

Caillebotte and Haussmann:
Art as Commentary on the Modern Built Environment

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Three men. One walking, two standing. Looking. One bridge, iron. Myriad apertures between girders and balusters, framing nature and city alike in highly deliberate, picture-perfect compositions. So unfolds Gustave Caillebotte's *On the Pont de l'Europe* (Fig. 1), a late 1870s work of generous scale, complementing his better-known and similarly grand *The Pont de l'Europe* (Fig. 2) which welcomes a broader set of characters into its warmer, wider frame.¹ Not so our painting, whose colder blues, greens and grays evade the midday sunlight and whose subjects hide their faces from the painter's brush and viewer's gaze.

The character closest to us is the least relevant and connected. His face cut off not by the angle of view but by the stubborn edge of the canvas, he exits house left at a brisk and regular pace. The most loosely rendered of the three, he swallows almost the entire left edge of the frame in his effort to leave it, dressed in a smart but not decidedly distinctive dark coat and top hat. He has not stopped to admire the view; this accomplished but no-nonsense bourgeois, neat hair sprinkled with flecks of silver, has somewhere better to be.

His peers have other plans, or at least temporarily put aside their plans to regard the landscape upon which they've stumbled. A man dressed in a blue laborer's smock leans squarely on the railing, hunched, focusing intently on the view below. His face is hidden, so we can't tell exactly what he's looking at, but it's likely Gare Saint-Lazare, Paris's bustling modern railroad hub, its ironwork dancing in and out of view between seas of locomotive steam and smoke. Though a member of the working class, the man wears a bowler hat that hints at his desire for and possible success at social mobility.² As scholars have pointed out, his placement between

¹ The former painting is sometimes referred to as an alternate version of the latter and titled something like *The Pont de l'Europe (Variant)*, but I will be applying the nomenclature of the Kimbell Art Museum whose permanent collection it inhabits, and whose catalog lists it as a standalone work with the title *On the Pont de l'Europe*. Generally, I will also refer to works by their English titles, excluding incorporated proper nouns as in *Arrival of the Normandy Train, Gare Saint-Lazare*.

² Robinson, Fred Miller. *Man in the Bowler Hat: His History and Iconography*. The University Of North Carolina Press, 2011.

two higher-class gentlemen also evidences an erosion of traditional Parisian social class distinctions. “Caillebotte’s picture of these two representations of the middle classes,” states Musée d'Orsay curator Anne Distel, “is a particularly telling image, for it was industrialization and the accompanying social changes that had indeed brought the lower and middle classes closer together.”³

These and other changes Caillebotte surveyed on his canvas, we will see, sprang directly from radical shifts in the very layout of his late nineteenth century Paris at the hands of Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann, prefect of Seine and urban (re)designer under Emperor Napoleon III. In this essay, I will examine Caillebotte’s treatment of the human presence in the context of the newly imposed Haussmannian grid that organized the city of Paris. Specifically I will explore people in Caillebotte’s paintings as they appear on bridges and balconies against a backdrop of seismic urban upheaval. Through analyses of a core group of his earliest paintings, I will show how his unique training and approach to art enabled him to weave social commentary into his works and attain a level of psychological introspection well beyond that attempted by his Impressionist colleagues.

On the Pont de l'Europe is a great place to start. The painting’s debonair third man was, moments ago, its frame-jumping first man, with a better place to be. But the instant frozen in time by Caillebotte sees him pause, distracted, and look at the railway station. This haphazard “slice of life” formulation, effectively passively observed rather than actively posed, speaks to the artist’s fascination with the nascent discipline of photography and its ability to capture fleeting, raw and unassuming moments. It has long been assumed by art historians that

³ Distel, Anne. *Gustave Caillebotte, Urban Impressionist*. Abbeville Press, 1995.

Caillebotte used photography as a tool in the development of his paintings, something I will address further on in this essay.

Dressed in a grayish-bluish frock coat and shiny top hat, this third man's outfit is far more detailed than that of his bourgeois compatriot, the coat accommodating a richer range of shades and the hat reflecting a sharper kind of light. His starched right shirt cuff is also visible, and he wears a spotless white scarf, likely silk.⁴ Placed to the right of the other men and almost in the center of the canvas, his head is turned just far enough to rob us off his face. He's the most intimately crafted of the three, but the bar is low. All we see is a clean-shaven cheek and a grizzled head of hair, almost identical to the hurried man at the edge of the frame. In fact, minor outfit discrepancies aside, they could almost be the same man.

The fact that that one looks, though, tells us much about him. It labels him a "flâneur," loosely translated as "stroller," "lounger" or even "loiterer." First appearing in 1808 to reference lazy members of the lower classes, the term was quickly appropriated by others, most famously French poet and critic Charles Baudelaire in his essay *The Painter of Modern Life*.⁵ There, he uses it to refer to a male urbanite of sufficient means who strolls the boulevards of Paris as a detached spectator, and this usage stuck. The flâneur makes the streets familiar to him, and walks with the sole purpose of observing the people in their newly modernized environment.

The crowd is his domain, just as the air is that of the bird, and water that of the fish. His passion and his profession is to merge with the crowd. For the perfect idler, for the passionate observer it becomes an immense source of enjoyment to

⁴ Ibid. Anne Distel and Kirk Vanedoe disagree on whether the man is ungloved or is wearing a white silk glove to match his scarf. Regardless, both a white glove and a pale, delicate hand lead to the same conclusion: the man is a member of the upper class and does not engage in manual labor.

⁵ Ferguson, Priscilla. *Paris as Revolution: Writing the Nineteenth-Century City*. University of California Press, 1997. Before Baudelaire, Balzac also used the terminology to refer to bourgeois idlers.

establish his dwelling in the throng, in the ebb and flow, the bustle, the fleeting and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel at home anywhere; to see the world, to be at the very center of the world, and yet to be unseen of the world[.]⁶

It is worth noting that the flâneur of Baudelaire and thus of Caillebotte is necessarily a male figure coolly observing his city, a “*man of the world.*”⁷ While later critics, most notably French novelist Marcel Proust, developed ideas of a female “*passante*” (a term also used by Baudelaire, but in his case clearly denoting a *passive* feminine passerby who is observed by others,) who operates much as a flâneur might, these were published well after Caillebotte’s death and it is unlikely that their themes could have influenced his work.^{8 9} The same applies to originations of a counterpart “*flâneuse.*”¹⁰ In Caillebotte’s paintings, with few exceptions, men are the ones found gazing and wandering.

So the faceless main character looks, and he for whom the city is a painting earns center stage in Caillebotte’s painting of the city. And not just any city. His Paris rapped at the door of the *fin de siècle* (end of the [nineteenth] century), an era defined by decadence and ennui, still recovering from the shadow of searing social and political turmoil including more than a few revolutions. The period saw Paris grow into a mecca of art, culture and cosmopolitanism, a haven for the greatest authors (Guy de Maupassant, Emile Zola), artists (Claude Monet, Gustave Caillebotte himself) and thinkers (Henri Bergson) of the age. Anyone who was anyone flocked to

⁶ Baudelaire, Charles, and Jonathan Mayne. *The Painter of Modern Life: and Other Essays by Charles Baudelaire*. Translated and Edited by Jonathan Mayne. Phaidon Press, 1964.

⁷ Ibid, emphasis mine.

⁸ Wagner, Geoffrey. *Selected Poems of Charles Baudelaire*. Grove Press, 1974.

⁹ Proust, Marcel, et al. *In Search of Lost Time*. Chatto & Windus, 1992.

¹⁰ Ferguson, Priscilla. *Paris as Revolution: Writing the Nineteenth-Century City*. University of California Press, 1997.

late nineteenth century Paris, alongside anyone who wanted to be anyone. These conditions exist at the periphery of our artist's and our painting's social consciousness, but even more important to *On the Pont de l'Europe* were the changes rupturing and renewing the physical fabric of the metropolis itself, the changes granting the flâneur a playground in the first place to spend his evenings “looking for that indefinable something we may be allowed to call ‘modernity[.]’”¹¹

Catalyzed by the second industrial revolution, dated roughly from the mid-1860s' proliferation of the Bessemer process of steel production through the beginning of World War I in 1914, the mid- to-late nineteenth century saw an unprecedented resettling of millions of people across the Western world. Rural residents left their farms and villages behind in search of the factories and paychecks of rapidly growing cities and industrial centers.¹² “It is because the urban transition — the shift from rural to urban society — is now close to complete in the West,” notes author Andrew Kirby, “that it is often hard for us to attain the sense of wonder which first marked that transformation. In the space of a millennium, we have gone from simple agricultural to complex economic systems that are based almost exclusively in some type of city.”¹³

In mid-1800s Europe, such change was very much in the air. In 1862, Prussian planner James Hobrecht unveiled a comprehensive land-use plan for Berlin, growing the city's incorporated area, overhauling its block structures, increasing its population density in residential areas and modernizing its sewers and other infrastructure. This helped accommodate what at the time stood as an influx of 10,000 inhabitants per year.¹⁴ Other European metropolises such as

¹¹ Baudelaire, Charles, and Jonathan Mayne. *The Painter of Modern Life: and Other Essays by Charles Baudelaire*. Translated and Edited by Jonathan Mayne. Phaidon Press, 1964.

¹² Scientific American, “Bessemer Steel and its Effect on the World.” Vol. 78, No. 13, 1898, p. 198.

¹³ Kirby, Andrew. “Seeing Cities Through Urban Art.” *Geography*, Spring 2017. pp. 33-43.

¹⁴ Bernet, Claus. “The 'Hobrecht Plan' (1862) and Berlin's urban structure.” *Urban History*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (December 2004), pp. 400-419.

London and Madrid, and American ones like New York and Chicago, saw similar, if less formalized, growth and renovations.

Grand as some of these developments were, their paragon was undoubtedly the revamping and associated public works project of the French capital. Napoleon III, nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte I, was elected as president of France in 1848; when he was unable to win constitutional reelection, he seized power as Emperor in 1851. During his reign, from 1852 to 1870, he pursued broad modernization of the French economy, largely in the form of vast infrastructure projects. Most relevant for our purposes, he commissioned an expansion and near-total overhaul of Paris to accommodate its ballooning population and improve traffic flow into and within the city.

Particularly central to his vision as leader of a young and turbulent empire, Napoleon III also aimed to cement the city as a European capital of the highest order that spoke to the vision and success of the imperial system of governance.¹⁵ “The plan for Paris to assume the mantle of imperial Rome and become the head and heart of civilization in Europe was [undoubtedly] part of Haussmann’s mandate,” argues historian David Harvey. “[T]he drama of the public works and the flamboyance of the new architecture emphasized the ... atmosphere within which the imperial regime sought to envelop itself.”¹⁶

For this project of unprecedented proportions, Napoleon III appointed French official of German descent Baron Georges-Eugene Haussmann as prefect of the Seine, the national district of Paris, and gave him almost unlimited power to knead the city into a bold new shape. And on June 23, 1853, “Haussmann took office as Prefect ... with a mandate to remake the city

¹⁵ Harvey, David. *Paris, Capital of Modernity*. Routledge, 2006.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

according to plan.”¹⁷ Tearing down crowded medieval neighborhoods with little regard for the welfare of their inhabitants and annexing suburbs at a rapid and haphazard pace, the prefect left thousands of poorer Parisians displaced and homeless in his pursuit of a Parisian *tabula rasa*.¹⁸ On it, he drew an unrelenting grid of wide boulevards intersecting at extravagant monuments and public parks, and flanked by highly uniform residential and commercial buildings. “There is no question that it was Haussmann,” notes Harvey, “who imposed the logic of the straight line, who insisted upon the symmetry, who saw the logic of the whole, and who set the tone for both the scale and style as well as the details of spatial design.”¹⁹

This logic and linearity was very much a new look for the city — until the prefect’s renovations, Paris’s streets and structures tended to be less deliberately ordered or generously proportioned, often built informally hundreds of years earlier and irregularly maintained over time. Buildings were made of plaster-covered brick or wood, and were rather narrow, often only about 20 feet wide compared to depths of well over 100 feet and heights of up to 73.5 feet (five or six stories).²⁰ They weren’t *designed* per se, though they did follow fairly standard layouts: ground floors were usually commercial space, while the floors above were residential; top floors, often designed as storage areas, were frequently converted into low-cost residences as responses to the city’s growing population.

Haussmann changed many of those elements. While his buildings were still generally half a dozen stories, with shops at the bottom and residences above, he ordered that all buildings be drafted not as unique, standalone structures but as segments of an unbroken, unified

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ De Moncan, Patrice, Claude Heurteux. *Le Paris d'Haussmann*. 2002.

streetscape.²¹ With the Rue de Rivoli as his first completed street and an example for the rest to follow, he designed whole blocks at a time. The facades of multiple properties were meticulously regulated to be the same heights (five or six stories depending on the street) and materials (usually locally-sourced cream-colored Lutetian limestone).²² While structural aspects and interior layouts weren't regulated, they tended to follow certain patterns: basements and ground floors contained commercial space, and featured thicker, load-bearing walls. Many had intermediate floors at the back with low ceilings, generally for storage or sometimes shopkeepers' quarters.

Second, or "noble" floors, especially in the years before widespread elevator adoption, were considered the most desirable for residences, and featured spacious apartments with large windows, running balconies and ornate detailing inside and out.²³ Third and fourth floors had smaller windows and generally lacked balconies except in some cases as window-specific units; fifth floors featured continuous wraparound ones but without the ornamentation of their "noble" peers downstairs. They also had smaller windows in the style of third and fourth stories. Sixth floors sat under mansard roofs, angled at precisely 45 degrees, containing garret rooms and topped with dormer windows.²⁴ All this, specifically the roofs and balconies that appeared to transcend building breaks, came together to create an unmistakable effect of horizontality that swept down wide boulevards (streets under Haussmann often nearly doubled in width from under 40 feet to around 80, and even more for central thoroughfares,) and across uniform

²¹ Harvey, David. *Paris, Capital of Modernity*. Routledge, 2006.

²² "The Stones of Paris." *The Independent*, Independent Digital News and Media, 21 Sept. 2007. Reporter John Lichfield notes that this bright stone and its ubiquity in the Haussmannian renovation is what lends Paris the nickname "city of light."

²³ We will return to floor numbering systems later.

²⁴ De Moncan, Patrice, Claude Heurteux. *Le Paris d'Haussmann*. 2002.

balconies along multiple buildings' already widened facades.²⁵ In his notes, the prefect recalls specifically “order[ing] the insertion of a clause in contracts for the sale of land belonging to the city, obliging buyers to give the facades of houses in each parcel the same principal lines, so that balconies would be continuous, and cornices and roofs would be as much as possible on the same level.”²⁶ His structures called attention not to themselves, usually lacking in elaborate sculpture or excessive ornamentation, but to the project of a new Paris, unified in its pursuit of grandeur and progress and the betterment of its diversifying populace.

On the transit side, the era being one of widespread steam locomotive and railway adoption, Haussmann oversaw the development of a huge Paris-centric French railroad system, expanding its size during his tenure by nearly a factor of ten from under 2,000 kilometers to over 17,000.²⁷ This served to ferry products and people in and out of the city, including agricultural wares to support the growing municipality as it shifted focus to the manufacturing of consumer goods and stopped producing most of its own food supply. The railroad's tentacles into the countryside also spearheaded a culture of bourgeois Parisian day trips and vacations to the city's environs, including among the Impressionists, like Monet's and Caillebotte's extended retreats to their respective gardens at Argenteuil and Yerres.²⁸ A network of dedicated bridges and tunnels brought trains and pedestrians to and from Paris's main travel hubs including Gare de Lyon and

²⁵ Historians have long debated whether the widening of Paris's boulevards was explicitly aimed at improving troop movement within the city and impeding the construction of barricades across narrow alleys. Zola and others believed so, and Haussmann himself recognized that wider streets delivered strategic benefits. However, he stated that he “never thought in the least, in adding them, of their greater or lesser strategic value,” instead trying primarily to improve traffic flow and to make the city a more pleasant place to conduct business and leisure. Harvey echoes this idea, stating that the wide boulevards were indirectly helpful militarily, but that strategic goals were central to Haussmann's renovations. See De Moncan, Patrice, Claude Heurteux. *Le Paris d'Haussmann*. 2002 and Harvey, David. *Paris, Capital of Modernity*. Routledge, 2006.

²⁶ Groom, Gloria. *Impressionism, Fashion, and Modernity*. The Art Institute of Chicago in partnership with Yale University Press, 2012.

²⁷ Harvey, David. *Paris, Capital of Modernity*. Routledge, 2006.

²⁸ Clark, T.J. *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers*. University Press, 1984.

Gare Saint-Lazare; one such bridge, replacing an antiquated and overwhelmed group of tunnels at the latter train station, was the Pont de l'Europe at the intersection of six new boulevards, where our three men now stand and walk and look.

That heavy metal bridge absolutely dominates our painting. Instinct and years of schooling have trained our eyes to recognize the familiar and to fall on human figures first, but the iron is where they settle. The three men, absent eyes and faces of their own, are only so interesting; the bridge is a visual labyrinth. Depicted roughly parallel to our field of view, it is flattened nearly to the point of geometric abstraction, industrial elements reduced to their most basic shapes. A beefy column, placed just right of center, bisects the painting into two halves: left and right, human and other. A railing splits the image horizontally below the midpoint, chopping it further into quarters. Relatively ornate next to the girders, its narrow oval apertures and sculpted concave balustrade provide respite from the otherwise severe and excessively functional support structure.

Rigid iron girders crisscross the midground, forming half-Xs on either side of the thick central column. Save for the railing, the bridge element closest to us is a sharply rendered girder placed at a near-45-degree diagonal that travels down from the center-right top of the frame to the lower left, ducking behind the two viewers before terminating behind the walking man. It is the only one with upturned flanges in an I-beam configuration (a technological innovation of mid-19th century France and Belgium to make metal stronger with less material); all others are entirely flat.²⁹ Softly curving segmental arches top each side of the image, linked in the center and disappearing just out of frame. Round and regular rivets, pockmarking girder intersections in

²⁹ Derdak, Thomas, et al. *International Directory of Company Histories*. (Uden Titel). St. James Press/Thomson Gale, 1988.

the top middle and top right, hold everything together. A strip of them is also visible in the shadowed interior of the central column.

Though ostensibly black, the ironworks are infused by Caillebotte with a quiet but diverse spectrum of color. Blues and grays dominate, while patches of green and hints of yellow moderate the otherwise visually cold metal surfaces. Shadow areas are doused in navy and purple, while highlights, especially on the painting's right side, earn yellows and whites and a touch of sky blue. The treatment of the bridge conveys a sophisticated understanding of hue and photonics, transforming the most functional of structures into a near-organic visual smorgasbord.

On the Pont de l'Europe is clearly aesthetically resplendent. But fully appreciating its psychological import requires familiarity with Caillebotte's "main" variant of the work, *The Pont de l'Europe*, and the studies that led to its final form. Even larger than its already substantial cousin, the oil on canvas masterwork stands at 49 x 71 inches, enormous for an Impressionist painting.³⁰ It depicts the same bridge, but its vantage point, subjects, coloration and disposition are markedly different. To begin with, the very number of people it contains, ever so clear in *On the Pont de l'Europe*, is somewhat elusive. There are evidently certain main characters, two to four depending on one's count, but a sprinkling of figures populating the mid- and background are harder to number. This is far less lonely a scene.

Most characters are again on the left side of the canvas, leaving the right to the bridge's trusses and the views they frame, but the painting's perspective is starkly different. While *On the Pont de l'Europe* places its bridge parallel to the picture frame, *The Pont de l'Europe* aggressively angles it, receding from the entire right side of the canvas and beyond to a

³⁰ Varnedoe, Kirk. *Gustave Caillebotte*. Yale University Press, 1987. A feature of Impressionist en plein air (in situ rather than in studio) painting, was that canvases had to be small enough to carry around on one's person. Varnedoe cites, and refutes, a Caillebotte family tradition that the artist executed *The Pont de l'Europe* from a windowed carriage on site. He notes that its preparatory studies and exacting specifications point to a studio context.

vanishing point in the top left quadrant. It is far brighter than the variant image, an early afternoon scene of warm yellow-greens and deep browns. This likely reflects a rise in actual temperature as well as a thawing of color temperature; the people are dressed for leisure or work rather than warmth.

As in *On the Pont de l'Europe*, a laborer leans on the bridge's iron railing, gazing at the great beyond, his class indicated by his thick, functional, loose-fitting clothes. Here the young man isn't hidden behind already cloaked bourgeois figures but unobstructed and quite alone, the sole human inhabitant of the painting's right side. Dressed not in bright blue but soft gray and topped with a humble cap rather than a bowler hat, he poses casually, legs crossed. Across the canvas, a smartly dressed man in a gray coat and top hat, the leftmost main figure, walks toward the viewer, hands behind his back. His facial features, especially the hint of sharply trimmed beard, closely resemble Caillebotte's, and, "by contemporary account as well as family tradition," the figure in fact represents the artist.³¹ Distel adds that "Caillebotte in the 1870s" saw himself as and "revealed himself to be an artist-flâneur, the painter of modern life as it had been transformed and defined by the street."³² That makes sense in our painting, where he's shown as a creative observer strolling Paris dressed to the nines in the middle of the working day. The transit hub-adjacent bridge is also quite a fitting location to install himself as flâneur — "The Pont de l'Europe as a meeting place or a place of promenade made it an ideal site for a Baudelairian flâneur: 'seeing the world, being at the center of it but staying hidden from people' in the crowd."³³

³¹ Ibid.

³² Distel, Anne. *Gustave Caillebotte, Urban Impressionist*. Abbeville Press, 1995.

³³ Ramos, Cecilia. "Caillebotte's 'On the Pont de l'Europe': A Transversal Vista of Modernity." *Thresholds*, 2006, No. 31. pp. 32-39. Ramos quotes Baudelaire's famous "voir le monde, être au centre de monde, et rester caché du monde."

By his side if falling a step behind is a woman in a lavish, form-fitting ruffled black dress, gloved, hatted, veiled and wielding a parasol against the sun. The man's top hat and the woman's umbrella (aided by her veil) cast both their eyes in shadow, introducing ambiguity to their sightlines — she appears to be looking at him, but he seems not to be returning the gaze. Instead, he is likely sharing the view off the Pont with the gray-suited laborer, or even looking at the worker himself, a three-pronged chain of unrequited glances.

Indeed, though *The Pont de l'Europe* is highly populated, no humans in it are making eye contact or directly interacting. Behind and slightly stage left of the bourgeois couple, an older laborer in faded blue and green workwear walks slowly, glancing out through the bridge. Past him, a string of people of diverse classes mirror the gray laborer, leaning on the iron railing and looking out at something or nothing at all. With every man (and woman) in the painting an island, art historian Marni Reva Kessler feels that “Caillebotte makes his point clear: We are meant to consider the relationships of the figures in [*The Pont de l'Europe*] within the context of Haussmann's Paris and all of the ambivalence and confusion that existed in it.”³⁴ Something about the environment is keeping people apart.

I specify a lack of *human* interaction since a charming brown dog bounds in to balance out the composition, occupying what is otherwise a sea of dead sidewalk space in the middle bottom of the painting. Facing away from us, it could very well be looking at the strolling man and woman, but we can't really know. What we do know is aesthetic, structural: the dog reinforces the stroke of the bridge, its body “act[ing] as a spatial arrow in its parallel thrust along [its] shadow line.”³⁵ Its presence also adds visual depth by introducing a primary foreground

³⁴ Kessler, Marni Reva. *Sheer Presence: The Veil in Manet's Paris*. University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

³⁵ Varnedoe, Kirk. *Gustave Caillebotte*. Yale University Press, 1987.

element. It is almost super-foreground in a way, its left hind leg cut off by the uncompromising frame of the painting, dragging in the viewer and asking us to stroll and look.

This reinforced diagonal line highlights the geometry of the painting. Late American art historian, MoMA curator of painting and sculpture and foremost Caillebotte scholar Kirk Varnedoe notes in his authoritative biography of the artist that its dominant form is a “skewed, lopsided X,” with one bar formed by “the curb line at lower left and the trellis top at upper right” and the other “by the promulgation of the diagonal of the railing (or the shadow on the sidewalk) into the receding line of of the buildings at upper left.”³⁶ This is important — in what appears to be a painting of pedestrians on a sidewalk, three bars of the central X lead to a vanishing point among the Haussmannian buildings at the top left whose roofs form the fourth bar. They’re easy to miss, and partly obscured by steam from the railway below, but their geometry is anything but ambiguous. Coupled with the overwhelming forms of the bridge itself, “nowhere in Impressionist painting does the call for artistic recognition of the forms of modern life receive as unequivocal a response as here, where the raw grids of iron (erected about a decade before) rise up to dominate a painting of major dimensions.”³⁷

Everything about this painting is highly calculated. In a painstaking analysis in partnership with his colleague, MoMA curator of photography Peter Galassi, Varnedoe argues that Caillebotte deliberately “exploited the steep uphill slant of the road at this point on the bridge in order to produce a misleadingly sharp apparent convergence of perspective, based on a system of two vanishing points.”³⁸ This creates the illusion of a space far deeper than it actually

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

is, a result made possible by the “idiosyncrasy of [the] specific site” and the artist’s ability to reproduce “technical pictorial fidelity.”³⁹

The curators conclude that “the easiest and most direct way [for Caillebotte] ... to transfer the complexities of the architecture to a two-dimensional surface was by means of a camera.”⁴⁰ The small size of his preparatory sketches speak to the likelihood that they “may well have been traced from a camera image,” as does the sheer difficulty of recording such an intricate blend of geometries in freehand. Particularly interesting to me is the authors’ observation that the “looming foregrounds, tiny backgrounds, and exaggerated convergences” of this painting and other works executed by Caillebotte between 1875 and 1877 all betray what can only be described in contemporary terms as “wide-angle” photographic geometry.⁴¹ In a charming and informative piece of investigative journalism and scholarship, Varnedoe and Galassi traveled to the actual Place de l’Europe with cameras in hand, where they took pictures of the site with lenses of various focal lengths. Their 55mm, or “normal” shot, closely approximating the field of view of the human eye, looked nothing like *The Pont de l’Europe*.⁴² Their 24mm wide angle shot, a field of view available only through a camera lens, matched the painting’s geometry perfectly.

Whether or not it involved a camera, Caillebotte’s artistic process was quite thorough, especially compared with the spontaneity of many of his Impressionist peers; his cogitation foreshadows the psychological angle we will explore as unique to his works. For *The Pont de l’Europe* and many other paintings of his, especially from the late 1870s, he drew pencil sketches

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² In photography, lenses at or near a 50mm focal length are referred to as “normal,” and are considered to most closely match the field of view of the human eye. See Modrak, Rebekah, and Bill Anthes. *Reframing Photography*. Routledge, 2011.

of individual subjects and visual elements, all ready to be placed into predetermined locations in his scene. He then painted slightly larger oil sketches of the entire image, mostly though not always populated with those characters but more specifically focusing on the architecture and lighting of the setting he wished to depict. Between sketches he might move around certain subjects and make subtle alterations, but larger changes by this point would be quite rare.

I'd like to consider two such 1876 sketches for *The Pont de l'Europe*. While we can't be totally sure of the order in which he completed them, it is reasonable to assume that the rougher example preceded the more detailed one. In the first sketch (Fig. 3), the central and really the only identifiable character is the laborer in gray leaning against the railing, his position remarkably similar to that of the final version. The ultimate main characters, Caillebotte-as-flâneur and the woman who walks beside him, are reduced to a swirl of grayish brush strokes, if they're there at all. Other characters are basically gone, mere blips of oil dotting the canvas, and bridge highlights and shadows are rendered quite abstractly with sweeping swipes of the paintbrush.

The second sketch (Fig. 4) gives us Caillebotte and his companion, plus some figures behind them and details like the steam billowing up from below the bridge. Curiously, the work features a strong shadow line at the bottom of the painting that is mostly absent in the finished version. The sketch is sharper than the first one overall, its renderings of foreground trusses and background buildings approaching the three-dimensionality of the final painting. It is also cooler in color, flirting with the blues and grays that found their way into *On the Pont de l'Europe* rather than the sketch's own exhibited terminus. Still miles away from *The Pont de l'Europe*'s meticulous detail, the sketch seems to me rather similar to the Impressionist styles of actual finished works by Caillebotte's peers like Monet and Edgar Degas, and even more detailed than

those of Paul Cezanne and Berthe Morisot. This journey speaks to the conscientiousness of Caillebotte's process, his deliberate divergence from the methods of his contemporaries, a point to which we will return later. Even so, an element absent until the final version is any detail in the subject's faces. In all the sketches, clothes may be accurately rehearsed, especially the woman's ornate ruffled dress, but faces are left composed of, or hidden under, pools of Impressionist non-painting.

Famously, Claude Monet also painted the iron bridge, but from a markedly contrasting point of view. His *The Pont de l'Europe* (Fig. 5), exhibited alongside Caillebotte's at the Impressionist exhibition of 1877, places the viewer on the train tracks below, "roughly opposite Caillebotte's vantage point."⁴³ The very different work "shares Caillebotte's sense of drama," notes art historian Robert L. Herbert in his "magnum opus" *Impressionism: Art, Leisure and Parisian Society*.^{44 45}

However, the way Monet sources that drama is quite different. While Caillebotte relies on complex geometries, perspective manipulation and stilted character relationships, Monet calls attention to sensory, atmospheric qualities. His painting shows the main bridge coming inward from the top of the frame's right edge, meeting its Rue de Londres axis roughly in the middle. Haussmannian buildings loom over the iron, their chimneys standing like sentinels above the rest of the image. A stationary locomotive sits at the bottom left corner, attended to by a pair of roughly hewn trainmen. The day is overcast, marked by an oily yellow sky and muted color palette. Natural light provides few highlights, but puffs and swirls of bright white engine steam billow and curl across the canvas, contrasting with the static train and the inert bridges and

⁴³ Herbert, Robert. *Impressionism: Art, Leisure and Parisian Society*. Yale University Press, 1988.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Woodward, Richard. "Robert L. Herbert, 91, Dies; Saw Impressionism With a Fresh Eye." *The New York Times*, Feb. 9, 2021, Section B, Page 11.

buildings above it. The human presence is negligible, its relationships and concerns irrelevant. Monet's *The Pont de l'Europe* is a purely aesthetic experience, its lights and darks, its "noises, smoke, smells and movements" the only platforms for audience participation.⁴⁶

Herbert goes on to argue that Monet sought to negatively portray recent transit and industrial developments via frightening and infernal imagery, that the artist's depictions of the railroad are meant to conjure up images of "monsters" or even of "hell." I find his notion that "[m]ost viewers of the 1870s would have brought to Monet's paintings ... long-standing associations of the railroad with ... a bestial, possibly malevolent, force" quite difficult.⁴⁷ While there may certainly be historic truth to the claim, I believe we need look no further than the artist's *The Gare Saint-Lazare* series (Figs. 6-8) of the same year in order to recognize that the artist's goal was to capture light and shadow rather than engage in criticisms of modernity and industrialization. His paintings within the Saint-Lazare train station are balanced, orderly and calm. His interior studies feature classical symmetry and pyramid configuration. By and large they depict neither locomotive nor architecture with the gloomy and foreboding palette of his *Le Pont de l'Europe* (with the possible exception of *The Gare Saint-Lazare, Arrival of a Train*, and its uncharacteristically deep blacks), and focus instead on the interplay between steam, smoke and natural light. The multidirectional illumination from the station's open walls and skylights provides ample opportunities to analyze this relationship.

I think Herbert concedes this point to a degree, that Monet wasn't all that worried about the new buildings and railroads springing up around his city, at least not in the sense that he communicated the feeling on his canvases. In the introduction to his book on Impressionism,

⁴⁶ Herbert, Robert. *Impressionism: Art, Leisure and Parisian Society*. Yale University Press, 1988.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Herbert states that “Monet and Renoir took a positive view of Haussmann’s alterations.”⁴⁸

Specifically, “they reoriented his spans, openings, and outlets, they interpreted his light and air in terms of the intense color light of their new palette, they rendered his trees in flickering brushwork that guides the banality of his buildings and blocks off his long, authoritarian vistas.”⁴⁹ Elsewhere, he notes that “Caillebotte’s streets have a stark emptiness that contrasts sharply with Monet’s.”⁵⁰

Even, perhaps, when they are teeming with people. Caillebotte’s *Paris Street; Rainy Day* (Fig. 9), another 1877 canvas of monumental proportions (his largest at 84 x 109 inches), depicts a highly complex assemblage of pedestrians crisscrossing a large Haussmannian intersection on a cool, gray day. It is, in the words of Kirk Varnedoe, “Caillebotte’s masterpiece ... one of the most lovely and subtle of his paintings.”⁵¹ The critic lauds the work’s delicate colors and structural harmony, but adds that “the picture is not ... one whose visual qualities are contemplated from a comfortable aesthetic distance. The near life-size strollers loom so immediately before us, and the sweep of the space is so compelling,” that we feel sucked into the painting, navigating the sidewalk along with its traveling subjects.⁵² It transcends its literal space: the intersection is, “in precise terms ... the rue St. Petersburg (now rue Leningrad) between the tracks of the Gare Saint-Lazare and the Place de Clichy; but, in larger terms, the subject is new Paris and by extension the modern city.”⁵³

As in *On the Pont de l’Europe*, the closest figure to us is cropped by the frame, face hidden. He fills the bottom half of the painting’s extreme right edge, carrying an umbrella which

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Varnedoe, Kirk. *Gustave Caillebotte*. Yale University Press, 1987.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

he cocks at an angle to avoid collision with the couple walking in the opposite direction. And as in *The Pont de l'Europe*, there is in fact a bourgeois couple walking toward him — toward us — man on the left and woman on the right. Here their relationship is less ambiguous; they stroll arm in arm, side by side, under a single voluminous umbrella held in the man's ungloved left hand. By now a Caillebotte trope, they both look off to stage right at some unidentified thing.

Behind the man's right arm stands a great green lamppost, nearly at the center of the image, starting around his wrist and shooting up past the top of the frame. Its reflection on the slick sidewalk mirrors that thrust, plunging downward past the bottom, effectively bisecting the painting into two distinct halves. Its right side is dominated by the life-size strolling couple, from their knees at the bottom edge of the painting to their hats and umbrella about a third of the way from the top; a smattering of pedestrians stroll in deep background space behind them. The left of the painting is all city, a sea of boulevard in the bottom quadrant and a phalanx of Haussmann-style buildings that recede to nothingness at two vanishing points in the top one. More pedestrians speckle the intersection but mostly avoid center space and hug the walls of buildings, leaving vast open areas of street between them. (While *On the Pont de l'Europe* and *The Pont de l'Europe* leave such open space on the right side of their canvases, *Paris Street; Rainy Day* does so on its left.) The cobblestones shimmer like emeralds, the million pools of rainwater between them like diamonds. A placid, gauzy mist hangs in the air like an invisible shroud.

The image is serene, muted, but fashion historian Aileen Ribeiro, writing in a guest section of Gloria Gloom's historical survey of clothing in Impressionist art, sees a dour social and urban commentary beneath the stoic surface of the work that she feels "sum[s] up the

modern city during the second half of the nineteenth century” better than any other painting.⁵⁴ *Paris Street; Rainy Day* exhibits not the “sunny, mellow, pleasurable scenes of Paris depicted by Caillebotte’s contemporaries, but rather the gritty reality of a gray, rainy day in the new bourgeois Paris created by Georges-Eugene Haussmann.”⁵⁵ If gritty Parisian reality is truly this painting’s mood, it surely channels Caillebotte’s various depictions of the Pont de l’Europe, and of “the Paris that Caillebotte loved, ‘the outsized scale of its spaces and the inhuman regularity of its architecture.’”⁵⁶

She advances this reading by observing the “alienation and isolation” caused by the painting’s “architecture and dress,” linking “[t]he predominant darkness of outdoor clothing ... [with] the grayness of [the scene’s] buildings and streets.”⁵⁷ Compared to *The Pont de l’Europe*, our couple is indeed dressed functionally, heavily, and our incognito intersection is much less stimulating a setting, especially on a gray and cloudy day.⁵⁸ Such a combination of anonymous buildings with oppressive fashion trends led Parisians of the age, according to Ribeiro, to “merge into their surroundings, lose their individuality, and retreat into their own private worlds.”⁵⁹

The same can be said about the curious effect of the work’s umbrellas. A cursory glance reveals that while the pedestrians’ various outfits are similar if not totally indistinguishable, their “umbrellas seem to be totally identical, made of waterproof gray silk stretched over a curved steel frame; inexpensive, and even slightly flimsy, they look as if the artist ordered them in

⁵⁴ Groom, Gloria. *Impressionism, Fashion, and Modernity*. The Art Institute of Chicago in partnership with Yale University Press, 2012.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid. Ribeiro quoting Varnedoe.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ While Varnedoe deciphered the actual location of the site, he acknowledged that it was meant to stand in for any Parisian intersection, as noted above.

⁵⁹ Groom, Gloria. *Impressionism, Fashion, and Modernity*. The Art Institute of Chicago in partnership with Yale University Press, 2012.

bulk.”⁶⁰ Wonderfully rendered, especially the tightening of the gray-blue fabric at the bottom of each frame rib, they “are all of a uniformly silvery tint.”⁶¹ This, along with the very name of the painting, implies a rainy day and the drops that come with it.

However, Ribeiro quotes nineteenth century critic Roger Ballu as noticing that “the rain is nowhere to be seen.”⁶² This, she feels, gets right to the heart of *Paris Street; Rainy Day*. The efficacy of the umbrella goes far beyond protecting suit and self from water: “Most writers saw the umbrella as a sign of protective anonymity amid the bustle and clamor of urban life; it creates a space around the person carrying it, enclosing and protecting him or her from other people as well as the weather.”⁶³ The most frequently repeated element of the painting is therefore a representation of and tool for further social separation and atomization in the great modern city.

Art historian Ruth Iskin goes further, employing almost every feature of the work to argue that consumer culture has conquered and anonymized the intersection scene. The “lone sign whose thin pale gold letters spell ... out ‘Pharmacie’[;] ... the near life-size man and woman in the foreground as consumers of the new department stores.”⁶⁴ Like Ribeiro, Iskin, citing nineteenth century critic Edmond Lepelletier, finds the umbrellas most disturbing. “Umbrellas might be seen on the street, but they were not appropriate for a painting.”⁶⁵ Caillebotte’s including them and “exaggerating [their] detail” is therefore a deliberate decision, essentially making them “as important as the people who carried them.”⁶⁶ Lepelletier bluntly states that “the

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ballu, Roger. Untitled article. *La Chronique des arts et de la curiosite*. April 14, 1877.

⁶² Ibid; Groom, Gloria. *Impressionism, Fashion, and Modernity*. The Art Institute of Chicago in partnership with Yale University Press, 2012.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Iskin, Ruth. *Modern Women and Parisian Consumer Culture in Impressionist Painting*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

great talent of Monsieur Caillebotte is to give an extraordinary intensity of life” not just to “all the people in his composition” but even to “objects as destitute of it as umbrellas.”⁶⁷ The artist’s “leveling of hierarchy” understandably did not sit well with critics uncomfortable with the notion that “objects, accessories and goods assume[d] a new importance that equal[ed] that assigned to people.”⁶⁸ The feeling that humanity could be replaced by a Bon Marché run or the installation of a derivative grid of streets.

Varnedoe tempers this discussion by reminding us that *Paris Street; Rainy Day* “is not ... a simplistic manifestation of urban malaise. Beautiful and marvelously calm, the picture even has, for eyes now accustomed to more violent intrusions of modernity, a charming nostalgia.”⁶⁹ While it is often cited “again and again in the late-nineteenth century reaction against Haussmann’s legacy,” it is more complex a work than just that, and, “beyond polemic,” quietly observes and speaks to certain realities of cities, of people, of being.⁷⁰ It can lament without anger and warn without complaint, he feels. “The uncommunicative isolation of [the painting’s] strollers — particularly the foreground couple, so physically close and yet so psychologically remote from us as well as from each other — touches in premonitory fashion a familiar truth of modern urban life.”⁷¹

As a brief coda to this discussion of *Paris Street Rainy Day*, I’d like to add that Caillebotte’s process for the work was as deliberate and thorough as his system for *The Pont de l’Europe* and its variants, if not more so. The artist produced dozens of pencil studies for its many figures. He prospected paving stones and people and umbrellas in paint. And he drafted a

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Varnedoe, Kirk. *Gustave Caillebotte*. Yale University Press, 1987.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

small oil sketch to precede the finished work (Fig. 10), where the placement of subjects and architectural elements were decided and their features almost fully complete. The one element he didn't even bother to detail, paralleled by its absence in his preparatory sketches for *The Pont de l'Europe*? All the subjects' faces.

The timeline of Caillebotte's life, and therefore of his experience of Haussmannization, sheds much light on his attitudes toward the effects of the changing city. "Impressionism's anomaly, in his life as well as his art," was born in August 1848 in the family home on Rue du Faubourg-Saint-Denis to parents Martial and Céleste.⁷² This made him younger than most of his eventual artistic peers, 14 years the junior of his "initial stylistic model" Edgar Degas.⁷³ Céleste was 29 at Gustave's birth; her husband was 49. Two other sons would follow, René in 1850 and Martial in 1853. Martial *père*, a greatly successful textiles manufacturer who supplied uniforms to Napoleon III's army, bought a large parcel of land on the Rue de Miromesnil, an upper-class residential neighborhood, where he commissioned a stately townhouse in 1866.

Gustave left for law school just two years later and briefly served in the Garde Nationale Mobile de la Seine during the Franco-Prussian War, returning to the Rue de Miromesnil in 1871 and beginning soon after that to involve himself in the Parisian art scene. This made him 23 years old at the time of his Paris homecoming, which happened to be a year after Napoleon III dismissed the Prefect of Seine and began wrapping up the Haussmann Renovation. As such, the budding artist grew up in tandem with the newly solidified city, and was just old enough to begin thinking about it seriously, even painting it, when its form and appearance began to ossify. His family home on Rue de Miromesnil proved a wonderful base of operations, right in the center of

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

a renewed district and not far from a certain iron bridge called the Pont de l'Europe. Without much specific effort, he was able to soak up the architecture, the boulevards, the urban landscape and the effect they all had on various flavors of Parisians. It's hard to know exactly what he saw or how he felt about it, but some attitudes can surely be eked out with a dose of historical criticism and a grain or two of salt.

It was soon after that homecoming, and following the downfall of Napoleon III's second empire and a swift citizen's revolt in Paris that was put down in a brutally bloody fashion, that Caillebotte began studying painting under Salon master Léon Bonnat (like Caillebotte, a lifelong bachelor).⁷⁴ "No Parisian," remarks Varnedoe, "can have remained unscarred by these events," and "for someone of Caillebotte's age, just reaching manhood at the end of the empire, they must have had a special impact."⁷⁵ It is therefore logical to assume that his work would have been influenced by these urban upheavals, perhaps informing his own "revolutionary" artistic and capitalistic direction; he not only painted with but also sponsored many of the Impressionists. Following Martial Caillebotte's death in 1874, Gustave was left with a vast fortune, and used much of it to fund the likes of Monet, Renoir and Pissarro by purchasing their works and occasionally even renting studio space for them.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, he at least initially also remained dedicated to the Salon of his classical education (and bourgeois upbringing). It was only the body's rejecting his *The Floor Scrapers* in 1875 for its vulgar (and potentially leftist) subject matter that his affiliation swung fully toward the Impressionist cohort. The following year, Caillebotte was underwriting and showing paintings at the second Impressionist exhibition,

⁷⁴ The Paris Salon was the official art exhibition of the Parisian Academy of Fine Arts, and until about 1890, was considered perhaps the most important art event of the Western world.

⁷⁵ Varnedoe, Kirk. *Gustave Caillebotte*. Yale University Press, 1987.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

but his art was never fully assimilated into the radical new school in terms of either style or content.

His independence could also be related to the fact that neither his career nor his life proved to be very long. While Monet painted for half a century, all of Caillebotte's paintings surveyed thus far were completed in an impossibly narrow window in 1876 and 1877 at the dawn of his artistic journey, and while he continued painting into the 1880s, mostly in Paris at the family home and then at an apartment at the Boulevard Haussmann (as well as at the family estate at Yerres), by 1890 he had mostly stopped creating new work. Later in life he bought a property at the Petit-Gennevilliers commune near Argenteuil, where he spent most of his time yachting and gardening. He died in 1894 at the age of 45, by which point "his artistic prominence in the avant-garde of the 1870s had been largely forgotten by all but a few."⁷⁷

His flame thus burned young, and close to family and home. It was even right in the family living room on the Rue de Miromesnil that Caillebotte painted another early and important canvas, *Young Man at His Window* (Fig. 11). Though it is one of the artist's last works surveyed here, it is actually one of his earliest compositions. Completed in 1876, roughly the same time as *On the Pont de l'Europe* (c. 1876–77), it depicts a man standing at a large window, modeled by the artist's younger brother René who was to die later that year (only two years after their father's death and another two before their mother's).⁷⁸

The man, almost completely silhouetted, wears a dark black suit, out from which peers a crisp white shirt collar. He stands with his back toward the viewer, but not squarely; the painting's field of view is closer to a 60 or 70 degree angle than a head-on 90. That gives us a

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid. "In an album of photographs of Caillebotte's paintings, compiled by his brother Martial," notes Varnedoe, "this painting is annotated in pencil: *René*."

tiny glimpse of his chin and beard to the left of his neck, his ear and his head of neat brown hair. His pose is casual, hands in pockets — “hands held in pockets can also be eloquent” — legs comfortably apart and straight but not locked.⁷⁹ A plush mahogany armchair with rich scarlet cushioning sits directly behind him, indicating that he may have just risen from it to regard something or someone (more on that shortly). The floor is covered with a thick maroon and black rug.

Directly in front of the man is a marble parapet, with a solid section at the bottom and a traditional urn balustrade on top capped by a squat square railing. It terminates on the left behind a long, heavy-looking patterned window curtain that starts above the painting’s top left corner and falls almost to its very bottom. The man covers where the right side of the parapet meets the far wall; a tall, large-paned glass window has been swung open there behind him. It continues upward past the top of the frame, downward to the chair and rightward near the edge of the canvas, mostly blocking the other window curtain. The room’s materials are elegant, sumptuous, reflecting the family’s financial security, especially after Martial’s death, and their comfortable place among Parisian high society.

Indeed, according to Distel, our setting is conspicuously a second story window, the most desirable floor for residences at the time as noted above.⁸⁰ Her classification follows the French system, where ground floors are numbered zero and subsequent upper stories begin with number one. Varnedoe cites both the American English and French vocabularies in his description, calling the location “third-floor (*deuxième étage*),” using a French parenthetical that translates to “second floor.”⁸¹ This matters so we can confirm the vantage point, as what we and our character

⁷⁹ Duranty, Louis-Edmond. *La Nouvelle Peinture: a Propos Du Groupe D'artistes Qui Expose Dans Les Galeries Durand-Ruel, 1876*. E. Dentu Libraire, 1876.

⁸⁰ Distel, Anne. *Gustave Caillebotte, Urban Impressionist*. Abbeville Press, 1995.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

really care about is what lies outside the window. The young man gazes upon a quiet intersection, identified at the confluence of the Rue de Miromesnil, where the townhouse's address (number 77) lies, and the larger Boulevard Malesherbes in the background. A building split by two terraced cornices fills the left edge of the casement, standing parallel to our own vantage point on the other side of the street. It's too close to make out details, and windows are out of view, but the farther buildings are more fully presented in all their glory, prime examples of the Haussmannized architectural order.

Part of the reason those structures are so visible is that, like in *The Pont de l'Europe*, *Young Man at His Window* features an optically widened and exaggerated field of view, pulling close interior elements closer and pushing far exterior ones farther away. Varnedoe and Galassi treat us to another pair of staged photographic illustrations at various focal lengths, showing that *Young Man at His Window* also approximates the perspective of a 28mm wide-angle lens.⁸² This blows up the window frame, allowing the Rue de Miromesnil building on the right to "fit" inside it, and grants us visual access to much of the Boulevard Malesherbes axis.

Atmospherically, the distorted treatment renders the streetscape a distant and alien land, difficult to reach and harder still to relate to.⁸³ "Because of the vantage point the artist has chosen," notes Herbert, "the insistent angles of Haussmann's regular building lines virtually crush the space of the street," making it appear insignificant by comparison to the grand constructions.⁸⁴ The young man looks upon an intersection that is bright and airy, chief features

⁸² Ibid. The curators also performed the same photographic study for the site of *Paris Street; Rainy Day*, but the effect is less relevant to our analysis of that work.

⁸³ It is worth noting that in his 1980 quasi-novella *Camera Lucida*, literary theorist Roland Barthes articulates a parallel philosophy of photography as alienating and anti-human. He states of the Western world, "where everything is transformed into images," that "only images exist and are produced and are consumed ... when generalized, [photography] completely de-realizes the human world of conflicts and desires, under cover of illustrating it." See Barthes, Roland, and Richard Howard. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Vintage Classics, 2020.

⁸⁴ Herbert, Robert. *Impressionism: Art, Leisure and Parisian Society*. Yale University Press, 1988.

of the new boulevard, with carriages and pedestrians making their way wherever they need to be. But through a combination of architectural reality and visual special effects, the plaza is, if anything, *too* bright and airy, too clean. Too wide — people cling to the edges where they feel most comfortable and safe, not unlike in *Paris Street; Rainy Day*. The intersection is attractive, but not really a place worth spending any extended amount of time, at least not over any of the other faceless intersections of the clinical new Paris. Based on the view in front of him, the young man could be anywhere. And perhaps that's why he chooses to observe the streetscape from the comfort of his salon. The prefect may not let him decorate his doorstep with gargoyles or paint the front of his building bright green, but our man can lay a deep red rug in his living room and feel very much alive.

While most pedestrians hug the periphery, one walks not in the shadows but in what from our viewpoint and our man's is the middle of the road. A young woman, wearing a fashionable petticoated bustle dress and matching hat, walks languidly along the edge of the sidewalk. Her body language is relaxed, implying comfort in her surroundings, but her face is a blur of Impressionist penumbra, hiding any further emotions. (Yet another Caillebotte painting where the faces of the dominant man and woman are hidden.) She strolls the street much like the bourgeoisie of *On the Pont de l'Europe*; we half expect our suited, silhouetted observer to trot downstairs, introduce himself with a charming witticism and begin walking the city comfortably by her side.

Instead, he watches her from afar, from above. The ultimate, aloof flâneur. He might even be more accurately described as a *badaud*, a static observer who forfeits the flâneur's sophistication due to his listless passivity. "The *badaud* has always been the flâneur's other

side,” notes author Bridget Alsdorf.⁸⁵ Why doesn’t he earn his flâneur stripes by making the sunlit street his oyster? Because Haussmann’s Paris gives him the opportunity to stay home, and little incentive to join or rejoin activity on and around the boulevard. Art history professor Jennifer Pride sums up this distance: “The bustling crowd below is constructed with frenetic, short brushstrokes that match the frenzy of modern life. The artist/viewer, however, is not part of the modern metropolis.”⁸⁶ I’m not sure the crowd qualifies as “bustling,” but the idea of separation is clear. And Herbert expands to compare with Monet’s depiction of Parisian boulevards, reflecting the older artist’s aforementioned sympathy for Haussmann’s grid: “[Monet’s flâneurs] are ... participating in the current of activity that flows along [those] fashionable avenue[s]. René Caillebotte,” on the other hand, “is sheltered by the obtrusive reality of his interior.”⁸⁷

He definitely finds it safe and comfortable. Our painting’s living room, with its warm tones and plush furniture, is simply more agreeable than the overly bright, stark and unadorned surfaces of sky and stone outside, where blue and bisque are just a bit colder than they probably should be in the unforgiving near-midday sun. Where buildings and skies are both flat and contourless, save for some dutifully represented shadows and chimney smoke. Where the cream of Lutetian limestone is afraid to frolic with golds and yellows, and instead retreats to a chilly, familiar gray. The dispassionate city in *Young Man at His Window* allows for an unhealthy kind of flâneur, of looking down on the world from a second floor in the clouds, and in doing so

⁸⁵ Alsdorf, Bridget. *Gawkers: Art and Audience in Late Nineteenth-Century France*. Princeton University Press, 2022.

⁸⁶ Pride, Jennifer. “Looking through the Parisian Window: Caillebotte, Zola, and the Post-Haussmann Interior.” *Art Inquiries*, 2016. Vol. 17, No. 1. pp 17-29.

⁸⁷ Herbert, Robert. *Impressionism: Art, Leisure and Parisian Society*. Yale University Press, 1988.

echoes *On the Pont de l'Europe*'s message that the new city is a stumbling block in the preeminent game of human interconnection.

Of course, this cultural commentary should not come as a surprise. "During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the transformation of Paris, initiated by Baron Haussmann, became the very motif for artists wishing to represent the changing fabric of society and its activities of leisure and spectacle."⁸⁸ And we have demonstrated that Caillebotte was more willing than his contemporaries to critique the new city, as well as to use that criticism to speak more broadly about man's shifting place in culture and the world. Distel points out that his goals in painting indoor scenes were quite different than those of his peers:

For the Impressionists, the window motif was above all a pretext for studying the penetration of light into an interior ... [w]hile Monet brushed in an interior scene and Renoir used the window motif to give a new inflection to the full-length portrait, Caillebotte here staged a confrontation between interior and exterior, formulating a new theme in the process. The truth he sought to capture involves a great deal more than lighting effects ... *Young Man at His Window* introduces a psychological dimension linked to the description of the deserted city ... [while] Impressionism [otherwise] did not concern itself with the exploration of contemporary psychology.⁸⁹

This analysis dovetails with our earlier comparison of Caillebotte's and Monet's paintings of *The Pont de l'Europe*, how the former artist was interested in human interaction while the latter was more impressed with light. It is certainly easy to believe that "Caillebotte

⁸⁸ Park, Malcolm. "Three street drawings by Gustave Caillebotte." *The Burlington Magazine*, August 2010. Vol. 152, No. 1289. pp. 536-539.

⁸⁹ Distel, Anne. *Gustave Caillebotte, Urban Impressionist*. Abbeville Press, 1995.

uses a window motif to enclose spaces and convey a sense of subjective interiority.”⁹⁰

Specifically, it seems, male interiority. In her analysis of *Paris Street; Rainy Day*, Ribeiro noted that the painting’s main male subject “seems mentally disengaged from his companion and looks as though he might be happier on his own.”⁹¹ She uses this scathing springboard to conclude that “Caillebotte demonstrated a particular interest in male solitude. He masterfully suggested idleness, boredom, and reverie in his silhouettes of men viewed from behind as they stand before a window or lean against a balcony, pausing in their wanderings about spacious, comfortable apartments to observe the spectacle of life in the street.”⁹² This seems a clear reference to *Young Man at His Window*, and a condemnation of isolating male flânerie in a city whose architecture had already done enough to cause “alienation and isolation.”⁹³

Such tropes predate Caillebotte’s era by at least decades. “In the work of many painters relevant to th[e] context of late Realism [in which Caillebotte was situated], we find revived the tenor, and sometimes the very motifs, of Romanticism,” observes Varnedoe.⁹⁴ Windows, balconies, people from behind, people from behind at windows and balconies — these concepts strongly channel eighteenth and nineteenth century German Romanticism. Saxon painter Carl Gustav Carus’s 1829 *Balcony Room with a View of the Bay of Naples* (Fig. 12) shows a balcony view of the Neapolitan bay, blue waves softly lapping at the bronze shore, framed by a large, deep-set window. As in *Young Man*, a large glass pane hangs partially open at right, and a heavy curtain frames the portal at left. Both rooms are also accented in rich red tones. Meanwhile,

⁹⁰ Pride, Jennifer. “Looking through the Parisian Window: Caillebotte, Zola, and the Post-Haussmann Interior.” *Art Inquiries*, 2016. Vol. 17, No. 1. pp 17-29.

⁹¹ Groom, Gloria. *Impressionism, Fashion, and Modernity*. The Art Institute of Chicago in partnership with Yale University Press, 2012.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Varnedoe, Kirk. *Gustave Caillebotte*. Yale University Press, 1987.

Carus's 1824 *Woman on the Balcony* (Fig. 13) incorporates a viewer, sitting at a railing upon which she rests her arm as she turns away to ponder the rolling azure hills in the distance. She, and even the castle on whose grounds she sits, seem paltry and insignificant specks among the great beyond.

It's not just Carus; celebrated Romantic portrait and landscape artist Caspar David Friedrich painted similar images during his illustrious career. His 1822 canvas *Woman at a Window* (Fig. 14) shows a woman, identified as the artist's wife Caroline, looking out the window of the artist's Dresden studio.⁹⁵ While masts of a ship extend upward, poking their way into the larger window above, our pulled-back perspective is such that it's difficult for us to see exactly what she's looking at. But the blues and greens outside are bright, complementing and reflecting off the studio interior and confirming that the day outside is brilliant and beautiful. Friedrich's 1818 *Wanderer Above a Sea of Fog* (Fig. 15) is far more menacing. Encapsulating the Romantic notion of "*Rückenfigur*," or rear-facing figure, a tool for audience identification with a work's subject and a vehicle for self-reflection, the quintessential Romantic painting thrusts a man onto a rocky ledge above a deep mountain landscape of fog punctuated by other rocky ledges.⁹⁶ The environment seems to go on forever, blue-gray mountains forming leading lines to a frighteningly distant vanishing point squarely behind our wanderer. His hair and topcoat flap against the strong wind; his face remains a wholly hidden enigma.

All this naturally points to René in *Young Man at His Window*, though "the motif has ... changed. What lies beyond the window here is not nature, as in Romanticism, but nature's antithesis, the metropolis."⁹⁷ Peering out from behind a *Rückenfigur*, we expect rolling hills and

⁹⁵ Schmied, Wieland. "Caspar David Friedrich." H.N. Abrams, New York, 1995.

⁹⁶ Koerner, Joseph. "Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape, second edition." Reaktion Books, 2009.

⁹⁷ Varnedoe, Kirk. *Gustave Caillebotte*. Yale University Press, 1987.

craggy cliffs, a puff or two of fog. Instead we're met with the blinding white facades of Haussmann's townhouses. And the city, even — or especially — one this grand, is decidedly not nature. The boulevard has replaced the waterfall; man no longer needs to venture out to encounter enormity. The confrontation in *Young Man* "is no longer between two polar opposites," man and nature, "but between two different forms of a common human condition: solitude." Both René, locked in his "close dark box of the window and balustrade," and the woman he watches, "isolated in the emptiness beneath and between the walls of the enclosing facades," are deeply and utterly alone.⁹⁸

How can we blame them? Baron Haussmann, or the Modern Prometheus, had just done the unthinkable: replaced the natural with the engineered, and in the process, laid waste to our characters' frustrating, charming, intimate and unforgettable city. Looking through their perfectly ordered windows, Parisians would no longer see natural growths and appearances of birds or trees or clouds but neverending architecture. (The prefect did plant trees, but in the same unnatural grids of his buildings. Even flora served to highlight and parallel cornices and curbsides.) This is exemplified in Caillebotte's *Interior*, where a woman gazes out of her sitting room onto a parallel building facade with its own matching fenestration (Fig. 16). For Parisians waking up in Post-Haussmannian renovations to an urban machine for living in, it was likely rather difficult to go about their days like nothing had ever happened, like their lives hadn't been turned upside-down.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Fend, Peter, and Jerome Sans. "The City as a Machine for Living In." *Grand Street*, no. 50, 1994, pp. 23–30. Originally coined by Le Corbusier to refer to his personal brand of International Style modern architecture, I think the "machine for living in" terminology is retroactively applicable to Haussmann's heavily ordered city.

Caillebotte isn't the only one who can't forget; Baudelaire cries that "Old Paris is gone ... And my dear memories are heavier than stone."¹⁰⁰ Symbolically powerful, this line is also markedly literal — the past, Baudelaire implies, is still more salient than the hulking, sterilized limestone swallowing more and more Parisian boulevards and vistas. The shift is painful to watch. Pride argues that "Haussmannization as cultural trauma involves the repetitive shocks and disruptions encountered in a city that was rapidly disappearing and reappearing as something different and unfamiliar."¹⁰¹ She states that this leads Caillebotte's characters to "retreat to the[ir] domestic interior[s]" rather than face "the modern metropolis."¹⁰²

Even without formalizing the reaction as "cultural trauma" to a "total break" from the past, "we must also recognize the radical shift in scale that [Haussmann] helped to engineer, inspired by new technologies and facilitated by new organizational forms."¹⁰³ The prefect really did play god: he "wiped out some communities, punched gaping holes through others and sponsored much gentrification, dislocation and removal."¹⁰⁴ This understandably enraged scores of Parisians, and over time "provoked a great deal of nostalgia for a lost past on the part of all social classes, whether directly affected or not."¹⁰⁵ Caillebotte, a member of the bourgeoisie who was too young to remember much of the redevelopments, was certainly affected less than many. But, as Harvey notes, that wouldn't have made him any less nostalgic. Like anyone else, he probably walked the prefect's interchangeable boulevards and felt himself interchangeable,

¹⁰⁰ Wagner, Geoffrey. *Selected Poems of Charles Baudelaire*. Grove Press, 1974.

¹⁰¹ Pride, Jennifer. "Looking through the Parisian Window: Caillebotte, Zola, and the Post-Haussmann Interior." *Art Inquiries*, 2016. Vol. 17, No. 1. pp 17-29.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Harvey, David. *Paris, Capital of Modernity*. Routledge, 2006.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

faceless, at the mercy of the buildings, balconies and bridges forever breathing down on him from above.

In her 2021 book *Discomfort Food: The Culinary Imagination in Late Nineteenth-Century French Art*, Marni Reva Kessler dedicates a delightful chapter to a comprehensive analysis of Caillebotte's 1882 quasi-still life *Fruit Displayed on a Stand* (Fig. 17), a novel depiction of fruits as they might appear on a high-end greengrocer's display.¹⁰⁶ She pays special attention to the work's gridded nature, with squared-off stacks of colorful produce fully separated by bright and direct thrusts of white and bluish paper. Across comparisons with contemporary paintings, urban street maps and nascent aerial photography, she concludes that "by structuring the composition so that it highlights [Caillebotte's] explicit focus on ... the distinctive form of a grid, the artist unequivocally summons the essential components of Haussmann's city plan, conceiving of this mundane, though unquestionably powerful, subject as a very particular kind of urban design."¹⁰⁷ Fruit and its paper wrappings are in fact the blocks, buildings and boulevards of Paris.

Kessler's thoroughly creative reading speaks to Caillebotte's preoccupation with Haussmann's unrelenting grid, to its way of creeping into paintings of his that at first glance appear to address markedly different things. Kessler adds that his focus is also broader than just the new city, encompassing the older Paris it came assertively to replace.

If the surface uniformity and evenness of the complete picture refers, as I have claimed, to Haussmann's Paris, then these inconsistencies and variabilities [in *Fruit Displayed on a Stand*] obliquely may call to mind the lost city, the one that

¹⁰⁶ Kessler, Marni Reva. *Discomfort Food: The Culinary Imagination in Late Nineteenth-Century French Art*. University of Minnesota Press, 2021.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

disappeared when Haussmann's bands of boulevards lined by indistinguishable buildings obliterated so much of Paris and its history. Vast areas of marvelous eclectic architecture that emerged over and across hundreds of years, edifices that held within them centuries upon centuries of lives and stories, now gone.¹⁰⁸

Caillebotte, Kessler states, felt deeply connected to the old Paris, the humble flaws and human stories the renovations replaced in what seemed like too cruelly short a moment. This pain, this feeling of mortal obsolescence, seeped into the gullies of more of his canvases than might be initially apparent. Such a strong emotional-cultural bent comes across as out of character for an Impressionist, but as we have explored in our comparisons with Monet, (and Herbert's and Distel's comparisons with Renoir,) Caillebotte was no ordinary Impressionist.

This was a fact appreciated (or lamented) from the earliest years of his career; Salon-leaning art critic Simon Boubée, after seeing *Young Man at His Window*, attempted to distinguish between Caillebotte and other "rebel" artists: "Caillebotte has at some point made the effort to study [academic painting], and thus can put a degree of skill at the service of his imagination. He has gone into the rebel camp on a lark. Some day the true artists will ... celebrate the return of this prodigal son."¹⁰⁹

Those sympathetic to the Impressionists found Caillebotte's stubborn adherence to Salon circumspection far less palatable. Novelist and culture critic Emile Zola noted wryly of the same *Young Man at His Window*, with its almost documentary-style rendering of form and light, that "photography of reality which is not stamped with the original seal of the painter's talent... [is] a pitiful thing ... anti-artistic ... because of the exactitude of the copying."¹¹⁰ In practice, he was

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Boubée, Simon. "Beaux-Arts, exposition des impressionnistes chez Durand-Ruel." *La Gazette de France*. April 5, 1876.

¹¹⁰ Zola, Emile. "Lettres de Paris, deux expositions d'art en mai." *Le Messager de l'Europe*. June, 1876.

taking issue with Caillebotte's departure from his Impressionist colleagues in his adherence to more traditional rendering techniques and his stubbornly faithful representation of places and things. In an age of the photographic image, Zola felt, simple representation was no longer the job of the painter. (He likely would have found Caillebotte's incorporation of photography into his artistic process especially offensive.)

While that argument based on style does hold water, the content of Caillebotte's work shows that he certainly saw himself as part of the "rebel" circle. His oeuvre followed Impressionist champion Edmond Duranty's directive to represent the glory and mundanity of contemporary life to a fault; his subjects sit and stand and stroll, "imitat[ing], depict[ing], and sum[m]ing up" the urban day-to-day.¹¹¹ Neither academic nor Impressionist, Caillebotte helps us "discard the artificially over-simplified dichotomy between courageously avant-garde Impressionists and stupidly reactionary academicians; Caillebotte's art, which sits uneasy in both camps, is enough in itself to disprove the utility of this weary cliché."¹¹²

I'd like to return to our starting point, *On the Pont de l'Europe*, to concretize our discussion of the atomization it depicts. As noted above, its ironworks sing a quiet symphony of color while its human characters occupy a much narrower tonal band. People, usually the main subjects of other genre paintings showing scenes of everyday life, are rendered far less richly than their context. The flâneur in the white scarf may be the most detailed, but even he lacks the vibrance of the inanimate bar of metal beside him. A wash of blue links him to the leaning laborer, but the man on the far left is drawn nearly in grayscale aside from his pale ear and neck.

¹¹¹ Duranty, Louis-Edmond. *La Nouvelle Peinture: a Propos Du Groupe D'artistes Qui Expose Dans Les Galeries Durand-Ruel, 1876*. E. Dentu Libraire, 1876.

¹¹² Varnedoe, Kirk. *Gustave Caillebotte*. Yale University Press, 1987.

He is almost completely colorless. The people are also constructed more “Impressionistically,” especially that leftmost character, with thicker brushstrokes and looser treatment of edges. The metal girders, while far from classically detailed, are sharp and delineated compared to their organic counterparts.

In this rather compressed arrangement, thematic opposite of *The Pont de l’Europe*’s wide-angle view but equally reflective of photographic influence (telephoto lenses collapse space much as live wide-angle lenses distort it), foreground man and midground iron appear immediately adjacent.¹¹³ “In contrast to the deep spatial rush of the other version, this composition emphatically blocks our penetration, by the edge-to-edge interposition, in shallow depth of the giant lattice of steel, parallel to the picture plane.”¹¹⁴ One person is actually leaning on the railing, and the others appear extremely close to it. Part of this is due to a lack of floor or street through which to plot perspective and orient ourselves; our frame ends inches above where the ground might begin. But what if we take a step back? Disentangling the men from the bridge leads to a striking realization: the Pont de l’Europe has a face.

This is not as obvious as it is with popular optical illusions that juxtapose, say, two heads across a flower vase, or a rabbit and a duck (Figs. 18-19); at first glance, it seems as strange as Kessler’s assertion that an assortment of fruit somehow stands for Paris. And yet, as with her argument, it soon starts to make sense: all the elements of a face are there if you look for them. The railing covering the bottom half of the painting forms a wide mouth, punctuated by balusters for teeth. The diagonal beams behind it form a lower lip, or perhaps a chin, and the balustrade caps the mouth with an upper lip or mustache. Two triangular openings above the railing, flanking the central column and topped by a pyramid of girders, form a nose. The most

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

prominent girder, the I-beam with the protruding flanges, hints at the direction the nose might be pointing.

Finally, the widest spaces, set above diagonal beams and below the arched crescents, are the eyes. Brows or lashes are hinted at by the shadows below those segmented arches. Within the left aperture sits the Palais Garnier, Napoleon III's pet project, home of the Paris opera at the time and the most expensive building constructed under the prefect. On the right, the Gare Saint-Lazare, predating Haussmann but central to his plans to connect Paris to the rest of the country via rail. "These two monuments of modern Paris are extraordinarily symbolic as they respectively represent access and spectacle — perhaps the two most important characteristics of the city itself."¹¹⁵ Within the openings, the custard sky is the whites of the eyes; a round puff of steam hints at catchlights within the iris of the mouth of the train station.

Comparison with previously discussed elements makes this composition especially notable. Most immediately, Caillebotte went to great organizational pains to mask the faces of his three human characters. As in *Young Man at His Window* as well as our survey of German Romantic paintings, the artist plays with *Rückenfigur*, showing us only his subjects' backs and forcing us to introspect rather than connect with them face-to-face. We are also to look deep into the bridge's eyes, into "the cyclopean metalwork, embodiment of industrial power, aggressive symbol of the transformation of Paris."¹¹⁶ After all, Varnedoe has noted, "Nowhere in Impressionist painting does the call for artistic recognition of the forms of modern life receive as unequivocal a response as here, where the raw grids of iron ... rise up to dominate a painting of major dimensions."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Ramos, Cecilia. "Caillebotte's 'On the Pont de l'Europe': A Transversal Vista of Modernity." *Thresholds*, 2006, No. 31. pp. 32-39.

¹¹⁶ Herbert, Robert. *Impressionism: Art, Leisure and Parisian Society*. Yale University Press, 1988.

¹¹⁷ Varnedoe, Kirk. *Gustave Caillebotte*. Yale University Press, 1987.

In addition to his celebrated Caillebotte biography, cited dozens of times throughout this essay, Varnedoe contributed a 1974 article to the journal *Art International* specifically regarding *On the Pont de l'Europe*. While Caillebotte's work is well known in today's academic art community, it was relegated to the footnotes of Impressionist history until at least the 1970s, when exhibits featuring and eventually starring it began to appear in European and especially American cultural institutions. Varnedoe therefore opens his article by stating that it is "widely forgotten" that Caillebotte painted near the Gare St-Lazare, beside Monet, in 1876.¹¹⁸ Likely sensing a need to educate the public about this artist, the critic provides an in-depth description of *On the Pont de l'Europe*'s content. He then launches into an analysis of themes communicated by the "complex" and "ambitio[us]" painting.¹¹⁹

"In the prominence of the iron, as well as by the sweep of spatial indices, the *Pont* evinces an anti-Impressionist incoherence of figure and setting."¹²⁰ Its highly compressed space, he states, "exists as a special presence, a stage of engineered forms and planned axes that dominate if not dwarf all figure movement. In his paeans to post-Haussmann Paris, Caillebotte thus suggests a sensitivity to the latent super- or anti-human qualities of the new environment."¹²¹ Less heavy-handed than Harvey or Ramos, Varnedoe still sees in the work a supersession of the human with the (non-human) urban. It is no wonder that Caillebotte redacts men's and women's countenances with the compositional equivalent of a heavy black Sharpie, and that he elevates the great face of the bridge to ponder in their place. The artist, an undeniable

¹¹⁸ Varnedoe, Kirk. "Caillebotte's Pont de l'Europe: A New Slant." *Art International*, 1974. Volume 18, No. 4. pp 28-59.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

beneficiary of Baron Haussmann's great renovations, still couldn't help feeling sanitized — dehumanized — by the new Paris.

Gustave Caillebotte was a different kind of Impressionist, one whose “oeuvre ha[d] an internal cohesion that suggests an artist truer to himself than to any shared conceptions of art.”¹²² While his colleagues, less explicitly bothered by Baron Haussmann's renovations, directed their art toward studies of color and light, Caillebotte was more wary of the new city and used his paintbrush to critique it. Linking Salon precision with photographic distortion, he drafted realistic but unnatural urban spaces and populated them with detached, solitary figures. On bridges and balconies, he masked sightlines and faces with backs and shadows to reference a perceived loss of humanity in the prefect's Paris. Blending *Rückenfigur* with *flânerie*, he bared a desaturated metropolitan landscape of social atomization and abandoned humanity.

In doing so, the artist revealed himself to be more psychological and introspective than his peers, shouldering deep concerns about his environment and how he feared it might harm his city's collective consciousness. Employing *On the Pont de l'Europe* as a lodestar through which to understand his greater canon, we have seen how Caillebotte's art speaks to a pervasive concern that the city had become too overwhelming — and had arrogated the face and soul of its people in the process.

The focal point of *On the Pont de l'Europe* is the bridge-as-city, and the Haussmannian temples within its eyes.¹²³ Eyes which are, it seems, the warmest parts of the painting, aureate oases in a wilderness of blue and gray. The real, human eyes we can't see regard the metaphoric

¹²² Varnedoe, Kirk. *Gustave Caillebotte*. Yale University Press, 1987.

¹²³ Ramos, Cecilia E. “Caillebotte's On the Pont De L'Europe: A Transversal Vista of Modernity.” *Thresholds*, vol. 31, 2006, pp. 32–39.

ones that loom large. And maybe the city's eyes are looking right back at them, at us. Paris's greatest flâneur is its own beating heart. As it grows, it watches generations of men grow alongside and within it. Men like Gustave Caillebotte, who have the foresight to turn the mirror backward and repeat the observational cycle.

Illustrations



1. Gustave Caillebotte, *On the Pont de l'Europe*, 1876-77.

Kimbell Art Museum. Fort Worth, TX.

Oil on canvas.



2. Gustave Caillebotte, *The Pont de l'Europe*, 1876.

Petit Palais of Geneva. Geneva, Switzerland.

Oil on canvas.



3. Gustave Caillebotte, *Sketch for The Pont de l'Europe*, 1876.

Museum of Fine Arts of Rennes. Rennes, France.

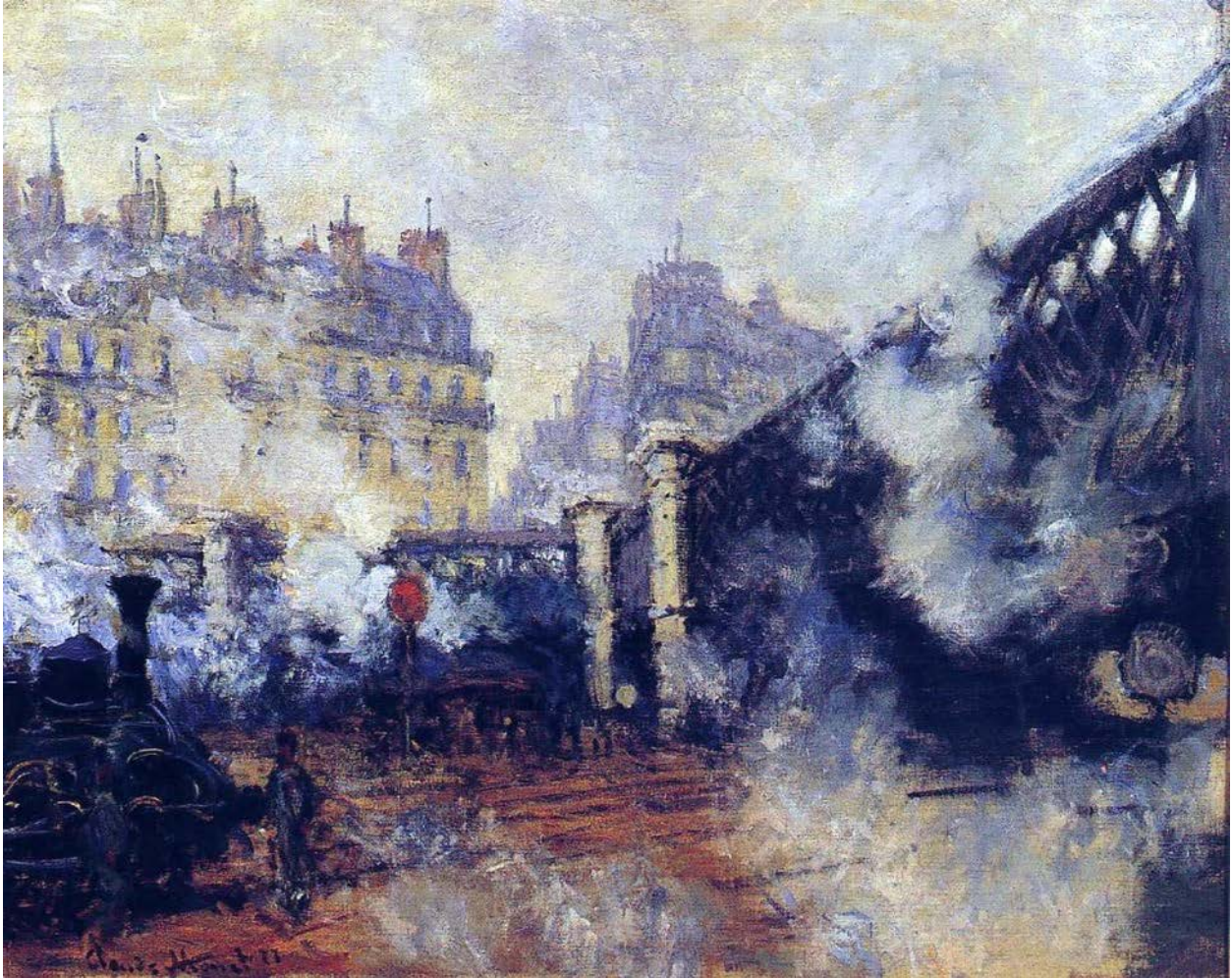
Oil on canvas.



4. Gustave Caillebotte, *Sketch for The Pont de l'Europe*, 1876.

Private collection.

Oil on canvas.



5. Claude Monet, *The Pont de l'Europe*, 1877.

Musée Marmottan Monet. Paris, France.

Oil on canvas.



6. Claude Monet, *The Gare Saint-Lazare*, 1877.

Musée d'Orsay. Paris, France.

Oil on canvas.



7. Claude Monet, *The Gare Saint-Lazare, Arrival of a Train*, 1877.

The Fogg Museum at Harvard University. Cambridge, MA.

Oil on canvas.



8. Claude Monet, *Arrival of the Normandy Train, Gare Saint-Lazare*, 1877.

Art Institute of Chicago. Chicago, IL.

Oil on canvas.



9. Gustave Caillebotte, *Paris Street; Rainy Day*, 1877.

Art Institute of Chicago. Chicago, IL.

Oil on canvas.



10. Gustave Caillebotte, *Sketch for Paris Street; Rainy Day*, 1877.

Private Collection.

Oil on canvas.



11. Gustave Caillebotte, *Young Man at His Window*, 1876.

J. Paul Getty Museum. Los Angeles, CA.

Oil on canvas.



12. Carl Gustav Carus, *Balcony Room with a View of the Bay of Naples*, 1829-30.

Alte Nationalgalerie. Berlin, Germany.

Oil on canvas.



13. Carl Gustav Carus, *Woman on the Balcony*, 1824.

Galerie Neue Meister. Dresden, Germany.

Oil on canvas.



14. Caspar David Friedrich, *Woman at a Window*, 1822.

Alte Nationalgalerie. Berlin, Germany.

Oil on canvas.



15. Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*, 1818.

Hamburger Kunsthalle. Hamburg, Germany.

Oil on canvas.



16. Gustave Caillebotte, *Interior*, 1880.

Private Collection.

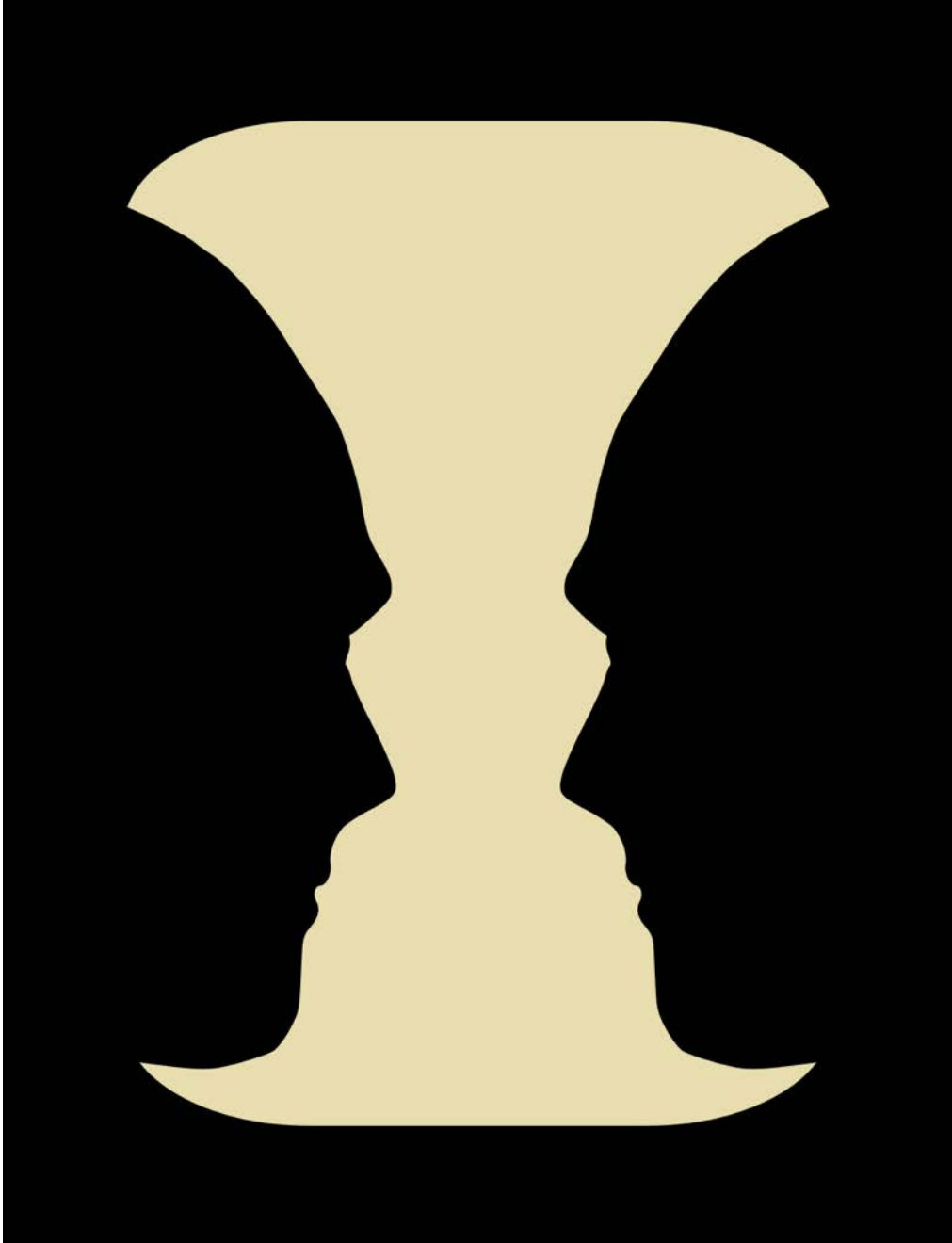
Oil on canvas.



17. Gustave Caillebotte, *Fruit Displayed on a Stand*, 1881-82.

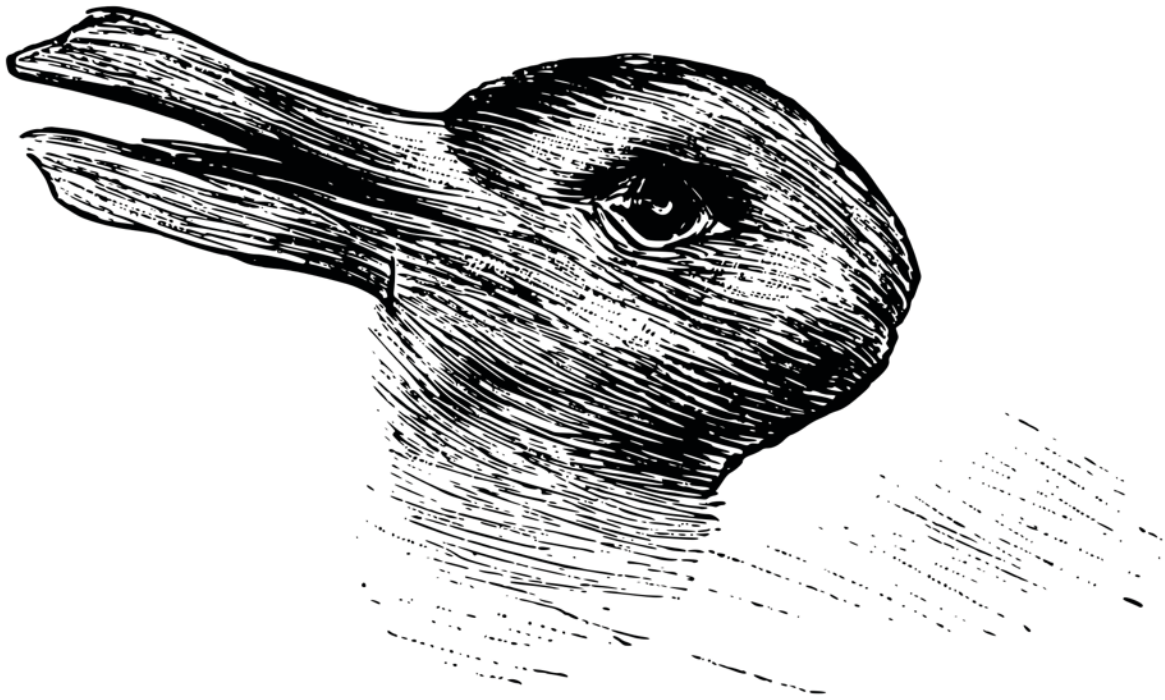
Museum of Fine Arts. Boston, MA

Oil on canvas.



18. Rubin Vase optical illusion, illustration.

Welche Thiere gleichen ein-
ander am meisten?



Kaninchen und Ente.

19. Rabbit and Duck optical illusion.