude consideration by the delegates of the copyright issue. Having failed to subvert discussion of the topic, which fellow delegates voted to retain as a major item of business, Chaudey, Hugelmann and especially Madier-Montjau argued forcefully against copyright legislation restricting the reproduction of art works. In a lengthy speech, Madier-

Montjau gave a series of practical reasons indicating why such legislation would be inappropriate and unjustified and asserted as a general principle — with unmistakably Proudhonian overtones — that 'l'oeuvre d'art est *res sacrae* et comme telle hors du commerce' (*Le Précurseur*, 23 August).

Most assuredly, Chaudey and Madier-Montjau also figured among the speakers who debated, during a meeting of the first section, the proposal to establish 'permanent' copyright protection. Although not cited by name in *Le Précurseur*, both could easily have been the opponents of such protection who argued, as Proudhon had already done in several publications, that the rights of society and the general public took precedence over those of the individual creator (*Le Précurseur*, 20–21 August).

- 26 Letter to Beslay, dated 'Bruxelles, 22 août 1861'. Internal evidence suggests that the date of this letter has been misprinted and that Proudhon probably wrote it at the very end of August, after the 26th in any case (*Correspondance*, vol. XI, pp. 185–7).
- 27 *Correspondance*, vol. XIV, 200.
- 28 Chaudey, 'Le Congrès d'Anvers', in *Le Courrier du dimanche*, 1 September 1861.
- 29 *Le Précurseur*, 23 August.
- 30 *Le Précurseur*, 22 August. The president of the third section, a professor at the University of Ghent by the name of Callier, was one of the most articulate of the traditionalists who opposed Courbet's views.
- 31 *Le Précurseur*, 22 August.
- 32 *Du principe de l'art*, p. 276. In the following discussion of Proudhon's assessment of the artistic genius of various cultures, we purposely look ahead to *Du principe*, where the philosopher had the chance to express his views on this and other art-related topics more comprehensively and incisively than earlier in his career. Quite obviously, Courbet could not have consulted this volume before making his speech in Antwerp. But he most certainly was familiar with the main themes of Proudhon's thinking on the arts which had been formulated in the 1840s and 1850s. The general evolution of cultural ideals from Ancient Greece to nineteenth-century France, the gradual shift from an art of the gods to one of man, praise of the Dutch of the seventeenth century as exemplary predecessors of the nineteenth-century realists: all these seminal themes of *Du principe* are already sketched out in the pages of *Philosophie du progrès* (pp. 88–97) and *De la justice* (especially vol. III, pp. 439–44; pp. 481–648; vol. IV, pp. 216–45).
- 33 *Du principe de l'art*, p. 94.
- 34 *ibid.*, p. 95.
- 35 'The basis of realism is the negation of the ideal.' See the Appendix for the complete text of Courbet's speech.

- 36 'In coming to a conclusion which posits the negation of the ideal and everything it implies, I fully achieve the emancipation of reason and of the individual, and finally democracy. Realism is, in essence, democratic art.'
- 37 'Thus, through realism which expects everything from the individual and his efforts, we succeed in recognizing that the people must be educated and that they must draw everything from themselves; whereas with the ideal, that is with divine revelation and, consequently, with authority and aristocracy, the people received everything from on high, owed everything to someone other than themselves, and were inevitably doomed to ignorance and resignation.'
- 38 'Romantic art like the classical school was art for art's sake. Today, in accordance with the latest expression of philosophy, one is required to reason even in art and never to let logic be overcome by sentiment. In everything reason must be the guiding principle of man. Mine is the latest expression of art because it is the only one which has till now combined all these elements.'
- 39 *Gazette des beaux-arts*, December 1878, p. 384. 'The day that [Courbet] came to the Antwerp Congress to say that the elimination of the ideal is the basic characteristic of modern art, he wounded us in the heart. [...] Courbet had talent; his works are of importance to the history of French painting; but one's feelings of affinity stop, hesitant and offended, before a painter so ignorant of the needs of the human soul that he undertook to decree the abolition of dreams.'
- 40 *Le Précurseur*, 22 August.
- 41 *Du principe de l'art*, p. 32.
- 42 *Philosophie du progrès*, p. 93; *De la justice*, vol. III, p. 522.
- 43 *Le Précurseur*, 22 August. '(...) a speaker asks that the third section declare that, in proclaiming liberty the basic element of the artist's inspiration, at the same time the existence of an infinite origin of art should be recognized.

M. MADIER-MONTJAU objects strongly to this confusion of liberty and the infinite, maintaining on the contrary that liberty will only be sanctioned by art when art has made its definitive break with the infinite. Any notion of an infinite proclaimed, defined and determined in advance by a school or a sect is a suppression of one's conscience, that is, of the conception of the ideal by the individual or of the free and subjective ideal. This one observation suffices to dismiss the criticism of those who affirm that true philosophy excludes all ideals.

M. DELAET, taking the floor, asks M. Madier-Montjau if he intends to exclude from art the intervention of all absolutes, of all theogonies, like his friends, MM. Proudhon and

Courbet.

Of all theogonies, M. Madier-Montjau answers, of all objective ideals, assuredly, but not with the necessary effect that the subjective ideal, product of reason and liberty, be excluded from modern art and prevent it from uplifting, beautifying, and poeticizing man's life, nature, and reality. We are therefore anything but materialists in the crude sense of the term as you are using it.'

- 44 We are also tempted to see Madier-Montjau (or perhaps Chaudey) as the unnamed delegate who contributed to the discussion of the third section a general overview of the history of humanity which showed that each period had its 'original, distinctive character'. The 'rapporteur' for the section remarked of this delegate that 'Il a passé en revue successivement la Grèce, Rome, la réforme, la révolution française; il s'est demandé si notre époque avait un caractère, si elle avait ses tendances propres.
- 'Entrant dans cette voie, on a pensé que ce qui caractérisait l'époque actuelle, c'était la souveraineté du peuple [...] (*Le Précurseur*, 22 August 1861). Both the historical survey, as we have seen, and the conclusion are vintage Proudhon and appropriate grist for one of his 'co-religionnaires'.
- 45 *Carnets*, vol. IV, pp. 251. 'Courbet is the author of the paintings, *A Burial at Ornans*, *The Stonebreakers*, *The Return from the Fair*, and his portrait. [...] These are genre paintings on large canvases. They convey ugliness as it exists, but with great vigour. This is not the purpose of art.'
- 46 Entry for 26 June 1855 in Bowness, p. 124.
- 47 *Du principe de l'art*, p. 188. 'Shall one say, with the writers of the new school, that these paintings [by Courbet] are realism in its purest state? Be careful, I will answer: your realism would compromise the truth which, however, you profess to serve. Real is not the same thing as true; the first applies more to matter, the second to the laws which govern matter.'
- Rubin notes that in this discussion Proudhon cites Castagnary's article 'Les Deux Césars' of 13 September 1863, and argues convincingly that Proudhon had also read other pieces by Castagnary in 1863 where the 'école naturaliste' and Courbet were prime topics of interest. See Rubin, pp. 93–5 and 161–3.
- 48 *Du principe de l'art*, p. 230. 'There is not, there cannot be any purely realist art, consequently no realist school or genre; realism being only the material basis upon which art builds, it is by itself beneath and outside art. Art is essentially idealist.'
- 49 *ibid.*, p. 220.
- 50 *ibid.*, p. 222.
- 51 *ibid.*, p. 225.
- 52 *ibid.*, pp. 225–6.
- 53 *ibid.*, p. 221. 'More artist than philosopher,

- Courbet has not expressed all the thoughts I have found [...]. But, admitting that what I believed to see in his paintings was illusion on my part, those thoughts exist; and since art is valid only in its effects, I do not hesitate to interpret it in my own way. If I exaggerate his importance as a thinker, there is no harm: that serves at least to make my readers understand what I want and what I am looking for.'
- 54 *ibid.*, p. 229.
- 55 Letter of 19 and 20 April 1861 to Francis Wey in Courthion, vol. II, p. 90.
- 56 In Courthion, vol. II, pp. 205–6. 'Beauty is in nature, where it assumes the most diverse forms. [...] As soon as beauty is real and visible, it has in itself its artistic expression. But the artist does not have the right to amplify this expression by artifice.'
- 57 *ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 27–8:
- 58 *ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 47.
- 59 Letter of 7 September 1861, Bibliothèque municipale de Besançon, PR 64 (9). 'Moreover, what can you regret? Did not Courbet speak for you? *Sileant omnes in conspectu ejus! Ego sum qui sum.* I am Courbet the real. I am the true Courbet! But I am joking inappropriately; because I, more than anyone else, appreciate Courbet's talent as is fitting. Only the orator does not rival the painter. *Cacatum non est pictum.* As for Madier, he threw himself into the subjective and the objective, like a true disciple of Hegel. Of what use is this philosophical jargon when one speaks to artists? One must speak to them in a language as concrete as their minds, if one wants to make oneself understood ... I am sorry Madier did not understand as much. I regret this all the more since I fully approve of everything he said.'
- 60 Our quote comes from the complete text of Courbet's undated letter to Max Buchon (written most probably in 1863) which Fernier has recently published as no. 6 in *Gustave Courbet: Correspondance*. Previously, the only available version of the letter was the abridged one published some years ago by Pierre Moreau. See his 'La Franche-Comté: marche frontière du Réalisme' in *Revue de la littérature comparée*, April–June 1937, p. 346.
- 61 Undated letter published as no. 2 in Fernier, *Gustave Courbet: Correspondance*. Fernier suggests that this letter was penned in the spring of 1856 and we would agree.
- As a young writer aspiring to win his laurels in the realist and democratic movement, albeit primarily on the regional level, Buchon understood as well as Courbet the profit to be gained from Proudhon's approval and backing. Over the years, Buchon made a point of sending Proudhon copies of his studies of life in the Franche-Comté, obviously in hopes of favourably impressing the renowned philosopher. On one occasion, he did not shy from directly appealing to Proudhon for 'quelques lignes sur la *Littérature populaire*' which he might use as a recommendation to newspapers of the Franche-Comté. Buchon boldly asserted that 'Nul n'est plus compétent que vous pour parler de ces affaires-là, surtout en ce qui concerne notre province, et pour mon compte, je serais tout fier de porter à ma boutonnière votre approbation motivée sur ces matières, qui ont je crois leur importance' (letter to Proudhon, 'Salins le 27 Juin 1861', published by Fernier in *Gustave Courbet: Correspondance*, p. 7).
- 62 See Proudhon's letter of 9 August 1863 to J. Buzon in the *Correspondance*, vol. XIII, pp. 131–2.
- 63 G. Riat, *Gustave Courbet, peintre*, p. 208.
- 64 Letter from Courbet to Buchon, undated, no. 9, in Fernier, *Gustave Courbet: Correspondance*.