ART, ADVERTISING AND MODERNISM:
THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE ARTIST
IN THE AGE OF CAPITALISM

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyses advertising as a “species of social communication” and “narrative” (Wick, 1988) that has been entwined with avant-garde art in a complex relationship of cultural construction and patterns of representation. Drawing on theories of the political economy of commodity culture, a new approach to understanding the development of early avant-garde art is presented that locates advertising as agency for avant-garde practice.

In particular, this dissertation examines the use of advertising’s most authoritative mode of cultural communication, branding, as the driving agent of avant-gardism in its crucial formative decades in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Gustave Courbet, I argue, was the herald of a new course for art in the era of capitalism. He pioneered defining patterns of avant-garde practice through leveraging the press for self-promotion and building a unique brand identity for himself and his art. His aesthetic strategies are investigated in the context of developments in advertising and mass culture at the time.

The dissertation concludes with an investigation of Édouard Manet’s *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, which is discussed in the context of Impressionism’s affair with mass culture. At least three decades before conventional art histories locate Cubism as the seminal art movement to transform the modes of commercial representation (text and image) and the complex meanings encapsulated in them, Manet’s last major work shows him to have had an intense critical engagement with advertising in the broadest sense of its reach, indeed command, over social and philosophical discourse.
## CONTENTS

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**  
vi  
**LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS**  
vi  
**INTRODUCTION**  
1  

### PART ONE

**ADVERTISING AS A FORM OF COMMUNICATION**  
25

1. **Pre-history: The Middle Ages to the Renaissance**  
From patronage to market brand: the power behind the name  
Early forms of artist brands in the Renaissance period 1350-1600  
The function of art (Changes)  
The art buyer  
Reputation, status, identity, and the brand  
The change in the symbolic meaning of the artist’s name  
Interpreting Marx: fetishism and the political form of art  

### PART TWO

**THE ARTIST AS A BRAND**  
46

2. **Identity construction: Gustave Courbet and brand building**  
The need to differentiate  
Identity formation  

   **Stage 1. Constructing a unique identity**  
Courbet’s self-image: manufacturing identity  
Identity formation and self-portraits  
Forms of identity  
Essence (Being) In search of the self  
Manufacturing identity: a program of self-awareness  
Self-portraits: self-affirmation  
Getting noticed in a competitive market  
Branding  
Branding the artist’s name  
Existential phenomenology  
Branding and essence  
Painting essence  

3. **Research**  

   **Stage 2. Market research**  
Research as a calculated manoeuver of branding  
Assessment of art schools and comparison of product  
Experimentation  
Trial and synthesis  
Market testing: trial at the Salon
4. Product development

Stage 3. Developing the product
- Building identity through painting self-portraits
- Trial and experimentation leads to a new art
- Thematic sources from popular culture
- Attention-seeking strategies: getting noticed
- Linking painting style to brand development

5. Positioning

Stage 4. Positioning
- Challenging the Academy
- Positioning in relation to art
- Defining position in relation to others
- Analysis of Salon 1850-51
- Developing Features of Realism
- Securing positioning

6. The Launch

Stage 5. The Launch
- Storming the French art world
- Timing: the critical moment to launch Realism
- Courbet’s exhibition as an advertisement
- The launch of an art brand
- Reputation
- *Le Réalisme* as a new system of art presentation
- Market testing in the provinces
- There’s no such thing as bad publicity
- Public response to Realism
- *Le Réalisme* as installation art
- Reviewing Courbet and his art through caricatures

PART THREE

ART OVERLOOKS ADVERTISING

7. Advertising and the commodity
- The spectacle of the commodity
- Baudelaire’s impact
- Baudelaire’s *flâneur* engages painters
- The contradiction: the omission of advertising from Impressionism

PART FOUR

ART’S ENGAGEMENT WITH ADVERTISING IN CAPITALISM

8. Manet and *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*
- Advertising and the brand as agents of capitalism
- Manet’s engagement with advertising
Manet’s modernist response to Parisian commodity culture 206
The structure of *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* 209
*A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* as an allegory 213
Two Suzons: Dualities, doubles and opposites in depictions of Paris 217
Advertising and brands in Manet’s art 222
Advertising Paris and its hedonism 223
Myth, branding and the ideology of Impressionism 226
An alternate reading of Manet’s engagement with advertising in the Folies-Bergère 228

CONCLUSION

_Courbet, Manet and Hirst_
The avant-garde artist and modernism in capitalism 232

BIBLIOGRAPHY 238
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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### LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

   Page 2

   Page 7

   Page 8

   Page 8

   Page 28

6. Chronology of brand architecture.  
   Page 47

   Page 49

   Page 50

   Page 59

    Page 59

    Page 60

    Page 60

    Page 60

    Page 60

    Page 61

    Page 61

    Page 61

    Page 61


21 Diagram. Courbet’s tangible brand features.


27 Diagram. Chronology of brand architecture. Stage Two: Market research


120 Édouard Manet, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, 1881-82. Detail. 218

121 Édouard Manet, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, 1881-82. Detail. 218


124 Édouard Manet, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, 1881-82. Detail. 225


INTRODUCTION

... as modernism hides its envy for the broad appeal of mass culture behind a screen of condescension and contempt, mass culture, saddled as it is with pangs of guilt, yearns for the dignity of serious culture which forever eludes it.


Advertising has caused a revolution in the popular field. Advertising has become respectable in its own right and is beating the fine arts at its own game. We cannot ignore the fact that one of the traditional functions of fine art, the definition of what is fine and desirable for the ruling class, and therefore ultimately that which is desired by all society, has now been taken over by the ad-man.

Mass production advertising is establishing our whole pattern of life – principles, morals, aims, aspirations, and standard of living. We must somehow get the measure of this intervention if we are to match its powerful and exciting impulse with our own.


This is a story about avant-garde artists fraternising with advertising. My argument can be summed up with one red dot. Mind you, it’s not just any painted daub. It was made by Damien Hirst on a hackneyed 1950s oil painting of Joseph Stalin. Hirst’s intervention of the propaganda portrait elevated its economic value from an estimated $AUS 2,200 to a staggering $AUS 420,000 paid by an anonymous buyer at a Sotheby’s auction in 2006.

This particular red mark came to be on the Stalin portrait after British newspaper columnist and writer A. A. Gill took the old oil painting he had owned for some years to the venerable art auction house, Christie’s for sale. Initially speaking with a representative from their Post-War and Contemporary department, Gill asked if they could sell the picture in one of the weekly nineteenth-and twentieth-century sales. The representative suggested an estimate of around $AUS2,200. A couple of weeks later Christie’s changed its mind. They were unable to handle the sale of the portrait as it was against policy to sell Nazi memorabilia or that of any other dictator. Not willing to

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3 The painting was eventually sold at Sotheby’s.
4 Although Christie’s does have a policy not to sell any Nazi memorabilia, a spokesperson later claimed they had no specific policy regarding Stalin. Vanity Fair, No.556, December 2006, 246.
accept the auction house’s public moral face (or political correctness) with what he knew of its dark past trading ill-gotten artefacts, Gill formulated a strategy to re-package the dictator’s image.

The plan began when Gill phoned his college friend, artist, Damien Hirst, to ask if he would paint Stalin’s nose red with the view to donating any proceeds of the painting’s sale to charity. He then called the Christie’s representative back and enquired if they would reconsider their interest in Stalin “if Damian Hirst painted his nose red” (such a mark would become a moniker of the artist in 2010 in a series of screen-printed red dots) ‘and then signed it?’ Gill confirmed he could verify the authenticity of the painting’s makeover with photographic documentation, so the Christie’s sales representative agreed to phone him back. A reply came promptly (within ten minutes in fact). Having reviewed its position the auction house was now keen to handle the sale, not in Gill’s “Stalin” but in his “Hirst”.

Christie’s interest in the propaganda painting of unknown provenance was rekindled because of the mysterious reification that had occurred through the application of a red daub and signature linked to the value in the identity of the artist who painted it. Gill had challenged the auction house’s moral principles by re-presenting the picture with the addition of the mark of a famous artist. The painting had barely changed, however its market value was transformed considerably. An insignificant and virtually worthless image of political kitsch had become a valuable opifact, as Roger Fry called art, functioning in the rarefied realm of high art instead of circulating in the mundane world of the bric-a-brac store where the painting was headed before being rescued from the rubbish. The 1960’s painting of the Russian ruler with a

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red spot eventually ended up in the contemporary art category of Christies’ competitor auction house, Sotheby’s, netting a significant $AUS 420,000.

So how do we reconcile the $417,800 value accorded to one red dot and a signature? The only way to account for it is the elasticity of economic and symbolic power in capitalist commodity culture. Such a system is at the core of both art and advertising. It turns objects into commodities, and its wide ratio of change accommodates both a use-value and an exchange-value within the one object; more precisely, “the use-values of messages are integrated within a system of exchange-value”.6

Advertising creates exchange-value through branding; a communications system that builds perceived equity7 into a name through the promotion of identifying characteristics and embedding it in an already existing paradigm of cultural codes. In this case Damien Hirst is the brand, and the desire of auction participants to possess the work linked to his identity for such a vast sum, demonstrated the degree of cultural resonance his name holds.

This dissertation has very little to say about Hirst, but if its argument is correct then Hirst’s intervention should not be viewed as a radical thumbing of his nose at the conventions of Western fine art, but the culmination of its venerable traditions and particularly of the avant-garde strategies that were developed during the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Art and advertising: an historic association

It seems absolutely necessary for the increase of our sales that some means must be unremittingly made use of to keep up the attention of the world to the fine things we are making and doing for them.
—Joshua Wedgwood to Thomas Bentley, 17798

The commodity culture of capitalism may be unique but the economic questions it addresses are universal. Joshua Wedgwood’s statement expresses a problem faced by any producer throughout history irrespective of the scale of operation, type of product or economic value—how to communicate with potential consumers. Like a global manufacturer today, a thirteenth-century silversmith making decorative urns

encountered a competitive market structure, a need to maintain market awareness, questions of product differentiation, and distribution issues. Artists too, have wrestled with the same kinds of commercial pressures over the centuries, the most fundamental being, how to keep up the attention of the general public and attract custom. As a factor in the way of life, to assert oneself into the awareness of those with whom one means to communicate, the need to publicize and promote, is a rudimentary, yet enduring, function of any form of exchange.

This research, however, primarily concerns the relationship between the commodity culture and avant-garde art of capitalism, particularly as it can be seen through parallels between advertising and avant-garde French art from the latter half of the nineteenth century. While the histories of advertising and art are generally perceived as mutually exclusive, even antagonistic, I will argue that the avant-garde’s fundamental need to constantly reinvent itself, brought about by competitive conditions within the art market, has made advertising in one form or other an essential, if not defining, feature of its practice. Indeed, even from the outset of his career Picasso was self-conscious of the need for singularity and the attention it may afford. When asked about his cubist experimenting, he replied, “I saw that everything had been done. It was necessary to break away to create a revolution and start from zero”.9 He had an early-career self-aware branding epiphany—“We were twenty-five years old, Renoir was the rage and we had to do something else”.10

In conventional art world discourse advertising is commonly regarded as the opposite of high art. It is considered to be the crass commercial herald of mass culture, frequently referred to as a part of “low culture” and the antithesis of art’s superior imaginative and autonomous, and therefore, “inspired” creativity. This is because advertising has a perception problem. Its historic links with the deceptive selling techniques of early hucksters and snake-oil salesmen, and its association with a much criticised mass-commodity culture, is a difficult image to shake. Where advertising in its many printed ephemeral forms is discarded daily, high or fine art is collected by esteemed museums all over the world. Yet art and advertising have been historically interlinked by shared forms of exchange from the earliest times, and well before capitalism stamped its unique mark on commodity culture.

The association between art and advertising can be traced at least back to Greek antiquity. Art historians, however, have dislocated advertising from its

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10 Ibid., 44.
chronicles by ignoring key episodes of art’s engagement with it. This dissertation seeks to redress such a bias and investigate significant moments that highlight modern art’s enduring reliance upon forms of advertising for its very existence. By interrogating episodes of art’s employment of advertising’s intricate system of assertion to create artistic presence, and its impact on identity and agency, this dissertation presents a new approach to understanding the development of early modern art in terms of advertising as a quintessential tactic of avant-garde practice.

Ignorance of the association between art and advertising is partly due to the lack of interest in the history of advertising, which is generally but mistakenly considered a relatively modern phenomenon. In comparison with fine art, little scholarly attention has been paid to documenting advertising and its practitioners, despite the fact that advertising, through its pervasiveness in Western society, affects more people than does any of the conventional fine arts. In a broader social context, advertising is the cultural phenomenon that people have most exposure to and the strongest opinions about. Advertisements are “present in the most personal settings of our lives, at home and in our leisure activities”.11 It is estimated that on any given day we are confronted by over 1100 advertising messages across a variety of mediums from the clock radio that awakens us in the morning to the brand of toothpaste we use at the end of the day, and all the print and electronic transmissions of chaotic social processing delivered in between.

Advertising has always held a marginal place in art theory and art history discourse. I have found scholarly attention devoted to advertising extremely inadequate, negligible even, when compared to the mountain of analysis in the fine art domain. Also, the format of art historical literature – images accompanying well-researched text and detailed analysis of artists, works of art and their legacies – has not been applied as systematically to the field of advertising. First-hand accounts of the creators of advertising and their contributions to the evolving and comprehensive visual art history have been lost because of advertising’s perceived inconsequential status in the lineage of visual culture and human experience, the “art of materialism”,12 as Twitchell quipped.

The art of advertising did not evolve out of the same kind of historical system as did fine art. There were no early forms of advertising guilds, workshops, schools or master advertising craftsmen. There has never been a mythic “Leonardo” of the letterpress, no ad campaign so compelling as to raise the spirits of mankind quite as

Capella Sistina. Nor was there a rise of the “court” advertiser. And with few exceptions, advertising has never made itself so collectable as to spawn an industry to stimulate an acquisitions market in the same enduring way that art has. Purpose-built repositories for collecting culture’s history through objects and research never opened their corridors to artefacts of commercial speech in the same generous and engaging way they have to fine art and craft. Advertising’s ubiquitous nature has fostered a discounted identity for itself and thus diminished significance to become the herald of commercialism, the “mezzotint of modern life”.13 Interestingly, while advertising has engaged artists since the mid-nineteenth century, in either concrete or abstract ways, it has never held the interest of art historians and therefore no systematic investigation has been made to establish a full and inclusive history that incorporates advertising with art.

Scholarly attention to advertising in its broadest scientific and sociological definition typically falls under the auspices of business and social science disciplines where its impact and relevance are confined to economic and business studies or sociology contexts. As for advertising discourse of a formal and artistic nature, it is kept isolated from fine art departments by relegation to design schools where its critical analysis remains quarantined from its “high” cultured cousin. Advertising and the significant people behind its historic development have remained anonymous except to those engaged in the profession. How many art students or their teachers are familiar with the contributions made to advertising’s vernacular – the same visual language that inspired Cubism, Dada and Pop art – by Mehemed Fehmy Agha, Alex Brodovitch or Charles Coiner? Much of the primary and secondary source material on advertising design practitioners like Agha and Brodovitch, is lost. Their critical links, along with countless others, with artists and the consequences of any formal or aesthetic interchange, have been overlooked or relegated to footnotes by art historians who present the relationship between art and advertising as a series of unrelated, hermetically sealed, one-way events. Even with postmodernism’s attack on the modernist myth of originality and authenticity in recent years through the art of Sherman and Prince (among others), which has turned all definitions inside-out, advertising is still rarely dealt with as a serious contributing form of the visual arts, and is even less likely to be discussed within the same cultural paradigm as fine art.

Of course, there have been some significant exceptions when advertising’s formal characteristics became the focus of an avant-garde high art, prompting new and innovative artistic pursuits – Cubism, Futurism, Dada and Pop art are exemplary. Such significant intrusions in the adoption of commercial vernacular

13 Ibid.
and its formal qualities have received substantial focus because they were (not specifically significant enough to warrant their own chronicle but rather) a part of seemingly broader more traditional histories attached to resonating art brand names like Chérat, Picasso, Marinetti, Duchamp, Léger, Davis, Oldenberg or Warhol, to name a few. What art history undergraduate doesn’t know of Pierre Bonnard or Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec’s graphic promotions for Parisian nightclubs of the last decades of the nineteenth century? That moment of advertising and art’s convergence has been harnessed well and truly to high art history.

At least since Courbet and the impressionists, there has been a free-swinging movement of exchange between art and advertising: avant-garde artists have immersed themselves in popular and mass-culture, while advertising has appropriated art in an attempt to legitimize itself by adopting cultural authority, as Pears’ proprietors successfully achieved using Sir John Millais’s painting *Bubbles*, 1886, to promote their soap. Indeed, artists from Pissarro to Tracey Emin have supplemented their income by painting advertising signage or leasing their personal brands for product endorsement and collaborative manufacturing ventures. Take Emin’s 2006 magazine advertising campaign for Vivienne Westwood or the more recent design program she completed for the luxury apparel brand ‘Longchamp’.

Emin conceptualised a new, limited-edition range of Pliage handbags based upon her controversial autobiographic work, *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963-95*. Art historians rarely examine commercial forays by fine artists in a comprehensive or contextualised approach. This omission of a satisfying account of art’s bilateral exchange with advertising beyond certain formal affinities is a type of “bigotry”\(^{14}\) that points to an anxiety. Advertising is, after all, an indelible visual reminder

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![Figure 2. John Everett Millais, *Bubbles*, 1886. Chromolithograph.](image-url)
to theorists like Greenberg and Adorno, and more recently Bourdieu, Jameson, and Leers, that “low” culture is, as Smithson asserted, “a powerful and exciting impulse”\(^{15}\) that has the potential to “dissolve all cultural distinctions,”\(^{16}\) and therefore the ability to neutralise art’s traditional authority. In fact, since the industrial revolution and the mass culture it ushered in and nurtured, art critics have regularly written on the moral and aesthetic relationship between mass culture and high art, warning of the former’s disintegration of the latter because its “rigid homogeneity of style” will inevitably lead to the “homogenisation of the audience”.\(^{17}\) What is more, this dichotomy of disparagement became a defining dialectic of Adorno and Horkheimer’s high modernist art critique. Greenberg further entrenched the historical position of mass-culture as the crass enemy of an elite modernism. More specifically, Greenberg feared that advertising was detrimental to aesthetic quality because it “pre-digests art for the spectator and spares him effort, provides him with a shortcut to the pleasures of art that detours what is necessarily difficult in genuine art”.\(^{18}\)

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Advertising’s relegation to the category of “low”, due to its connection with art’s aesthetic and philosophical rival, mass popular-culture has been perpetuated by modernism’s “time-worn strategy of exclusion”. The antagonism has remained surprisingly stringent over the decades. This caricature was recently interrupted in the postmodern critique of high art and low culture in which Varnedo and Gopnik brought attention to the misrepresented pattern of interpretation:

For all the sweeping ideas, subtle nuances of analysis, and arresting personalities involved in theorising about high art and low culture in modern society, it seems that a few stereotyped responses are repeated over and over again, with a dismaying permanent narrowness.

The repetitive, well-trodden responses Vernado and Gopnik refer to here are the art world’s traditional (and society at large) schema of analysis devised in the mid-nineteenth century that separated advertising and popular cultural themes from art. The narrowness they speak of is a resistance by art historians to examine advertising objectively. Yet art producers, like any other producer, have had to “actively solicit customers by, in some fashion or another, hawking their wares” and promoting their names. While not wanting to negate the considerable differences between the two domains, my aim is to investigate the internal history of the unilateral exchange between advertising and art.

Due to a fundamental need to be always contemporaneous and new, brought about by modernity’s continued insistence upon innovation and competitive market pressures, advertising and art have looked to each other for inspiration and revitalisation in a multiplicity of ways. Competitive market pressures forced the circuits of artistic innovation beyond the familiar manifestations we have come to know as French poster art or Cubism’s incomprehensible puns that came directly from commercial vernacular or even Duchamp’s use of materials from popular consumption in his ready-mades. In an effort to attain public exposure artists have appropriated advertising’s “readymade” sign system together with its symbolism and values to assert themselves into “society’s public ideological life”. This observation led me to review artists and their art making enterprises mindful of a different kind of “artistic” innovation. I found a new dimension of modernism with its own devices, motifs and codes.

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21 Ibid.
Also, as my research continued into the diversity and complexity of the exchange, the occupational practices of artists began to appear strikingly familiar to the marketing logic that I knew (from twenty years professional practice) underpinned advertising. Sets of similarities between the two became apparent.

In the first place, advertising has from its beginning always been a communicative process. From markings branded onto the hind quarters of cattle in ancient Egypt, to medieval tournament heralds and monograms, to the printed packaging of early nineteenth-century, mass-produced commodities like Coca-Cola and Quaker Oats, to the most recent internet launch of the Mac iPad, advertising messaging is the location of an exchange of meaning between a sponsor (the sender) and receiver (the audience and the consumer). In this psycho-sociological function, advertising and art are siblings with a common ancestry, while their audiences are subject to the same cognitive operations. They both function using the same transmission model: to communicate by making a meaning (the art work or advertisement) for reception and an exchange of understanding by a receiver (the art audience or product consumer).

Secondly, while art is viewed as the expression of the maker’s creative impulse to convey a personal inspiration, and advertising as the communicative means to create charisma for commodities in the teleology of salesmanship, they both need to draw content from their social context to look closely at the question “for whom is it made?” And therein lies another crucial parallel—addressing an audience and the domain of consumption. This is a particularly problematic issue because of entrenched notions that conventionally partition art from advertising on the grounds of traditional beliefs in “the autonomous artist”, and advertising’s infamous, mysterious power and influence over consumers’ social imaginations and desires. But what lies behind these simplifications of difference is the fact that all art is like advertising; it is produced to speak to and convince, some one, and in a final analysis, both conclude their transactions through an economic exchange. Further, each is dependent upon the most transient of determinants, the tastes and whims of their audience that in the modern era has meant being subject to a constant pressure for maintaining renewal—the spirit of the moment, the here-and-now—through innovation. Each is subject to competitive conditions established by a cultural and economic elite who set the pace for a “special register of consumption” that controls scarcity, price, and the rate-time ratio of changes in style.

23 Ibid., 27.
24 Therefore both are forms of, as Wernick alludes, communicative arts that “the ancient world called rhetoric”, 27.
for the output of advertising and art to be constantly advanced and always
innovative and different from what came before it.

Another comparative analogy I became preoccupied with is semiotics and the
examination of how advertising and art’s respective communications systems operate
between makers (producers) and their audiences, and how social experience, shared
symbolism and meaning structures form corresponding and symmetrical linguistic
patterns. Interestingly, it is the audience for art, as it is for advertising, which does the
mental processing of the stimuli (or shared symbolism) to determine meaning. Schwartz
explains:

The meaning of our communication is what a listener or viewer gets out of
his experience with the communicator’s stimuli. The listener or viewer’s
brain is an indispensable component of the total communication system.
His life experiences, as well as his expectations of the stimuli he is receiving,
interact with the communicator’s output in determining the meaning of the
communication.26

Like advertising, art transmits cultural knowledge – societal content accumulated
through generations of explanations and interpretations (also myth) – and handed down
information in its reflective messaging. Moxey writes of art’s historical role as ‘canonical
content,’ a sort of ‘syllabi,’ ‘transferring knowledge’27 like a ‘master narrative’.28 Scholars
of advertising and sociology also use the same expressions of meaning in their analysis
of the way in which the audience derives meaning from an advertisement. Leiss, Kline
and Jhally explain advertising’s meaning process: “Its creations appropriate and transfer
a vast range of symbols and ideas: its unsurpassed communicative powers recycle
cultural models and references back through the networks of social interaction.”29

Therefore, while advertising uses reflective social information, it is also a form
of narrative transferring knowledge between persons in which signals are sent that
contain information from a body of amassed and established cultural curriculum built
up over time like a collective memory. Art, as advertising, engages in the manipulation
of such accumulated and handed-down information as symbolic code. Jhally eloquently
interprets Roland Barthes referent system of codes of connotation that unifies the various
elements in the process of the construction of meaning: “A code is a store of experience
upon which the advertiser and audience draw in their participation in the construction

London. 86.
28 Ibid.
29 Leiss, W., Kline, S., and Jhally, S., 1990, Social Communication Advertising. 5.
of ‘commodity meaning.’ According to Leiss, Kline and Jhally, the messages of advertising “reach deeply into our most serious concerns: interpersonal and family relations, the sense of happiness and contentment, sex roles and stereotyping, the uses of affluence, the fading away of older cultural traditions, influences on younger generations, the role of business in society, persuasion and personal autonomy, and many others.” This cultural information as societal knowledge is “malleable” or “mutually convertible” between art and advertising. It is always modern because it is “engaged in a process of continual change”. In other words, art, as I began to see it, resembled advertising in the way it reflects the cultural codes and symbolic conventions of its social milieu because it is produced to communicate with, or say something to, the same contemporary audience.

Finally, these codes are drawn from the same source as art. The ideological process of reading cultural signs, semiotics, became my next concrete parallel between advertising and art. I came to learn, as this thesis sets out to explain, that advertising and art are analogous because they are both devices for the transmission of cultural signification. Both fields deal in material and symbolic expression that draw their audiences (dare I say, consumers) into a complex paradigm of interpersonal distinctions of status politics and power relations within their social groups.

The interdisciplinary nature of this research – which has taken in psychology, sociology, semiotics, and philosophy – has continued to establish fundamental links regarding meaning patterns, such as composition, aesthetics, politics of representation, realism, naturalism, class, status, motivation, ideology, myth, and history. These issues, in turn, opened up further shared patterns, particularly in the domain of human nature – the notion of a relationship between the self and society – and what I found particularly fascinating, a cultural logic of a “stylised world of aesthetics and consumption”. However, what ultimately grounds this cultural logic of art and advertising in the same space is their shared experience of modernity. During the second half of the nineteenth century the life of the professional artist greatly changed. The loss of traditional forms of patronage forced artists to engage in fundamental self-promotion. Without the surety of state commissions and the guarantee of broad public exposure through the Academy and Salon system, artists engaged in strategic maneuvers of

31 Ibid., 1.
33 Moxey, K., The Practice of Persuasion; Paradox and Power in Art History 88.
publicity and distribution in order to earn a living. This fostered the emergence of the dealer-critic arrangement. At the same time, enterprising manufacturers of mass-produced consumer products began to embrace advertising in order to extend the distribution of their products beyond local markets and counter growing forces of competition. For both kinds of producers – the artist for a small exclusive bourgeois market and the manufacturer of industry-reliant, low-price-large-sale commodities – modernity forced new kinds of strategies in order to cope with their respective market place’s new competitive conditions. For both, this meant building and employing strong and enduring identities.

In this thesis I argue that this bilateral relationship between advertising and art is far more complex, with intricate signifying functions of dissemination (modes of address), than is currently recognised. My particular interest is avant-garde art and artists (militantly antagonistic and considered revolutionary and subversive) and their deployment of advertising’s operations for self-advancement.

The full extent of symbiotic interaction between advertising and art is too vast to adequately discuss here. The plan for this dissertation is to identify and expand upon three particular historical moments in French avant-garde art during the second half of the nineteenth century that exemplify advertising’s relationship to avant-garde art at this pivotal time in the formation of Western modernism.

I examine the avant-garde’s use of advertising beyond art movements and schools where its modality (the way in which information is encoded) has conventionally been restricted to style and form, or references to commercial and popular culture per se. Specifically, I argue that an initial, critical and decisive demonstration of early avant-garde strategic use of advertising is evident in Gustave Courbet’s self-promotion, and then discuss the impact of his aesthetic strategies on the generation that followed him.

Art historical scholarship on modern art’s association with advertising is rare, and when it occurs, mostly superficial, and incidental to accounts of artists and their careers. Advertising is considered a supplementary issue and never the focus within its chronicles of the stylistic developments of individual artists or movements. Until now,

there have been no critical accounts that combine a close reading of an artist’s personal, economic and social circumstances with an analytical discussion of advertising as a pervasive disseminator and strategic positioning mechanism of taste, value and culture, and therefore a significant variable in the production of art.

From the outset, I embarked on a broad-ranging approach to research what connected advertising to art. An early work I examined (from which I drew several key issues) was *Avantgarde & Kampagne*, the catalogue-book accompanying the exhibition *Art meets Ads*, held at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, in 1992. *Art meets Ads* was a survey of contemporary advertisements and works of art presented with equal integrity and focus, thus allowing their points of contact and differences to present themselves in the extensive exhibition spaces as equals. The co-curators – art director Michael Schirner, and curator Jürgen Harten – wrote the catalogue essays. While lacking in critical analysis, their joint proposition to “regard advertising as art and simultaneously taking the risk of considering art as a kind of advertising”, became the starting point of my initial thinking on this project. Fundamentally, *Art meets Ads* counterpointed advertising works, such as Benetton’s ‘United Colours’ campaign, with the art of artists like Jeff Koons and Barbara Kruger that Schirner refers to as “concept artists”: Koons’ *Made in Heaven* and Calvin Klein’s ‘Obsession’ are exemplary of this notion. Such comparative staging through numerous couplings in various media highlighted the interchangeable materiality and aesthetics of art and advertising. Tecno Test’s *Selected Works*, and Ashley Bickerton’s *Seascape: Floating Costume to Drift for Eternity II*, are prime examples of Shirner and Harten’s conceptual arrangement.

Schirner also identified an increasingly common practice by conceptual artists to outsource labour, which he notes, “barely differs from the internal structures of an advertising agency”. All that seemed to differentiate art from advertising was the artist’s signature, which according to Schirner, is what added value to a work of art. In other words, the signature acted as a brand, thus further linking art and advertising.

Another work of considerable use in my early research was Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik’s seminal encyclopaedic volume, *High & Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture*, accompanying their blockbuster exhibition of the same name. The chapter dedicated to advertising is a thoroughly researched and all-encompassing history of modern art’s appropriation of, and dialogue with, advertising, commencing with French poster art and ending with the last decades of the twentieth century. Their detailed analysis of Rosenquist’s *F-111* (1964) was particularly important because it broadened

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the discussion of the association beyond style and aesthetics into the ideological
function of advertising as a creator of modern fantasies through the economy of
material culture. This work therefore became an early reference point, a platform from
which several directions for this enquiry sprang.

Following on from Varnedoe and Gopnik’s formal approach to descriptions of
the association between art and advertising, I narrowed my focus to the modern era
when advertising emerged as a constituent feature of modernity. Indeed it became an
industry in itself, intersecting with art in many significant ways. This moment also
paralleled the breakdown of the official art exhibition system in Paris challenged by the
rise of the modern art market in the second half of the nineteenth century. It appeared
to me that this was a significant time in which to begin my interrogation of art’s use of
advertising because the institution with the most influence over an artist’s economic
disposition and career – domination really – was slowly being replaced by another more
democratic structure incorporating private galleries, dealers and critics, in which the
artist’s reputation, or name, became a more critical component of the power behind
artistic standing and value.

The history of modernist art, insofar as it has been formalist, has impoverished
our understanding of the meaning of an artist’s identity and how he or she builds
perceptions in the eyes of the public. Nevertheless, there are numerous examinations of
this era that focus upon the new type of practitioner Bätschmann calls the ‘exhibition
artist’ whose emergence was prompted by the institutional shift from the Salon to the
dealer-critic system, from a sociological rather than formalist perspective. However
none link the sociological scope of their findings to the idea of the artist’s signature,
identity, or reputation, let alone to the domain of advertising and its embodying material
forms, such as branding, even though many seem acutely aware of the marketing
mechanism’s of the dealer system. Michael Fitzgerald, for example, describes Picasso’s
adroit management of his reputation and the way in which he enhanced it through
personal marketing strategies and professional tactics that incorporated the
manipulation of relationships with dealers and patrons. He discusses the complex nature
and criticality of establishing an artist’s reputation without touching on what exactly
‘reputation’ is, the specificity of its properties, and the mechanisms with which it is built.
The relationship between Picasso and Paul Rosenberg, he explains, was a great deal
more involved than merely commercial transactions and the presentation of art: “From
the outset, it was an intense collaboration that both stimulated Picasso’s art and
contributed to his growing reputation.”38 And again, in anticipation of a more fully discussed argument of Picasso’s susceptibility to the demands of the market and connecting them within the system of advertising and its powerful apparatus, branding, Fitzgerald structures his arguments around new, unpublished source material that feeds straight back into existing art historical teachings: “Picasso and Rosenberg pursued a collaboration in artistic promotion that substantially created the image of Picasso and the modern movement that is still widely affirmed.”39

Griselda Pollock advances a theory of the avant-garde as canny self-promoters orchestrating their identity. Using Paul Gauguin as an example, in *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888-1893 Gender and the Colour of Art History*, Pollock posits a notion that accounts for the success of one artist over another within the new economic forces of market capitalism. While largely a feminist reading of Gauguin’s painting of his Tahitian wife, *Manao Tupapou*, Pollock argues avant-gardism should be viewed as a series of maneuvers for establishing an identity in avant-garde sub-culture and the wider Parisian art world of the 1890s. Avant-gardism, she asserts, involves “a series of gambits for intervening in the interrelated spaces of representation, publicity, professional competition and critical recognition”.40 Here she speaks indirectly of advertising systems and their role in the promotion of art to a growing audience, branding, and the establishment of a unique identity of renown.

Pollock’s theoretical paradigm of reference, deference, and difference is the closest that any scholarly art historical account has come to breaking the pattern of the conventional analysis of artists’ careers. In statements such as “To make your mark in the avant-garde community,” “your own move involved establishing a difference,” or, “This complex process increasingly involved the manufacture of a public identity for the artist/producer,” Pollock acknowledges the significance of ‘representation’ and ‘perception’, two aspects that I came to believe could best be explained through advertising theory and branding logic, and account for the authority that identity has in the making and perpetuation of avant-gardism. Her discussion on artists’ promotion of ‘the self’ as a device for increasing value41 is far from complete, yet it suggests a key proposition advanced in this thesis, that of the artist as a brand, in which the value of the art object is directly attributed to the artist’s name and its place in the hierarchy of an already existing system of cultural codes.

38 Fitzgerald, M., p. 11-12.
40 Pollock, p. 12.
41 Ibid., p. 16.
Another study of artists’ strategies for intervening in the promotion and public perception of new art and the artists who made it, is Oskar Bätschmann’s lengthy work, *The Artist in the Modern World: A Conflict Between Market and Self-Expression*. His discussion on Courbet and Manet in reference to what the French refer to as, *succès de scandale*, is particularly relevant to the aim of this thesis. While describing Courbet’s scandal-raising manoeuvres of 1855, Bätschmann builds the picture of an attention-obsessed artist without exploring the long and enduring process that Courbet experienced coming to terms with his identity as an artist and the ways in which he used this experience to establish a new paradigm—that of the avant-garde artist—in which reputation is a product of orchestrated branding efforts.

Bätschmann’s assertion that art became as aggressive as advertising prompted me to consider examining an artist whose career paralleled the emergence of the advertising industry, particularly at a time when the establishment institution for art promotion and exchange, the Salon, was increasingly becoming “problem-ridden” and unable to adapt to the conditions of modernity. I became convinced that this period of French history provided a unique context with which to draw out important themes related to free-market economics and the extent to which identity branding became a modern cultural manifestation of the nineteenth-century avant-garde. Thus, I began a close examination of Gustave Courbet and his art, primarily through the scholarship of Jack Lindsay, Georges Boudaille, Sarah Faunce, Linda Nochlin and T. J. Clark. Added to this were more recent texts by Ségolène Le Men, James Rubin and Michael Fried, and in particular, Petra ten-Doesschate Chu. My focus narrowed in on the crucial years between 1848–55, the period in which Courbet produced his most significant work, developed his identity as an artist – the man who would ultimately challenge the French Academy and its Salon – and the architect who invented the original script for generations of avant-garde.

To this end, Chu’s account of Courbet’s professional development is a significant addition to art history, and supports a cornerstone in the argument of this dissertation in its uncustomary acknowledgment of the artist’s attempts to achieve recognition for himself by asserting the traits of his character in a business model that parallels the development of any successful, contemporary product or consumer brand. Linking Courbet’s art to the rapid expansion of the nineteenth-century press, Chu deftly describes the artist’s strategy for writing numerous letters to newspaper editors in the

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hope that they be published, therefore, asserting his politically charged views that publicly challenged the art establishment, resulting in publicity for himself and eliciting a “maximum amount of discussion”.44 Chu argues that there were distinct advantages in being discussed in the contemporary press, whether derogatory or adulatory. Understanding how exposure in print amounted to publicity for your art, Courbet sought to optimise the causality of his “outrageous” opinions about art and editors’ penchant for hyped-up controversy. The result is a revised understanding of the effect media culture came to have on his developing approach to both his self-perception and admission into the French art world. Chu’s, *The Most Arrogant Man in France*, is a significant, recent attempt to initiate a direct connection between the creation of a public persona and the artist’s output. While my argument does not reference her groundbreaking book in any significant way, it does serve as a primary starting point of my thesis. This is partly because I only discovered her book when the research for this thesis was substantially completed but also because her concerns are only one current in the larger argument about the ways in which Courbet deliberately created a brand through which he inserted his identity into the public domain. As I will show, Courbet’s intuitive understanding of branding as the agent for his success makes him the most exactly modern painter of his time and the archetypal precursor of ours.

My interest in Courbet was focused on the crucial seven years between 1848–55, the period in which he produced his most significant work, developed his identity as an artist, the man who would ultimately challenge the French Academy and its Salon, and the architect who invented the original script for generations of avant-garde. I came to see Courbet and his Realism as two interconnected identity mechanisms, or brands. Linking Courbet and his Realism to brand theory became a critical trajectory. The approach at this point was to draw on contemporary brand theory to fully explore my thesis that the artist is a brand.

Here, Douglas Holt’s excellent work on the principles of iconic brand theory presented an alternative perspective with which to interpret Courbet’s life and art, and the opportunities he made for himself by leveraging mass advertising and cultural disruption. Among other authoritative texts were *Brands and Branding* by Rita Clifton and John Simmons, and Leo Bogart’s *Strategic Advertising: Matching Media and Messages to Markets and Motivations*. These I found to be invaluable resources as Clifton and Simmons both demonstrate a rare intimate knowledge and extensive personal

experience in the architecture of contemporary brands. And while Bogart’s anthology covers wide-ranging domains of advertising in their broadest sense, from defining a target audience to the psychology of a persuasive argument, it also demonstrates the complex communicative significance and “profound influence on culture, values, and the quality of life”, of branding.46

Following this, it became necessary to broaden the terms of reference and draw upon a variety of other disciplines to better examine the nature of identity as a phenomenon, which I came to realize is common to such fields as psychology, sociology, and philosophy, as well as branding as a form of advertising. As my research of the literature on Courbet opened up beyond the familiar litany of Lindsay, Mack, Faunce, and Nochlin, the artist’s Realism became more obviously connected to a corporeality of self-representation than to an “ideal of fidelity to appearances” as repetitively documented in art history.47 Against the grain of traditional, formalist approaches to understanding modernism, Michael Fried’s examination of Courbet’s early self-portraits and controversial allegorical works (that have come to be known as his breakthrough paintings48, in *Courbet’s Realism*, opened up a whole new way for me to understand the emergence of the artist’s identity through his search for an authentic experience of appearance and how it was ontologically connected to identity. Fried’s use of existential phenomenology – an approach inspired by the theories of Maurice Merleau-Ponty – expanded my approach to examining how people manufacture their identities through analysis of unique characteristics and essential qualities, the rudimentary components of branding. In this equation I would find my second thematic leitmotif from which two seemingly opposed tendencies – to assert an identity in a commercial context, i.e. to brand, and to assert one’s identity as a human being – could be reconciled. Both posit essential properties to be the thing it is – whether a person, a place, an object or product, an art movement or a political position. This train of thought resulted in the examination of existential phenomenology, beginning with Hegel but focusing on Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, particularly Heidegger’s *Identity and Difference*.

Another major theme of this dissertation is the ideological nexus between advertising and art. In this respect art history has overlooked the function and significance of complex systems within advertising, such as symbolic coding and branding, that greatly affect how our perceptions of commodities, ergo art and artists, are

48 *After Dinner At Ornans, The Burial, The Stonebreakers*, and *Peasants Returning From the Fair*. 
formed, especially in the modern world where the function of art is not given (it is not, for example, an adjunct of religious worship) but must be made and sold in much the same way as any other commodity. This led me to consider Courbet’s followers, in particular Manet and the French Impressionists more generally. I was particularly concerned with their representation of Paris. The studies of Johannes Willms and David Harvey enabled me to grasp Paris as a vivid tapestry of social, political, artistic and economic texture. This was enhanced through a number of works on the social history of Paris that contextualised the works of Balzac and Zola, in particular Walter Benjamin’s readings on Paris in, The Arcades Project, and Baudelaire’s essay, ‘On the Heroism of Modern Life’, also Philip Hamon’s, Expositions: Literature and Architecture in Nineteenth-Century France.

The art of Manet and the Impressionists are the lens through which I examine my third thematic cornerstone of the relationship between advertising and art. I began with Novelene Ross’s close reading of Manet’s last great painting in, Manet’s Bar at the Folies-Bergère, and T. J. Clark’s, The Painting of Modern Life. In any close examination of this painting in context with broader questions on the rise and representation of commodity culture during the second half of the nineteenth century, and advertising’s role in it, Clark’s final chapter entitled, “A Bar at the Folies-Bergère” is essential background reading. While Clark’s argument concerns forms of class as visible obstacles of the emerging modern life, I found his analysis of forms of class in commercial locations of spectacle, such as the cafés-concerts, helpful, for the link it makes between spectacle and the visible ways in which the classes mingled publicly. My focus then turned to identifying forms of advertising as a representational agent for symbolic social meaning within Manet’s painting. Additional supportive sources were, The End of the Salon by Patricia Mainardie, Jensen’s, Marketing Modernism in Fin-de-Siecle Europe, and James Rubin’s Impressionism, along with countless other examinations of this often-studied era.

To tease out exactly what and how the attendant commercial culture was manifested in the art of Manet and the Impressionists, and examine unexplored social constituents linking advertising to art, I analysed the commercial speech of advertising as a cultural phenomenon with its own signifying codes and symbolic constitution. From this viewpoint my interrogation of art uses the same semiotic criteria as an examination of any other commodity with both a use-value and a symbolic exchange-value. In order to draw out key ideas and connections between advertising and art under this agenda I initially looked to the theories of early social and economic thinkers, Karl Marx and Thorstein Veblen, with particular emphasis on the symbolic constitution of art within the wider sphere of commodity culture at mid-nineteenth century. Marx’s
theory of ‘the fetishism of commodities’ and Veblen’s notion of ‘conspicuous consumption’ both consider the concept of commodities as communicators of social code. In addition, those twentieth-century social theorists whose works are anchored in their accounts of capitalism and who further critiqued the cultural manifestations of the commodity’s abstract forms in advanced capitalism, also evoke the system of signs that underpins consumer society. In this regard a number of texts became key readings: Roland Barthes’ examination of the semiotics of consumerism in *Mythologies*, and Guy Debord’s *The Society of the Spectacle*. However, Sut Jhally’s brilliant work *The Codes of Advertising*, Andrew Wernick’s *Promotional Culture*, and Judith Williams’ *Decoding Advertisements* particularly enabled me to draw together abstract concepts such as the traditional Marxist notion of reification, the political economy of the commodity, the semiotics of advertising with the more concrete and tangible world of Manet and the Impressionists. Thomas Richards’ *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England* and Christopher Linder’s *Fictions of Commodity Culture: From the Victorian to the Post Modern* then became important resources in my understanding of art as a commodity circulating in commodity culture in much the same way as any other value-bearing product would, and situating these concepts in the nineteenth-century Paris.

What every art historical study on the subject has hitherto overlooked is modern art’s most potent attribute, the name, or signature of the artist. For within the very idea of the artist’s name is a powerfully distinguishing feature of advertising – the brand – a socio-cultural lexicon that links identity to value, indeed, even explains the value in the simplest of marks, like Damien Hirst’s red dot. Describing and analysing the various forms the link can take in early avant-garde artists is the task of this thesis.

This dissertation is in four parts. In Part one I outline the core argument of my thesis, which is that the nexus between advertising and art is the system of branding. I begin by examining the notion that the artist is a brand, which is explicated through Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism and its interpretation by contemporary cultural theorists such as Sut Jhally and Richard Linder. In so doing, I examine branding as a sign system that adds symbolic social meaning to people as well as objects. Social theorists such as Jhally, Baudrillard and Debord have argued that this process – the “transformation of the commodity-as-thing into an advanced cultural form: the
commodity-as-image”⁴⁹ – is the achievement of advanced capitalism.⁵⁰ Capitalism may well be the most advanced form of branding, but I argue in Part one, ‘From patronage to market brand’, that embryonic forms of branding are evident well before this in the late Middle Ages, when the artisan-artist came to understand the meaning and value in his name. At this time branding, usually discussed in terms of modern commercial enterprise, evolved into a mechanism through which some acknowledged master artisans became artists during the Renaissance.

Part two, entitled ‘The Artist as a Brand,’ examines the use of branding at the beginning of avant-garde art through the case study of Gustave Courbet, his career and rise to art world prominence. Courbet is a key figure in my argument because his advance from being a young unknown provincial artist to a famous French master coincides with a significant phase in the changing career pattern of professional artists, and the evolution of the newspaper as a dominant forum for commodity and cultural representations for the middle-class. New models of communication and engagement created a widening bourgeois audience for art at the same time that traditional networks of patronage were disintegrating. I argue that Courbet was the herald of a new course for art in the era of capitalism (or the market system), and that he outlined a defining feature of avant-garde art: the use of advertising tactics for self-promotion and building a unique identity for the art as well as the artists.

The case study of Courbet is an exemplary account of the artist as a brand as the development of his painting was intimately linked to the manufacture of his identity, and ultimately the emergence of his brand. In some respects my argument follows established art historiography that measures an artist’s identity with “reputation” – “the relative esteem in which a person or thing is held”.⁵¹ However, identity is a complex phenomenon of psychological and social response that, I argue, is best explained through branding as a specialised system with the capacity to incorporate a number of very precise interdependent processes and variables of concrete and abstract form.

Consisting of five chapters, Part two details the sequential process in which Courbet established his brand. This five-stage procedure of brand building is a revised history of Courbet, indeed of the brand architecture process also, and a new way of looking at Realism, how it evolved as an artistic phenomenon, and its positioning within

the socio-political moment of mid-nineteenth century French painting. From this vantage point Courbet’s career appears less mythic and romantic, and more calculated and opportunistic. It is not my intention to challenge his status or underestimate his innovation. What I want to demonstrate through his example is how inextricably enmeshed modern art has always been with advertising, not just in reflecting its presence but also in adopting its methodology and processes. In effect I am arguing against the widely held view that the avant-garde (artists in general) is disinterested in performing for the market and functions in a purely autonomous sphere.

The Third and Fourth parts of this dissertation examine the legacy of Courbet’s art around the time of French Impressionism. This moment in nineteenth century art is conventionally taken as the exemplar of the avant-garde’s interest in modernity – particularly of the celebration of city streets and vistas and its development of an autonomous style of painting. French Impressionism is conventionally portrayed as a reflection of the broad sweeping changes in social and cultural experience that occurred as a result of industrialisation and the accompanying modernity in Paris during the later decades of the nineteenth century and the beginnings of a new subjective autonomy in art that would culminate in the abstractions of the twentieth century. In particular, art historians have described how the artists developed a new subjective vision that at the same time produced a new objectivity in art that spelt the end of academic idealism. A defining feature of the epoch’s new urban experience was advertising in all its bright colour and lurid sounds. However, advertising’s imagery occupies virtually no space in Impressionist studies of modern urban life. In this comparative analysis, I contrast Impressionist painting of city vistas to photographic and written accounts of the time, and in doing so argue for a different interpretation of Impressionism that accounts for the increasing impact of advertising on avant-garde art. My comparisons show that Impressionism omitted advertising – the finely crafted typography of signage and printed forms – and the defining socio-commercial Zeitgeist that endowed Paris its alluring singularity. The excising of significant commercial aesthetics from their urban depictions, I will argue, questions conventional understanding of the Impressionist enterprise.

Part four focuses the argument of the Impressionists’ omission through critical examination of Manet’s work *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* along with two of his other paintings from around the same time. I argue that these paintings reveal him to be an

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52 As well, it is a new presentation of how branding functions, it is an original addition to existing academic work in this field.
53 Along with tranquil vistas of countryside and seashore, domestic interiors and the leisured classes in fashionable Parisian cafés as described on the back cover of *Impressionism* by James, H. Rubin.
exception within the ranks of those famous great names of modern French painting said to portray Parisian modernity. Manet’s inclusion of advertising in a number of guises within these three works show him to be particularly sensitive to the spirit and tone of the city’s modernity in all of its manifestations. With a unique uncritical approach his works prove compelling evidence of complicity between advertising and art, and a deep cynical understanding of advertising’s role in shaping late-nineteenth-century culture, providing a “sense of proffering social reality”.54

What Courbet had identified as a new platform for recognition and attention, the use of public reaction provoked by his art, Manet also enlisted to his advantage as a way to insinuate himself into the flanks of modern French art, and as the artist next-in-line to effect the course of modern painting and its vision of contemporary life. Provoking heated public discussion that positions the artist at the epicenter of social discourse is a rate-free form of cultural advertising that Damien Hirst would turn into an art in itself one hundred years later. Following the chapter on Manet my concluding comments place Hirst’s art at the end of the Realist current initiated by Courbet. Although now a global concern, Hirst’s brand, like his predecessor’s, tests excepted notions of art while the artist himself, as Courbet before him, is famous for challenging the bourgeois by reflecting them and their contemporary way of life. Hirst, as I see it, is the twenty-first century’s champion of Realism.

PART ONE

But certainly for the present age, which prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, fancy to reality, the appearance to the essence, . . . illusion only is sacred, truth profane. Nay, sacredness is held to be enhanced in proportion as truth decreases and illusion increases, so that the highest degree of illusion comes to be the highest degree of sacredness.

—Freuerbach, Preface to the Second Edition of *The Essence of Christianity*, 1841.⁵⁶

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1. PRE-HISTORY

Middle Ages to the Renaissance.
From patronage to market brand: the power embedded in the name

Advertising is an old profession. As far back as 2700 BC the Egyptians wrote stories and notices on papyrus.\(^5^7\) Evidence of communication with a broad audience in the form of posted statements has been found in Pompeii and Carthage.\(^5^8\) During the Roman Republic rentals for shop-houses appeared in daily notices called *Acta Diurna*, which translates as Daily Public Records. Presented as message boards and posted in public locations like the Roman forum, these official communications were carved on stone or metal.

Such early examples of communication all evolved out of the relatively simple need to either inform, announce or to identify. Arguably, the prime purpose of art in ancient times was to promote various gods and religious groups, and this resulted in the rapid evolution of sophisticated advertising. During the middle-ages when few people could read, and before the advent of mass printing, ornamental objects such as statues and stained glass windows were a form of publicity. Cathedrals, for example, became objects of Christian pilgrimage because of their religious art as well as for their miraculous relics. Objects of devout totem were a means by which the church affected their liturgical teachings upon their congregation, a mechanism of consecration that today is publicity through branding.

In Renaissance Italy such advertising acquired a secular dimension. Fierce competition grew for ecclesiastical “media” opportunities – chapel decoration, altar paintings, sculptures, stained glass, and so on. Art patronage was good public relations for the patron, artist and church. Rich merchant families, in the pursuit of piety and elevated social standing, vied for promotional opportunities by commissioning great works of art for the church – much like the motivation behind today’s corporate sponsorship of the Telstra Stadium or Foster’s Melbourne Grand -Prix. Wall space in chapels and basilicas were advertising opportunities for socially ambitious families. Demand grew among wealthy families, particularly in Florence, to engage prominent artists and craftsmen into patronage relationships in an effort to demonstrate their

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\(^5^7\) Papyrus is a thick paper-like material made from the papyrus plant.
\(^5^8\) Carthage refers to a series of ancient Phoenician cities on the Gulf of Tunisia. The main city is Carthage, located on the eastern side of Lake Tunis. It was colonised, according to Roman legend, in 814 BCE by the Phoenicians led by an exiled princess from Tyre called Queen Dido. Carthage came to be called the “shining city” and ruled 300 other smaller cities around the western Mediterranean.
holiness and taste in a time when badges of wealth were limited in comparison with today’s endless choices. Mass itself became a promotional apparatus for the ruling classes, sold to the highest bidder, turning faith into a commodity for trade, promoted in the same way as a master silversmith might publicise his wares. Here, the line between art and advertising was very fine indeed.

Historian Richard Goldthwaite argues in *Wealth and Demand for Art in Italy, 1300-1600*, that the reason we have such an abundance of Renaissance artefacts today is quite simply because the demand for such objects was so great at the time. James Twitchell goes so far to claim that such art *was* advertising:

Florentine churches were as cluttered with this iconic stuff as commercial television is with interruptions or as newspapers are with messages from Sears. The Holy Roman Catholic Church is quite possibly the most material-oriented religion ever developed, not because the church fathers wanted it but because the parishioners clearly did and could afford it.59

Kings and popes too, have always been astute publicists. The Sistine Chapel was built for papal conclaves and decorated by the frescos of the greatest Renaissance artists including Michelangelo, Raphael, Bernini, and Sandro Botticelli. Divine scenes from the bible executed with sublime imagery from eminent masters encoded with ecumenical messages of salvation, delivered with attention-seeking drama, drew the crowds. Elaborately ornate liturgical carvings, holy paintings, chalices, and other glorious devout objects were used by the Catholic Church to convince a largely illiterate populace of the mystery of transubstantiation.60 Its services were held in magnificent buildings filled with glorious architectural detail and elaborate and expensive objects. Twitchell continues:

Liturgical apparatus of all kinds was used, then cast aside as newer models appeared – flashier models, ones more likely to arrest audience attention. During the sixteenth century certain Florentine churches celebrated more than a hundred masses a day. They needed more space. They devoured new media.61

In today’s world we call this kind of publicity, *branding*. The purpose of a brand is *identification, description, and differentiation*. The earliest known form of branding was on livestock; marks of ownership made by ancient Egyptians using hot branding irons on the hindquarters of their stock. This was a means by which farmers could protect their

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60 Ibid.
61 Ibid., 180.
cattle from theft.62 During the middle ages craftsmen practiced branding in an effort to establish the distinguishing character of their wares. The most fundamental “uniqueness” of an object was its maker, and so silversmiths, ceramics and furniture makers, printers, stonemasons, and other tradesmen, all marked their products with personal insignias to establish *origin* and *authenticity*.

Par Mollerup argues that the motivation of craftsmen and artists to mark the objects they make is a complex desire to “communicate the urge to take credit, to show pride and to claim responsibility” and that it “must be universal and at least partly rooted in psychological need”.63 However, there are also other reasons. As the economy developed and people gravitated towards villages and towns, there was increasing competition between craftsmen producing the same types of products. The marking of objects made by craftsmen became a necessity, not only for identification, but also to *distinguish* one maker from the other in order for craftsmen to confront growing competition and build a client base. This form of branding, distinguishing one maker from another by way of a visual mark, is advertising on a rudimentary level.

The attributes of a brand can be concrete and therefore tangible, such as a trademark or logo, an identifying set of moustache and eyebrows, or something as simple as a single colour, as is the case with Coca-Cola. A brand can also be abstract such as a set of symbolic ideas or values64 and therefore intangible such as the notion of compassion or holiness that defines a person, say, Mother Theresa; or the idea of corruptible loyalty and acute emotional pain as exemplified in the betrayal of Jesus Christ by his friend Judas Iscariot. If one were to think about the idea of caring for the poor and sick, the orphaned and the dying in India, the image of the Catholic nun comes to mind. Her compassion and holy nature are abstract notions, intangible attributes that together with physical features, such as her clasped hands and distinctive habit – the blue and white striped veil worn under her cowl – are a rich set of defining characteristics and qualities. Mother Theresa’s identifying features are unique, and therefore, constitute a personal *identity* brand.

Over time, we accumulate knowledge through information we gather from handed-down and amassed experience, the formation of opinions, and expectations. We apply this process of thought to objects, products and people every day, which results in us formulating perceptions and then judgments in our minds. This is culture at a raw

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63 Ibid.
level. As time goes by such ideas acquire sets of characteristics and qualities with which they are uniquely identified. When these qualities are distinguishing and sustainable, the object, product or person, may be said to have a brand. Douglas Holt refers to people or things that are generally considered as the most compelling symbol of a set of ideas or values that a society deems important, as having reached *iconic brand* status (Figure 5). When this occurs, a specific look, usually highly cultivated by the person concerned, becomes indelibly associated with the brand, if not the brand itself.

Artists, like other people from various professions (sport, music, politics, film etc), who have reached a high level of notoriety are often associated by physical features as well as their art form. For example, Ted Snell wrote of the West Australian artist Robert Juniper: “For five decades his imposing figure, clad in black and adorned with his signature hat, silver belt buckle, medallion and cowboy boots, has stood colossus-like, astride the local art scene.” David Bromfield wrote of the same artist: “Big black hat and shirt and jeans to match have become a bit of a trademark themselves.” Adding, “For five decades his imposing figure, clad in black and adorned with his signature hat, silver belt buckle, medallion and cowboy boots, has stood colossus-like, astride the local art scene.” Bromfield again drew on the physical attributes of the artist in the opening lines of his review for “The Warhol Look”. Reflecting on the one time he saw the artist, Andy Warhol, in a New York club in the 1970s Bromfield wrote, “He had a silver wig, dark jacket and black framed shades, plus he was classically bored, like a Greek statue”.

However, for an artist to achieve such an iconic status, his art must have preceded him. It must have already attained an identity, based on technical accomplishment or style, that differentiated it from other art. An artist’s *identity* was linked to his unique artistic accomplishment. Thus, Gotlieb asserted,

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65 Ibid.
66 Snell, T., 1999, “How the West was won over”, *The Weekend Australian*, 2-3 October, 22.
69 Ibid.
“The painter’s secret was not transferable. Born from the spirit, it served as the material signature of the artist’s creation.” 70 Further, “So great was Seurat’s paranoia regarding dissemination of his method that he was disinclined to exhibit his pictures and charged his followers with theft and betrayal”. 71 It is no wonder that in past eras when there was little intellectual property protection, as is the case today, technical innovations in the artistic domain were treated as “industrial secrets,” as if they were distinguishing marks of the artist’s identity.

**Early forms of artist brands in the Renaissance period 1350-1600**

Branding was central to the Renaissance revolution in the visual arts, driving change to the established order of art making and prompting the shift of artists’ occupational status from the level of artisan to artist. As a consequence, a new type of artist arose, one who because of branding became conscious of his intellectual and creative powers, and importantly, the economic value in his name.

> Prestige buttresses power, turning it into authority, and protecting it from social challenge.

The notion that the artist could be a brand has historical links to the shift that occurred in art when it evolved from the traditional patronage order that was tied to the medieval guild or workshop structure, towards a more modern market system. The origins of this evolution may be traced to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when the occupational conditions changed for some artisans through an increase in demand for artistic product and the gradual breakdown of the guild structure. As a result it became possible for individual artists to build reputations and to make names for themselves and their art practice. This the “artist” did by demonstrating a discernable difference in artistic talent from all other “would-be” artists. Roger Fry referred to such a difference as that unique “synthetic power”. 73 Some enterprising painters, sculptors and architects whose work fit the discerning requisites of masterly achievement came to be recognised

71 Ibid.
for unique and defining artistic qualities with widely acknowledged reputations, constituting the earliest forms of artist brands.

Several interconnected modifications in the market for art products prompted a change in the political value of art that led to the authoritative breakdown of the guild institution and the “separation of artist from artisan”,74 opening the way for artists to acquire higher status and develop “individual” commercial identities.

Firstly, demand for commission art increased from a growing merchant class keen to engage in municipal schemes as well as private works for their villas and stately homes. Devotional art, once the exclusive domain of church and religious orders, came to be commissioned by private individuals as well as institutions in “response to church doctrine”.75 Roger Fry’s observations about the history of human motivation for acquiring art and supporting artists as a gesture of social ranking through the display of purchasing power (Veblen called this conspicuous consumption) are particularly fitting when he says the desire for art is “uniquely rooted in culture”, and determined by distinct sets of principles embedded in society.76 The gradual rise of a market economy increasingly led to the rise in the status of artisans/artists over the course of the seventeenth century as connoisseurs77 and the new bourgeoisie demonstrated their aspirations of social status.

Both Fry and Shiner place the changing rank of the artist as a significant determinant of the transition from traditional to a modern fine art system. A cornerstone of the new system was the self-realisation of the artist when he/she came to understand his/her value as expressed through numerous social forms and a network of relationships such as the identity status of the artist in relation to other artists, the potential of supply to satisfy an increasing desire by collectors to own unique and expensive objects, the status of the collector and then the scarcity value of the artist’s work in relation to demand. Art made by high-status artists came to be understood in market terms, as a finite product where consumption outweighed production, even in circumstances such as the “factory atmosphere” of the workshops of Bernini and Rubens who employed assistants,78 thus enabling an increase in production.

Secondly, the increase in demand prompted a shift in the symbolic meaning as well as political value of a work of art. Where previously its value was judged by the degree to which it personified the traditional formal distinctions of beauty, order and

76 Ibid., 18.
78 Ibid., 61.
discipline, as dictated by the requirements of guild regulations, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries psychological need embedded in social process altered the attributes valued in an art object, and thus the meaning assigned to its functionality.

Conventionally, such features of social process are discussed in nineteenth-century discourse in relation to Karl Marx’s *use-value-exchange-value* theory written in response to industrialisation. In order to understand how the nature of an artist’s name changed, we must delve some 300 years earlier than Marx’s exposition of capitalist development to understand the source of people’s *motivation* to purchase art, the origin of the change in the nature of value ascribed works of art and ultimately, the change in the meaning and value of the artist’s name.

**The function of art (Changes)**

In contemporary art theory the transition from old systems of patronage to the modern independent artist is most often associated with the notion of the *autonomous* work of art. In the political economy of art objects, this meant the value of art was no longer solely linked to its social ideological utility in, for example religious communion. Instead, its *symbolic mediation* reflected the social characteristics of its producer, his place in the greater social relations of society, such as with other producers, and consequently, his relations with patrons. This central modification to the functioning of autonomous art was the value ascribed to the *name* of the artist, the object’s perceived intrinsic worth or what Shiner calls “self-sufficiency”, meaning that it is a self-contained object with attributes that relate to its apparent beauty, the status of who made it, and what the object is worth to sell. Indeed, an important feature of the art made by the hand of important artists was in the correspondence between object and man in its capacity to satisfy the emotional need for authority over others. Art could now change the social relations of the purchaser, altering its previous use-value-exchange-value status as the object to inspire faith and spiritual devotion, now becoming a token of status for the collector.

This culminated in the *commodification* of the work of art during the nineteenth century, in which art objects are produced in a market atmosphere of increased demand. In such a setting individual and independent producers supply buyers and collectors instead of production being restricted to guild controlled commissions and patronage contracts. However, its basis was established several centuries earlier, when artists came

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to realise the authority that their identity carried within social and pecuniary economies, features of most striking economic and historic significance.

The idea used to explain and legitimise such socio-cultural change was the “inspiration by genius”, a divine endowment – *divino* – bestowed upon a select few architects, painters and sculptors. In their hands art objects were the expression of artistic “creativity” instead of formulaic “construction” following the mechanical attributes of skill, rules, imitation and service by an artisan. According to Shiner, this special gift of creative inner force present in autonomous artworks was a collection of characteristics that reoccurred at “various times and in various countries”. The greatness of Michelangelo and Shakespeare was not that they separated art from craft but that they created their incomparable pieces while holding together imagination and technique, form and function, freedom and service. The art genius’s personal gift of creative inspiration that Fry referred to as the *aesthetic impulse* is a unique quality of each individual artist, an instinct “which gives to works of art their original significance”. The expression of an artist’s unique aesthetic was the key determinant of their *singularity*, the *hallmark* of their *brand* of art.

Roger Fry succinctly articulated the distinction between the new type of art made by the new kind of artist in his important work of 1926, *Art and Commerce*. In it the critic differentiates (between) the work of art that fulfills human use beyond “emotional needs of the imaginative lives of humans” and the artists capable of expressing a “particular emotion which we call aesthetic emotion”, from all other artists. This had the effect of focusing attention on the individual artist rather than the art. Therefore, the artist’s name became a sign of value, and it too, underwent a significant transformation in symbolic meaning when some artists obtained control of the direction of their art and the conditions of its manufacture, claiming autonomy for their work and self-expression and originality for themselves.

With self-expression and unique aesthetic impulse an artist could differentiate himself from others working in the same field. The socio-political consequences accompanying this occurrence opened up opportunities for great fame and wealth for those identified as singular in a chosen field never before seen by a profession that had only recently been regarded equal in status to furniture-makers and other mechanical

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86 Ibid.,20.
crafts. The development of distinct identities by individual artists, rather than the group identity of a cohort of painters or sculptors (the guild system group identity) had reverberating consequences for the emergence of both the new consumption patterns of art and the related art market and the art public. The notion of identity formation is a particularly important issue in this context because it places the artist and his name at the core of the mysterious transformation of a labour-product into a commodity. A new sense of self-worth by artists changed the nature of art’s function along with its value and a corresponding change in the manner in which it was consumed:

The change in life, if one may generalise on such a vast subject, was towards the recognition of the rights of the individual, towards complete self-realisation and the recognition of the objective reality of the material universe which implied the whole scientific attitude—and in both these things the exemplar which men put before themselves was the civilisation of Greece and Rome. . . . The study of classical literature was followed in strict connection with the study of classical canons of art, and the greater sense of individual importance found its expression in the new naturalism which made portraiture in the modern sense possible. 87

While Fry’s remarks refer to the significance of science as it relates to the notion of rationalism, 88 the supplanting of religion in the imagination of man by science had significant consequences for the symbolic meaning of art that led to changes in the behaviour of art collectors and patrons.

The art buyer

Henceforth, the work of art of elite artists was no longer constructed or produced according to the rules of the guild. Instead, it was created by a new kind of artist, one believed to be possessed by ingegno 89 and who displayed grazia or divine qualities, 90 an innovator of originality and most importantly, freedom of creative imagination and the possessor of individuality. This went hand-in-hand with the emergence of the new kind of art buyer who, like the artist, also needed to establish his or her identity, and used his association with the genius artist to accomplish this. “By the sixteenth century, there was a small body of connoisseurs who wanted not just a devotional or bedroom panel but a painting by the hand of a celebrated master like

87 Ibid., 19.
88 Ibid.
89 “Ingegno”, according to Emerson was a complex concept and identified quality in an artist. Originally meaning ‘intelligence’ but evolved to be used in biographies to mean “divine”. See Emerson Leiden and Boston: Brill Academic Publishers: Boston, 2004, pages 4-6 for further etymology of the word.
Titian, Raphael, or del Sarto.”91 The new class of patron or art collector generally had a bourgeois lineage that Rudolf Wittkower describes as having a “highly-developed individualism, sense of liberty and enterprise”. Together with its “approach to artists which differed from that of the established powers”,92 the new art market segment opened the way for artists to be treated as equals, some even attaining a status equivalent to that of their patrons. This trend was contingent upon the desire for collecting by the wealthy and the dynamics of supply and demand for prestigious and exclusive artistic product. According to Fry, throughout history the key motivation for the art purchaser’s “impulse” for collecting art has been “the exaltation in one way or another of his personal worth either in his own or still more in others’ eyes”.93

Art production then, became a high-intensity market setting for status symbol politics that masqueraded for the socially ambitious as pious patriotism: “Collecting was as much motivated by impulses of piety, prestige, and show as by pleasure in purely pictorial qualities.”94 Individuality as expressed as originality, inspiration and creative imagination, therefore, was the development by artists of distinct identities through the unique characteristics in their artwork, became the defining feature of the modern artist.

Reputation, status, identity, and the brand.

The change in the symbolic meaning of the artist’s name.

The nobles and captains, the discreet few and the murmuring many, the princes and cardinals and popes esteem and sometimes almost worship that man alone who is reputed to be peerless and excellent in his profession. In Italy great princes as such are not held in honour or renown; it is a painter that they call divine; as you, Michel Angelo, will find in letters written to you by Pietro Aretino, who has such a sharp tongue for all the lords in Christendom.95

In the modern period the meaning of the artwork became, to a large extent, located in the artist’s name. As Wittkower puts it: “works of art could now henceforth be valued as the individual creation of great masters, when names were bought and high prices were involved.”96 In becoming a genius, the artist had also become a brand,

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with the potential to control the supply of their rarefied artwork desired by a growing number of wealthy collectors. The cornerstone to branding was the artist’s reputation.

Reputation is a multi-facetted instrument of social order greatly affecting human relationships. As a cognitive phenomenon it is the evaluation of a person and their identifying attributes in relation to others in society. The subjective assessment is based upon a heterogeneous assemblage of a person’s characteristics that make up their identity paradigm. A person’s identifying reputation and characteristic features make up their brand. Douglas Holt calls such identifying determinants “a set of ideas or values” in relation to iconic brands i.e. brands that have become “widely regarded” and therefore compelling to society. Reputation is a ubiquitous, spontaneous and highly efficient determinant of social relations despite its immaterial quality. It made the difference between artisans who remained contracted and remunerated according to set wage patterns and those who seized their autonomy and notoriety through the production of great work.

Importantly, reputation is different from identity. Identity is the mechanism by which a person’s characteristics may be recognised, whereas reputation is the evaluation of those characteristics by others. Shiner argues it was as much an artist’s reputation that was being purchased, as it was the actual art product or the identity that it signified in the transactional exchange under the new market system of the Renaissance. Furthermore, he reinforces the central argument of this chapter that the art brand evolved as early as the fifteenth century due to new criteria of patronage such as “originality, expressiveness, and formal perfection”. He goes on to link the mental nature and economic value of the work of art to the artist’s reputation within the market system:

the “price” of the fine art seldom has any basis in the work itself – not in its materials, not in the amount of labour, not even in the difficulty of execution since it is no longer a construction but a spontaneous “creation.” In itself, the work of fine art is literally “priceless,” its actual price set by the artist’s reputation and the buyer’s desire and willingness to pay.

Thus, reputation is an abstract phenomenon, even a metaphysical aspect of the meaning and value of art. If, as Shiner asserts, the economic value of an art product is set by the producer’s reputation, then the economic value and the buyer’s willingness to

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99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
pay is linked to the producer’s unique and defining characteristics, in other words, his brand.

**Interpreting Marx: fetishism and the political form of art**

In our society, as in pre-modern times, human-made commodities have a value in material as well as symbolic terms. Therefore, embedded in their meaning are the social relations of their production. From this idea, Karl Marx developed his theory of the ‘fetishism’ of commodities’ that directly addresses the relationship between people and their objects through his concept of use-value-exchange-value:

A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties. So far as it is a use-value, there is nothing mysterious about it, whether we consider it from the point of view that by its properties it satisfies human needs, or that it first takes on these properties as the product of human labour.

During the production and exchange of commodities something occurs to impute them with information about the social relations of their production. This is Marx’s “metaphysical” elusiveness – the symbolic constitution of the commodity – what he referred to as fetishism. Marx particularly analysed commodity fetishism in capitalism, by which he meant the tendency of commodities to appear autonomous and interact with humans and other commodities as if they possessed life. He was greatly impressed by theories of nineteenth-century anthropological literature that described the religious practices of West African societies in which certain material objects were invested with supernatural powers that could affect human behaviour and standing. Marx noticed an analogy between what he read of African religious fetishism and the emerging market society of the nineteenth century in relation to the domain of commodity production.

There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men’s hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.

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103 Ibid., 165.
The key qualities of the genius artist, from the time of art’s shift, became attached to and inseparable from the art object through the nature of the new value of the artist’s labour. The *value* of labour, as Marx identified, is an “enigmatic character of the product of labour” when it becomes a commodity. The *fetish* nature and psychological value (an operation performed in the mind’s of people and not in nature) of a work of art by a recognised master, therefore, is in direct relation or corresponds to, the *fetish* nature or *value* in the producer’s name, in other words, his brand. The *fetish* is the *brand*. The value-form the fetish takes is the value and significance (or symbolic capital) accorded the work of art. The work of art, like any other commodity, undergoes what Marx called “the metamorphosis of the commodity”. While he was specifically concerned with mass-produced commodities, the “metamorphosis,” according to Marx, imposed a *social character* upon the product, one that is closely interlinked with existing systems of social relations within a given society. This is an “adventitious” process because the new character of the commodity is not a natural or inherent element, but rather one that is imposed upon the product in people’s minds. With art, the source of the metamorphosis or symbolism is the symbolic or cultural capital of the maker, that is, the fetishistic perception people have of him. In the case of master artists the power of their brand is attached to the work they produce, a prestigious artefact with a specific “labour-time” objectification and which therefore has an “exchange-value of a definite amount”. The high prices and terms purchasers were prepared to accept testifies to this. The patron acquired not so much the product of the artist’s labour but his brand. It was believed that the artwork of a master was embedded with his brand, and therefore the meaningful characteristics of his identity now resided in – or have been transferred to – the object of his labour. “Through this substitution, the products of labour become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same time supra-sensible or social.”

What connects Marx’s theory of the fetishism of the commodity and art history’s discourse about the autonomy of art objects, is their mutual concern with an artificial, un-natural and intangible, mysterious inherent value or power in objects. This acquisition of value is a mental transaction, in which the value isn’t actually embedded in the object as such, but is “perceived” to be present. Rather, it is linked to the symbolic meaning in the producer’s name, becoming attached to his *identity* as one of his defining attributes. Art is much like other status symbol objects that man has,

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104 Ibid., 953.
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid., 165.
from the beginning, acquired in order to display or communicate who and what we are. Prestige objects are a powerful medium of social relations, specifically status and social distinction and use a sanctioned system of code that “facilitate messages between people”.\(^{109}\) Pope Julius II believed Michelangelo was possessed by *ingegno*, and the divine qualities of God. “It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things.”\(^{110}\) In commissioning the esteemed artist, Pope Julius coveted his divine qualities, bringing him, in his mind, closer to God.

Three hundred years before Marx conceived of fetishism, art procurers motivated by the mysterious and abstract psychological needs of status and envy, commissioned the work of recognised master artists. This art mediated relations between collectors and society as it functioned as a source of power as well as pride, and the location of elite social standing. The art, therefore, fulfilled both a material and symbolic function. In her work, *Creating the Divine Artist From Dante to Michelangelo*, Patricia Emison analyses reputation and fame within the period conventionally called the Renaissance. It’s a gripping story of the mutual leverage between patron and artist: “Both artists and patrons had an interest in augmenting artistic reputation, though the patron’s interest had a degree of ambivalence. He wanted to own art by famed men, without creating a rival in prestige – a problem only conceivable after the successes of Michelangelo, and inconceivable after his death.”\(^{111}\) The greater an artist’s reputation as divine (*il divino*), the greater was a patron’s insurance as a person of taste.\(^{112}\) More than any other Renaissance artist, the success of Michelangelo “set the paradigm for artistic genius”\(^{113}\) and the pattern for a new artist-patron relationship.

Giorgio Vasari understood the value in a sustainable brand identity. Just as Lorenzo de’ Medici had recognised the formal traits of *spirito divino* in Michelangelo as a young apprentice, so too did Vasari when he later set out to nurture the image of an older Michelangelo as “*divinissimo*”\(^{114}\). According to Emison, it was critically important to the historian to promote the artist’s image:

He needed to save Michelangelo for a Florence the sculptor himself had rejected, for a Duke who was not particularly well disposed toward the self-imposed exile. His [Vasari] own professional status depended

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110 Ibid.
112 Ibid., 11.
113 Ibid., 15.
upon his ability to make Michelangelo palatable to the contemporary powers of Florence, who were all too ready to forget not only Michelangelo but anything that smacked of feisty individuality. To promote Michelangelo as the type called “divino” was to speak a language to which the Duke was receptive.115

The Duke (of Ferrara116), like any other commanding patron, understood the equity in Michelangelo’s brand as the ambiguous “recipient of divine grace” and “artistic ingegno,” the man of autonomous creative imagination and “the grace of God”.117 What was he responding to in conciliating the “incorrigible and cantankerous” master if it was not the impressive brand attributes and the symbolic mediation in a social context attached to it? The reputation, the brand of Michelangelo, has outlived the artist himself, many of his works (the fresco the battle of Cascina for example) and the men like Vasari and Condivi who were instrumental in founding the cultural mythology of Renaissance masters.

With the expanding and increasingly powerful merchant class generating demand for the imprimatur of famed artists, demand grew for the work of artists who had achieved high professional standing and a widespread public reputation. It was indeed an attractive proposition for the wealthy to appear powerful and envied by commissioning a famous master to produce a civic work in their name. In Wittkower’s words: “The building and adorning of churches and chapels, so common among merchant patrons, was not only a pious duty but also an act of personal and family pride and a sure way to impress rivals.”118 Gombrich further elaborates on the desire for envy and notoriety (or gratification) by patrons:

To erect magnificent buildings, to commission splendid tombs, to order great cycles of frescoes, or to dedicate a painting for the high altar of a famous church, was considered a sure way of perpetuating one’s name and securing a worthy monument to one’s earthly existence. As there were many centres competing for the services of famed masters, the masters in turn could dictate terms.119

Demand for art made by artists and craftsmen with outstanding reputations was a key determinant in the erosion of the medieval “just price” wage-fixing structure that had placed control of a commission firmly within the hands of patrons.120 With increasing

115 Ibid., 144.
116 Ibid., 138.
117 Ibid., 6.
numbers of people wanting the art produced by a limited number of esteemed artists in Florence, the equilibrium between producer and procurer changed. Collecting art became popular, and when an artist could choose whether or not to undertake a commission, all sorts of work practices were rearranged.

Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries status artists – such as Leonardo, Raphael and Titian – brought about what Wittkower called a *volte-face* in dealings between artist and their patrons, allowing the artist to become a contractor rather than the “contracted”. No longer was he bound to accept wages and conditions set by the patron. Patrons who traditionally set wages had no choice but to pay whatever price was quoted by a master if their desire for cultural prestige that accompanied the commissioning of superior art was strong enough to concede to the newly demanded, unprecedented, “star fees”. Wittkower gives an example of the typical collector’s experience with a recognised master, Rubens, in Sir Dudley Carelton:

In a letter of November 25, 1620, addressed to him by his agent Toby Matthew, the latter says about his negotiations with Rubens: ‘I did with all discretion I had, deal with him [Rubens] about the price, but his demands are like the laws of Medes and Persians which may not be altered . . . the cruel courteous painter would not set a less price upon it than before.’

A new and broader structure of value accorded the work of art was being formed. It now included a more complex set of variables in its scope as a commodity that carried the value of an artist’s name, the level of demand for their work, the degree of scarcity, the willingness of a collector to pay the increased fees and relinquish control, and an important new element, the symbolic (cultural) *authority* believed to be transferable to the owner from the producer. Previously one kind of fetish – an icon for devout spiritual focus – the artwork became another kind of fetish. Its pictorial or aesthetic qualities, which were the brand of the artist, guaranteed the transference of symbolic content (divine power) to the owner from producer.

At the crux of this new development of aesthetic and fetish commodification is the relationship between people and objects, at first wealthy Italians who acquired paintings and sculpture for reasons other than the expression of faith or as the object of private contemplation. The desire to collect in the Renaissance was not confined to princes and popes. To engage in the commissioning of civic ventures or more private projects bestowed social standing and became a competitive arena for wealthy

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121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
123 Ibid.
merchants, nobility and burghers. Inspired by Thorstein Veblen’s detailed critique of the
behaviour of the bourgeoisie in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Roger Fry conceived that
“the desire for prestige is a widely distributed human characteristic” and that the
conspicuous display of art is an “effective way to gain prestige”.124 Once an art object
entered the new market setting as a venerated commodity desired for characteristics
linked to the circumstances of its production, particularly the status of the producer (the
artist), its function changed. Art now transcended its traditional ecclesiastical utility of
ritualization and volitional rapport with God to satisfy more earthly *symbolic* human
needs associated with vanity and class. Art objects came to mediate the patron’s
relationship with society. This was usually a demonstration of status and authority. In
this situation collectors were prepared to relinquish power and control over a
commission in exchange for the services of certain renowned masters whose unique
qualities and cultural capital—genius—it was believed could be extended or transferred
to the buyer. This form of self-transformation of the collector occurred through the art
object, not in a physical sense, but in a mental experience. Marshall Sahlins’ piquant
elucidation of fetishism’s communication process is particularly powerful in the context
of art: “man speaking to man through the medium of things.”125 The desire for objects
that conferred prestige upon the purchaser was in itself an expression of self-imaging
constituted through a status meaning system already established in society and used as a
class “barrier”.126

And this is where the “mystical” character of the commodity that Marx spoke of
becomes a concept closely linked to the rise of branding as a prime communicative
device in social discourse with the power to bestow authority and cultural value upon
not just an artist’s name, but the purchaser (patron) as well. Demand for exclusive
commodities, signs and symbols of power, goes back to antiquity and no doubt beyond.
But the ability to derive symbolic cultural capital through the product of labour127 of
artists emerges during the Renaissance when the balance between supply and demand
for the work of recognised art masters was unequal. Quite simply, those desiring unique
objects in their “pursuit of exclusiveness”128 meant that the very exclusiveness of the
sought after product would outweigh supply. Moreover, Fry zeroed in on the crux of
objects of distinction when he identified that an art object (which he called an *opifact*)

125 Sahlins, M. 1976, *Culture and Practical Reason*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago. Cited in Leiss, W.,
126 Williams, R. H., 1982, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France*, University of
127 Marx, K., *Capital*, 164.
Kegan Paul Ltd., 282.
that anyone can possess does not confer prestige, and is therefore useless: “Rarity, and the fact that other people want and cannot have the rare object that you possess, is essential to the whole business.”  

The desire to display wealth through luxury made art an “objective phenomenology of property,” a communicative device for the self to promote the ultimate reality of status.

The Renaissance abounds in stories of prosperous merchants and nobility whose thirst for amassing collections of art by the famous further contributed to the myth surrounding the significance in the artist’s name. The Marchioness Isabella Mantua is a prime example. As one of the most ardent collectors of ancient and modern art in her time, Wittkower tells us she was indeed so desperate for a work by Leonardo da Vinci for her collection that she attempted to leverage aid from the Carmelite Vicar-General of Florence to persuade the esteemed master. This extract is from her letter to his eminence:

Your Reverence might find out if he [Leonardo] would undertake to paint a picture for our studio. If he consents, we should leave the subject matter and the time to him; but if he declines, you might at least induce him to paint a little picture of the Madonna, as sweet and holy as his own.131

If we apply contemporary sociological concepts to art, analysing it as a privileged commodity rather than the haloed object of veneration that art history has assigned it, we can employ Sut Jhally’s Marxian theorem to better understand the patron’s motivation for the acquisition of art, such as the example of Isabella Mantua, that threatened their entitlement to dictate commission arrangements:

Consumers have a direct interest in characteristics and an indirect interest in product qualities. Consumers order their preferences directly in terms of characteristics and indirectly in terms of goods. Commodities themselves thus become highly complex material-symbolic entities.132

The Marchioness was prepared to compromise her traditional claim on control of the aesthetic instruction of any agreement with the artist da Vinci in view of who he was. It was more important to her to acquire a work by the hand of the artist whose identity brand was already mythical, whose cultural value out-weighed that of any other artist, sculptor or architect, than to commission the specific work of art, she actually desired,

by another artist. This is a pithy case in point of the vital relationship between people and their objects where the absolutely fundamental characteristic of human need is personified as a material-symbolic correlate. In this example, the manner of needing becomes a function of human communication in what Jhally asserts is the “subordination of use-value (what it does for people) by exchange-value (what it is worth)”.

Da Vinci had, by this stage in his life, more work and commissions than he could possibly fulfill from esteemed patrons known to him and those who knew him only by the resonance of his name. The Marchioness’s desire to own a work by da Vinci contributed to the accumulating myth that surrounded the significance of his name, giving substance to his brand.

In attempting to make sense of such powerfully persuasive motivation, as da Vinci’s symbolic equity was to the Marchioness, we need to return to Marx to understand the two-fold mode of existence:

We have already seen that the commodity must acquire a two-fold mode of existence if it is to be rendered fit for the circulation process. It is not enough for it to appear to the buyer as an article with particular qualities, i.e. as a specific use-value which can gratify specific needs whether of individual or of productive consumption. Its exchange-value must also have acquired a definite, independent, form, distinct, albeit ideally, from its use-value. It must represent both the unity and the duality of use-value and exchange-value. Its exchange-value acquires this distinctive form independent of its use-value, as the pure form of materialized social labour-time, i.e. its price. For the price is the expression of exchange-value as exchange value, i.e. as money, and more precisely as money of account.

Art is like other luxury commodities in that it circulates within a system of privileged products that sees utility restricted to exchange relations. In this object-person relationship the work of art expresses a state of need in the collector. Hirst’s reconfigured image of Stalin is an illuminating example. The work’s characteristics, rather than its physical qualities, facilitate a material-symbolic correlate for the collector becoming an instrument of their “social, religious, and political life”. The artwork’s most significant attribute was the unique and defining qualities of its maker. The Marchioness was prepared to exchange her demands that accompanied her rank, plus, the nominated economic commission price demanded by da Vinci, for a work she believed contained his distinctive and unique qualities – characteristics she believed were transferrable to herself. The fetishism in this situation is in the Marchioness’s belief that the nature of da

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133 Ibid., 22.
134 Marx, K., Capital, 955.
Vinci’s qualities (exclusive, “divine” grace, autonomy) was inherent in his art. For her, da Vinci’s work gave the Marchioness the same authority and power he held over her because “embedded in goods, as part of their meaning, then, are the social relations of their production”.\textsuperscript{136} A contemporary comparison of such mental transaction is evident in Holt’s \textit{mind-share} brand model, in which he argues a brand’s value “is based upon the strength and distinctiveness of brand associations. The brand essence, lodged in the consumer’s mind, is its source of equity. The more firmly rooted, the stronger the brand”.\textsuperscript{137} The Marchioness’s sense of satisfaction in acquiring such a prestigious object at considerable effort and cost, an object that would stand in for the identity of da Vinci in her mind, was analogous to the willingness of the Sotheby’s buyer prepared to trade $AUS 420,000 for the distinction believed to be present in one red dot and a signature.

Therefore, if we accept Shiner’s argument that art produced in the new market system of the Renaissance came to be seen as an expression of the artist’s personality, and the buyer was purchasing “the producer’s imagination and creativity expressed as reputation,” rather than the materials and labour (as a measurement of time) of its making, then the buyer is purchasing the authority in the producer’s identity or his \textit{brand}. Gill’s “Stalin,” a clichéd portrait of little aesthetic significance or economic value, became an important work of contemporary art, endowed with the power behind Hirst’s name simply through a perceived transference of the meaningful characteristics of his identity (and therefore economic value) to the portrait, a transaction that took place in the mind of the successful bidder at the Sothebys’ auction.

PART TWO

The Artist as a Brand

I am a Courbetist
—Gustave Courbet.138

When I am no longer controversial I will no longer be important.
—Gustave Courbet, 1852.139

It worked to his advantage to have a persona, public image, however crude or insulting.
—Sarah Faunce.140

Our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism . . . it forms with it a system.
—Maurice Merleau-Ponty.141

2. **IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION**

**Gustave Courbet and brand building: a case study**

The following account of Courbet’s early career in Paris does not announce any new discoveries about his life or art gleaned from obscure archival documents. Rather, it offers a new interpretation on this well-know story. Mining the voluminous existing accounts which have picked over every aspect of this formative period in his career, my aim is to provide a new understanding of the extent to which Courbet both intuitively and consciously created his career through developing a brand, and did this in ways that pre-empt modern marketing campaigns and future generations of avant-garde.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHRONOLOGY OF BRAND ARCHITECTURE PROCESS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STAGE 1: Construct Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAGE 2: Market research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAGE 3: Product development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAGE 4: Positioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAGE 5: Launch</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6. The successive stages in the brand building process Courbet executed over a thirteen-year period, between 1842 when he began his series of self-portraits and 1855, when he held his one-man exhibition *Le Réalisme*.

With this in mind I have divided my account into five successive stages that correspond to a modern marketing campaign: Stage 1 concerns the development by Courbet of a unique personal identity; Stage 2 analyses and evaluates the way in which Courbet gained valuable information about the kinds of painting taught in art schools, exhibited at the annual Salon, purchased by the state and displayed at the Louvre, and importantly, the kinds of art private collectors were interested in. Market research is not normally associated with artists, yet the reconnaissance he carried out informed his early development as a painter and helped him understand what it was he didn’t want to paint and therefore how his painting could differentiate himself from other artists of his time. Stage 3, Product development, examines the process Courbet undertook to develop his new style of painting that took its themes from popular imagery and fused them with autobiographical experience, creating a style of Realism that he became identified with, a new art he could call his own. How Courbet gave definition to his enterprise and refined how he would be perceived as an artist [and therefore embed his Realism within contemporary painting trends] in relation to other painters is explored in Stage 4, Positioning. In this chapter I review the intuitive grasp Courbet had for positioning himself in the minds of the French art world, and the broader general
public. In the final chapter of the brand-building process, Stage 5 the Launch, I begin by considering Courbet’s first one-man exhibition, *Le Réalisme*, as a strategic, month-long advertisement for himself as a master artist of such significance that he should have his own dedicated and exclusive exhibition. Then, I explore the political implications of his themes in relation to the exhibition as a defiant act of independence, the inaugural presentation or launch of his brand.

My argument is not that Courbet consciously developed and then applied such a strategy over this seven-year period of self-portraiture. Rather, he intuitively pioneered a new type of artist when he deliberately developed a public persona and nurtured it into a brand. The course he took was not predetermined. It can only be mapped after the event, and the map I have drawn is designed to emphasise the extent to which he manufactured his brand for a particular emerging market. This market became increasingly attuned to the commodification of culture through the experience of newspapers and magazines that occurred with the expansion of the press since the French Revolution.142

The need to differentiate

In a letter to his family in January 1846, Courbet wrote:

> But one thing is certain, I must make a name for myself in Paris within the next five years. There can be no middle course. . . . I know it will be difficult to attain; there are few, sometimes only one in thousands, who succeed . . . . To make more progress I need but one thing, money, in order to carry out my ideas boldly.143

Courbet instinctively understood the need to publicly project a compelling personal image if he was to differentiate himself from other fledgling artists and secure the public attention he needed to acquire a competitive advantage. After familiarising himself with his eminent contemporaries, those masters of the Salon, Delacroix and Ingres, he concluded that French art was committed to the past in its adherence to traditional academic clichés. Believing in the need for a new kind of art, Courbet said to himself: “The only thing to do is go off like a bomb across all the subdivisions.”144 This is a prophetic statement and powerful self-fulfilling declaration in the tone of modern

advertising speech. Indeed, it sounds like the publicity cry in an advertising campaign managed by David Ogilvy.\textsuperscript{145} In fact, much about Courbet reads more like the strategy one would expect from an advertising agency in preparation for the launch of a new product in an already flooded market. If we look upon Courbet’s art, not as the rarefied object we’ve come to accept art as, but rather as any other commodity, then we can see him as any other producer needing to differentiate his product in order to attract attention from an indifferent audience.

Courbet’s ambitious nature, yet professional approach, is obvious in his remarks of disappointment in the reception of his painting, \textit{Guitar Player} – the first of his paintings in four years of submissions to be accepted into the Salon of 1845. In a letter to his family he wrote,

\begin{quote}
During the next year I must paint a large picture which will enable the public to appraise me at my true value, for I demand all or nothing. All these little pictures are not the only thing I can do . . . I want to paint on a bigger scale. What I am saying is not . . . presumptuous, because everybody predicts this for me.\textsuperscript{146}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{145} David Ogilvy was an advertising practitioner of renown for founding the Ogilvy & Mather advertising empire and implementing advertising practices copied the world over in almost every advertising agency.

\textsuperscript{146} Mack, G., \textit{Gustave Courbet}, 38.
From early on, Courbet’s approach was entrepreneurial. He was not content to be a marginalised and impoverished young artist under the control of the State’s system of exhibition. In what now seems to be an epiphany, he realised two conditions were essential to his potential success as an artist. The first was the need to build a public identity for himself that was unique and conspicuous, something worthy of comment. From very early on, Courbet recognized the greater value of attention from the press than exhibiting in the Salon. In his words:

My painting is going great guns. I hope to finish it in time for the Exhibition. If it is received, that will be most useful for me and will give me a wide reputation. Even without that I am about to make it any time now, for I am surrounded by people who are very influential in the newspapers and the arts, and who are very excited about my painting.147

The second condition focused on identifying a style of painting that was new and altogether representative of its own time, something original that would challenge the existing order and which he could claim for himself. The following section aims to describe the interrelated defining stages of the brand-building process.

IDENTITY FORMATION

Stage 1. Constructing a unique identity

![Figure 8. The development of a brand begins with the construction of a unique identity.](image)

Courbet’s self-image: manufacturing identity

There is a striking parallel between Gustave Courbet’s arrival at Realism and the manufacture of his self-image and the identity that stemmed from it. His program for developing his personal image was documented through his early paintings, in particular, the series of self-portraits made between 1842 and 1849. In this chapter I will outline how Courbet came to establish two interconnected brands over the seven years of his development as an artist between 1842 and 1849. As a result, the unique characteristics of his personality were unified with his art, aesthetically, philosophically and

professionally. This, I assert, was the first draft of the ‘avant-garde script’ that has staged Western art practice since.

Courbet’s initial move in making an impression within Paris’s art world was to assume a distinctive identity that emphasised his unique characteristics. The agenda for this self-conscious personal development was intimately connected to his independent education program to become a painter of note. Courbet achieved his goal when he arrived at Realism – the existential manufacture of a master artist personified through his new program for art.

New to Paris in 1840, on arrival Courbet began to make his mark in the enlivened metropolis – he was 21. Gregarious, full of ambition and confidence, he attracted attention to himself at every opportunity: “Gustave with his boisterous display, [in which it] is sometimes difficult to distinguish between genuine conceit from mere high-spirits.”

From Courbet’s extensive correspondence with family and friends we learn of the characteristic way in which he, as a newcomer to Paris, conducted himself while in the company of friends and contemporaries, often singing or involving himself in philosophical discussions as he held court in the Brasserie Andler where artists gathered:

His nature, which appeared very strange and original to his companions, led the latter to follow him everywhere and repeat his sayings. He had a picturesque way of speaking and made very skillful use of the little knowledge he possessed. He was nicknamed Courbet the Preacher.

Indeed, it was in the Andler – Champfleury dubbed it the “Temple of Realism” – that Courbet set up his base, a kind of studio annex where many young artists and writers came together for camaraderie and to theorise on art and politics. By the end of the 1840s he frequently met with Charles Baudelaire, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and his fiercest supporter, Jules Champfleury, the Realist author and critic. Modest in looks with the feel of a “village tavern”, Champfleury described the restaurant’s “rustic manners and conviviality” as “a Protestant Village; here was the natural breeding ground for ideas of Realism”. Castagnary underlines the atmosphere and importance of the Andler as the setting for innovative and creative discourse in Courbet’s narrative of Realism, when he wrote in 1860:

148 Lindsay, J., 1951, Gustave Courbet and His Life and Art, Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 21
150 Ibid., 43.
Realism may have been born in Courbet’s mind in his studio . . . but the brasserie held it over the baptismal font. Here it was that he [Courbet] established contact with the outside world. From six to eleven in the evening we ate, argued, coined phrases, laughed, and played billiards. Courbet held court. The brasserie was merely an extension of his studio. People eager to see him came there. . . . He held forth on all the arts, all the sciences, even those he knew nothing about. . . . Great was the number of Parisians attracted to this manager where, they were told, a new god had been born . . . . The fame of the brasserie spread, its praises were sung in prose and poetry.152

The Brasserie Andler played a critical role in the development of Courbet’s identity and theories. Here, he exchanged ideas with other young minds of anti-bourgeois sentiment and developed his socialist sympathies. Further, in the broader context of Courbet’s own brand and the early influences upon his self-image, the coming together of intellectuals and artists, musicians, writers and poets, in a convivial locale, was fundamental to their shared theoretical dialogue, and Courbet’s existential considerations affecting his identity. But most importantly, the Brasserie Andler provided the context and place in which Courbet first established and tested his image, his developing identity, and his brand as an artist.

Identity formation and self-portraits

In this chapter I argue that the establishment of a distinct and unique identity as part of the interconnected process of branding, is a fundamental component of avant-gardism. This I believe makes Courbet an early example of the individualism that would become a defining quality of the avant-garde spirit, shifting its meaning from that which Baudelaire identified it as in the early 1860s: “nonconformism reduced to a kind of military discipline or, worse, to herd-like conformity.”153 Courbet was the first artist to deliberately use his individualism and nonconformity in a programmatic way, and importantly, through his very public association with these concepts as the material with which to build an aesthetic, and achieve a high level of resonance in public awareness through the response to this art. At its heart was the development of an identity discourse i.e. a discourse in which self-image becomes the basis of fashioning an aesthetic program.

Unlike artists in previous centuries, Courbet’s process for bringing his work to the public was more than simple identification and information; he actively sought to promote his art through agitation. While some Renaissance artisan/artists came to

152 Lindsay J., *Gustave Courbet and His Life and Art*, 40.
understand the dynamics, indeed the power, embedded in their name, from the first half of the nineteenth century there were technologies and techniques previously unavailable that separate these two eras into distinct pre-modern and modern periods. Dürer, for example, had a fine sense of the commercial value of his name, but lived in a time before ‘mass’ advertising when marketing activities (advertising) were rudimentary. Towards the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries refinements in papermaking came together with new and advanced printing presses powered by steam that made the print industry as a whole more affordable to more people. Courbet happened to live at this watershed moment when technologies and techniques for the purpose of advertising enabled his innovative and opportunistic promotional ideas to be emphasize in their effects to build his identity and further his reputation. Le Men explains:

Courbet turned to the advertising techniques in full bloom. Although not going so far as to print posters [such scale was still cost prohibitive to the individual], he produced typographic posters that announced the display of his paintings [when he travelled to Besançon and Dijon before the delayed Salon of 1850-52].

And further:

By becoming a showman – like an exhibitor of curiosities, a Barker of his paintings, a peddler of inexpensive literature, or a Barb of popular ballads – Courbet became aware of the element of performance inherent in a work of art, whose staging benefited from the written argument. This attitude to his work became important insofar as Courbet henceforth remained constantly involved in the exhibition of his work, whether in the provinces, abroad, or in Paris during the Expositions Universelles of 1855 and 1867. The experience of his early “expedition” not only taught him that paintings change meaning along the way as their audience changes, but also that he could alter their impact by regrouping them.

The essential difference between Courbet and artists before him is his mindful efforts to develop unique identifying attributes. He did this by building his aesthetic around “popular imagery,” a clever strategy Le Men describes as “a marker of his own identity,” because it was a time when social and political conditions could be harnessed to maximum effect. Courbet used popular imagery in his compositions, a move that further embedded a political tone to his Realism by complementing his

154 Le Men, *Courbet*, 162.
155 Ibid.
156 Ibid., 156-157.
socialist themes at the very moment when government officials were trying to quell the activities of itinerant book sellers in the provinces, a system identified as a form of propaganda liable to incite the rural population. In addition, it was Courbet’s self-assured manner in asserting himself and his art upon the French art world that assumed the tone of “an act of protest” or political propaganda, with the impact of a twenty-first century advertising campaign. And while showing work in regional exhibitions and sending art to dealers abroad was not in itself uncommon, Courbet’s provincial tours to Besançon and Dijon where he held small private showings, when viewed as part of a broader brand-building process, was a modern advertising innovation that even manufacturers with their new modern industrialised production processes had not yet embraced.

Forms of identity

Identity or (self-) image is the cognitive model we build of ourselves. Identity is at the core of individuation, the process of possessing specific essential predicates that serve to distinguish and identify one person from the next. Identity is also at the core of branding in the context of individuation – identifying and communicating those essential characteristics and qualities that differentiate one product from the next (or one person from another, in meaningful ways), and to some degree giving them eidetic illumination. Personal identity is, a sense of self built up over time as the person embarks on and pursues projects or goals that are not thought of as those of a community, but as the property of the person. Personal identity thus emphasizes a sense of individual autonomy rather than of communal involvement.

The notion of identity is a preoccupation of a number of disciplines, in particular sociology, psychology and philosophy. Sociology examines the idea in identity negotiation where a person negotiates with society (peers and others) on the meaning of his/her identity, using a set of defining characteristics. Sociologists use another term, social identity, in which the individual, having multiple thoughts of the self expressed as

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157 Le Men, Courbet, 156-157.
158 Ibid., 157.
159 Le Men, Courbet, 162.
personal traits, is defined by the perceptions of a group membership.\textsuperscript{161} As we shall see, Courbet’s sense of self was forged in a very public arena, firstly within his own bohemian circles and then the wider Parisian art world, and it was this publicity that largely defined his identity and success as an artist.

Psychologists use the term identity to describe \textit{personal identity}, or the sense of self-experience, as a “set of idiosyncratic attributes that differentiate the person”\textsuperscript{162} making them unique. Courbet’s search for his identity is first evident in his self-portraits made between 1842 and 1849. Their development was achieved not as the act of “those of a community” but “as the property of the person”\textsuperscript{163} demonstrating another key predictor of avant-garde practice, individual autonomy.

However, philosophy is the most useful discipline in understanding Courbet’s program and the full realisation of its achievement, specifically phenomenological analysis. The phenomenological approach may be explained as the analysis of experiences with, according to Edo Pivčević, a view to “bringing out their ‘essences’, their underlying ‘reason’”.\textsuperscript{164} What then is meant by \textit{essence} from a phenomenological perspective? Hegel’s postulation on the source of man’s conscious enquiry into identity is enlightening,

The universal and absolute need from which art . . . springs has its origin in the fact that man is a \textit{thinking} consciousness, i.e., that man draws out of himself and puts \textit{before himself} what he is and whatever else is . . . This consciousness of himself man requires in a two-fold way: first, \textit{theoretically}, in so far as inwardly he must bring himself into his own consciousness, along with whatever moves, stirs, and presses in the human breast; and in general he must see himself, represent himself to himself, fix \textit{before himself} what is summoned out of himself and in what is accepted from without. \textit{Secondly}, man brings himself \textit{before himself} by \textit{practical} activity, since he has the impulse, in whatever is directly given to him, in what is present to him externally, to produce himself and therein equally to recognize himself. This aim he achieves by altering external things whereon he impresses the seal of his inner being and in which he now finds again his own characteristics. Man does this in order, as a free subject, to strip the external world of its inflexible foreignness and to enjoy in the shape of things only an external realisation of himself.\textsuperscript{165}

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid.
**Essence (Being) In search of the self**

In philosophy, *essence* is the attribute or set of attributes, that distinguish a thing from all other things, and which it has by necessity, and without which it loses its identity or difference. The English word “essence” comes from the Latin *essentia*, which was coined from the Latin word *esse*, meaning “to be”, which in turn is a translation of the Ancient Greek phrase *to ti en einai* (literally, “what it is for a thing to be”), coined by Aristotle to denote an object’s *essence*.\(^{166}\) According to Stephen Yablo: “The essential properties of a thing are the ones it needs to possess to be the thing it is.”\(^{167}\) In Courbet’s case his essence is *realism*, which sits oddly with Yablo’s assertion that because essence is fundamental, it has metaphysical significance.\(^{168}\) Phenomenology provides a philosophical answer to this conundrum.

Edmund Husserl—considered the father of modern phenomenology—asserted that an individual is not simply “a pure ‘this’ or a ‘that’” but rather a “what”, possessing a “set of essential predicates that determine its identity”.\(^{169}\) Martin Heidegger called these essential predicates *Dasein*. Dasein “is the existent which lives in the ‘understanding of being’; it is the place where being ‘discloses itself’; it is literally the ‘there’ of *being*.”\(^ {170}\) In other words, Dasein, the understanding of being, is the *essence* of identity. According to Pivčević, “*Dasein* is an existent for which, in its being, this very being is in question.”\(^ {171}\) This does not involve simply the examination of the self, as if the self can be analysed as any other object, but an analysis of the analysis of the self, a sort of self-conscious thinking of the self as a thinking thing. In Heidegger’s words: “Being is the absolute self-thinking of thinking. Absolute thinking alone is the truth of Being, “is” Being.”\(^ {172}\)

Further, says Heidegger, “Man as *Dasein* enjoys a special position because he *ek*-sists, which means that his being is ‘disclosed to him’.”\(^ {173}\) Continuing his interpretation of Heidegger’s view, Pivčević says: “A thing is what it is. Man, on the other hand, is capable of ‘transcending himself’, of seeing what he can become and what he cannot be. It is in his awareness of his own possibilities that Man asserts himself as

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\(^{168}\) Ibid.


\(^{171}\) Ibid.,


existence and, at the same time, finds his own ‘essence’. Other entities do not exist in this way. They cannot relate themselves to notions of “being” and ask themselves, as Courbet did through his portraits of himself, who am “I”?

Existential phenomenology examines the disclosure of being – the set of essential qualities or Dasien that determine identity. In a similar way, the aim of branding is to communicate that set of essential characteristics and defining qualities, the abstract material that resides at the core of a “branded” product, company or person, and their reason for “being” which is different from the being of others. The advertising designer is in search of the Dasein of the product when he sets out to communicate a single proposition or brand in the making of an advertisement. Courbet found, as numerous guardians of commercial brands do every day, that identity is fluid, but its essence or Dasein, is fixed.

In this scheme, Courbet’s self-portraits are not simply likenesses of an already-existing person but projections that disclose the being, which is Courbet. This ‘self’ he portrays is not an object but “constantly in the process of making”, a moving shadow within which he seeks to grasp an essence that, like Dasien, is not given but continuously calls into question its being. Courbet’s self-portraits are painted projections of his self-analysis, his experience of himself and his existence. Over the seven years of his development of a brand – i.e. Realism – the man objectified his knowledge of his existence as it changed. He painted the “dynamic” view of consciousness, or what Sartre called “reflective consciousness”. In this way he didn’t so much uncover a self formerly hidden from view but painted himself into being. That is, Courbet’s unique identity was manufactured or made.

Courbet’s motivation was to make himself as an artist within the art world of Paris. His unique identity was contrived out of his desire to become an eminent master painter. His success was his timing. Courbet’s phenomenological aesthetic, if it can be called that, chimed with the emerging conditions of commodity formation in capitalism described by Marx.

As a young and largely inexperienced provincial, the energetic atmosphere of the city, with its tingling sensations of the modern experience and flamboyant culture, must have filled Courbet with hope and a naive anticipation for a life of fame and wealth. Compelled to be a part of the promise and fervor of the metropolis and its artistic sub-culture, Courbet responded by creating an image by which he could be noticed. This

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175 Ibid.
176 Ibid.
identity was built in part by intentional design and the balance was due to his innate sensibility. To this end Courbet immersed himself in the Bohemian world of the painters and writers of Paris, “living precarious marginal lives” in opposition to the “official culture of eclecticism and the juste milieu”.177

Spurred on by the sentiments of his contemporaries, other artists who had begun to protest publicly against the Salon’s autocratic system, Courbet grew in confidence for himself and his art.178 Experimenting with ways of self-presentation in the early years, he eventually settled into his comfortable bohemian artist persona. But more than this, he gave it a public face, i.e. he launched himself on the world as a brand. By the end of the 1840’s, this brand, which he called Realism, provoked a great deal of public controversy which resulted in Courbet becoming the most famous artist in France by the close of the decade. The more he shocked and outraged the art establishment with his agenda for new art, the greater renown he acquired.

**Manufacturing identity: A program of self-awareness**

The first brand associated with Gustave Courbet was the *identity* brand he manufactured for himself in his early career. Not long in Paris, he quickly got a measure of the art world’s market system, its new mechanisms for exchange and the artists supplying it. One visit to the Salon convinced him – thousands of paintings were densely hung one on top of another from floor to ceiling (Figure 7). Celebrated Masters’ paintings were given generous space, even galleries, while popular painters’ works hung at eye level where patrons and spectators could best appreciate them. He concluded that he must stake out a location in relation to other artists by forging a distinctive identity if he was to achieve the remarkable success that he believed he deserved. It was not enough to simply get noticed.

Over the course of seven years Courbet entered into ‘identity negotiation’,179 first between himself and his peers – experimenting in the safety of the Andlers – then society at large. His identity paradigm emerged through exploration and commitment to certain “essential” personal traits he viewed as appropriate for his individual self in the context of an art innovator. To this end, Courbet accentuated his physical presence by drawing attention to his striking good looks, those Assyrian features of fair skin, dark hair and protruding lips, by growing his beard quite long. He cunningly played up to his strange, guttural accent, native to the Franche-Comté region of his origin, a tactic that

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179 Identity negotiation is a process in which a person negotiates with society at large in regard to the meaning of his or her identity.
gained him positive attention from his early portrait sitters. He cultivated a social manner of polite interest in the lives of commissioners who could help with his efforts to be accepted into the Salon. The critic Philippe Burty’s description of the young and confident artist is both evocative and grand:

He was slim, tall, supple, wearing long black hair with a black silky beard. He was never met without an escort of friends, as one tells of Italian masters coming out of their studios. His long languorous eyes, his straight nose and low brow, with his superb profile, his projecting lips mocking at their corners as the eyes were at theirs, his smooth and bulging cheeks, gave him the closest resemblance to the Assyrian Kings who are set on bodies of bulls. His drawling and melodious accent . . . added a peasant charm to his words, very caressing and very fine.

Courbet also did something more. By exaggerating his regional accent and adopting the role of provincial, semi-literate peasant, Courbet distanced himself from the bourgeois world of Paris – a gambit that was quite consciously aimed at creating a new definition of the successful artist that we now associate with the subversive qualities of avant-gardism and shock value of its art. Unlike the aristocratic associations of neo-classicism and romanticism, Courbet cultivated the avant-garde image of socialist and revolutionary. It quickly became the public expectation of contemporary art.

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181 Lindsay, J., *Gustave Courbet and His Life and Art*, 21.
Self-portraits: self-affirmation

Significant to his artistic vision, Courbet expressed his psychological image of himself through detailed studies in an unprecedented series of self-portraits painted between 1842 and 1849. Much scholarly work has been carried out on these portraits over the years, emphasising their critical role in the development of Courbet’s Realism. However no one has analysed them as exercises in self-branding.
If we are to accept Courbet’s Realism as Boudaille describes it: “a concrete expression of his will to portray the world as it is without poeticising it, without betraying it, and not as it could be or as one would wish it to be,”\(^\text{182}\) then how do we account for his fabrication of his image?

According to the sociologist Harrison White, our identities emerge out of efforts to control our experiences and interactions. He explains: “These control efforts need not have anything to do with domination over other identities. Before anything else, control is about finding footings among other identities. Such footing is a position

that entails a stance, which brings orientation in relation to other identities.” This helps explain why Courbet chose to present himself not as who he was, the son of a wealthy provincial landowner. His image from the beginning was tied to the manufacture of his career as an independent artist.

Courbet’s own words reveal that his unusual focus upon his sense of self lay at the root of his program. These are just some of his proclamations testifying to his belief that honest and authentic art comes from one’s own experience: “A reasoned and independent consciousness of my own individuality,” “the achievement of my intellectual liberty,” and then, “the example of liberty and personality in art.” As he progressed with his self-portraits, refining his painting craftsmanship as he went along, he experienced a simultaneous development of his own self-image as he dwelt upon the various distinctive styles of the artist he wished to portray. This is glaringly obvious in the theatrical tone of the portraits, particularly in the dramatic shifts of costume and pose. They are Courbet’s parallel identity experiments in personal as well as art stylistic models. Even the titles of the self-portraits are a clue to the deeply personal journey he embarked upon when he decided to take on the French Academy and its Salon: wounded, lovers, fear, guitarrero, sculptor, cellist. These words list a series of personal idiosyncratic experiences and trials, vividly illustrated by the varied characters he played in the paintings and also, it seems, in life. From all accounts, the image that Courbet developed of himself in his early years in Paris was vivid, strong, dramatic and superlative. Alfred Delvaux describes Courbet’s entry to the Andler in the early years:

He moved on, carrying his head high – like Saint-Just – and the others surrounded him. He sat down, and a circle formed around him. He spoke, and they all listened. When he went off they still listened. When he had departed there was a concert. ‘What a head’, said one. ‘He’s an Assyrian’, said another. ‘What a nose’, said the first. ‘He’s a Spaniard’, said the second. ‘What a mouth’, resumed the first. ‘He’s a Venetian’, replied the second. ‘What eyes’, added a third. ‘He’s an Indian’, put in a forth. ‘What teeth’, someone observed. ‘He’s a Burgundian’, everyone answered. ‘This Bisontin is quite simply a Byzantine’, exclaimed an enthusiast.185

James Rubin views Courbet’s narcissism as more manufactured than heartfelt: “Perhaps Courbet’s search for identity had a note of desperation, for his shifts of pose are only slightly more frequent than his changes of coiffure and styles of facial hair.”186 However, this underestimates Courbet’s achievement. While manufactured, his identity involved an evolving and deep self-examination of himself as a thinking being in the contemporary world.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>GUSTAVE COURBET’S BRAND</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TANGIBLE FEATURES</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Name</td>
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<tr>
<td>Product</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visual distinction (trademark)</td>
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<td>Politics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Actions</td>
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<td>Audience perception</td>
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Figure 21. Courbet developed the material markers of his identity out of experiences in his life and interaction with others. With these tangible attributes, and an extended period of self-reflection, he settled into a comfortable, complete model of self-realisation – brand Courbet.

White’s theorisation of identity development is useful in view of the apparent nexus between Courbet’s personal uniqueness and that of another identity – his Realism. White writes: “Identities trigger out of events – that is to say, out of switches in surroundings – seeking control over uncertainty and thus over fellow identities. Identities build and articulate ties to other identities in network-domains.”187 Courbet’s peers, their anti-establishment sympathies, but also the conventions and traditions of

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185 Lindsay, P., *Gustave Courbet and His Life and Art*, 42.
187 Ibid., 2.
the art world, made a profound impact upon the kinds of determinants with which he manufactured his image. In his own words, he proclaimed: “I wanted to extract from the entire body of traditional knowledge the reasoned and independent sense of my own individuality.”\(^{188}\) While the meticulous observances of his own physical characteristics are often dismissed as signs of his vanity, they were necessary in order to make his being the central embodiment of these determinants. As Georges Boudailles observed:

> Whatever the setting of these autobiographical fragments, the care which Courbet lavished on the reproduction of his features guarantees their veracity. It was not without reason that he called himself a “realist,” and an analysis of the folds, the furrows, the pouts, enables us to follow stage by stage how he stood up to the trials he underwent, how he faced both failure and success.\(^{189}\)

In psychology theory, a *psychological identity* relates to self-image, a person’s mental model of him or herself, self-esteem, and individuation. What is universally important to all people is how an individual views himself both as a person and in relation to other people. In cognitive psychology the term “identity” refers to the capacity for self-reflection and the awareness of self.\(^{190}\) From his own writing it’s apparent that Courbet’s capacity for self-reflection, his purposive sense of identity, was boundless and at the same time underpinned his art, confirming what he divulges of himself in his letters and journals on his struggle to become the autonomous artist that he dreamed of being.

Courbet’s series of self-portraits painted throughout the 1840s document this very journey (See Figures 11 through 20), an awakening to full artistic maturity and self-awareness for the artistic freedom he would claim as the innovator of Realism. In a letter to his friend and patron Alfred Bruyas, Courbet speaks of the significance of the relationship between his painting and the experience of his life: “I have made in my life quite a few portraits of myself, in proportion as I changed my mental situation; in a word, I have written my life.”\(^{191}\)

Sarah Faunce interprets the *essential character* of Courbet’s painting to be his use of the experiences of his life for the material of his art. While I agree with Faunce that his life’s experiences shaped his thematic pre-occupation, this alone does not account for the enormous significance of his project of self-examination. Certainly self-realisation was the driving force behind his enterprise to develop a new art, without which he would not have been able to complete his revolutionary program. However, he did not just think about himself and conceptualise a construct of “self” and its

\(^{188}\) Rubin, J., *Courbet*, 17.


interpersonal role in the art world of mid-nineteenth century France. He also thought about what this process of individuation and self-examination means in an existential sense as a contemporary being in the Parisian art world. Courbet’s art was a visualisation of his experience in life mediated through the rigorous and deeply intimate self-thinking for his identity as an artist in the contemporary art world. In other words, his self-identity was not just subjective or romantic. Rather it reflected the objective conditions of everyman in the contemporary world. It is in this sense that Realism and Courbet were one, as if Courbet was the ideal contemporary being, an ideal through which the contemporary world shows itself.

Between *Self-Portrait with Black Dog*, 1842-4, and *Self-Portrait: Man with a Pipe*, painted seven years later, Courbet evolved both as a man (Being), and as an artist, in much the same way that his painting developed. Depicting his image in several different personae, we can see how Courbet sequentially established his unique identity.

Beginning with the romantically portrayed bourgeois dandy of *Self-Portrait with Black Dog*, through several different guises, Courbet arrived at the striking, confident-looking artist in *Man with a Pipe*, who successfully challenged the authority of the French Salon. Faunce argues: “What begins as an artist’s self-portrait, the most subjective and intimate kind of image, ends by becoming a virtual summing up of the idea of the Bohemian artist in the mid-nineteenth century.” Of the man who emerged after this process, Courbet wrote to Bruyas and declared,

> It is not only my portrait, it is yours. I was impressed when I saw it; it is a crucial element in our solution [here Courbet refers to their joint triumph of

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Realism. It is the portrait of a fanatic, an ascetic, a man without illusions concerning the nonsense that composed his education, one who is trying to establish himself in harmony with his principles.  

He came to view the fundamental principals of contemporary man as those of his Realism – one set of determining imperatives assigned to two linked identities, Realism, or the contemporary world, and Gustave Courbet, the artist.

**Getting noticed in a competitive market**

Courbet’s program of self-manufacture seems to innately understand the principles of branding and the significance of its commercial application in an era when the notion of branding as a mechanism of commercial communication was yet to evolve in any formal sense. Courbet’s realist project happened at a time of particularly harsh professional conditions facing young artists trying to establish themselves outside of secular and religious patronage. During his first ten years as a painter he sold almost nothing, surviving on income from a family allowance, all the while remaining confidently focused upon recognition at the Salon, a bastion that proved almost impenetrable to the unconnected. Of twenty-five paintings that he submitted between 1841 and 1847, the Selection Committee accepted only three.

![Image of the Salon of 1787 at the Louvre](image)

Figure 24. Pietro Antonio Martini, The Salon of 1787 at the Louvre, Bibliothèque nationale, Paris.

The 1840s art world of Paris for those recently arrived was certainly a cutthroat and competitive arena. In the previous fifty years the number of registered artists had jumped from 345 to over 1,789, with the number of artists vying for the attention of

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193 Lindsay, J., *Gustave Courbet and His Life and Art*, 114.
Many young hopefuls had come to the city with little more than dreams of great fortune and success in the Mecca of nineteenth-century art, and a pocketful of confidence. Despite the widening of art’s audience from a growing middle class, the art market was not sufficient to economically support such an exploding population of artists. After the French Revolution of 1789, legislation abolished artists’ craft guilds and the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, making way for the opening of the profession to a full market system. Without the support of a master painter and the introductions he may afford, it is little wonder Courbet, like so many others, struggled to attract the attention of collectors and the status he so deeply sought.

BRANDING
Branding the artist’s name

In sociology branding is seen as a system of communication and it is typically associated with the advertising and marketing of mass-produced products. The term brand refers to all the information connected with an object that point toward its identity, including its name, trademark, colour, type font, and any other design features that are associated with it. There is also another group of brand descriptors operating on a much deeper level, that of the more abstract or non-physical kind, such as character, personality, tone of voice, reputation and audience perception. Together, these complete the brand’s identity determinants – information needed to distinguish one product, or person, from another.

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<th>Brand Discipline Essential Criteria</th>
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<td><strong>TANGIBLE FEATURES</strong></td>
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<td>Visual distinction</td>
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<td>Other distinctive features</td>
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<td>Actions</td>
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Figure 25. Tangible (or concrete) features of brand architecture.

194 Rubin, J., Courbet, 31.
The objective of branding is to individuate, and this is achieved by focusing on the product’s unique attributes – a sort of parallel to the personal identity axiom that is applied to people.

The way in which the information determinants of a product’s identity operate is referred to as brand architecture. Brand architecture is the inclusive process of the macro system of branding. Douglas Holt’s analysis of the functioning of branding in *How Brands Become Icons*, puts forward the notion that brands consist of material markers – those tangible descriptors connected to a brand identity. They are characteristic features that make up a product’s uniqueness. In the context of this discussion on Courbet’s desperate need to identify himself and his painting within the Salon, as the unique representative of the contemporary age, we can see how his strategies to single himself out parallel those of branding.

Particularly relevant in Holt’s interpretation of branding is his postulation of distinguishing between an established brand and one that is new. Although a new brand may have a name and a set of unique visual features, it doesn’t really exist beyond its name until it has a history. The brand’s material makers, its identifiable features, are insignificant and “devoid of meaning” without characteristics that customers/audience/consumers can associate with or experience in some way giving them the data needed to build a perception. Until the brand and its unique physical features have been filled with customer or audience experiences, its material markers, or perceptions as a brand name, are empty.195 Holt explains that over time the brand’s markers acquire meaning by the accumulated information and experience of its users or audience – that

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is, ideas about the product accumulate and fill the brand markers with meaning. A brand emerges when a collective understanding about it becomes firmly established as a public perception. Establishment occurs through the circulation of “stories” about the brand that come from various sources including the company producing the brand, culture industries, intermediaries such as the people who sell the brand, critics, consumers and the media. These stories can be enhanced by incidental provocation or strategic and skillful tactics played out in full view of the public. Courbet established self-branding as the quintessential avant-garde function, a function that has continued through generations of contemporary art practice to this day.

The objective of branding from the producer’s perspective is to differentiate its product from others in the same market by projecting a unique image, because in a competitive commercial environment, this is the best way to secure a comparative advantage. Holt refers to this notion of unique identity as the brand’s “distinctive constellation” of abstract concepts, which he believes need to be identified in the consumer’s or audience’s mind as part of a brand identity. The abstract qualities are the brand’s essence (without which it is not what it is), and it is this essence which needs to be constantly conjured up in communications that carry the brand’s message, and must remain the focus of any such communications – whether advertisement or work of art. Holt continues: “Managers must ensure that this brand essence is consistently evoked in every activity that carries the brand mark and remains consistent over time,” adding: “Organisations are to look deeply inward to truly understand their identity and then inculcate the brand spirit so that they can express this spirit in everything they do.”

The importance of creating and maintaining identity communications and then ensuring continuity throughout public contact, is paramount in building brand myth, the communicative information of identity longevity.

Over one hundred and fifty years before Holt formulated his brand theories, Gustave Courbet was practicing them. From the time of his artistic maturity – conventionally accepted to be from After Dinner at Ornans, 1849 – the defining features of his personal brand permeate, indeed power, his art. Through his self-reflexive process of self-representation he manufactured his essence, making tangible the intangible nature of his being. Courbet knew this innately and confirms so in a letter to Bruyas:

Yes my dear friend, I hope to bring just one miracle to pass; I hope to live by my art throughout my whole life without ever having deviated in the slightest

197 Ibid., 22.
from my principles, without ever having for one instant lied to my conscience, without ever having made a painting in order to please anyone at all or in order to sell it.  

EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGY

Branding and essence: Courbet’s embodied perspective and phenomenology

The word ‘phenomenology’ derives from \textit{phainomenon} (\textit{phainomai}, to appear) and \textit{logos} (reason) and among phenomenologists much significance is attached to this etymology. Whatever ‘appears’ appears in concrete experiences; there is no ‘unexperienced’ appearing. Accordingly, the aim of phenomenology is described as the study of experiences with a view to bringing out their ‘essences’, their underlying ‘reason’. This is a very wide definition which tells us nothing about how this study is, or ought to be, pursued, but it gives a sufficient indication as to where the sphere of phenomenological investigation lies. It lies in the domain of \textit{experiences}.  

Phenomenology offers a theory of branding in that it concerns itself with determining the \textit{essential properties} and structures of consciousness and \textit{conscious experience}. Through systematic reflection and analysis, the aim is to understand how different aspects are constituted into an actual object or person as experienced by the person experiencing it. Likewise, the objective of branding is to identify the essential properties, the \textit{essence}, in order to communicate them through publicity.

Motivated by his desire to become acknowledged for what he loved (his painting), and determined to differentiate himself as a way of coping with the complexity of an overcrowded art world environment, Courbet’s narcissism provided him with the essential subject on which to base his art – himself. In this way he remained faithful to his deeply personal agenda to stay firm to his principles (refer to above quote), feed his lifeblood ambition and document his essential qualities as they existed both as essence and more concrete, public corporeality.

Fried draws a relation between Courbet’s desire for success and the solution he found in the portraits of the 1840s in which he interprets the embodied experience of the painter-beholder relationship and its significance to Courbet’s legacy.

It seems … likely that his precocious attraction to and handling of the genre were motivated by desires and compulsions deeply rooted in the psyche and only minimally shaped by a specific pictorial context. But those desires and compulsions were evidently in full accord with his growing sense of vocation as

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a young French painter of titanic ambition, which suggests on the one hand that they unavoidably engaged the problematic of painting and beholding … and on the other that it may have been the peculiar strength of those desires and compulsions in Courbet’s case that underlay the radicalness of his innovations.\footnote{Fried, M., 1990, \textit{Courbet's Realism}, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago. 79-80.}

Courbet’s singularity as an innovative painter was enabled, then, by his art. His innovation is rooted in the attempt to progressively repeal the traditional distance separating painter and the painter’s representation of himself (the external). Fried sees this as an attempt by the artist to “annul” an essential feature of his identity as the beholder – “his presence outside” the painting in front of him (his external existence). There is a paradox in this explanation of Courbet’s project. While he revokes “something fundamental” to his identity as the beholder outside the painting (his presence in front of the painting), he is simultaneously establishing the material reality of what the art world came to perceive as a precocious master painter. This makes brand building in Courbet’s case an embodying experience.

In \textit{Courbet’s Realism}, Fried employs an existential phenomenological approach to argue that Courbet was driven to express his own physical substance or embodied-ness in his art. His broader consideration though, is that Courbet’s self-portraits call into question the ontological impermeability of the picture surface; the boundary between the world of the painting and the world of the beholder that becomes only imaginary as he closes the gulf between sitter and beholder in the series of self-portraits.\footnote{Ibid., 61.}

Increasingly, Courbet’s self-portrait compositions became relaxed, simplified and focused. This brings the sitter-subject closer to the picture surface and beholder, until, as Rubin observes, “that face is almost assertively close to the picture plane”.\footnote{Rubin, J., 1997, \textit{Courbet}, 45.}

According to Fried, the self-portraits made during the 1840s are a study concerned more with his existence incarnate – his bodiliness as a human individual – and its role in shaping his mind, his consciousness.

Fried’s reading of the self-portraits is particularly important from the standpoint of my main goal to outline a sound foundation of branding in a material sense as it applies to people, particularly artists. His explanation of Courbet’s aesthetic strategies (repetitions of unique motifs) parallels branding’s material realm of essential predicates that determine identity. Fried grounds his interpretation of the self-portraits in the analysis of a number of formal aesthetic devices that became repetitious and highly...
specific motifs throughout Courbet’s œuvre.\textsuperscript{203} These include “peculiar” body positions and angles, facial expressions, and compositional structures such as the nearness of the image to the painting’s surface. In particular, Fried examines the hand of the sitter in a number of portraits to elucidate what he believes is its important role in portraying the emotional expressions of the sitter.\textsuperscript{204} Fried underscores his thesis with what he asserts is another embodying strategy used by Courbet in his efforts to emphasise the sitter’s “possession of his own body from within”: the frequency with which Courbet painted himself with his eyes closed or partially closed, a point which he suggests is a deliberate effort on the artist’s part to devalue the sitter’s gaze. According to Fried, this is in line with Courbet’s emphasis on the incarnate experience from within, rather than that of being observed (by the sitter) from without.\textsuperscript{205}

Fried’s analysis of \textit{Self-Portrait: Man with a Pipe} interprets the self-portrait program as a phenomenological project rather than simply an effort by the artist at self-representation. This incarnate experience forges the essential qualities of his identity, which constitute his actual \textit{essence}. In the self-portraits Courbet establishes a systematic identity architecture, which in today’s world, is conventionally carried out in advertising.

\textbf{Painting \textit{essence}}

The portraits, I argue, transcend simple depictions of the world as Courbet found it because they are imbued with his evolving ideals of who he was, both physically and psychologically. As Fried argued, Courbet tried to paint himself in a developed corporeal fullness that he explained as a “bodily being”.\textsuperscript{206} He had begun to paint himself as the whole contemporary man, not just a sitter. I believe Courbet understood the difference. If we consider the portraits as individual connective pieces of the one body of work – beginning with \textit{Self-Portrait with Black Dog}, 1842-4, and concluding with \textit{Self-Portrait: Man with a Pipe}, 1848-9 – what emerges is documentation of the sequential maturing of a man searching to uncover himself as a distinct being in the modern world. Courbet painted his essence in Heideggerian terms by painting his existence as an “absolute reflection”.\textsuperscript{207} In this way he succeeded in painting his \textit{identity}, not just the image he saw in the mirror, but the man, the being as he experienced it and which he made, through the brand of Realism, into the quintessential existential being of modernity – the modern man, the being of the future.

\textsuperscript{203} Fried, M., 1990, \textit{Courbet’s Realism}. 57.
\textsuperscript{204} Fried, M., 1990, \textit{Courbet’s Realism}. 64.
\textsuperscript{205} Ibid., 78.
\textsuperscript{206} Fried 78.
The foundational principals of Realism emerge directly from the core attributes of Courbet’s identity as an artist of individual standing who would take as Faunce suggests, “his experience of the individual self in the world” as the “only valid source of art.”\textsuperscript{208} Courbet’s identity, then, can be viewed as a set of essential properties related to Realism, and as Yablo asserts, because his set of properties are fundamental, they become of metaphysical significance.\textsuperscript{209} Michael Fried also views the early self-portraits as a deep philosophical and existential enterprise:

as the work of a painter who, far from desiring simply to reproduce his outward appearance, to analyse his character of personality, or to record the external signs of various transient inner states, found himself compelled to seek to express by all means at his disposal his conviction of his own embodiedness.\textsuperscript{210}

Courbet’s revolutionary Realism then, is ultimately based less on an ideal of fidelity to appearances, than on one of phenomenological self-representation, depicting “Being”. Courbet has painted, in Hegelian terms, “The truth of Being is essence”, that is, “absolute reflection”.\textsuperscript{211} This is evident in a comparative analysis of the landscape compositional portrait of himself in \textit{Self-Portrait with Black Dog}, c. 1842-4 (Figure 22), set in his beloved Ornans, through works such as \textit{The Man with Leather Belt}, 1846 (Figure 33), and \textit{The Cellist}, 1847 (Figure 19), where we, as viewers, are brought progressively closer to Courbet’s image. The space between beholder and sitter is, as Fried observed, increasingly diminished as the experiential qualities of Courbet are heightened. This is the function of branding – to express the true self, the essence, the core of identity and the permeating properties with a “capacity to signify and accrue meaning”.\textsuperscript{212}

\textsuperscript{208} Faunce, S., and Nochlin, L., 7.
\textsuperscript{210} Fried, M., 1990, \textit{Courbet’s Realism}, 78.
\textsuperscript{211} Heidegger, M., 1969, \textit{Identity and Difference}, 43.
3. RESEARCH

Stage 2. Market research

**CHRONOLOGY OF BRAND ARCHITECTURE PROCESS**

![Image](Figure 27. The development of a unique identity is followed by analysis of the marketplace.)

If I’m to be an exception to every rule in every way, I’m off to pursue my destiny.
—Gustave Courbet, 1837.\(^{213}\)

In this chapter, the work Courbet produced during his first seven years in Paris is viewed as an experimental artistic response to the market research information he gathered on the Parisian art world. In these paintings, Courbet trials composition, theme, paint handling and virtuosity, the human form, landscape, style, and importantly, scale. Through his persistent attempts at acceptance into the Salon and his calculated development in his painting practice, he arrives at Realism.

Courbet arrived in Paris in 1840 at the age of 21 with little more than a few letters of introduction to family contacts. His only close relation was an uncle – a law professor with no useful connections or particular interest in art – who had agreed to keep an eye on the boy. Young and confident, full of hope for fame and wealth, Courbet chose to forge his own way into the art world rather than follow the more orthodox path taken by other young hopefuls from the provinces aiming to establish themselves as artists.

**Research as a calculated maneuver of brand development**

Like any competent manager in today’s aggressive global world of commodities aiming to challenge existing market conditions and establish a new brand, Courbet did his research and examined trends of the mid-nineteenth century French art system.

Market trends is a term most commonly associated with contemporary financial market discourse, and it refers to the non-scientific analysis of the movement and cycles

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of market prices of commodities over a period of time. It can be used as a guide to identifying whether a market is likely to increase or decrease in value. It is a first-hand indicator of institutional and public mood. Courbet’s inventory of art market trends on his arrival in Paris provided him with exposure to the aesthetic standards of mid-nineteenth century French art, while his first-hand experience of the mechanisms affecting these trends, amounted to a steep learning curve of the standards and tastes of the Salon’s oligarchy, the selection committee (the Academy’s mouthpiece), the audience for art, and the art critics and writers.

Assessment of art schools and comparison of product (art)

Courbet gathered information about the field he wanted to enter, assessed the artists, and their painting, systematically collated evidence of the kind of art the buying audience was interested in, and gained insight into the art educational system. From the outset, he clearly defined the independent artist he wanted to be. Where fledgling artists, embarking on an art career were expected to enroll in one of Paris’s prestigious art schools such as the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, or to secure a place in the atelier of a recognised master who could prepare him for the Salon, Courbet chose an independent route, making no attempt to obtain entry into the state-run system. He overlooked his uncle’s advice to register in the esteemed art school of Baron von Steuben, its academic formalism not suited to his willful personality.

In an effort to satisfy his father’s interests, Courbet made a tour of the art schools of Paris to examine and compare the painting tuition available. Observations of the state-run art schooling led him to determine the kind of painting he did not want to produce and he was convinced that he could not learn from the teachers in these schools. His own words belie the enormity of his naïve confidence in his abilities at this early stage of his career. Speaking in the second person, he wrote in his journal,

After arriving in Paris he was very disillusioned to see the pictures of the French school, and he told his companions that if this was painting he would never be a painter. He looked at all the paintings to be seen in Paris and sorted out his ideas.214

Greatly disillusioned by the academic classicism favoured in art schools of the École des Beaux-Arts, and largely indifferent to the painting in the Louvre, Courbet rejected institutional instruction, opting instead for a self-developed education program in painting. To the disappointment of his father, (who had reluctantly agreed to send his

son to Paris to study law, not art\textsuperscript{215}) he instead chose to attend the Atelier du Père Suisse, a much less formal institution whose director, a former artist’s model, gave no formal instruction to students or criticism of their work. It was a simple and spontaneous educational affair, where for a small fee, nude models were provided for artists to paint. This arrangement suited a young and independent-minded Courbet with an antagonistic temperament and anti-academic outlook toward traditional formats of classical teaching ideals.

**Eclectic experimentation: the interests of a young, ambitious artist**

From the beginning Courbet rejected institutional instruction. He had an inflated opinion of himself and his abilities, and claimed to be unimpressed by the two most successful and celebrated painters, Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres and Eugène Delacroix, both acknowledged masters of the time who enjoyed Salon success and great wealth. Boudailles cites an extraordinary outburst of egotism for one so young and inexperienced when, upon standing before Delacroix’s impressive \textit{Les Massacres de Scio} at the Louvre, Courbet declared, “I could paint like that tomorrow if I dared to”\textsuperscript{216}.

He set out his own study plan using ideas from Töpffer’s \textit{Réflexions et menus propos d’un peintre genevois} (Thoughts and Ramblings of a Geneva Artist)\textsuperscript{217}. Writing to his family of the rigorous routine he acted out each day in his efforts to prepare work for the Salon, and his need for psychological as well as financial support, he says, “If you think I am trying to deceive you, I am much offended. One thing is certain: I can’t work any harder. And yet my father has the effrontery to write me letters which, far from encouraging me, are extremely depressing, and they always arrive at the most inopportune moments – just at the times I am most pressed.” He continues, “I believe that I give more thought to my future than anyone else, and I’m proving it”\textsuperscript{218}.

However arrogant he was, Courbet was not completely foolhardy. His artistic investigation and research program began by surveying all the great works in the Louvre. Mack points out Courbet’s resistance to established tastes did not go so far as to include all past masters. Overlooking the more traditional classics of the Italian Renaissance\textsuperscript{219}, Courbet focused his attention on the Spanish painters Jusepe du Ribera (1591-1652), Diego Velázquez (1599-1664) and Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664)\textsuperscript{220}.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{215} Rubin, J., \textit{Courbet}, 9.
\item \textsuperscript{216} Boudailles, G., 1968, \textit{Courbet}, 16.
\item \textsuperscript{218} Lindsay, J., \textit{Gustave Courbet and His Life and Art}, 23.
\item \textsuperscript{219} Mack, G., \textit{Gustave Courbet}, 30.
\item \textsuperscript{220} Ibid., 30 - 31, Rubin, J., \textit{Courbet}, 40.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
He was particularly interested in the Dutch masters Frans Hals, and Sir Anthony Van Dyke, although it was to Rembrandt that he felt most indebted. He copied all of their work in the Louvre galleries. This is evident in the painting process he began to develop early on where he built up an image from a dark background, and contrasting light and dark areas, as his latter portraits of the 1840s would demonstrate. *Self-Portrait* ca. 1850 is exemplary in this respect. This is a front-facing composition – rare among Courbet’s self-portraits – a gloomy depiction of a serious, young professional artist.

In a letter to his family of May 1842, in which the novice painter attempted to bring his father around to the facts of the immense difficulty in the undertaking he had embarked upon in his ambition to become an artist of the Salon, Courbet discloses the professional approach he took in his endeavor to fulfill his calling:

> If you think I am amusing myself [a dig at his father] you are wrong; for more than a month I have really not had a quarter of an hour to myself. This is why: I have models who are very expensive, from whom I paint from the earliest morning light until five in the afternoon, my dinner hour. In the evenings I have to buy what I need for my work, hunt for models from one end of Paris to the other, and then call on people who might be useful to me.221

Only two years in the capital and Courbet had already realised the gameplay in the art world of Paris included socialisation and networking, focusing on and building up relationships among influential people who might be gainful in his career objectives.

Courbet’s early work was marked by an expansive experimentation, as is evident in its eclectic style. Gerstle Mack comments,

> Courbet’s work during his first four or five years in Paris, considerable in quantity, varied greatly in quality as he struggled simultaneously with technical problems and conflicting theories of art. This was a period of immaturity, of transition and indecision. He devoted far too much of his time to the painting of romantic and literary subjects, sometimes sentimental, always stiff and wooden.222

Through trialing a range of combinations of composition, theme and painting methods – techniques learnt during his research through studies made in the Louvre – Courbet considered various sources. Sometimes romantic, as the somber image from *The Cellist*, 1847, and *Lovers in the Countryside*, 1844, show, and other times classical, as in *The Awakening of Saint Jerome*, 1840. It is generally believed that he floundered in his bid to find a theme and style that reflected his inner conviction and at the same time would appease the Salon’s jury. Mack’s assessment, above, of the self-proclaimed radical’s early

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portrait points to the harsh reality faced by such a young and independent artist forced into career compromise as he undermined his free spirit and personality for a sleek romanticism aimed at appealing to the middle-class art market. Courbet could clearly see from his visits to the Salon what it was that the bourgeois collector wanted and official patronage dictated – large genre images from history, emotional scenes from the bible, glorious heroes and portraits of the famed.

**Trial and synthesis: Courbet’s steep learning curve**

The self-taught painting program Courbet carried out between 1842 and 1849 was a long and arduous process of trial and synthesis without the benefit of a mentor. Of the intense sessions working in the Louvre Boudailles argues that Courbet retained more intuitive and abstract qualities, “a spirit, a manner of seeing,” rather than solid physical practice in painting. However, it is difficult to see how Courbet could not increase his stock in artistic knowledge as he examined a varied range of sources. His research encouraged trial in the real and textual interpretation of others’ aesthetic and painterly considerations. He was informed by systematic investigation of stylistic qualities, absorbed and diffused through his renderings. Piece by piece, Courbet built up a virtual art database – a mental catalogue of ideas on theme, composition, style, paint finish, brushwork, surface quality, size, and a feeling for drama. All to be retrieved and manipulated into his own personal expression at will.

From Ribera and the Spanish school he learnt of form and weight in sharp contrasts, an assertive chiaroscuro from Rembrandt and Hals, inspiration for large scale compositions from Flajoulot, the effects of darkness using bitumen from Diego Valázquez, the common-man as saint theme from Zurbarán. His early use of romantic landscape backgrounds is conventionally viewed as an influence from Camille Corot. A comparative look at Corot’s *Girl Reading in Fontainebleau Forest*, c. 1830 (Figure 28), and Courbet’s early *The Large Oak*, 1843 (Figure 29), echoes such affect. At this time the depiction of nature, a subject already hailed by the Romantic poets, had became popular in painting. Rubin suggests Courbet’s use of luminescent sky and clouds that counterpoint earthly figures, could be influenced by Venetian art. Guitarrero, 1844 (Figure 18), the self-portrait of the young artist in troubadour costume is representative.

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224 Boudailles, G., *Courbet*, 16.
226 Ibid., 26.
From Millet, Courbet learnt about subject matter; the compositional stance and physicality of Millet’s figure in *The Winnow*, c. 1847-8, is a striking parallel with Courbet’s young man carrying a basket of stones in *Stonebreakers* painted two years later, 1849-50. The theme of the hero worker painted in bold form is suggestive of the le Nains. More specifically, Rubin identifies a strong link between the idea of a large group portrait of ordinary people, peasants even, and the theme of the meal, in Louis le Nain’s *The Peasants’ Meal*, 1642, and Courbet’s use of the same subject in *After Dinner*, painted in 1848-49.

From Rembrandt and Ribera he gleaned the sensitivity to render luscious and illuminated skin, an essential feature for the success of his portraits such as *Self-Portrait: Man with Pipe*, 1848-9. Some years later, Courbet declared, “I wanted to extract from the entire body of traditional knowledge the reasoned and independent sense of my own individuality”. 227 Paradoxically, Courbet sought to express his essence, to articulate his individualism, through the aesthetic hallmarks of others. For many of his contemporaries, learning painting expression by adopting the characteristics of their masters’ signature

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227 Boudailles, G., *Courbet*, 16
styles was accepted protocol. But for Courbet, the eclectic variety of influences broke with this approach, creating a more open field in which he could find his own way.

Through his determined analysis of all the painting styles to be seen in Paris, and his reasoned selection process of what he believed appropriate to his objective, Courbet progressed his painting development program on his own terms from 1842 through until 1849 when he painted his first break-through picture, *Dinner at Ornans* (Figure 30). According to Rubin: “The main constant was an ostentatiously precious style of painting in bright contrasts and tight forms, imparting a sophisticated sense of control.”228 In what now can be viewed as a marketing tool with which to advertise his skills, Courbet has, in this first large work, brought together a combination of influences – theories, styles and ideas – into a single successful composition that would inaugurate his Realism.

Experimenting, learning and gaining in strength of direction and skill with every effort, each canvas was an advance on the previous. This calculated development of investigational artistic practice can be seen in the progress of expression and artistry from one of his earliest paintings, *Self-Portrait with Black Dog*229, c.1842-4 (Figure 20), to the erotic image of a sleeping girl in *The Hammock* (1844).

![Figure 32. Gustave Courbet, The Hammock, 1844. Oil on canvas; 70 x97 cm. Sammlung Oskar Reinhart, “Am Romerholz,” Winterthur, Switzerland.](image)

Although *Black Dog* – a sentimental and romantic portrayal of a self-consciously, fashionably dressed man, and the persona of youthful idealism – was accepted into the Salon, and *The Hammock* rejected, the advancement in Courbet’s painterly craftsmanship in rendering the forms of nature is quite an extraordinary effort to have achieved in just two years. The landscape of Ornans in which his portrait of a finely attired dandy is situated, has been rendered more like the instantaneous expression of an impressionist’s *plein air*, even if it seems anomalous with the almost photo-realistic

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229 Otherwise referred to as *Self-Portrait with Black Dog*, the same title as the portrait he made of himself that won him acceptance to the Salon of 1844.
affection with which Courbet painted his self-portrait within the composition. This is an early example of the fragmented (or non-continuous) spatiality that becomes a feature of his work, a structural stylisation that has its origins in his eclecticism.

The eclecticism is also evident between paintings, as in the contrast in *The Hammock* and another painting made at the same time, *Man Filled with Fear*, c. 1843-5 (Figure 16). Their compositional structures, painting styles and techniques, as well as themes, and especially tone, could not be more contradictory. *Man Filled With Fear* is a guttural response to the precarious disposition Courbet found himself in, as if expressing “the strongest feelings of his innermost being”.230 It has a vivid palette and unfinished quality, with patches of paint application for the vague detail making up the surrounding landscape from which he jumps. By contrast, *The Hammock* appears to be lovingly laboured, a genre picture where every fabric fold, blade of grass and leaf, is savoured. Courbet greatly enjoyed painting female flesh, and in this considered work the veiled bosom of his sleeper is illuminated by his luster. The figure resonates brightly amid his masterfully rendered forest, closing in upon the sleeper, penetrating her presence. It’s clear from *The Hammock* and other smaller portraits from this time, such as the one of his sister, *Portrait of Juliette Courbet*, 1844, that his trials and efforts were advancing his technique. Refining surface and composition quality, over time Courbet restricted his sketchy rendering technique to areas of distance and darkness.231 He developed his artistry for rendering objects and textures realistically throughout the decade, advancing towards masterful translations and creating the sensation that “the viewer could touch and feel” 232 his imagery.

Always maintaining a link between his life and his art,233 Courbet progressed toward Realism. He worked diligently and tried to produce his own concepts – landscapes, literary subjects,234 genre studies, allegorical compositions and portraits of friends – securing the occasional commission to supplement his father’s allowance. The many ideas and “sensitivities” Courbet observed from the artists he had closely analysed at the Louvre were crystallising. In *The Man with Leather Belt*, 1846, Courbet has stripped back the trappings and accessories of the earlier genre self-portraits. Together with *Portrait of H. J. Van Wisselingh* from the same year, it reveals his debt to Rembrandt.235

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230 Le Men, S., *Courbet*, 70.
231 Rubin, J., *Courbet*, 27.
232 Ibid.
234 *Lélia* By George Sand, *Odalisque* inspired by the poetry of Victor Hugo. See Lindsay, 20 and 32.
Market testing: trial at the Salon

Am I to make others suffer the despair that I did during my youth?

—Gustave Courbet. 236

In what would be a period of many blows to his youthful sense of self-importance, Courbet submitted his first two paintings to the Salon in 1841, just one year after his arrival in Paris. Both were portraits of his friends: one of Adolphe Marlet and the other Urbain Cuenot. Both were rejected. The next year he tried two more submissions, one an interior, the other a hunting scene. 237 Again both were rejected. He tried again in 1843 for acceptance into the Salon with another portrait and self-portrait, entitled Small Portrait of Courbet, 1842 (Figure 12). Both were refused.

The young, feisty, independent painter with huge ambitions was not long in waiting to experience the ruthless power base of the French Academy and its stranglehold over entry to the Salon. This continual rejection must have been a devastating wrench to Courbet’s self-esteem. Sylvain Amic explains: “Courbet was doubly at a dead end: both pictorially and personally, the Romantic ideal was leading to the abyss.” 238 And it is into this “abyss” that the frustrated painter apparently thrusts himself – outward, towards the picture’s edge where it joins with the world of the spectator, away from everything he loved; the countryside of Ornans, the world of

237 Rubin, J., Courbet, 336.
238 Amic, S., Curator; Musée Fabre, Montpellier. 103.
French painting that continued to reject him, and the theatrical personas he engaged with up until this time. Amic argues that this is self-evident in *The Desperate Man* (Figure 13) and *The Man Filled with Fear* (Figure 14), both of which were probably produced in 1845.239 According to Amic, *Desperate Man* is an important work in which Courbet paints the peak of his crisis: “the moment in which the vacuity of a lost youth is revealed,” and he sees it as “the artist’s wish to produce an emblem on a par with the trauma he experienced.”240 Le Men agrees, arguing that the painting is a “close-up study of despair”, expressive of “the strongest feelings of his innermost being, the melodramatic outpourings of despair and terror”. 241

However, I would argue *The Desperate Man* is a contrived and self-conscious attempt at portraying a dramatic psychological state. While a technically brilliant summation of Courbet’s acquired painting virtuosity, its melodramatic outpouring has a pervasive sense of hysterical falseness. Unfortunately, such opinion remains speculation, as correspondence with his family at around this time is lacking any informative information with regards to the painter’s true state of mind.242 This is mostly because Courbet generally wrote positively in his letters to home in a bid to reassure his father of the success of his decision to become an artist. Nevertheless, Amic is probably right when he says of *Desperate Man* and *Man Filled with Fear*:

Courbet aimed to demonstrate how the pursuit of the ideal and the absolute leads only to a dead end; at the same time, he marked the close of a phase of artistic education petrified by the dogmas of Romanticism and the academy. This rupture represented a decisive milestone for the painter.243

In this respect *Desperate Man* is a purging of his previous strategy, a goodbye. If this is the case, in *Man Filled with Fear* Courbet faces up to what he needs to do. *Desperate Man* was almost certainly painted first as Courbet is clean-shaven, whereas his appearance in *Man Filled with Fear*, is closer to his melancholic face in *The Cellist* (Figure 19) from 1847. Further, *Man Filled with Fear* is far more critical a landmark work in Courbet’s “entire opus”244 for no other reason than it marks his psychological and emotional awakening to the seriousness of his venture, evident in the unflinching hand.

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239 In his essay on *The Desperate Man*, Amic Sylvain mentions the doctor who attended Courbet in his final days at La Tour-de-Peilz. Courbet had always kept this painting with him, and because of the artist’s expression in the picture Dr. Paul Colin entitled it *Despair*. The painting was exhibited in Geneva in 2007 and is believed to have been painted in 1845. For a more comprehensive telling of the painting’s physical history, see Forges1973, 33-34.

240 Amic, S., Curator; Musée Fabre, Montpellier. 104.

241 Le Men, S., *Courbet*, 70.

242 Amic, S., Curator; Musée Fabre, Montpellier, 102.

243 Ibid.,106.

244 Ibid., 104.
The major problem with Amic’s speculations about *Desperate Man* and Courbet’s dark mood is that a year earlier he had finally been accepted into the Salon with the second portrait he painted of himself with his dog, *Self-Portrait with Black Dog*, c.1842-44. 1844 also marks a significant milestone for two other reasons. Firstly, there is a distinct change in the direction of his conceptions as an increasing disillusionment with Romanticism takes effect. And secondly, an ideological notion for the direction of his painting begins to take form.

The young painter’s acceptance into the Salon of 1844 was providential. That year Courbet had planned to submit the conventional history painting with the Biblical theme *Lot and His Daughters* (unlocated) and a large landscape that has remained unidentified. As luck would have it, August Hesse, a teacher “of excellent repute” under whose tutelage his friend Marlet trained, suggested Courbet submit a work the young artist had over-looked, *Self-Portrait with Black Dog* which Hesse had seen at Courbet’s studio.

*Self-Portrait with Black Dog* is a simple composition, yet, a telling portrait of the man who will successfully challenge French painting. While still holding on to theatrical characteristics of earlier images in his choice of the most fashionable attire and accessories of the dandy, Courbet has calmly brought together his strengths in painting figures and landscape scenes by skillfully silhouetting his enigmatic figure, accompanied by his English spaniel, against the pale stone of the entrance to a grotto near Ornans. The background recedes gently into pale sky and valley land, against which the central figures of man and his faithful companion project and engage the viewer with the power behind the sitter’s knowing and provocative stare.

This self-portrait, so confident and relaxed, is an allegorical self-promotional poster, the image of a successful young painter in the countryside of his origin, his home. It is the first acknowledged “fusion” of “the artist and his native land”. There’s no romantic tone here, just a declaration of self-awareness and the smug expression of a man who, in his mind, has challenged the Academy to a duel over the future of French

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245 Sylvain, A., Curator; Musée Fabre, Montpellier. 103.
247 Ibid., 35.
248 Ibid., 27.
249 Ibid., 34.
250 Sylvain, A., Curator; Musée Fabre, Montpellier., 107.
painting. Ségolène Le Men concurs with the idea that Courbet asserts his intention: “An adolescent archangel, haloed by the black rim of his large hat, like Pierrot in negative.” She continues, “The “face” of the black English spaniel echoes that of the sitter, like a silhouette and its cast shadow.” “The painter proclaims his independence in this self-portrait by looking at the spectator from on high, while affirming his position in the Franche-Comté.”

Courbet had found his way. This research becomes a calculated maneuver of his brand development.

251 Le Men, S., Courbet, 67.
4. PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Stage 3. Developing the product

He found a style that was original because it was natural; it consisted of painting modern, popular subjects in a manner that was inspired by the masterpieces of the past without imitating them. —Gustave Courbet

The period between 1842-49 is commonly regarded as the formative phase in Courbet’s artistic development. My intention is to give this typical art historiographic viewpoint a slight twist by considering this “formative phase” in terms of new product development. In other words, can art be understood in much the same way as the production of any other commodity and the processes involved in bringing it to an audience or market? I am not intending to imply purely commercial motives in Courbet’s efforts or to devalue his artistic achievement in any way. On the contrary, I believe we need to focus upon his self-conscious awareness of the development process to understand how he successfully built his program for new art, because the two progressions were so inextricably linked.

Courbet’s early experiences in the metropolis were harsh. By the third year in Paris he had submitted six paintings to the Salon, all of which were met by refusal. Like market research today, his initial efforts during the early years in Paris schooled him in the desires and demands of the art market. He needed to get a measure of the audience’s proclivities by trialing his painting with the Salon selection committee, assess the results, and evaluate his next move. During this time you can see how the young and ambitious artist developed his product through absorbing what he believed to be essential from available artistic sources and eventually incorporating it into his own ideas about painting. The young and

aspiring painter set about clarifying his identity into the definitive *iconic* brand he achieved by maximising his personal and artistic attributes to their full, public-orientated potential.

**Building identity through painting self-portraits**

**Trial and experimentation leads to a new art**

While others before him, Rembrandt, Dürer and Titian for example, had frequently painted portraits of themselves using a mirror, Courbet is unique in that his series is a collection of “autobiographical fragments”. On the sale of *Self-Portrait: Man with a Pipe* to his friend and patron Alfred Bruyas he acknowledged, “I have done a good many self-portraits in my life, as my attitude gradually changed. One could say that I have written my autobiography”.

The series begins with the *Self-Portrait* from 1842 (Figure 12). This is the first of two self-portraits Courbet painted with his black English spaniel (The second painting, discussed in the previous chapter, won for him acceptance into the Salon in 1844). Upon comparison with a recognised source that Courbet most likely had access to in the Louvre, Titian’s *Portrait of a Venetian Gentleman*, ca. 1510, there appears a number of features the young artist may have used as reference for his personal composition; a piercing gaze, dark attire with an open neckline, the right arm and hand resting upon a horizontal surface providing the image with a depth of field, and importantly, a simple vignette background – a significant feature that Courbet would later adapt to the large compositions of the 1850s.

The 1842 self-portrait with his dog was followed by the second portrait with the black English spaniel, *Self-Portrait with Black Dog* dated between 1842 and 1844 (Figure 22). Over the same period he painted *Lovers in the Countryside* and *The Draught Players*. *Man Filled with Fear* is also dated from around 1844-45, along with *The Desperate Man*,

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253 Boudailles, 19.
255 This painting is often referred to as *Self-Portrait with Black Dog*, making it confusing with the second portrait Courbet painted with his dog entitled *Self-Portrait with Black Dog* dated 1842-44.
256 Sylvain, A., Curator; Musée Fabre, Montpellier. Cited in Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Ostfildern, Hatje Cantz, 2008, 94.
discussed in the previous chapter, as well as *The Wounded Man*. Following the two terrorized self-portraits, Courbet painted *Guitarrero* (sometimes called *The Guitar Player*) in 1845, and another image of himself in Medieval theatrical attire, *The Sculptor*. Between 1845-46 he made *The Man with Leather Belt*, and *The Portrait of H. J. van Wisselingh* in 1846. The series concludes towards the end of the decade with *Self-Portrait: Man with a Pipe* c. 1849 and then *Self-Portrait*, 1850.

Portraits had a particular interest for Courbet from the very beginning of his desire to become a painter. There are a number of additional portraits and self-portraits produced during this time, and while less well-known than the more privileged paintings mentioned above, they are important in the context of the development of his art, because together, they suggest that Courbet’s course for Realism was already deeply set by the time he began his evaluation of the art education system upon arrival in Paris. *The Siesta*, for example, from 1841-42, is one of the first works in which Courbet depicts himself in the landscape of his homeland in the Franche-Comté.257 Already at this early stage, the young painter demonstrates bold courage in the handling of tonal contrasts between figure and landscape, and a striking sensitivity to the representation of his attire. A keen awareness of personal presentation and vanity are by now evident; his clothing – harmoniously synchronised in colour with the surrounding landscape – and the subject’s graceful pose, express a man of self-satisfaction and self-importance.

Another work from 1841, *Fording a Stream*, also places Courbet’s figure in a natural setting, a theme Le Men claims became the “album of the Romantic heroes”.258 A recurring subject for writers and poets, the countryside was “saturated with sentimental signs”,259 and the location in which Courbet immersed himself artistically. From the stories of popular novels of his youth, through the numerous relationships of adolescence and into young adulthood, the emerging painter firmly establishes his interest in the “Romantic bohemian milieu,” of which, he will become a part. The composition of *Fording a Stream* has its immediate source in an illustration in Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s novel, *Paul et Virginie*, a tale of ill-fated love set in Mauritius.

258 Le Men, S., *Courbet*, 80.
259 Ibid.,
Tony Johannot’s steel-engraving, *Paul and Virginie Crossing the Torrent*, from the 1838 Curmer edition of the novel, shows how directly Courbet acquired his themes and compositional structure. Although Courbet’s Paul walks away from the viewer in the opposite direction from Johannot’s, the leitmotif made famous from the novel is fundamentally identical; Paul carries Virginie in His arms across the water.

Le Men observes that *The Large Oak* is also inspired from the various forms the story of *Paul et Virginie* came in at the time, from the popular novel, magic lantern plates, decorated tableware, and scarves.²⁶⁰ Courbet has transposed Paul and Virginie as children on Réunion Island for the young lovers under the oak tree in Ornans.

**Thematic sources from popular culture. Engaging your audience**

> The gifted young provincial, adulated by his family, measured what he lacked to become the painter he dreamed of being. —Georges Boudailles, 1969.²⁶¹

![Figure 39. Gustave Courbet, *Fording a Stream*, 1841. Oil on paper mounted on canvas; 26.5 x 22 cm. Institut Gustave Courbet, Ornans.](image1.jpg)

![Figure 40. Tony Johannot, *Paul and Virginie Crossing the Torrent*, 1838. Curmer. Paris.](image2.jpg)

According to Le Men, in *Self-Portrait with Black Dog* each of the significant compositional features draws directly from *Paul et Virginie*: “vignette by vignette from either the old-man narrator or the hero of the novel: the walking outfit, the wide-brimmed hat, the walking stick, the company of a dog, the rest stop under a tree, and the intimacy of the natural setting.”²⁶² Le Men’s description reads more like a guide on

²⁶⁰ Le Men, S., *Courbet*, 80.
²⁶² Le Men, S., *Courbet*, 80.
‘how to engage your audience’ in mid-nineteenth-century France than an aesthetic critique. Perhaps that’s what Courbet was trying to do; appeal to public taste with pastiche iconography they already had a predilection for, rather than to express his own autonomous creativity. This can certainly be said for a number of other self-portraits from the time such as, *Lovers in the Country, Sentiments of Youth, The Sculptor* and *The Checkers Player*. Notwithstanding, Courbet persisted in his efforts to break through the rigorous demands of the Salon for three years straight, with continued rejection, until, *Self-Portrait with Black Dog* went before the selection committee: “At last I have been accepted at the Exhibition, which gives me the greatest pleasure,” he wrote to his parents. “The accepted picture is not the one I would have most liked to show, but that doesn’t matter. I can ask for nothing better . . . They have done me the honour of giving me a very good place in the show, which is some compensation.”

A number of significant issues regarding Courbet’s progress in the development of Realism concern the acceptance of *Self-Portrait with Black Dog* into the Salon. The admission he received was to the *Salon d’honneur*, the Louvre’s Salon Carré, reserved for a selection of “the best works in the Salon”, as Courbet reported to his grandfather. Success in the Salon was critical to Courbet’s future. It was his only avenue to public recognition because of its significance as a social event for Paris, indeed the country as a whole. The Salon was a mass-spectacle, a feature of the Parisian social calendar that drew enormous crowds from every social class, and as Lindsay so precisely explains, the life-blood of art world presence:

attended by vast numbers of people; they were extensively discussed in the journals and in pamphlets; they formed a main theme of conversation for many weeks; they enabled a new artist to make an impact on the public and gain patrons, who thereafter would call at his studio.

**Attention-seeking strategies: getting noticed**

For one with little experience, and without the benefit of a mentor, Courbet reveals an exceptional understanding of how best to navigate his next moves in his bid to storm the Academy’s bastion. In a letter to his parents, he wrote:

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263 Lindsay, J., *Gustave Courbet and His Life and Art*, 24.
264 Ibid.
265 Ibid.
“I’ll tell you only that the painting that I have at the exhibition has been hung in the Salon d’honneur, which is very much to my benefit, for it is a place reserved for the best paintings in the Exhibition. And if, instead of a portrait, I had a more important painting, I would have received a medal, it would have been a great debut.”

Once again, Courbet reveals his intuition and his thinking at this time in another letter to his family the following year, commenting on the size of paintings in relation to the level of attention received by Salon audiences: “Small pictures don’t make a name. I must paint a large picture that will make me decisively known at my true value. I want all or nothing.” Then, speaking of M. Hesse’s encouragement to produce a large canvas, he added, “… if I could produce a picture painted like that during the next year it would win me a high rank among painters. I admit there’s some exaggeration in his words. But what’s certain is that I must make a name for myself in Paris before five years.”

Courbet had figured it out – the key to artistic success, the solution to the Salon’s impenetrability – promote yourself, advertise your strengths.

In the scheme of his advance towards Realism, *Self-Portrait with Black Dog* is self-reflexive. At one and the same time, Courbet has painted his self-portrait, located the figure in a place both symbolic and reflective of his life to date, the rugged countryside of his homeland. In Le Men’s words: “The painter proclaims his independence in this

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267 Lindsay, J., *Gustave Courbet and His Life and Art*, 28.
self-portrait by looking at the spectator from on high, while affirming his position in Franche-Comté.”268 It is for Courbet, as a man at the outset of life’s adventure, the pinnacle or centerpiece of all the self-portraits to date, because in it he explores the eternal conundrum facing all budding artists, that of the bifurcated issues to affect an honest view of one’s own self-image through your art, and at the same time appeal to public taste. In Courbet’s case this was an immense challenge in view of his declaration to succeed on his own terms. He has invested *Self-Portrait with Black Dog* (Figure 20) with aesthetic features drawn directly from his existence at that time, making it unquestionably autobiographical, and at the same time, assimilated his knowledge of pictorial and cultural traditions mastered over the past four years through his painting program. All the styles, techniques and manners trialed throughout the previous portraits and self-portraits clarify in this painting into the embryo of a new art, an art that will become his own.

The elegant and confident looking young man gazes down directly at the viewer – the audience at the Salon – with a self-satisfied and “superior gaze”.269 His pose, the English dog as companion, the fashionable dandy clothes and the accessories, are all socially ambiguous props. They are obviously not that of a rural landowner, nor that of a peasant (interestingly, a persona Courbet began cultivating as a part of his distinct personal identity when in Paris). The pipe, the wide-brimmed hat, long hair and the patterned trousers are all suggestive of the Bohemian he will become. The sketchbook alludes to the artist, and yet, the upright and conceited demeanor pervade a bourgeois mien. Sylvain nails it when he says, “Bohemian, artist, dandy, highlander: the many sides of Courbet’s personality reveal a complexity that has long been overlooked”.270 Through this composition Courbet has declared his independence with his steely gaze, affirmed his position as provincial by situating it in his homeland, and claimed his status as a skilled and schooled artist. In particular he demonstrates, as Le Men recently identified, a number of early nineteenth-century manners. I have included the full comment here because of its usefulness in explaining Courbet’s links to popular sources at the Louvre:

The chiaroscuro of the face shaded by the hat, the position of the model in the countryside evoking English art, Géricault’s *Portrait of a Man from Vendée*, Adolphe Leleux’s Brittany portraits, Nicholas-Toussaint Charlet’s soldiers (or even those of Horace Vernet). The *Self-Portrait with Black Dog*, which makes use of the physiognomic resemblance between man and dog, refers, without doubt, to the engraving of the self-portrait of William Hogarth that appeared as the frontispiece of his aesthetic treatise *The Analysis of Beauty*. Walking in nature is a

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270 Sylvain, A., Curator; Musée Fabre, Montpellier, 109.
theme of literary works from Rousseau’s *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* to the autobiography of Hector Berlioz. The genre found its full visual expression in the 1787 *Portrait of Goethe in the Roman Countryside* by Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein, evoking the excursions of poets and painters in Rome and the Roman countryside.²⁷¹

Courbet thus came to define his personal identity through the process of defining his art in relation to popular visual and literary culture. Over seven years he developed his art product by filtering all the knowledge he had learnt in the studio, through his observations at the Louvre, and his contemporaries at the Salon.

Despite the look of smug self-containment, this image, that gained for Courbet his first taste of public recognition, belies the enormity of the contradiction simultaneously addressed in the work: from the outset Courbet asserted himself and declared his position of defiance to the phalanx of contemporary institutional learning. He had rejected the Academy’s culture, and it was deeply important to him to establish himself by his own measures. However, it was critical for a young artist to receive sanction through the only available mechanism for public recognition, the Academy controlled Salon. Courbet’s deep-felt motives for creative autonomy and identity through individuation contradict his ambitions for validation, fame and income. Yet, it is by way of such a paradox that Courbet develops his strategy for new art through self-reflection within the series of portraits of himself. Because of its recognition by the Salon, *Self-Portrait with Black Dog* became for Courbet the springboard from which Realism evolved.

Linking painting style to brand development

During the period of his painting and submitting Self-Portrait with Black Dog—between 1842 and 1844—Courbet produced his two terror paintings, Man Filled with Fear and The Desperate Man, The Sculptor, The Guitar Player (or Guitarrero), Lovers in the Country, Sentiments of Youth, and The Checkers Players. Following his initial success in the Salon of 1844, he submitted five paintings the following year with only one, The Guitar Player, accepted. This was an intense phase of artistic development as well as the time in which he considered his personal identity, clarifying his unique attributes in the various poses and characters he assumed, defining the image by which he would come to be identified.

While these images are evidence of Courbet’s expression of self—the symbolic representation of his state of mind at the time—they also become publicity posters for the brand that is the artist, Gustave Courbet. In other words, the self-portraits are evidence of his building his brand identity. He was not deterred by the rejections he received at the hands of the Salon jury: in 1845 he submitted five paintings with only one (The Guitar Player) accepted, in 1846 he submitted eight paintings with only one, The Man with the Leather Belt accepted for exhibition. And then in 1847 Courbet submitted three works with all refused.

Rubin explains how, even with the market growth due to the expansion of the middle-classes and their interest in art, the exploding population of artists in Paris could not be supported during the middle decades: “The 1830s saw the beginnings of refusals at the Salon, which increased dramatically in the 1840s. Young artists, less well known or less well supported by eminent teachers, were the first to suffer poverty. Courbet’s disappointing experience was hardly unique.”

While continued Salon success eluded the young painter, Courbet had made extraordinary headway in his developing artistry. The Man With Leather Belt, The Cellist and his portrait of the Dutch art collector and dealer, H. J. van Wisselingh, portray a painter with considerable technical proficiency. The Man with Leather Belt and the portrait of Wisselingh both display Courbet’s flare with confident chiaroscuro and a pervading spirit of “sensitivity and introspection”. The Cellist along with the Man with a Leather Belt, despite abandoning the brightly coloured costumes, maintain Courbet’s hold on Romanticism, albeit a quieter sense of gravity, understandable considering the continued refusal at the hands of the Salon jury.

272 Rubin, J., Courbet, 31.
273 Ibid.
The Man with Leather Belt signals the beginning of a new phase in Courbet’s sequence of self-portraits and progression towards Realism. The coloured clothing has gone, so too has the playful theatrical approach to theme and subject matter. In its place, is a quieter forceful assertion of character, more self-reflective and considered than anything he had produced to date. In The Man with Leather Belt Courbet has painted himself as the mature artist resigned to the realisation of an independent career outside the support of a patron and the security of Salon success. Although he maintained his objective to “distance himself from official style”,274 in The Man with Leather Belt Courbet has remained within a lineage of traditional aesthetic paradigms. According to Laurence des Cars, X radiography has shown that he painted this self-portrait over the top of his copy of Titian’s Man with a Glove,275 confirming Courbet’s interest in the dark and sophisticated portraiture of the Renaissance276 277 – an aesthetic he develops, masters even, in the 1848-49 After Dinner at Ornans.

In view of the developing product, an art original in personal content and theme guided by one’s own experience, Courbet demonstrated a considerable advance in his realist project by the closing of the decade. However, he continued to defer to contemporary art world convention in obvious links to past masters like Titian, regarded at the time as “one of the crown jewels of the Louvre’s collection.”278 While The Man with Leather Belt was rejected for the Salon, it is regarded, art historically, as his most ambitious work of the period.279 The first that Courbet painted almost life-size, it concluded his autobiographical posture and commenced a new series of metaphysical genre pictures that bring the relationship between the beholder and the painting into sharp relief – a phenomenological concept of structure that became an identifying compositional element of the artist from this time.

In The Man with Leather Belt the proximity of Courbet’s image as sitter to the beholder has been shortened, until, as Faunce observes, it has collapsed.280 The table upon which the composition rests is right up against the picture’s surface, the sketchbook almost tips into our world. Courbet has demonstrated an even and dramatic

274 Ibid., 35.
275 Starting in the 1920s, historians such as André Fontainas (1927), Paul Jamot (1929), and Pierre Courtion (1931) pointed out the relationship with the Venetian school. Haavard Rostrup (1931) was the first to propose a direct link to Man with a Glove.
277 Le Men, S., Courbet, 55.
278 des Cars, L., Curator, Musée d’Orsay, Paris. 100.
279 Fried, M., Courbet’s Realism, 74.
280 Faunce, S., and Nochlin, L., Courbet Reconsidered, 43.
illuminated luster in the rendering of his hands and face, drawing our focus to his eyes that, while they gaze back, it is not at the beholder but to a place of deep thought, perhaps about the nature of being. This is a captivating image with a heightened impression of physical proximity, giving one the feeling that you could reach out and grasp his left hand.

The effect of physical proximity is pushed even further in *Self-Portrait: Man with Pipe*, c.1849. Through an assertion of the nearness of the sitter to the picture’s edge, and therefore the viewer, Courbet declares physically – almost flaunts – a relaxed self-assured confidence, not seen before, a man who is indeed very comfortable with who he is, a master painter and bohemian. With his eyes almost completely closed, and a gentle expression of contentment across his face, Courbet has painted himself smoking a pipe – a simple yet powerful gesture that underscores his demeanor of an “inner sensitivity”.281 Théophile Silvestre, the painter’s contemporary wrote, “He dreams of himself as he smokes his pipe”.282 Courbet’s project to educate himself as a painter is at this time complete. The emergence of a self-possessed man with a distinctive identity has also come about. Perhaps his choice to educate himself as a painter rather than follow a conventional program through the art schools of the Ecole du Beaux-Arts was a serendipitous element of his success, the turning point for him, away from becoming a part of the *juste milieu*. For, it is unlikely that Courbet would have had the autonomy to pursue such a private program under the persuasion of a mentor.

In his choice to depict contemporary images, experiences from the life he led rather than dramatic episodes from the lives of biblical and antique heroes, Courbet had signaled a political stance against the reigning authority of French art. Faunce links the personal subject matter to a broader issue of Courbet’s social avant-garde milieu when she states of *Man with Pipe*:

What begins as an artist’s self-portrait, the most subjective and intimate kind of image, ends by becoming a virtual summing up of the idea of the Bohemian artist in the mid-nineteenth century. . . . It is this kind of transformation of the material of the artist’s own life into paintings of broad significance that I take to be the essential character of Courbet’s painting. How he did it is a matter of continuous looking and interpretation of the work, and can never finally be summarised: that he did it is a matter of history, and enables us to grasp the importance of his work to his own generation of vanguard artists and to those immediately following.”283

Notwithstanding, this superior self-portrait among the gallery of images of himself, stands as a promotional picture of brand Courbet in much the same way a political propaganda poster operates – it communicates the development of the modern artist “the turning point between his early floundering and what he now could call a firm direction”.\textsuperscript{284}

\textsuperscript{284} Rubin, J., 	extit{Courbet}, 48.
5. POSITIONING

Stage 4. Positioning

You see I am the greatest painter working today, for I am subject to the most frequent attack.
— Gustave Courbet, 1851

This painting, surrounded in Lille by Italian and Spanish canvases, is as calm as if it had received time’s sanction. One could remove Courbet’s name; the painting of the *After Dinner at Ornans* would be regarded as the powerful work of one of these masters who, in Holland and in Spain, attempted Realism, during periods when the quest for Realism meant nothing particularly subversive.
— Jules Champfleury, 1855

Between 1848 and the end of 1850 Courbet painted four significant canvases that affirmed his position as the master of a new art. Each of the major compositions from this period, *After Dinner at Ornans*, *The Stonebreakers*, *Burial at Ornans*, and *The Peasants of Flagey Returning from the Fair (Daubs)*, challenged contemporary artistic convention, shocked Salon audiences and provoked hostile reactions from the critics, assuring him the title “champion of realism”. While the sources for the subject matter of Courbet’s compositions at this time have been established as themes from popular imagery, together these major works may be viewed as pivotal milestones in his enterprise to establish himself through an evolving style that is based upon autobiographic experience. Further, on an even deeper level, they are allegorical self-portraits in that the depictions come directly from his life. *After Dinner* is a testament to Courbet’s developed self-awareness, his psychological identity that he has come to accept and is at home with. More specifically, it marks the affirmation of Courbet’s

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positioning as the man who would cause an artistic revolution, transforming French painting. *The Stonebreakers*, *Burial* and *Peasants* depict his sociological identity, the Realist (regionalist)\(^{289}\) painter who would become the acknowledged leader\(^{290}\) of Realism among other regionalists Bonvin and Millet, to lead French art towards its future.

Though capable painters like Couture came up [in the art world], they sought only to cash in on the vogue for the large pseudo-classical fabrication. The high bourgeoisie who had triumphed with Louis-Philippe in 1830 wanted no exploration of the real world; they asked from art a false picture of the past which could be used to decorate their own existence with various glamourisings. Literature in Stendhal and Balzac had broken through such fetters; but art, granted its Salon by the king and dependent on rich patrons, was on the whole obedient to the demand for flattering portraits and the pseudo-heroic.

—Jack Lindsay, 1977\(^{291}\).

The years 1846 and 1847 were important for Courbet. Despite successive rejections by the Salon selection committee, his self-confidence was growing. Settled in a comfortable social milieu, Courbet was among other like-minded Bohemians of the world of Realist painters and writers in Paris who began to publicly air their grievances with the Salon’s jury\(^{292}\) and the direction of its choices. Not withstanding, as we have seen, it was also a difficult time for Courbet in his dealings with the Salon.

Lindsay’s colourful description above is a nimble account in its portrayal of the “influential” audience for art at whose behest Courbet and his contemporaries were compelled to defer if they were to survive as artists in the art world of mid-nineteenth century France. In a letter to his family in January 1846 Courbet wrote,

> There is nothing in the world more difficult than the practice of art, especially when nobody understands it. Women want portraits with all shadows eliminated; men want to be painted in their Sunday clothes; there is no way to combat these notions. It would be better to turn a crank mechanically than to earn a living by such daubs; at least one would not have to compromise with one’s principles.\(^{293}\)

Although Courbet’s painting had reached a level of maturity, and he was kept busy with commissions, his continued obstruction to reach a broad buying public was exasperating. In a letter to his family in March 1847 he explained: “but one must exhibit in order to

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\(^{289}\) Rubin, J., *Courbet*, 53.


\(^{291}\) Lindsay, J., *Gustave Courbet and His Life and Art*, 53-54.

\(^{292}\) Rubin, J., *Courbet*, 35.

become known, and unfortunately there is no other exhibition.”294 He continues: “In former years, when my own style was less fully developed and I still painted a little like themselves, they accepted me; but now that I have become myself I must henceforth give up hope.”295 While other young artists, recently graduated from the schools of the École des Beaux-Arts who chose to relent to economic pressure and “cash in on the vogue for the large pseudo-classical fabrication”,296 that so delighted bourgeois taste, Courbet pushed ahead with his artistic program.

The following year a major opportunity happened for him with the February Revolution of 1848. The Salon’s usual conservative jury made up of Academy members was eliminated and replaced by a number of exhibiting artists. This Salon libre was an exhibition open to everyone,297 with 5,500298 works submitted and displayed. That year the selection committee was made up of artists who were elected by exhibitors; the jury who designated awards was formed by both Government nominated and elected artists.299 Courbet showed seven paintings300 including After Dinner at Ornans and The Man with Leather Belt.301 After Dinner was awarded a second-class gold medal and the director of the Beaux-Arts, Charles Blanc, bought the painting on behalf of the government for 1,500 francs.302 Blanc intended to hang the painting in the Luxembourg, however, after under pressure from an academic faction of artists, he presented it to the museum in Lille.

**Challenging the Academy**

Courbet’s award-winning composition depicted an interior image of three men seated around a table in a kitchen, listening to a fourth man play the violin. There is no engagement between these three characters as each appears to be in his own meditative moment, perhaps reflecting on the music from the violin played by Courbet’s musician friend Alphonse Promayet, seated on the right. Viewed from behind is a childhood friend, Adolphe Marlet, who lights his pipe and is accompanied by his faithful dog sleeping soundly under his chair. On the left of the canvas is Courbet’s father, Régis, who also seems to be in a relaxed state, even sleeping. In the center is Urbain Cuénot in

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295 Ibid.
296 Lindsay, J., *Gustave Courbet and His Life and Art*, 53-54.
300 He had submitted eleven works in total; two drawings and nine paintings.
301 The other works were; *Grape-Picking at Ornans, Valley of Loue, Château of Saint-Denis, Communal Pasture at Chassagne*, also a portrait of Marc Trapadoux. Lindsay, *Gustave Courbet and His Life and Art*, 54.
302 Lindsay, J., Ibid., 55.
whose house the tableaux takes place. Across his face is the same comfortable drowsy
look we saw on Courbet as he lay at ease and relaxed in the clearing of *The Siesta* discussed in the previous chapter. This is a glimpse of a private moment shared by three ordinary men as they undertake little more than experiencing music “after a good meal copiously washed down”, as Boudailles poetically wrote.

![After Dinner at Ornans](image)

*After Dinner at Ornans* sent shockwaves through the French art world, announcing to the Salon that its traditions were on notice. Courbet was declaring his intentions for painting and marking out his territory as an art innovator. The impressive picture (195 cm x 257 cm) represented contemporary times, a private experience from his life, in an enlarged and aggrandized manner that Academic protocol guarded strictly, reserving exclusively for history painting. Courbet had defied convention that held large format compositions for idealized mythology and religious scenes. He had ripped through handed-down custom and the classical hierarchy of genres by painting a scene from the everyday life of ordinary people with the “sense of importance

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303 Upon a close examination of both images, I would argue that it is not Courbet’s own image in *The Siesta*, but rather that of his friend Urbain Cuénot. The nose and eyebrow shape in relationship to the size and height of the brow suggest Cuénot’s profile not Courbet’s.

commensurate" with the highest artistic ambition. Champfleury, whom Courbet had met the year before, wrote enthusiastically: “Courbet forces the doors of the Salon. For a long time there has not been so abrupt a success. . . . Before many years he will be one of our greatest artists.” Francis Wey recorded Delecroix’s enthusiastic outburst upon seeing After Dinner: “Have you ever seen anything like it, anything so strong, with no dependence on anyone else? There’s an innovator, a revolutionary too; he bursts out all of a sudden, without precedent; he’s an unknown.”

Courbet’s unexpected and enormous success at the Salon was momentous. In the first place, the acknowledgment confirmed for him that his idea to paint observations of provincial life on a grand, almost life-like, scale was a successful move towards his ambition of producing a large composition that would attract for him the attention he believed he justly deserved. The relative newcomer had won an important award allowing him free entry to future Salons unrestrained by the selection process. And his painting was a sensation. A real and tangible perception about Courbet had been created: a talented and capable painter, but a ruffian peasant. His positioning was being set. This was the artist who would force the bourgeoisie to look at a modern art that explored the real world rather than an idealized one of the past. In Champfleury’s words: “Yesterday, no one knew his name; today it is on everyone’s lips. It has been a long time since someone met with such instant fame.”

**Positioning in relation to art**

In advertising and marketing theory, positioning has come to mean the location in which a product or brand’s identity is situated in the minds of its audience and target market relative to competitive products. Where branding is a form of communication function that aims to emphasise and transmit the distinguishing characteristics of a product, positioning is also an exchange of identity information, but it is conveyed through relativity to the identity of competing products. The main objective of positioning is to cut through the white noise of other products in the same category to establish a moment of real psychological contact, a resonance with the intended recipient.

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305 Faunce S., *Gustave Courbet*, 58.
306 Lindsay, J., *Gustave Courbet His Life and Art*, 55.
307 Ibid., 55-56.
Positioning is a perception phenomenon that happens in the minds of an audience. It is the aggregate discernment the market has of a particular company, product, service or brand, in relation to the perceptions they have of competitors in the same category. Positioning discernment happens independently and more-or-less automatically as the product comes to the attention of its audience. It is an evolving and accumulative communicative process and the perception can be manipulated by influencing the audience’s understanding through strategic actions such as advertising, public relations, press coverage and marketing. This is where Courbet makes an interesting case example because he was pro-active and deliberate in promoting himself and his art to effect and maintain public prominence through his provocative personality and the way in which he conducted himself publicly, which was startlingly different from the his contemporaries. He therefore settled himself in an unoccupied niche – a complete break from all his peers – within the mid-nineteenth century art world. He established himself as the art innovator who would bring about change to art.

The significance of positioning is that an audience or potential buyers see a product in comparison to the posture of competitors. They assess a set of identifying features in a relative relationship to others. In this regard Courbet is exemplary. The process by which he developed his personal brand hinged on the perception that the French public had of his painting, that for them, had begun developing with Self-Portrait with Black Dog in 1844.

After Dinner at Ornans is a deceptively simple composition; three dark figures are cleverly set in a darkened, spartan kitchen background, devoid of any detail except for a checkered hunting hat. The fourth figure is centralized and is the focus of the work’s illumination. The fine detail of the still life on top of the table is sharp and almost photographic in its life-likeness. White plate upon white cloth, Courbet has rendered the empty plate as if you could reach across the foreshortened picture space and pick it up. The glass in Régis Courbet’s hand is crystal clear. Faunce makes a discerning observation on the painter’s aesthetic intuition: “Everything in the painting is realized: the stone floor, the sleeping dog, the wooden chairs and white tablecloth, the wineglasses and plates, the plaid cap casually hung on a nail above the table.”310 For the first time Courbet had brought together the various individual components of his artistry developed over the previous years, all the sources and techniques were composed, harmoniously. After Dinner at Ornans has been painted in the same style as The Man with Leather Belt;311 an even handling of bold chiaroscuro across the canvas.

310 Faunce S., Gustave Courbet, 58.
311 Boudailles, G., Gustave Courbet Painter in Protest, 39.
sheds light upon and features the faces and hands, in particular, those of Promayet on his violin.

Critics at the time observed that the organization of figures around a table was reminiscent of Caravaggio’s *The Calling of Saint Matthew*, ca. 1598, and Louis Le Nain’s *Peasant Meal*, 1642 (Figure 31). Like Le Nain, Courbet has grounded the composition with the table, using the voluminous folds of its white tablecloth draped at the corner as a structural device to draw the viewer’s gaze toward the center of the picture, Marlet and his sleeping dog. The tablecloth, full of wide soft folds, the smoking of the pipe and the playing of a violin, are particularly resonant of *The Peasant Meal*. More Le Nain than any of the Dutch masters or Italian precursors of Realism like Caravaggio, Courbet has employed a limited palette of browns, greys and light stone colours, giving the image a warm and, again, drowsy and relaxed atmosphere. And like Le Nain, as Caravaggio before him, Courbet has singled out one object by painting it a brighter shade of brown, almost red. In this case the chair in the center of the canvas upon which Marlet sits. These compositional features signaled that Courbet had related his “new” painting to acknowledged, past masters. Pollock’s theory of the decisive character of avant-gardism – the play of ‘reference, deference and difference’ – is fitting, and states that with a cultural product such as art, credit and validation as cultural capital is conferred upon a work of art if it can be acknowledged within an existing critical framework: “the particular character of the product (the difference achieved by this gambit) can be named and its relation to an already valorized context of meanings can be identified (its reference).”\(^{312}\)

Of immense significance to Courbet’s artistic program was the successful transition in *After Dinner at Ornans*, from self-portrait to group portrait.\(^{313}\) In just two years he had developed fully the expertise required to render multiple figures on a life-size scale with skilled management of dramatic compositional chiaroscuro and landscape settings. Georges Boudailles asserts that in *After Dinner at Ornans* Courbet had resolved to work on the large-scale paintings, “as though he were jealous of *The Night Watch* and

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\(^{313}\) Le Men, S., *Courbet*, 124.
wished to compete with Rembrandt”.314 Yet it assumes an even greater importance when compared to *The Man with Leather Belt*.

Between *The Man with Leather Belt* and *After Dinner at Ornans*, Courbet demonstrates a pivotal advance in the broader notions of his identity and how to articulate it in relation to his agenda for new art. In Boudaille’s words: “Treated in the same style as *The Man with Leather Belt*, *After Dinner at Ornans* marks a decisive stage in the affirmation of Courbet’s personality, not only by its subject, but also by the particular outlook expressed in the composition.”315 This we may take to be the comfortable and relaxed focus upon a mundane and commonplace event of rural life, a democratic and inclusive attitude to his selection of subject matter and theme. Courbet’s advance to the employment of the group portrait was a compositional device upon which the future of his innovation for large format painting lay. For without “moving up” from the single portraits to a “more ambitious composition”316 Courbet might never have considered, indeed had the skills to approach, *A Burial at Ornans*, or *The Painter’s Studio*.

Courbet’s timing for painting such obviously provincial subjects was opportune and had two advantageous repercussions. Firstly, it gave the work an association with the program of his “proto-Realist” friends like François Bonvin and Jean-François Millet – both successful Salon artists – and socialist thinker friends such as Proudhon317 and Champfleury. Secondly, during the 1840s the lives of ordinary people became a dominant focus of Realist literature. And under the new political regime, the “glorification of the ordinary citizen” was encouraged.318 Importantly, *After Dinner* was seen to be “the portrayal of peasants”,319 and for this reason, it was interpreted as a provocation in light of the political atmosphere choking the air within mid-nineteenth century France after 1848. To the Salon audience, mostly made up of Parisian bourgeoisie, the sturdy values and masterful execution of Courbet’s realistic figures in their sensitively rendered surroundings, were overlooked in view of his apparent breach of aesthetic decorum and deliberate vexation of their sensibilities.

The 1848 Revolution had celebrated the lower classes. Louis Napoleon’s victory in December was largely due to the votes of the industrial working class and the rural masses making up the largest voting group in France. *After Dinner at Ornans* was the depiction of hard-working provincials and, as Rubin points out, the work’s title brings

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315 Ibid.,
318 Ibid., 44.
focus to a little known home-town: “It clearly associates the artist’s self with this milieu, with its homely, modest interior infused with tacit camaraderie and unpretentious culture.” Irrespective that After Dinner at Ornans drew upon accepted historic models like gentlemen and soldiers in the taverns of past masters Hals, Vermeer and de Brey, or the Le Nains, Courbet was judged a “capable painter . . . a boor, a mere peasant, who lacks all taste and all response to the finer things in life.”

In positioning himself as a peasant and boor, Courbet understood the demands of his time. It greatly worked to Courbet’s advantage; he became famous, literally, overnight: “Yesterday no one knew his name,” wrote Champfleury. “Today his name is on everyone’s lips. Such a success story hasn’t been seen in a long time.”

**Defining positioning in relation to others**

Courbet’s prelude to his revolution for a democratic art, introduced with After Dinner at Ornans, was summarily followed up with a visual tidal wave of large-scale, class-conscious images depicting the ordinary life of rural society. The most significant characteristic of After Dinner at Ornans, and the one most commented upon, was its scale. Such subject matter was usually presented on a more modest scale like Millet’s The Gleaners. When Courbet continued with his new formula in The Stonebreakers (Daubs), A Burial at Ornans and The Peasants of Flagey (shown at the Salon of 1850-51) the public outrage firmly established Courbet’s positioning as a master painter and artistic revolutionary. Exhibited at the Salon of 1850-51, these gigantic monumental images of peasants confirmed Courbet’s self-positioning.

Following his success with After Dinner at Ornans, Courbet worked intensely throughout the next 18 months. To his advantage political turmoil delayed the 1850 Salon until late December, giving him much needed extra time to complete his paintings. Of the nine works exhibited, Self-Portrait: Man with Pipe 1849, was the only painting to receive general approval. The impressive body of work included; two large paintings, Stonebreakers, and The Peasants of Flagey Returning from the Fair (Daubs) (Figure 49), the enormous The Burial at Ornans (Figure 48), and a portrait of the dissident, Jean Journet, along with four landscapes.

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321 Thanks to Champfleury’s advocacy and political propaganda, the art of the Le Nain brothers experienced renewed interest in France and was even exhibited at the Louvre in 1848.
322 Lindsay, J., *Gustave Courbet His Life and Art*, 55.
324 83.5 x 111cm.
Analysis of Courbet’s entries to the Salon of 1850-51

Courbet’s radical approach to Realism was presented in three particularly large paintings that caused a public outcry: Stonebreakers, The Peasants of Flagey Returning from the Fair (Daubs) and A Burial at Ornans. They incited an angry response from the Salon audience and a heated storm in the press. The uproar was largely due to the blatant presentation of images clearly sourced from “popular imagery, caricature, and contemporary illustration”.325 Burial had been hung in an enormous room with three other large paintings that were reverent exaltations to the French Revolution, including Charles-Louis Müller’s, The Last Roll Call of the Victims of the Terror. The Salon audience largely made up of haute bourgeoisie and middle-class spectators, whose discriminatory taste for art was firmly fixed on the Academy’s sanctified model of the traditional, classical ideal, was irritated by what it saw. Crucial in this respect were the individuals Courbet painted rather than the genre types rendered from the imagination of “pastoral fantasy” and the clichés of neo-classicism.326 Courbet depicted real people engaged in mundane work, labouring by the side of the road or walking livestock home from the fair, or mourning at a burial gravesite. These were images thousands of miles away from the haute bourgeois of Paris and their spectacle in paved boulevards, glamorous entertainments, and silk finery, and also from Ingres’ allegory Martyrdom of Saint Symphorian, or Delacroix’s Liberty Leading the People.

325 Le Men, S., Courbet, 150.
326 Faunce, S Gustave Courbet, 60.
Instead of melodramatic compositions focused on history, or parlour-sized realism, Courbet gave them the concrete and unpretentious reality of the contemporary everyday. His subject matter was thus philosophically alien to that which the Salon audience was attuned, and his aesthetics bewildered them. Lindsay elaborates: “Especially in the early 1850s Courbet was apt to stress the rusticity of his themes by a certain naïvety of drawing and grouping.” Meyer Schapiro notes how the taste of the critics and Parisian bourgeoisie differed from that of the rural

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327 Lindsay, J., *Gustave Courbet and His Life and Art*, 68.
The developing features of Realism

In his offering Courbet portrayed no imperial luxury in antique manifestations, nor opulence in Renaissance heroes, only grimy peasants, forlorn labourers and insignificant rural bourgeois. At this delicate moment of socio-political self-consciousness, he could not have hit a more shattering chord. His images of life-size peasants and toiling workers threw salt on the open wound of the bourgeoisie’s class-conscious fear. Hostilities between peasants and rural bourgeoisie, along with continued insurrections in the countryside, established an underlying apprehension among the capital’s middle classes of imminent revolt from the provinces. Courbet’s pictures, especially Stonebreakers, offended viewers of the Salon, triggering what Lindsay calls a “correlation of the rural workers and farmers with forces that had been beaten down but not destroyed,” three years earlier. This reaction cemented Courbet’s positioning as a radical and political artist, making him the new force in French art.

To most critics Courbet’s subjects were unpardonably ugly, and his thematic pattern was viewed as a deliberate incitement with a threatening quality: “There was something about the dress, the attitude and expression of these figures in mud-spattered smocks and even tailcoats calculated to shock visitors to the salon.” Jack Lindsay summarizes the feeling:

*The Stonebreakers* was seen as a fairly direct piece of accusation and menace. In such a situation as that of December 1850, it posed the question: How long will the blind cycle of submission to exploitation go on? By painting the man and lad life-size, and thus arrogating to them the dimensions and dignity of History-Painting, Courbet stressed this question; for, in terms of the period’s

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329 Lindsay, J. *Gustave Courbet and His Life and Art*, 80, (Clarke, 287).
330 Ibid., 79.
sensibilities, he was saying that these men had as much right to consideration as
gods and the great ones of earth.332

The painting of obviously poor, wretched, and unglorified figures working at such
explicitly harsh conditions in *Stonebreakers* incited arguments and discussion at all levels
of the art community. The press found the furor surrounding Courbet an opportunity
for unrestrained satirical attack.

![Figure 50. Cham, Caricature of The Stonebreakers, Le Salon caricatural, 1851.](image)

He became famous with the first of many caricatures ridiculing him, appearing in the
print media. A cartoon of *Stonebreakers* by Cham in *Le Salon caricatural* lampoons the
feature of the painting that most irritated the audience – Courbet’s overt socialist
reference to social inequality, extreme poverty and low-paying employment experienced
by millions throughout the country. In this example, a young boy asks his father: “Why,
then, Papa, is this called socialist painting?” The bourgeois father in top hat and tails
replies: “Parbleu! Because instead of rich painting, it’s poor painting.”333

Then in a letter to Juliette, his friend Urbain Cuenot informed his sister of the
enormous attention that continued around Courbet:

Gustave is still the topic of every conversation in the artistic world. The most
contradictory rumours and the most amusing information are circulated about
him . . . There are drawing rooms in which people claim Courbet used to be
an artisan, a carpenter or a mason, who one fine day, impelled by genius,
started painting and produced masterpieces from the very first moment. In
others people assert that he is a terrible Socialist, that he is at the head of a
band of conspirators. You can tell this from his painting, they claim.334

332 Lindsay, J., *Gustave Courbet and His Life and Art*, 80.
Exacerbating the reaction to his paintings was the scale of his compositions. Courbet made his impression all the more “real” and threatening by painting his subjects close to life size. Contemporaries who were a part of what Rubin calls the “so-called Realist (or regionalist) trend,” had not considered historic scale for their scenes that celebrated rural culture and the dignity in the activities of country life. Millet’s *Going to Work*, c. 1851 is a mere 56 x 46 cm. The famous *The Gleaners*, of 1857, is 83.5 x 111 cm. However, Courbet established his Realism in the eyes of the art world with large-sized, confrontational format compositions that matched or surpassed in scale the largest neoclassical Salon paintings.

Francis Wey wrote to a Besançon friend: “Courbet’s canvases are attracting a great deal of attention; they are heavily attacked and sturdily defended. This lad has his denigrators and his enthusiastic admirers. He is none the less one of the leaders of the Salon.” Courbet even grabbed the attention of the youth. Jules Vallès, who was no more than eighteen at the time, commented on how vehemently he and his friends identified with Courbet’s paintings: “We had in our hearts respect for all that was suffering or conquered, and demanded of the new art that it should serve also in the triumph of justice and truth. This grey-toned picture, with its two men with calloused hands and sunburnt necks, was like a mirror reflecting the dull and painful life of the poor.”

The sharp division that Courbet drew between his ideas and those perpetuated by the Academy, illuminated his *positioning*. This positioning was characterised by a deep gulf between his concrete, unpretentious and visible reality, and that of his contemporaries – melodramatic compositions focused on history, or easel-painting realism. The public was comfortable with the remoteness of the “perfection of myth”, with its implied hierarchy and horizon, its “disclosure of unprecedented worlds, an opening on to other possible worlds which transcend the established limits of our actual world”. Courbet’s Realism was existential, dealing with the conditions of his existence and the individual people in it. He offended traditionalists by asserting the importance of the present rather than the past. In short, what Courbet painted was “too” real.

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335 Rubin, J., *Courbet*, 53.
Response to Courbet’s new art secures his positioning

Identity occurs when positioning is fixed in the minds of the audience, relative to competitive others.

Courbet had indicated his nonconformist inclination with *After Dinner at Ornans*. Then, his clear message of artistic liberty and difference to his contemporaries was declared with his three large paintings in the 1850-51 Salon. The art world niche Courbet claimed for himself hinged upon the innovative brand identity and the unique features he was coming to be associated with. His attitude effected perceptions of his art and the opinions people had of him on a number of levels. To a large degree, the Salon’s direction was maintained by the buying public, effectively, the middle class: it was facilitated through public discourse in the press by writers whose business it was to describe and make judgments on contemporary art as it was presented at the Salon. Favourable opinion in the press weighed heavily in the decision-making process of art purchases – particularly government ones – and success at the Salon could either make or unmake, an artist’s reputation. Courbet came to understand this power of the media and press and he understood his only hope was in leveraging from it what he could.

*Stonebreakers, A Burial at Ornans* and *The Peasants of Flagey Returning from the Fair*, hit three nerve centers of the Parisian art world with socio-political precision. Firstly, there was the sensibilities of polite society – those potential buyers whose taste needed appeasing. Then there were the Salon’s jurors whose judgment spoke for the Academy. And finally, there were his contemporaries. The perception that the public came to develop of Courbet and his art from impressions in the press became important elements in the sequential and accumulative identity linked to his positioning.

*After Dinner* attracted much attention because it was awarded a second-class gold medal, establishing a set of characteristics upon which Courbet’s personal image rested: a talented painter with sympathies of the rural working class. As an award-acknowledged artist, almost every critic mentioned the painting. However, while his name became known, not all reviews were flattering. Derision in the press – viewed by newspaper audiences as scandal – advanced Courbet’s fame. One writer asserted that, “no one could drag art into the gutter with greater technical virtuosity.” Regarding *Burial* the bourgeois critic Claude Vignon wrote, “One has never seen, and never could see, anything so frightful and so eccentric. So this picture gains its author, M. Courbet, at

least a success of shock . . . Good God, how ugly it is!341 The Stonebreakers and Peasants drew an equally acerbic response from Vignon when he said of their representation “in the most grossly possibly way whatever is grossest and most unclean.”

The diatribe response to Peasants Returning From the Fair was relentless:

P. de Chennevières remarks that Courbet has been called the Holbein of nineteenth-century art, the Messiah of Democratic Art: which ‘convulses one with laughter’. Courbet shows ‘hatred even of art’.342 Even a progressive like P. Haussard of the National, a republican-socialist paper (20 February 1851), couldn’t stomach the man with the pig and umbrella in the Return; and this was the paper that Buchon had declared would approve of the paintings.343

Discord of opinion among Courbet’s contemporaries on his new painting fuelled his notoriety. Even the living masters were divided on the nature of Realism’s provincial imagery and its ordinary citizens. As we have seen (in the previous chapter) Delacroix, one of the Salon’s favourite artists, was excitedly supportive in his remarks upon viewing After Dinner. However Ingres, the Neoclassical guardian of academic orthodoxy, had quite a different view of Courbet’s new compositions:

How does it come about, that nature herself ruins her finest creations? She has endowed this young man with the rarest gifts. Born with qualities that so many others so rarely acquire, he possesses them full-grown at his first brush-stroke. This prelude throws out with a sort of bravado a work that’s masterly in the most difficult aspects; the rest, which is art, totally evades him. He has given nothing of himself and he has received everything. What lost values! what sacrificed gifts!” He finishes his tirade, “This new revolutionary will be a dangerous example.344

Courbet had made a sensation. Almost all the critics mentioned After Dinner at Ornans. While some reviews proclaimed him as a true talent, many castigated him. From one:

This lifesize interior, these family-portraits in the guise of a colossal genre-picture, are a strange novelty; all that has never been done before, but therein lies precisely the singular merit of M. Courbet and the bold stroke of his rude and naïve talent.345

341 Vignon, C., Salon de 1850-1 (1851); Bull., ix, 9f; critiques: Georges Rait, 87f. Cited in Lindsay, J., Gustave Courbet His Life and Art, 77.
342 Lettre de l’art français; Rait, 86. L. Reau, of the Institute, in Les Arts plastiques . . . . Cited in Lindsay, J., Gustave Courbet His Life and Art, 77.
343 Lindsay, J., Gustave Courbet His Life and Art, 76.
344 Ibid., 56.
345 Ibid., 55.
His painting skills were recognized, but the threatening nature of his down-to-earth subject matter overwhelmed any positive criticism. Another critic’s appraisal is equally scathing:

The technical cleverness in the After dinner is at least equaled by the absence of taste, the lack of distinction, and that’s to make a by no means small charge. One could not degrade [écailler] art with more technical ability, be more of a painter and less of an artist.346

Courbet knew that whether derogatory or complimentary, to be the topic of conversation in the influential circles of Paris was all that mattered. Any public attention strengthened his identity and promoted his art. More importantly, the derogatory nature of much of the criticism attributed the failures of his art to his personality. Hence, Courbet’s personal identity became linked directly with that of Realism, an artistic terminology he came to appropriate as his own.

It was clear from the masterful painting skills executed since Self-Portrait: Man with Pipe that Courbet could have become a successful painter within the official style of the French School, should he have so chosen. However he proceeded otherwise. Perhaps, when controversy began to follow him from the time of After Dinner, Courbet knowingly chose to continue rural working-class subject matter to leverage the “style à la the Le Nain brothers”.347 It was a fine example of political and social opportunism for the artist to embody “provincial pictorial naïvete”.348

Courbet’s response to biographer Compt. H. Ideville’s question about his motivation for depicting rural labour and misery in Stonebreakers, validates this idea. Ideville, who was also a friend of Courbet, asked, “Did you mean to make a social protest out of those two men bent under the inexorable compulsion of toil?” “I see in them, on the contrary, a poem of gentle resignation, and they inspire in me a feeling of pity.” To which Courbet replied, “But that pity springs from injustice, and that is how I stirred up, not deliberately, but simply by painting what I saw, what they call the social question”.349

Courbet would have realised that his challenging ideology, presented with such bravado in scale and theme, to an audience of conservative art and politics could not pass unnoticed. Indeed he seemed to deliberately fan the flames. According to Gombrich, he “wanted his pictures to be a protest against the accepted conventions”

346 Lindsay, J., Gustave Courbet His Life and Art, 55.
347 Rubin, J., Courbet, 44.
348 Ibid.,
349 Lindsay, J., Gustave Courbet and His Life and Art, 60.
and to “shock the bourgeois out of his complacency”. In a letter to Francis Wey Courbet proclaimed his deliberately provocative agenda: “Yes, art must be vulgarised! For too long the painters, my contemporaries, have been producing art according to preconceptions and stereotypes.”

Positioning is defining who you are, declaring by way of gesture, relative to the announcements of others. Courbet clearly communicated his new direction for French painting at the Salon of 1849, consolidating it at the 1850-51 Salon. The process he used to create his identity in the minds of the exhibition’s audience was aggressive in its sophisticated execution. By presenting images of workers breaking stones beside a country road, provincial bourgeois at the cemetery, and peasants returning from a fair, he publicly announced his opposition to the Salon and the delicate sensibilities of its audience. Through a simple artistic gesture – two large oxen and a pig tied at the leg, for example – Courbet indicated his belief that rural animals had the same rightful place in art as any pure-bred stallion or hound, over-throwing the aesthetic value system of the past two and a half centuries. Courbet had found his personal and stylistic identity through representing the world in which he lived, filtered through his socialist inclination. According to Proudhon,

Others before Courbet have attempted socialist painting and have not succeeded. That was because the wish was not enough; one had to be an artist. . . . The Stone-Breakers is a satire on our industrial civilization, which continually invents wonderful machines to perform all kinds of labour . . . yet is unable to liberate man from the most backbreaking toil.

In the convergence of his socialism and art lay Courbet’s positioning, the role of the first avant-garde artist: “The instigator of an unfamiliar art whose innovative nature could be measured by the indignation it aroused.” In Rubin’s words, “there can be no doubt that his self-positioning was politically opportune”. des Cars develops this idea further, “Supremely confident of his talent, Courbet engineered his entry into the history of French painting, taking it by storm in a head-on assault”. The critic François Sabatier-Ungher wrote drolly of his arrival to center-stage at the time: “M. Courbet has made a place for himself in the current French School in the manner of a

351 Boudailles, G., Gustave Courbet Painter in Protest, 42.
352 Lindsay, J., Gustave Courbet and His Life and Art, 59.
353 Le Men, S., 2008, Courbet, 120.
354 Ibid.
cannon ball which lodges itself in a wall.”356 Courbet was “now full of himself as the savior of both art and society”.357 The caricaturists of the Second Empire found in him “not merely an easy subject but a theme which filled their bourgeois readers with satisfaction”.358 The scandal surrounding the Salon of 1850-51 had secured his positioning as a contemporary artist of clout.

357 Rubin, J. Courbet, 132.
358 Ibid., 68.
6. THE LAUNCH

Stage 5. The Launch

![Chronology of Brand Architecture Process](image)

Figure 51. The launch follows identifying a product or brand’s positioning in relation to competitors. Courbet’s launch was valued-added because its timing coincided with the State’s official art show in the Universal Exposition 1855. He enhanced the political tone of his art, strengthening its links as a subversive force to both himself and Realism by holding an event such as his one-man show Le Réalisme.

Shout loud and march straight ahead.
—Courbet’s Grandfather, Oudot, prior to 1848.\(^{359}\)

The cliché ‘larger than life’ was tailor-made for Courbet. Big, boisterous, and boorish, not because he knew no better but because he had a huckster’s sense of publicity, Courbet had entered the Parisian art scene the way a fighting bull enters an arena – ready to attack anything that moves.

—Beth Archer Brombert, 1996. \(^{360}\)

In the modern world of business, it is useless to be a creative original thinker unless you can also sell what you create. Management cannot be expected to recognise a good idea unless it is presented to them by a good salesman.

—David M. Ogilvy. \(^{361}\)

In June 1855 Gustave Courbet mounted an exhibition of his paintings in a private gallery he built in Paris. By setting up a one-man show at this particular time he took his program for Realism to a vast international audience drawn to Paris for the Universal Exposition, and in one strategic publicity move launched Realism, and himself, to the world and to the canons of art history.

In this account Courbet’s one-man exhibition is viewed as a ‘spectacle’ event, and tactical endeavour that was effectively a month-long advertisement for his new art, Realism and brand Courbet.

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Oh sea! Your voice is tremendous, but it will never succeed in drowning out the voice of Fame as it shouts my name to the whole world.

—Gustave Courbet, 1854.

In 1854 Courbet painted a small work for Alfred Bruyas called, *The Sea at Palavas*, while staying at Languedoc on the Mediterranean coast. “The horizonless sea” he wrote to his parents – “how odd it is for a mountain dweller.” Numerous accounts acknowledge this painting’s debt to romanticism, in which the artist typically depicts the human onlooker dwarfed by the immensity and power of nature. Michel Hiliare, for example, writes: “this time the silhouette, perched on a rock, lets itself be submerged by the forces of nature.” However, the painting can also be interpreted as an assertion of Courbet’s belief in his growing pre-eminence and the strength of his identity, his brand. Indeed, critics have also noted that he has depicted himself greeting the sea as an equal. Le Men writes, “the small figure silhouetted against the light sticking out its chest and greeting Nature with a sweeping, melodramatic gesture.” She suggests that this “figure of a man seen from behind, looking out over the expanse of the natural world, but also dominating it,” is an allegory of the Bruyas–Courbet “Solution.” And in this way, to consider the figure in “urbanite” dress as Bruyas, rather than Courbet, Hiliare’s theory

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366 Le Men, S. *Courbet*, 305.
367 Ibid.,
that this is a double portrait, seems likely. Hiliare views the painting as a celebration of “the independence and optimism of the creator in the face of the infinite possibilities of the visible world, and the visionary and unfailing commitment of his main patron”.\textsuperscript{369} Indeed, a logical corollary then, is that this painting is a promotional poster of their relationship, a private gesture between artist and patron that Courbet would more fully realise in his great work, \textit{The Meeting}.

According to Rubin, a biographer known to Courbet affirmed that the small figure, none other than the artist himself, calls out to the great expanse of water: “Oh Sea! Your voice is formidable, but it will never drown out the voice of fame as it proclaims my name to the entire world!”\textsuperscript{370} Even if apocryphal, \textit{The Sea at Palavas} speaks of Courbet’s sense of self-confidence and the enormous ambition that he and Bruyas both shared through their belief in the redeeming and revolutionary purpose of art. Courbet was self-aware and confident of his place in French art. His next step would be to elaborate that role in much more explicit detail.

\textbf{Storming the French art world}

In 1855 Gustave Courbet mounted a one-man exhibition in a private gallery he built in Paris funded by his friend and patron Alfred Bruyas. The date, June 1855, was significant for it coincided with the State’s Exposition Universal, a cultural event of world-significance with the vast international audience it attracted. The show was an independent presentation of forty of Courbet’s Realist paintings, a defiant act against the art world establishment and a first move towards an artistic extremism that came to be associated with avant-garde culture. In one strategic promotional move, Courbet effectively \textit{launched} his program for Realism and himself as master artist, to the world. My interest in Courbet is that while the one-man exhibition was not entirely unique at the time – though it was extremely rare\textsuperscript{371} – the circumstances surrounding its conception make it a tactical endeavour in response to the restrictive nature of the institutional art world of Paris, in particular the State’s offer of conditional participation in their international art extravaganza planned for the 1855 Exposition. In this context \textit{Le Réalisme} was a brilliant advertising exercise, a publicity intervention in the manner of Hans Haacke even, aimed at exploiting the political situation to the fullest – a move never before accomplished by an artist acting alone. While the term \textit{realist} was initially

\textsuperscript{369} Ibid., 272.
\textsuperscript{370} Museum of Fine Art, \textit{Gustave Courbet 1819-1877}, 19.
\textsuperscript{371} Faunce and Nochlin state that Courbet’s Pavillon du realism was “unprecedented.” Faunce, S., and Nochlin, L., 1988, \textit{Courbet Reconsidered}, 9.
given to Courbet as a disparaging label by critics in response to his 1850-51 Salon entries and according to Faunce and Nochlin it was loaded with its own social and political history of the seventeenth-century “battle between the Ancients and the Moderns,” the political climate at the time gave his paintings a menacing quality and therefore threatening perception in the capital. Indeed, Rubin questions Courbet’s letters to newspapers at this time in defense of his ‘socialist’ leanings that read more like publicity statements dressed up as political declarations of claim, suggesting their ulterior aim was “to get his name in the paper and further personalise his artistic profile”. All the political discourse and rancor was tantalising material for the satirical sense of humour of the caricaturists.

As he discovered, political regimes often restrict artistic freedom . . . and in his case, political interpretations had defined his position as an artist. Courbet had no qualms about exploiting politics to promote his artistic claims.

Timing: the critical moment to launch Realism

In advertising, a product is launched after its positioning has been identified. It is the final stage in the sequential chain of branding logic that forms the focus of this section of my dissertation, and concerns the overall theme of the interrelationship between advertising and art. Conventionally, the launch of a product brand is the conclusion in the emergence or bringing of a new product to its anticipated audience. In marketing theory, the prospective customer group is called the target audience. In the lexicon of marketing they are the consumers. The strategy behind the product launch is twofold: the sponsoring company or individual is able to assess market interest from a potential audience for a new product, identifying its competitive stance and establishing its positioning. And as a pre-advertised event it is potentially newsworthy. The logic in executing a launch stems from its ability to interest the media and therefore the likelihood of engaging an impartial public’s interest. One of the conditions of reliance upon the media for dissemination of a new product or brand is that the product’s sponsor is subject to the writer’s ‘limited’ understanding and judgment of the product and its features, and therefore public response will be guided by the perceptions of critics or the literary specialist’s report. That is unless — and this is where Courbet makes

374 Rubin, J., Courbet, 100.
for such an interesting study – the producer has an influential hand in the perception and therefore the opinions of those writing for newspapers. In some situations, and this was the case with Courbet, he directly affected public opinion through the innovative nature of his new painting that so greatly antagonised their sensibilities. Courbet was very active in describing and articulating the philosophical framework of his Realism, which he did through his manifesto, *Le Réalisme*, sold at the exhibition and reproduced countless times since. From the beginning of his public life as caricatured in the press in 1851, Courbet had quickly realised the causality between his painting’s themes and the “shock” value of the Salon’s audience, and how that translated into invaluable public and media attention.

For Courbet, the critical moment to initiate his launch of Realism arose because of a number of interrelated circumstances that prevented him from being included, on his terms, in the State’s preeminent art exhibition considered by Louis Napoleon to be a majestic cornerstone of the Universal Exposition. In the first place, Courbet had risen to Parisian art world fame at the 1850-51 Salon, confirming his position as a revolutionary artist of some substance. Through *Stonebreakers*, *A Burial at Ornans* and *The Peasants of Flagey Returning from the Fair (Danbos)*, he clearly demonstrated both his masterly painting expertise and his revolutionary intentions. This was fodder for the press – titillating coverage for readers who enjoyed the entertaining aspect of the artist’s public controversy. However, ironically, Courbet’s art transcended such disparaging attention. By 1853 he was talked about not only throughout the art world of Paris, but outside of its social environment.

The second circumstance affecting the timing for *Le Réalisme* was in the restrictive nature of the Academy’s artistic conservatism and its historic opposition to any connection between commerce and art. Related to this restraint was the invidious proposition that Count Nieuwerkerke offered Courbet towards the end of 1854 in the form of a commission for the forthcoming French section of the arts exhibition for the Universal Exposition. The Chief of the Beaux-Arts Administration of the government put it to Courbet that he was to “soften his radicalism” and in accordance with custom, submit preliminary sketches for approval. Not surprisingly, Courbet found this request intolerable as he had been appointed *hors de judgment* with the second-class gold medal won at the Salon of 1849 with *After Dinner at Ornans*, which meant he was free to exhibit in the Salon without submission. Additionally, Courbet’s sense of self-

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376 According to Mack, the art for the French section of the Exposition Universelle was selected by a jury of thirty members and presided over by Nieuwerkerke. 133.
377 Lindsay, J., *Gustave Courbet His Life and Art*, 104.
confidence had experienced a great burst of exuberance with the empowerment that accompanied his new relationship with Alfred Bruyas, whom he had met during the 1853 Salon, becoming his patron and most loyal supporter.378

Courbet’s exhibition constitutes a launch because he viewed *Le Réalisme* as “the manifestation of freedom”379 from Academic control – a distinct proposition and commercial approach – never dared before, and so never before experienced. It was also Courbet’s way of “ensuring the independence of art”.380 a model of representation yet to be ratified by the next avant-garde generation. Additionally, in advertising logic it was a strategic marketing gambit to assert not only “his” Realism, but also his public image as the champion of artistic Realism, a badge he coveted for himself, and in so doing, empowered both as brands. Courbet’s identity and the perception of Realism were substantiated through the lampooning of their definitive characteristics, subject matter that the press came to find irresistible.

From a financial viewpoint *Le Réalisme* failed to recover the 40,000 francs for construction expenses underwritten by Bruyas. However, the spectacle nature of such an event and the paintings themselves made Courbet a celebrity: “Courbet’s name was on everyone’s lips. He was a favourite subject for chansonniers (cabaret artists) like Gustave Mathieu who parodied the artist’s personal gestures and narcissism.”381 His private affairs, opinions and failings became fodder for the curiosity of a public eager to read gossip. Gossip was a fast-growth industry emerging commensurately with the development of newspapers and journals (not at all dissimilar to the tabloids today).

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380 Ibid.,
Some newspapers even had special art supplements to cover the Salon reports. Courbet became a major public figure as well as an art master who continued to shock the Sunday strollers of the Salon for most of his career. Caricaturists of the Second Empire (1852-70) found in him “not merely an easy subject but also a theme” – in the same way Michael Jackson became the focus of public interest in the 1980s and 90s, and Andy Warhol during the 1960s and 70s. This culture of celebrity first emerged in the nineteenth century with the development of mass media and an accompanying tabloid public. Gerstle Mack writes of the French public’s interest in Courbet,

Almost overnight he found himself famous, or at least notorious. Thenceforth his work held the attention of critics, who wrote innumerable articles, some praising him to the skies, more condemning him to the nethermost reaches of the artistic inferno, but for the most part striking some note of modified commendation or disparagement between the two extremes. The rest of his life was passed in a glare of publicity, which even when unfavourable, gratified his vanity. In the press an extraordinary amount of space was devoted to him and to his work; the most celebrated caricaturists of the day – Cham, Nadar, André Gill, Daumier, and many others – were kept busy drawing clever and often malicious travesties of his pictures, his physiognomy, and his more conspicuous mannerisms; he was gossiped about in Parisian salons, quarreled over on café terraces, burlesqued on the stage.

*Le Réalisme* (its full title, *Le Réalisme, G. Courbet*) was an extraordinary effort by one artist to bring his art to the public at a time when newspapers and other forms of mass media were in their infancy and little else posed as an option for raising awareness. The existing state-run approach to the public representation of fine art and its patronage had largely rejected Courbet, therefore cutting him off from access to a buying audience. Until he met Alfred Bruyas at the Salon of 1853, Courbet’s prospects for the grand plan he had for himself and his new art had little chance to be fully realised. His objective in 1855 was to intervene in the government-controlled structure that linked artists with the public, collectors, and the media. In Courbet’s mind the Pavilion of Realism was to be the “great burial” of official art. He drew inspiration for his pavilion from the circus, which at the time was fast becoming an international form of entertainment. In a letter to Bruyas where the artist outlined his plan, he enthusiastically describes his revolutionary intentions for French painting:

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You have to admit that the role of gravedigger is a fine role, and that sweeping the earth clean of all that rubbishy jumble is not without its charms. Forty thousand francs, it is a dream!

At this point we have to rent a site from the city of Paris, opposite their big exhibition. I can see it here already: an enormous wooden tent with a single column in the middle, walls made of wooden frames covered with painted canvas, all mounted on a platform. . .386

**Courbet’s exhibition as an advertisement**

In this analysis of Courbet’s one-man exhibition it is not my aim to review the paintings in a conventional art historical manner. Rather, the focus is on the exhibition itself as *spectacle* and as an *event* to launch brand Courbet. In this scenario we view the artist and his work from a value system outside art historiography’s traditional formula. From the viewpoint of advertising and interconnected branding logic, I will examine Courbet’s independent exhibition of new art as a successful manoeuvre in launching his career and establishing Realism.

Implicit in Courbet’s idea for a one-man exhibition was an understanding of the meaning of his individuation. I believe Courbet became aware of the power of publicity between 1851, when he first held the focus of caricaturists, and 1854, when he conceived of the idea to hold an independent retrospective, the “solution”, as he came to call it.387 This solution had three aspects:

1. That an artist could develop an identity, which had a life force independent of Salon auspices. This was inherent in his claim to Nieuwerkerke to “liberate” himself from the “traditional art” he had studied.

2. That this identity was an expression of his “personality” to be expressed and represented “in an original way.”

3. That maintaining characteristics of his identity through his painting builds and strengthens that identity, giving his work an authentic and contemporaneous quality.

Courbet understood that with each painting he could further embed himself and the philosophy of his Realism in the art world and the public’s mind. His art became his advertising communications over one hundred years before David Ogilvy would declare: “Every advertisement must be considered as a contribution to the complex symbol which is the brand image – as part of the long term investment in the reputation

386 Chu, *Letters of Gustave Courbet*, letter 54-1, to Alfred Bruyas [Ornans, January 1854], 120.
of the brand."³⁸⁸ Significantly, the launch of Realism also introduced a new type of artist, one who completely embraced the emerging politico-economic system and was inseparably linked to market capitalism and the bourgeois taste upon which it would henceforth depend for its survival. In Courbet’s private exhibition was the battle of the brands: the great tradition of the academy and all it stood for, versus Courbet, Realism and the individualism of the artist, in a word, Modernism.

The launch of an art brand

Within the sequential signifying chain of the branding process, the launch is the last stage when something new is brought before a market. Courbet’s originality was to present Realism as a product – a new kind of art with a new set of defining characteristics (thematically and formally) together with a written statement, the manifesto that explained how Realism was different from the art of his contemporaries. Together, these components constitute the launch of ‘the artist as a brand’. Aaker and Beil explain the fluid interconnection between producer, product, audience: “The image of a brand has three contributing sub-images: (a) the image of the provider of the product/service, or corporate image; (b) the image of the user; and (c) the image of the product/service itself.”³⁸⁹ The manner of execution was analogous to the launch of any other commodity or product at the time, utilising principal channels of communication, relying heavily on the power of the critic-journalist’s response to transmit and inadvertently further publicise both his own personal identity and that of Realism through their response to his “scandalous” compositions. We may even view Courbet’s manifesto as a kind of informational propaganda “press release” that ultimately aided dissemination of Courbet’s brand of Realism.

Conventionally, the product launch is the conclusion in the emergence of a new commodity or brand, the moment when an audience is exposed to something new for the first time. The launch initiates the information dissemination process that communicates the defining features and characteristics of the product. Key information to be broadcast is focused on the brand’s uniqueness. Often companies with a new product will introduce it at a function with an attention-seeking component – a publicity stunt – to maximise public attention and generate increased interest from a broad-based audience, from whom it is hoped to grow custom and loyalty. If the stunt nature of the launch is sufficiently newsworthy to draw attention

from the media, the producer’s advertising expenses can be heavily subsidised. Due to Courbet’s wily entrepreneurial spirit and a growing desire to be autonomous from the French art system, stirred up by Nieuwerkerk’s conditional proposition, he devised a most poetic and newsworthy ploy in mounting his own independent show simultaneously with the state’s official exhibition. It was not by chance that he decided to launch Realism to the art world at that particular time and place – June 1855 during the Universal Exposition, at 7 Avenue Montaigne,390 – directly opposite the official State exhibition site. Courbet identified a controversial opportunity and pounced on it. He exploited any publicity prospects that presented themselves by leveraging the press’s coverage of the critics’ responses.

Tomorrow, the Salon will have no other character and no other aim but that of an art market: The Salon will no longer exist.

—Marcus Vachon, critic, 1881.

Zola, for example, recounted all the drawbacks of state control of the art education and exhibition system, concluding: “This is what makes the most independent talented artists remain servile, bowing and scraping before functionaries.”391 392

Courbet’s generation had to construct their identities through the perceptions of various Salon stakeholders. This was because the Salon was the exclusive publicity platform upon which an artist could receive attention and establish a reputation. In economic theory, this is called a monopoly. And since Academicians controlled the Salon’s jury, they also controlled this monopoly.

Like most monopolies, the Academy was self-serving. It maintained awards and commissions within its closed ranks. Its objective over the previous one hundred years had been to eliminate the State’s annual Salon altogether, replacing it with a long-interval, elite exhibition limited to Academicians only.393 To the Academy’s professors the annual Salon was no better than a marketplace. In the words of conservative critic E.-J. Delécluze:

It must be acknowledged that the exhibitions in the Louvre, created to serve the interests of those who make painting into a trade, have contributed much more powerfully to diminish the importance of this art. Since their institution, the Salons of the Louvre have, year by year, assumed the character of a bazaar at which each

390 Mack, G., 1951, Gustave Courbet, 134.
In 1849, the year that Courbet experienced his first real success at the Salon with *Self-Portrait with Black Dog*, there were twenty medals of three grades and one special medal scheduled for presentation. Cash prizes accompanying the medals were fairly substantial, at least for an emerging artist such as Courbet. In 1853 for example, “250 francs were given with third, 500 francs with second, and 1500 francs with first-class medals, plus 4,000 francs with the single Medal of Honour instituted in that year”. To an emerging artist, 4,000 francs was indeed a financial windfall especially as it was accompanied by public attention and possibly a State purchase or commission. For well-known painters however, a medal win was primarily beneficial for publicity purposes only, as the money attached to awards was, for most, of minor consideration. As an example, Jean-Louis-Earnest Meissonier was receiving prices as high as 70,000 francs for his paintings at the time. An esteemed Academician, he was regarded as a leading French Classicist painter famous for his military depictions of Napoleon and his armies. More important than the prize money, was fame. However, it was available to the very few of distinction, and only through the Academy’s bureaucratic aesthetic protocols.

While the Academicians had effective control of the monopoly enjoyed by the Salon system, the critics did offer some competitive opportunities—they were the sole form of publicity open to artists. However, they tended to reinforce the Academy. Most critics during the first half of the century were classically trained artists themselves, turned writers. Thus, they tended to legitimise the Academy’s values, and therefore effectively acted as publicists of the Academy and Salon through their critical descriptions of art works, reviews of prize and medal winners, and announcements of government appropriations. Interest from newspaper and journal critics was generally limited to prize recipients. Award and medal winners were possibly the only individuals to have gained any public relations benefit from

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394 Ibid.,18.
396 Ibid., 70.
397 In this capacity I refer to publicity as the function to attract public attention through available media.
398 See White and White, *Canvases and Careers: for a break down of critics other jobs*, 96.
399 Critics were, until the arrival of gazettes ushered in the professional journalist, professional men-of-letters (novelists and/or essayists), artists, historians, political scientists, and philosophers. Ibid.
exhibiting at the Salon as it was the sole avenue by which public or collector attention could come their way.⁴⁰⁰

Courbet’s genius was to use the critics to his advantage. Through their responses to his paintings in the Salon, they unintentionally became communicative channels broadcasting information about him to a wider audience he had no hope of reaching by himself. Of *Burial*, the renowned critic E.-J. Delécluze wrote: “this work embodies qualities that are too solid, and certain parts are too well painted, for one to be able to believe in the savagery and ignorance that are affected by this artist.”⁴⁰¹ Another commentator remarked of *Stonebreakers*: “the painter had proved that if you want to affect public opinion, you had to seize it by the throat.”⁴⁰² In general the critics believed that he was a valuable talent wasted on painting “ugly mugs”.⁴⁰³ He was accused of “ignoring the traditional code of the ideal, nobility of feeling, charm and grandeur”⁴⁰⁴ in favour of painting the “ugly” and the ordinary. The greatest publicity came less from considered reviews and more from hostile ones, especially those caricatures making him the butt of ridicule. The considerable amount of ink spent on the humorous lampooning of his character and his art advertised his reputation as a provocative artist, adding to the power of his public perception. In effect, Theophile Gautier’s ramblings of disgust created free publicity that aided and abetted Courbet’s brand awareness in the art world and that of his art in the broader metropolitan audience—a strategy that would be repeated by his avant-garde followers. In this way Courbet also engaged the

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⁴⁰⁰ An interesting aside here is Mainardi’s discussion on conditions of the eighteenth-century Salon, when she notes the minister of the interior in 1796, Bénézech, and his innovation to list artists’ addresses in exhibition catalogues so that private patrons could easily locate an artist whose work they sought to commission. Mainardi, P., 1993, *The End of the Salon: Art and the State in the Early Third Republic*, 26.


lower social and economic classes, who had increasingly become interested in serious art throughout the nineteenth century.

Reputation

The English Oxford Dictionary defines reputation as: “1. The condition or fact of being highly regarded or esteemed; distinction, respect, fame. Later also, a person of note or distinction. 2. The general opinion or estimate of a person’s character, behavior etc.; the relative esteem in which a person or thing is held. 3. The honour, credit, or good name of a person or thing. 4. The fame, credit, or notoriety of a being, doing or possessing something.”

According to Money and Hillenbrand, reputation is a concept held in the minds of stakeholders. It is the summation of a range of complex ideas about a person or thing. In business for example, a corporate reputation is a perceptual representation of a company’s past actions and future prospects that describe the firm’s overall appeal to all of its key constituents when compared with other leading rivals. This also includes an attitudinal construct in terms of a firm’s appeal.

If reputation is what an individual or object is known by, a brand is how that individual or product, knowingly defines itself by way of a self-conscious set of descriptors. A brand emerges when these collective understandings become firmly established. Establishment occurs through public discourse by critics, individuals, other artists, and collectors. Holt asserts that what makes a brand powerful is “the collective nature of these perceptions; when the stories become conventional and so are continually reinforced because they are treated as truths in everyday interactions”.

Reputation, like branding, is a mechanism of legitimation and an anchor point of value in both an economic and cultural currency sense. It is an intangible component of an individual’s identity, and in the context of an artist, it is part of the exchange-value dynamic, a key determinant of economic success. In Courbet’s case, his reputation as an antagonistic and revolutionary painter became a self-fulfilling feature, as it shifted from a perceptual construct into a clear-cut brand attribute that he nurtured through his behaviour throughout the decade of the 1850s.

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407 Ibid.
409 In 1846 Courbet met J. van Wisselingh, an art dealer from Amsterdam when he came to his studio to buy paintings. He commissioned a portrait, the famous Portrait of H.J van Wisselingh, and bout two other pictures. He then came to introduce Courbet to other collectors, sparking a long and successful
People’s experiences with reputations are complex matters that are constantly in motion (experiences accumulate and enable views to be updated). “People routinely overlay the public construal of the brand with their own personalized stories, images, and other associations.”410 This is how a collector comes to view an artist he is interested in buying: he considers the available information about the artist and his art (opinions of critics, reviews, awards, past sales, and other current interested collectors) and then overlays his own subjective thoughts and opinions. As an aside, this is analogous to brand authors discussed in the earlier section, and therefore, we may in this case assume the reputation to be the same as brand. When the views about an artist’s characteristics are a collective opinion, they denote what White and White, and Mainardi, refer to as “reputation”, and in this context, connote a brand.

The Academicians fought a losing rear-guard action against the commercialisation of the Salon, as it had long been the location that policed the artist’s reputation. Further, once the Salon became, in 1791, open to all artists (rather than just Academicians) French or foreign, it effectively opened art to the market. Its large, annual exhibitions were associated with “pictures to sell” – art as commodity, rather than images with a powerful and ennobling spirit; and encouraged small easel paintings, “hastily produced for a growing bourgeois market”.411 Thus, the frequency of exhibitions became an important issue, particularly to conservatives who believed frequent salons (annual or every two years) endangered the standards of the French school. Academicians like Meissenier, along with conservative factions, constantly complained of the deterioration in the quality of art, and so lobbied State administrators to return the Salon to “pictures to see”; small, infrequent exhibitions with a “severe”

relationship with dealers, artists and collectors in Holland where the painter became famous. See Lindsay (1973) J., Gustave Courbet and His Life and Art, 28-29.


choice of paintings of unquestioned value, limited to master artists and Academicians only. Ingres, one of the spokespersons for the conservatives, argued that the Salon was not a commercial location, picture shop or bazaar with a mandate to promote art sales and the reputations of newly emerging artists. Rather, its purpose was to continue art’s classical function to educate as espoused by the Academy and implicit in history painting. Hence there was constant tension between the Academicians using their control of the Salon jury to force artists to submit annually to standards and conditions of the French school, and the possibility of gaining access to publicity and opportunity for building a reputation and brand. In this respect, Courbet’s “publicity stunt” was the culmination of a long battle between the traditions of the ancients and the new economy of the moderns.

**Le Réalisme as a prophetic new system of art presentation**

*Le Réalisme* launched a modern system for the promotion of new art that utilised communicative resources like the media (which meant only the press at this time), the exhibition system, the nurturing of relationships with private collectors and critics, and antagonising the tastes of the middle-classes – to influence the economic value of his art. In a spirit of entrepreneurship Courbet brought to fruition an alternative economic structure for the display and consumption of art. He prefigured the private dealer-critic system and its methods of promotion and publicity, generally credited to the Impressionist exhibitions mounted by Paul Durand-Ruel. Brombert comments on Courbet’s marketing legacy:

> There is no question that his oversize presence was seen and felt by all who followed him. Manet had been indelibly impressed by Courbet’s sublime arrogance in setting up his own one-man show of forty paintings because two of his greatest works, *Burial at Ornans* and *The Painter’s Studio*, out of thirteen submitted, had been rejected for the 1855 exhibition. Resorting to the same tactic in 1867, but without Courbet’s bluster, Manet would don Courbet’s mantle as the leader of the next avant-garde.

Courbet’s rebellion expressed through the launch was an epochal endpoint of a new system. He was a revolutionary figure, the first of a new type of artist. A new kind of self-motivated, entrepreneurial producer of art emerged in 1855, one who fearlessly experimented with new aesthetic forms (production), one who engaged new forms of exhibition (display), one who embraced the new forms of review in the boom of

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412 Ibid., 17-19.
413 Ibid
France’s dominance in language and criteria of art journalism\textsuperscript{415} (relationship with critics), and one who directly cultivated relationships with private buyers and collectors (entrepreneurs) in order to take responsibility for his own destiny. His economic and career security was no longer regulated through a formal state-controlled structure that he played no part in controlling.

The Salon could not, by its own classical and conservative values, validate the new and innovative. Therefore, Courbet had no choice but to adopt new and innovative means if he was to appeal directly to the critics. This is because the critics, themselves servants of the Academy, would only notice the new, even if it was to ridicule it. Thus the constraints of the Salon system necessitated Courbet to launch his art to the world as a revolutionary force.

The critic Marcus Vachon observed in 1881, “Tomorrow, the Salon will have no other character and no other aim but that of an art market: The Salon will no longer exist.” The reasons for the inevitable breakdown of the Salon were to do with shifting social patterns of patronage that the Salon system could not cope with. Courbet’s mastermind was to tie his banner to these developing changes that, in one word, can be called modernity. Against the restrictive policy of the École to control the reputations of artists and discourage open art marketing, Courbet developed his own tactics, empowering himself by opening direct contact with his audience – a move greatly criticized by officialdom at the time. In this way he magnified his own genius. But at the time nothing was inevitable. All of his moves were enormous gambles, and his real accomplishment is the way in which he managed these moves.

By all accounts Courbet’s fame was discussed and argued over in art world circles and gossiped about on the streets of Paris. He had proved himself an accomplished painter with \textit{After Dinner at Ornans} and the many enormous realist paintings he had exhibited over the following ten years. As the state was not offering Courbet his own retrospective in the Universal Exposition Salon, alongside the great masters Delacroix and Ingres, as he believed he was due, he gave one to himself. Today it is difficult to imagine how audacious this move was. He effectively snubbed the Academy’s widely valued hierarchy and protocols that at this time enjoyed a monopoly on aesthetic value and taste. What, then, gave Courbet the courage and confidence to not only propose but also successfully carry off this bold strategy?

Market testing: Courbet takes Realism to the provinces

Prior to his exhibition in 1855, Courbet presented *A Burial at Ornans* and *Stonebreakers* in three different locations, providing him the opportunity to measure response and differentiate between the reactions of various audience groups before showing them at the Salon. The reaction at each location was different, and together, they gave him an early indication of the public’s response – an impression of how the reception to the new painting could vary according to class, specifically, socio-geographic and political inclination, in the volatile and politically fragmented France of that time. The process was of immeasurable value to him because it demonstrated the power of the provocative image when presented in the right location at the appropriate time.

Courbet would have quickly learned that he was assured of being noticed if he developed an antagonistic aesthetic. This strategy was realised through the fashionable utopian socialist theory pervading the bohemian milieu of the Parisian café culture he had adopted (as in the deeply personal composition in *Man with the Black Dog*, and *Dinner at Ornans*), and strengthened by his penchant for attention-seeking antics. However, this should not be interpreted, as it sometimes was at the time, as the ravings of an egomaniac. Proudhon’s anarchist ideas allowed Courbet to transform such personal concerns into universal theory. Courbet made the focus of art the artist himself because notions of the artist’s autonomy chimed with the ‘logic of contemporary philosophy’.

The Salon of 1850-51, where Courbet planned to launch *Burial*, had been delayed until New Year’s Eve due to de-stabilizing political events. Impatient to unveil such an enormous and deeply felt project, Courbet decided to show *Burial* independently, together with his other new work *Stonebreakers*. Firstly, on completion of *Burial* he hung it in the church hall of Ornans where all the locals, especially those who had modeled for him, could observe themselves as the artist had represented them at the gravesite. He then took the works to Besançon and Dijon in May and July respectively. Jack Lindsay suggests these efforts were more a personal submission than professional investigation: “The exhibitions themselves showed how he felt about his new paintings; they represented a sort of appeal to the people ahead of the Salon, and he felt very strongly about them.” On the other, hand the experience strengthened his resolve to mount a private exhibition. The Ornans experience garnered Courbet

417 Ibid., 71.
418 Lindsay, J., 1977, *Gustave Courbet His Life and Art*, 62.
confidence in his idea to hold a one-man exhibition in the capital for he had been received with an overwhelming enthusiasm.

As *Burial* and *Stonebreakers* are linked intimately with Courbet’s personal image, we may consider their initial exhibition as a form of audience-response, information gathering (or market research) for his brand; in much the same way as focus-group testing operates today for market response and evaluation of proposed advertisement concepts for new products. Clow and Baack explain the strategy in relation to advertising:

> Before launching the campaign, the agency may show the ad in a test market area. Several tools can be used to measure the quality and impact of the ad . . . The final stage of evaluation takes place after the marketing communication has been. Information collected at this time helps the company’s leaders and the advertising agency to assess what worked and what did not.\(^{419}\)

These findings are then used in the development of future marketing campaigns just as Courbet had used his evaluation of responses to his new, large canvases in the planning of his future painting program and what he hoped it would achieve for his public profile.\(^{420}\)

**Ornans**

In Ornans, the whole town came to see *Burial*, which is not surprising with so many of the town’s occupants featuring prominently within its composition. The Besançon exhibition was held in the concert room of the town’s market place. Max Bouchon wrote a publicity brochure outlining Courbet’s motivations and philosophies for the two large canvases, the seed of what became his Realist manifesto. Courbet trialed the advertising of the exhibition with posters he placed throughout the town. The showing was a success, even with an entry fee. It seemed that Courbet’s exploits in Paris were felt in the regions where he stirred up interest and gossip from his 1849 gold-medal award for *After Dinner at Ornans*. The response in Besançon was particularly


\(^{420}\) Companies have several methods to investigate the message content of the advertisement of a marketing piece . . . Concept testing is aimed at the actual content of the ad and the impact that content has on potential customers . . . The most common procedure used for concept testing is a focus group. *Focus groups* normally consist of eight to ten people (a small sample group representative of the target market). Focus group reactions can be quite different. Results are affected by the makeup of the group and the way the session is conducted. Therefore, it is a good idea to study the responses of several groups. Comprehension and *reaction testing* are most common in determining if an advertisement had been correctly comprehended by the individual or the group. Reaction tests are used to determine overall feelings about a marketing piece, most notably whether the response is negative or positive. Exploration of reactions provides advertisement producers with input to modify the marketing piece to increase its significance. See Clow and Baack, particularly, 492-494.
supportive as Louis Napoleon was an unpopular president there. In Dijon, however, where Republican sympathies and political factions divided the city, little interest was given to Courbet’s paintings. With troops billeted throughout the town, response to Burial and Stonebreakers was flaccid, not hostile, but unenthusiastic, with no attention from the local newspapers. He was forced to take a loss and close the show early. In his journal, Courbet records the experience with creative exuberance: “In the name of decentralisation he began to exhibit these pictures in 1850 at Ornans, Besançon, and Dijon, establishing himself as a master painter with enormous posters and the authorization of the mayors in places made available to him by the towns.”

Following the delayed Salon of 1850-51, in which he presented Burial, Stonebreakers, and Peasants of Flagey, Courbet sent Burial to Frankfurt where he had been exhibiting paintings for some time and quietly building an enthusiastic following thanks to the efforts of van Wisselingh. With the enormous response in the press to his Salon entries, the tactic to capitalise on such publicity in new and growing markets was advantageous in bolstering his career and income. The triptych of Burial, Stonebreakers and Peasants caused quarrels and heated public discussions that the press found irresistible to comment upon through review and caricature.

In the metropolis Courbet’s new artistic themes provoked an angry response from hostile critics speaking for and defending the tastes of Paris’s haute bourgeoisie, those whom Courbet directly addressed in his visual essays. Georges Boudailles and Sarah Faunce both perceive the artist’s motives as a direct assail of the established classes. Faunce explains,

There was something about the dress, the attitude and expression of these figures in mud-splattered smocks and even tail-coats calculated to shock visitors to a salon. When Courbet added the two big oxen and the pig tied by a leg, it amounted to a provocation.

His imagery, the depiction of the rural lower classes (and the petit bourgeois of Ornan), in all their common and sordid everydayness, was an obvious representation of political ideology. To render the figures in such provocative a scale, quite unlike the expected presentation of genre compositions, was to covet the grand dimensions that tradition had reserved for heroic religious and regal themes. The overall impression was a flagrant attempt to exasperate the Parisian bourgeois who had assumed (rightly or wrongly) the

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421 Lindsay, J., 1977, Gustave Courbet His Life and Art, 70.
423 Ibid., 46.
role of “arbiters of taste,” the artistic gatekeepers of the system of artistic patronage.\textsuperscript{424} Even those critics not associated with the neo-classicism of the Academy, and who might be expected to be more sympathetic, took the bait. Romantic critics such as Theophile Gautier and the de Goncourts are exemplary of such response. Lindsay explains that Gautier,

could only mourn over a talent gone wrong; but the de Goncourts, who had defined extreme (Courbetian) realism as a ‘daguerreotype’ carried out by a blind man who stops to sit down whenever he comes to a dungheap, had begun to favour a milder realism that did not deal only with what was (in their view) the ugly. Something of the dilemma appearing for critics is seen in G. Planche’s account (\textit{Revue des Deux Mondes}, 15 September), which lauds Delecroix, Ingres, Decamps, and, while insisting that Courbet has misread tradition, which ‘does not authorise the cult of the ugly’, admits his ‘magnificent and courageous resolution to express his own personality’.\textsuperscript{425}

Drawing attention to himself through the paintings’ contravention of aesthetic and cultural etiquette, Courbet and his Realism immediately became linked as a movement of rebellious intention, a form of aesthetic agitation viewed by some as an egotist gambit in his advancement toward fame. As Faunce points out succinctly, Courbet had made a definite claim at the time for the importance of \textit{Burial} by its size, in the immense effort required to complete it, and in the title he gave it: “Tableau de figures humaines, historique d’un Enterrement à Ornans.”\textsuperscript{426} As a direct attack upon the whole notion of the “beloved” \textit{peinture d’histoire}, Courbet had set himself up as an alternative and challenge, to the practice of art in France of the past one hundred and fifty years. Faunce notes that Claude Vignon commented: “We perhaps would not have spoken of these distressing productions of M. Courbet, if he had not been announced as destined to lead a school, and if we ourselves had not perceived in him, beneath all the eccentricities, an artist of talent who has

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\textsuperscript{425} Lindsay, J., 1977, \textit{Gustave Courbet His Life and Art}, 152.

strayed into a false road . . .”\(^{427}\) Presenting himself as art’s Janus,\(^ {428}\) the one who will bring about change and transition, would not go unnoticed. Perceptive critics recalled all the self-portraits of the past, which now represented his irksome narcissism and the self-promotional motivation that was read into them.

**There’s no such thing as bad publicity**

Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
(That last infirmity of noble mind)
To scorn delights, and live laborious days.
—From John Milton’s Poem *Lycidas*, 1637.

While the controversy he stirred was inflammatory to Academicians and conservative critics – key proponents of the art institution and defenders of the Salon’s realm – critical response in the press was advantageous for Courbet in terms of further asserting his name. Of *Burial*, the renowned critic E.-J. Delécluze wrote: “this work embodies qualities that are too solid, and certain parts are too well painted, for one to be able to believe in the savagery and ignorance that are affected by this artist.”\(^ {429}\) Another commentator remarked of *Stonebreakers* “the painter had proved that if you want to affect public opinion, you had to seize it by the throat”.\(^ {430}\) And others slung the divided criticism that he was a valuable talent wasted on painting “ugly mugs”.\(^ {431}\) He was accused of, “ignoring the traditional code of the ideal, nobility of feeling, charm and grandeur,”\(^ {432}\) in favour of painting the unattractive and the ordinary.

Courbet painted a new kind of imagery that questioned important cultural institutions. He conducted himself in a conceited manner both privately and publicly, and the political content of his paintings riled commentators and their audiences. In Jack Lindsay’s words:

If we try to summarise the critical reactions to Courbet’s work we may say that his early works of the 1850s were damned by critics who one way or another expressed the bourgeois fear of the revolutionary phase through which French society had just passed. They could see only a horrible and deliberate ugliness, a defiant addiction to plebeian themes and models.\(^ {433}\)

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\(^{427}\) Ibid.

\(^{428}\) Janus is the Roman god of beginnings and transitions. He is depicted with two faces on his head that face opposite directions, one facing east and the other facing west.


\(^{433}\) Lindsay, J., 1977, *Gustave Courbet His Life and Art*, 152.
However, Sarah Faunce argues that any information circulating publicly about him was viewed by Courbet as a constructive move in his advance to fame, whether positive or negative:

he may complain of the epithets and insults, but he knew that it was inevitable, because what he wanted to do constituted such an enormous challenge to the existing system. He would also come to realise that such controversy was, despite the hostility, not altogether to his disadvantage. Controversy, after all, meant publicity, and as we have seen in the remark to Francis Wey quoted above, he was concerned early on with the question of publicity, of getting his work seen. For these purposes it worked to his advantage to have a persona, a public image, however crude or insulting.434

Public and official outcry attracted the attention of the press. The more public discourse focused on the offending features of his art, the more embedded Courbet became with Realism. He was entrenching himself, through his paintings, into the cultural life of mid-nineteenth century France.

Aaker and Biel note the importance of a strong non-verbal component of the brand image and its ability to automatically access the brand name from memory when the brand is shown. They site King (1989): “the use of a well-chosen visual metaphor can capture, through association, desirable values associated with a brand.”435 The metaphor of Realism was a powerful symbol that galvanised his art into one single idea that made the launch of Realism resonate loudly throughout 1855, and beyond. James Rubin supports this idea: “As he discovered, political regimes often restrict artistic freedom (in late 1851 Courbet thought he was being followed by the police), and in his case, political interpretations had defined his position as an artist. Courbet had no qualms about exploiting politics to promote his artistic claims.”436 He found himself serendipitously handed a powerful determinant that would resonate loudly, propelling him to the attention of the French art world, a perception as an active revolutionary that years later would embroil him in the Commune affairs.

While the political associations with Realism were not a part of Courbet’s early artistic ideas, they nevertheless “became” connected to his identity and perception, as well as that of his paintings as they were presented to the public in the press. Courbet came to leverage this very useful interconnected set of ideas to his advantage. When he began active involvement in public discourse through the letters he wrote to newspaper editors around 1851437 claiming socialism, democracy and republicanism as determinants

434 Faunce, S., Nochlin, L., 1988, Courbet Reconsidered, 8.
437 Ibid., 97.
of ‘his’ art, he strengthened the link between himself and a Realism of revolutionary and political intent.

Courbet had built himself a definitive image that was being bolstered by external sources – albeit from misunderstood ideas about his art. This was the ideal way in which to enhance and develop a brand around his art, and is the model of avant-garde brand building to this day.

Aaker and Beil underline the importance of the visual and tangible aspects of a brand linked to a set of characteristic attributes: “A good starting point is to describe the image of a brand as a cluster of attributes and associations that consumers (or audience) connect to the brand name.”

Ongoing public and official outcry about Courbet’s images continued to attracted the attention of the press. “Visual images and words or phrases linked with strong brands are likely to be more easily retrieved from memory. Finally, strong brands are held in high regard.” As if realising this, from about 1851, Courbet began to actively engage in public communications in order to confirm, rather than deny, his public image. This move finally merged the idea of Realism with his identity, a convergence that anointed both as radical brands. This convergence became a strong identity for them both and set in place a principle tactic of the artistic avant-garde, which is to meld the artist’s subjective identity with an ideological position.

To respond to the accusation that he was “the socialist painter”, Courbet started writing letters to the editors of newspapers who reported on either himself or his painting, declaring: “I accept that title with pleasure.” He added that he was not only a socialist, “but a democrat and a

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439 Ibid.
republican as well – in a word, a partisan of the entire revolution and above all a Realist, … a sincere lover of the veritable truth.”\(^{440}\) He thus authenticated the brand of Realism, creating a set of strong associations of tangible qualities (his paintings, caricatures in the press and derogatory reviews) that were linked to emotional attributes (socialist, agitator, disruptive, grandstander, revolutionary).

The frustrated critical responses from critics, perplexed by his new social motifs within his political compositions, were, for Courbet, clues for a strategy on how to move his program forward. The messages he took from the controversy gave him inspiration for direction and confidence to prevail. And so he could write in a letter to Bruyas and declare of a solo exhibition: “It’s truly a matter to make Paris dance on its head,” and, “It’ll be beyond dispute the strongest comedy played in our time.”\(^{441}\) Social reprimand was sustenance for gossip; public reproach for ignoring the traditional codes of the Academy garnered attention in print that penetrated audience consciousness confirming physical features and emotional attributes that solidified his brand.

Baudelaire seemed to grasp Courbet’s accomplishment when he remarked of Courbet’s exhibition, *Le Réalisme*, in 1855: “A young painter whose remarkable débute took place recently with all the violence of an armed revolt.” Baudelaire referred to him as “a fierce and indomitable will,” and a “dissenting spirit, a slaughterer of faculties”.\(^{442}\) Lindsay came close to identifying the self-consciousness of Courbet’s quite deliberate *succès de scandale*, when he suggested: “It may be argued that all this is very devious. Why did not Courbet, with his conviction of Realism as the expression of Democracy and Socialism, paint obviously political pictures?”\(^{443}\) By the time Courbet came to include *Burial* in his Pavilion of Realism, he was fully aware of the impact and reaction the work’s antagonistic quality was likely to provoke.

Courbet’s self-promotional gestures were a mixed bag of expressions (expressive enactments) of his egocentric confidence and single-minded careerism. Building upon each varied experience in the public arena, from holding court at the Andlers among his contemporaries in the early days, to the bold taunts of his socialist images within the very conservative venue of the Salon, Courbet demonstrated his command of presentation of both his artistic vision and personal image that were progressively becoming more closely tied, together asserting his brand. His final gambit in the assertion of his brand was the consummation of his vision and image in the audacious

\(^{443}\) Lindsay, J., 1977, *Gustave Courbet His Life and Art*, 106.
retrospective he called the *Pavillon du Réalisme*. “Omnipresent, both accepted and rejected, Courbet had succeeded in imposing his presence both within and without the official event.”

*Le Réalisme* as installation art

The line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps indistinct as possible.

—Allan Kaprow, “The Event.”

Installation art is a term that loosely refers to the type of art into which the viewer physically enters, and which is often described as ‘theatrical,’ ‘immersive’ or ‘experiential’.

—Claire Bishop, 2005.

Becoming a showman – like an exhibitor of curiosities, a barker of his paintings, a peddler of inexpensive literature, or a bard of popular ballads – Courbet became aware of the element of performance inherent in a work of art, whose staging benefited from a written argument.

—Ségolène Le Men, 2008.

What Hal Foster called the return of the real—which he saw as part of the dialectic of modernism still being played out in the minimalist, conceptualist and installation art of the late twentieth century—was first inserted into the ideological matrix of modernism by Courbet. This is the legacy of Courbet’s launch of *Le Réalisme* in the cultural setting of 1855 Paris. Courbet’s private exhibition set out the conditions of Installation art over one hundred years before it was identified as a specific type of art practice and idiom. Its scale and phenomenological experience, as discussed previously, collapsed the distance between audience and work of art, creating an immersive experience. While one can find many earlier precedents – after all painting as a medium descends from architecture – Courbet’s ideological intent of engaging the audience in a phenomenological experience was keyed to the issues of subjectivity, democracy and the critique of authority that were giving shape to the experience of modernity. Considered in respect to the political implications of its location and the

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forms of public interaction and response to the exhibition, the *experiential*, *theatrical*, and *immersive* qualities of its site-and-time-specificity, become significant. Thus the exhibition being a work of art itself can also be read as paradigmatic of avant-gardism’s “artistic extremism and ‘experimental’ spirit” in looking at the whole as an art *interventionist* gesture by Courbet *vis-à-vis* the intrusion it made upon Napoleon’s showcase Universal Exposition art show.

The origins of late twentieth-century performance and installation art are generally located in earlier twentieth-century Dada and Surrealism. In his recent work, *Displaying the Marvellous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí, and Surrealist Exhibition Installation*, Lewis Kachur examines the late phase of Surrealism’s use of exhibition environments that embodied subjective ideologies. Using three Surrealist exhibition installations, Kachur explains how the artists left the neutrality of traditional exhibition spaces for environments that were conditioned by their sites: “In each setting the participants abandoned any attempt at neutrality of presentation in favour of a subjective

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450 The 1938 *Exposition Internationale du Surrealisme* was held in Paris, and the *First Papers of Surrealism*, of 1942 were created largely by Marcel Duchamp. Dalí’s “Dream of Venus” pavilion was presented at the 1939 World’s Fair, New York.
environment that itself embodied a statement.”\textsuperscript{451} Well before the three exhibitions extensively recreated by Kachur, Courbet presented a bewildered audience with an event that I argue was a form of installation art, and a \textit{performance} advertisement.

One of Julie Reiss’s defining features of installation’s recurrent characteristics also associates the audience in “performing” the art, where “the spectator is in some way regarded as integral to the completion of the work,”\textsuperscript{452} rather than simply a viewer who is “a pair of disembodied eyes that survey the work from a distance”. Likewise, Bishop asserts that, “installation art presupposes an \textit{embodied} viewer whose senses of touch, smell and sound are as heightened as their sense of vision. This insistence on the literal presence of the viewer is arguably the key characteristic of installation art”.\textsuperscript{453} Thus, says Bishop, “without having the experience of being in the piece, analysis of Installation art is difficult”.\textsuperscript{454} She poses these questions: who is the spectator of Installation art? What kind of \textit{participation} does he or she have in the work? Why is installation at pains to emphasise first-hand \textit{experience}, and what kinds of experience does it offer?\textsuperscript{455} In answering these questions, so relevant to a review of Courbet’s Pavilion of Realism, the enormity of the contribution by him to the rise of modernism, his impact on subsequent generations even up to today, can be better appreciated.

The performatve nature of installation art operates at multiple levels, including the phenomenological engagement between the art world and audience, an ideological and intellectual encounter created by textual exhortations from the artist, and also participation of critics. The individual paintings exhibited by Courbet have been analysed by numerous critics and historians, mainly from the perspective of their ideological commitments. But the question to be asked, in the context of the performativity of \textit{Le Réalisme} as an exhibition, must address the phenomenological experience of his artworks as well as the collective nature of the exhibition as it was experienced, then.

The importance of Courbert’s exhibition is that the audience did not simply evaluate it in terms of the individual paintings exhibited. Rather it was considered an event, an intervention, a happening that was interpreted in the context of current social issues, particularly, the significance of the 1855 Universal Exposition to France, and the groundswell looming over criticisms of the annual Salon. The impact and meaning of

\textsuperscript{454} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{455} Ibid.
Le Réalisme were profoundly affected by Courbet’s choice of location, a feature that contributed to its “annoyance of the spectator”, a characteristic Kachur attributes to contemporary installation. Each audience responded from the viewpoint of his or her cultural background, class and life experiences. In essence, the meaning of the exhibition was not solely inherent within the painting, but was created in the relationship between the image and the viewer (in context of the current timing of the Universal Exposition) and their place and understanding of the world at that time.

The way in which Installation art structures a “particular and direct relationship with the viewer” is, according to Bishop, “reflected in the process of writing about such work”. In Courbet’s case the relationship with the Salon audience was immediate hostility emanating from their puzzlement and reactive tension to the slur represented by his paintings. This was then re-reflected through critics – the “multipliers” and makers of public opinion – who stirred up the poisonous reception and derogatory image of the artist and his art by interpreting public perception in view of the artist’s ultimate insult to the State, the people, and Napoleon, in mounting his own private exhibition so close to, and at the same time as, theirs. Courbet presented a ‘face-off’, one historic institution against another, tradition against modernism.

Le Réalisme’s audience experience was in the first instance a direct exposure to an all-encompassing environment of compelling images that stirred both incomprehension and distaste. This was Courbet addressing Paris directly as complicit participants in the art system he wished to bring into crisis – a topical issue of significance for some time (a legion of independent artists, Delacroix being a vocal spokesperson, had lobbied for some years to overhaul the Salon). The “sensory immediacy, on physical participation” by visitors to Le Réalisme, led to a “heightened awareness” of Courbet’s art’s striking offensiveness and difference, as the audience became complicit in generating the second exposure or experience of the Courbet sensation through their reading of reviews about the show. Several cartoons further implicated and ridiculed the Parisian audience and their participation in art-as-performance (Figure 61). Courbet and his Realism continued their advance and impact on the art public in his performance through the unabated press commentary and public discourse that ensued: “A transitive relationship therefore comes to be implied between ‘activated spectatorship’ and active engagement in the social-political arena.”

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458 Ibid.
459 Ibid.
What Nicholas de Oliveira said of Duchamp’s ready-mades was also true of Courbet’s exhibition (which is ironical given Duchamp’s distaste of Courbet’s Realism): it challenged the foundations upon which we, “distinguish the world of art from what lies outside it”.460 To experience *Le Réalisme* was to be a participant in the event, rather than passive spectator, because it was the site of contending ideologies that directly implicated two kinds of audiences, those who viewed the work first hand, and those who engaged with it as spectators through the press.

The political language of *Le Réalisme*’s radicalism was simple and direct: engaging with its surrounding space, Courbet had secured a site directly opposite the State Palace of Fine Arts at 17 Avenue Montaigne, where the State’s prestigious art exhibition was to be held (Figure 60). Its propinquity to the government’s Exposition enhanced the provocative force and intentionality of his enterprise. With nine of his paintings displayed at the State exhibition, and another forty works in his private retrospective, Courbet presented himself on the same exalted footing as Ingres and Delacroix, blurring the borders of Realism and (his) fantasy. Revealing a programmatic intention to incorporate a public critique that went far beyond the exhibition in real time, broadening the scope of his rebellion, Courbet’s “temple”461 showed the artist’s endeavour to be more than an issue of subject matter or the delicate sensibilities of the bourgeois. He questioned aesthetic governance, the outdated tastes of those who

460 Ibid.
461 Chu, 1996, (letter 54-51, to Alfred Bruyas, Jan. 1854), 112.
supported it, and the exhibition system itself. He thus fashioned the enduring model of avant-garde art for the next 150 years.

Reviewing Courbet and his art through caricature

After Courbet, after Manet – the caricature! What could be more logical!
—Maurice du Seigneur, Critic, 1888.

_A Burial at Ornans_ by Courbet, master painter. This painting has attracted the greatest notice at the Salon, and rightly so. A burial is normally a sad affair. Mr Courbet, who rejects woolly tradition and well-worn paths, has contrived his burial in such a manner that one is seized by a kind [of] mad hilarity when looking at it. And that is a sign of genius.
—Caption to Bertall’s _Caricature of Burial_, 1855.

Baudelaire said of Honoré Daumier, _l’un des hommes les plus importants, je ne dirai pas seulement de la caricature, mais encore de l’art moderne._ (One of the most important figures, I will not say only of caricature, but also of modern art itself.)

Another mode of publicity that enhanced Courbet’s brand, and which I have only lightly touched on, was the newspaper caricaturist. The caricaturists of the nineteenth century were a mainstay of newspaper’s content. Such was the popularity of the illustrative and comedic style that some publications specialized in it. While caricaturists entertained readers (and the illiterate) of the daily press with distorted likenesses and wit, their role was more than simply to decorate the pages of newspapers and journals, in a time before photography, to glorify lengthy editorial. Caricaturists acted as cartoon journalists – the visual commentators of current and topical social issues.

The most pointed statements on the broader social implications of Courbet’s Pavillon are told through the caricatures that appeared in the press at

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the time. Within the illustrative essays of caricature is a spontaneous synopsis, a shorthand depiction of how exhibition society, as well as the general public, perceived the paintings in his show. These drawings, contextualise the antagonistic quality both of his art and his temperament – a feature that became a defining determinant of his public identity and his Realism. To know what Parisian society thought about Courbet through such a first hand source is to get a feeling for contemporary culture and its opinions without the filter of generations of re-worked art historical interpretation.

McLees’ insightful work on Baudelaire’s poetic caricature provides a succinct outline of the stylised drawing form’s historic background. The major aesthetic principle of modern caricature, he explains, is exaggeration, from the Italian, *caricatura.* Through it, the caricaturist becomes a “seer”. An interesting aspect of caricature in the context of this examination of how Courbet’s identity became entrenched beyond the art world is, that caricature allows the artist to picture what is not visible (such as public perception) by exaggerating aspects of the visible. In this way the caricaturist extracts the quintessence of his model. In particular, “physiognomic interpretation views a flaw as the quintessence of character, brought to the surface and expressed through distortion. To extract the quintessence, then, is to unmask character,” a point previously discussed in reference to identity and the operation of the branding process. In other words, a brand is a form of caricature.

According to McLees, caricature is a graphic form that dates back to the late sixteenth century, when it was confined to use in the artist’s studio – a kind of “parlour game shared among artists”. It was a medium of free expression in a time when the status of artists was changing: “He could express opinions on themes rather than just fill orders.” “Gradually the freedom to experiment and to express personal feeling through caricature moved out of the studio and into the public domain.”

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464 Ibid.,127.
465 Ibid.
466 Ibid., 2.
467 Ibid., 3.
literacy levels were low, cultural exchange and entertainment could be enjoyed by a broader cross-section of classes through the humorous lampooning of caricature in the press. Caricaturists acted as cartoon journalists—the visual commentators of current and topical social issues. To be parodied by one such as Quillenbois, Gill, Bertall or Daumier, was in itself affirmation of renown. Their usual subjects, targets even, were—particularly for Daumier during his time at *L’Illustration*—the bourgeoisie and royalists. However, any issue of broad social concern was open to their satire. During the mid-to-late nineteenth century there was so much page space filled by caricatures and cartoons that some newspapers created special supplements specifically devoted to them.

Caricaturists were attracted to both Courbet and his paintings because they were interesting; they posed a direct challenge to the bourgeoisie. Because of Courbet, Realism had developed a menacing political quality in its rejection of ancient heroes and esteemed noblemen, for vulgar commoners, those excluded from Parisian bourgeois society. Not only did Courbet draw on popular imagery and caricature for inspiration, and was himself seen as a type of caricature (given his penchant for exaggeration in most aspects of his life), but also, many of Courbet’s major figural compositions were parodied in caricature. The newspaper caricatures especially served as brand markers for Courbet as they provided a terse and memorable image of the artist and his paintings, ensuring a place in the psyche of Parisian culture as it moved towards a developing modernity.

![Figure 64. Bertall, The Peasants of Flagey Returning from the Fair, Le Journal pour rire, March 7, 1851.](image1)

![Figure 65. Bertall, Young Ladies of the Village, Le Journal pour rire, April 16, 1852.](image2)

The satirical reviews about Courbet’s art began suddenly in 1851 in response to the group of paintings he submitted to the Salon that year, three works de Font-Réaulx calls the triptych. *The Burial, The Peasants of Flagey, and Stonebreakers*, each entered the crosshairs of the caricaturist’s watch, to become stylised epigrammatic comment. Cham,
responding to the swell of public indignation over *Stonebreakers*, in *Le Salon*, and Bertall took aim at *Peasants* and *Burial*, in *Le Journal pour rire*, a satirical political journal.

These three paintings are commonly held to be Courbet’s breakthrough pictures. What links them together, an issue immediately seized upon by the cartoon-journalists was the dramatic artistic contravention of the Salon honouree’s expectations of the kinds of paintings exhibited at the Salon. Bertall, drawing for *Le Journal pour rire*, pounced on Courbet’s painting style as well as the composition’s subject matter. The stiff and uncomfortable positioning of the characters in *Peasants* has clearly been likened to wooden puppets, while their animals are transformed into “rag dolls”. Bertall openly mocks Courbet’s artistic integrity, as he does with *The Young Ladies of the Village*, alluding to Courbet’s sources for the compositions in popular, culture rather than, as was expected at the time, tradition and its glorious themes. While imagery of the lower classes had been used in genre painting during the late 1830s and 40s, and prints and drawings of different social types often appeared in illustrated journals like *L’Illustration*, such themes were not welcome at the prestigious, annual State exhibition.

Some months later, Bertall focused again on Courbet’s representation of country life and its occupants in his Realism and its preoccupation for rural society, ridiculing the self-conscious minions, the country bourgeoisie: the three female characters in *The Young Ladies of the Village* hand out charity to a poor peasant girl. Once more, Bertall responds to Courbet’s artistry by caricaturing the figures and the animals as rigid dolls, no more noble a subject than children’s toys. He goes further still, as the literary critics did, irreverently linking Courbet’s enterprise to the daguerreotype. In his essay for the catalogue of the New York Metropolitan Museum’s 2008 exhibition of Courbet’s art, Domonique de Font-Réaulx discusses how the daguerreotype was used as a foil by critics, conveniently providing them with a derogatory tool for critical analysis of the art they did not yet understand: “More than any other artist of his time, Courbet crystallised this association between painting and the daguerreotype. As with caricature, it was less the proximity with popular images or with photography that caused his critics to make this connection, than the painter’s own ambition to ‘make large pictures.’” The witticism of critics’ rebuffs, however, became valuable advertising for a new artist of the

472 Ibid., 36.
Salon and his campaign to bring the institution down. Courbet’s persistence in contravening academic hierarchy in his compositions, and particularly his “break with the moral order of society”,\(^{473}\) gained him the attention he needed.

*A Burial at Ornans*

Belying its economical rendering style, caricature reduces complex issues into simplified, focused ideas presented as stylised drawings or ideograms. Their visual rhetoric of cultural motifs concentrates social information through the use of social codes that their audience understands. An excellent example of the compression and reductive powers of cartoon-journalism is Bertall’s caricature of *A Burial at Ornans*, which takes a broad swipe at Courbet’s composition as a whole and its portrait of “small-town bourgeoisie”,\(^{474}\) while cleverly addressing the specific issues of his offence to the conventions of Salon art. It is a sophisticated interpretation of what the art world saw in *Burial* as apparent artistic infringement, ideas succinctly reduced to four pithy graphic icons.

![Bertal, Caricature of A Burial at Ornans. Le Journal pour rire, 7 March 1851.](image)

Firstly, the dominant element is a series of inverted, white commas, interrupted by the busts of two figures, representing the parish officials dressed in red (clearly regarded by Courbet as a key element of his composition because they are the only colour within the image). Then, a rather stiff and naively drawn image of a dog that also bears the comma-shape pattern (that de Font-Réaulx’s recent reading of the work attributes to the decoration of funeral cloth) is positioned prominently in the

\(^{473}\)Ibid., 35.

foreground. And finally, an enormous caricature of Courbet’s exaggerated signature is drawn deliberately large to appear quite out of proportion with the composition as a whole. Ever since Courbet had shown Self-Portrait with Pipe at the Salon of 1850-51, his enthusiasm for the genre of self-portraits became a focus for widespread criticism, leading to him being referred to as the “peasant Narcissus.” Bertall’s cartoon goes straight to the core the painting’s originality in its new approach, issues at the core of Courbet’s challenge, and shock, to Salon audiences.

In this humorous reading, Bertall attacks Courbet’s new style of rendering in its stark contrast in the shading of the faces (and hands) of the processional figures dressed in their heavy, dark clothing that merge into the composition’s background – represented by the horizontal line of inverted, white commas (a kind of stylisation, almost a caricature drawing itself, in its interpretation of the original painting’s characters). By stylizing the key components of the painting, the long procession of mourners, the two parish officials, and the dog, Bertall has attacked Courbet’s contemporary iconography drawn from popular culture’s imagery and thematics and his rejection of the noblesse of tradition. Bertall has directly referred to the ‘transgression and unconventionality’ of Courbet’s political agenda within his narratives (or allegories in the case of The Atelier). Lastly, Bertall’s greatest strike at Burial is a shot at the artist himself and the overt egocentricity Courbet nurtured, by enlarging his signature to a ridiculously large. Such an imposing size, and the most significant component of the caricature, the signature represents what it was about Courbet that came to rile the art world most.

This interpretation is exemplary of the parallel between the function of branding and caricature. Both communicative functions have reductive powers, and focus on essential aspects of representation to communicate information – in this case the views of society filtered through the mind and hand of Bertall. One projects unique descriptors to construct an enhanced mental image, while the other deconstructs an image into its concise and distinguishing characteristics. Rubin recognised the link between a personality lampooned in the press and the advance of notoriety and fame: “Nowhere is the connection between Courbet’s style and popular forms better evoked than in caricatures of his paintings. Caricatures are a valuable tool for the history of art, for they often have a way of focusing on the essentials.” He continues: “The caricature implies, then, that Courbet’s painting can only have been produced by a gigantic

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egomaniac, and it is at this moment, we might say, that the Courbet ‘legend’ began.”

In this way then, the critical attention Courbet’s imagery received and the public commentary stimulated by it, worked to Courbet’s advantage as it strengthened his identity, developing his brand in the eyes of a disinterested general public, not just the audience for art.

The essentials Rubin speaks about are the features and characteristics Courbet recognised he could use to differentiate himself from other artists, while using them to build his identity (discussed in Stage 1, Construct a unique identity). Bertall’s caricature focuses on the significant features of Courbet’s painting, reducing his realistic iconography into stylised, graphic icons – the two beadle, a series of inverted commas, a dog, incidentally decorated with black commas, and a large signature. While illustrating his critical opinions, likely aimed at the newspaper’s petit bourgeois readership, Bertall has inadvertently exemplified key attributes of what became Courbet’s brand. He has created four graphic symbols that came to be uniquely associated with the artist and his Realism; subjects from the everyday that critics colloquially called “ugly”, as represented by the line of white commas and two officials, the child-like, stiffly drawn, picture of the dog, representing Courbet’s painting style viewed by critics as “poor” painting, and the enormous signature that overpowers all the other elements in the painting, which represents how prominent Courbet’s personality and identity became in relation to his art. Ironically, the exaggerated scale of the signature works in this context in much the same way as a logo would in an advertisement. It is a distinct symbol, a trademark conveying only one thing, the persona and presence of Gustave Courbet.

The English translation of the title of the newspaper in which this caricature appeared, _Le Journal pour rire_, is, “The Journal for Laughing”. It was a broadsheet-sized publication filled with humorous woodcuts. The caption below the cartoon is a snappy abstract of the painting’s reception: “A Burial at Ornans by Courbet, master painter. This painting has attracted the greatest notice at the Salon, and rightly so. A burial is normally a sad affair. Mr. Courbet, who rejects woolly tradition and well-worn paths, has contrived his burial in such a manner that one is seized by a kind of mad hilarity when looking at it. And that is a sign of genius.”

Bertall published a striking piece of communication about Courbet and the painting, that because of its humorous nature, added meaning and relevance to _Le Journal pour Rir’s_ audience and attaching to it a

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479 Le Men, S. 2007, _Courbet_, 152.
“symbolic load”, 480 that further entrenched him into the fabric of mid-nineteenth century culture.

**The Stonebreakers**

Perhaps the most comprehensive attack upon Courbet’s new iconography, and the insolence he expressed for Salon values, was another of Cham’s sardonic retorts to *Stonebreakers*. In this satirical drawing (Figure 67) Cham harnessed the deep-felt experience of the class division of self-satisfied Sunday strollers to retaliate against Courbet’s aesthetic transgressions. The significant difference between Cham’s earlier graphic reaction (Figure 50) and this more complex depiction is the broader socio-political dimension that attacks Courbet’s unauthorised anointing of peasants, “the honour of gracing the Salon walls in a style whose lower-class primitivism and naïveté shocked the habits and good taste of well-dressed Sunday strollers”. 481 The crux of Courbet’s provocation to the Salon audience was in his audacity to confront such a tender and sore matter as the one still etched deeply in the minds of Parisians – the social and political developments of 1848-51 when the faceless and therefore unimportant rural peasants made their presence felt in the city. Two wretched and exhausted looking workmen toiling by the roadside, their garments dramatically rendered thread bare and patched, highlighted the plight of the rural peasant and their completely disenfranchised position. Courbet’s misdemeanor in *Stonebreakers* was to illuminate a humanitarian issue that the bourgeois believed was best kept out of sight. This was dirty social laundry, a scandal of such magnitude painted on a huge scale by an obviously masterful hand, and then presented at the Salon alongside traditional depictions of venerated classic heroes.

Cham’s caricatures, together with their captions, enhanced Courbet’s identity and confirmed his status as a successful Salon painter. He mainly focused his attention on the socialist aspects read into Courbet’s work by critics, an interpretation that was built into an impression that became flesh upon the framework of his brand, one characteristic of the many he was to become identified by. Critics of the press joked that

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if you wanted to be painted by Courbet, you had to be poor and clothed in rags before he would be interested.

**The Meeting**

When I am no longer controversial I will no longer be important.
—Courbet, May 1854. 482

They accuse me of vanity! I am indeed the most arrogant man in the world.
—Courbet. 483

I have met you; it was inevitable, as it was not we who have met, but our solutions . . . As for me, I am ready . . . I will do all that you wish and all that is necessary.
—Courbet. 484

*The Meeting*, or, *Bonjour, Monsieur Courbet* (Figure 68), marks the awakening of Courbet’s confident manner and awareness of self-possession. In it, he meets his newfound and obviously urban bourgeois benefactor as an equal, metaphorically, and as Bruyas superior, physically. Courbet has captured a complex set of relationship issues within their association in the most concise, yet subtle, “carefully calibrated”485 formal devices of elevation and iconography. In this regard he has positioned himself closest to the foreground therefore making his figure both visually more formidable than either Bruyas or his manservant, Calais, and closer to the viewer. The artist has depicted himself considerably larger than either Bruyas or Calais, with substantial-looking strong legs—possibly a visual counterweight to the immense out-door painting equipment pack he carries upon his back. He has a walking stick in one hand that punctures the space between the artist and Bruyas, and at the same time, symbolizes Courbet’s new position, one of social prestige; he appears to be holding the stick in the same manner as one would a staff of office, unlike the traditional urban walking sticks of modest style carried by Bruyas and Calias.

483 Ibid., 109.
484 Ibid.,
On one level, the painting describes a casual encounter between Courbet and his patron who is accompanied by his manservant as they travel along a dirt road. Then, another reading of the meeting of three, one discussed by Faunce, Nochlin, Rubin and many other historians, is the narrative of the artist and patron at the commencement of their complimentary relationship; the artist and patron embarking on their aesthetic and philosophical journey that would, according to the artist’s correspondence, “save the independence of art, and ultimately the world”.\footnote{Rubin, J., 1997, Courbet, 131.} In the catalogue of a recent Courbet exhibition, Robert Buck writes that *The Meeting* was “commissioned by Bruyas to commemorate the artist’s stay as his guest at Montpellier between June and October 1854”, and that it “captures precisely the spirit and meaning of Courbet’s words (above quote) and his understanding of their respective roles as creator and benefactor”.\footnote{Faunce, S., and Nochlin, L., 1988, Courbet Reconsidered, 116.} However, Quillenbois’ interpretive caricature depicts the conventional artist-patron relationship turned on its head, where the artist is genuflected to by patron, manservant, and even the dog. Upon considering this interpretation of *The Meeting* within the context of the artist’s private, one-man exhibition, *Le Réalism*, where it was viewed for the first
time in the capital, its new reading reveals something entirely different in how the image was received at the time. For within Quillenbois’ caricature is another layer—the implication of the painting’s public reception and Courbet’s growing public image. I argue, the cartoon depicts a more fully comprehensive intention of Courbet’s unspoken meaning—the artist’s complete independence and acknowledgement of his identity, together with the implied authority that comes with such status. Quillenbois has prophetically drawn the image of the modern master artist, a venerated human, and an exclusive brand.

In her seminal essay of 1967 in *The Art Bulletin*, Linda Nochlin made the influential link between Courbet’s *The Meeting*, and his until then, unrecognised appropriation of popular imagery or illustration for his compositions: “*The Meeting* is a document neither of sheer narcissism nor of pure observation, although there is more than a measure of both in it; its composition is unequivocally based upon a source in popular imagery: a portion of a broadside of the Wandering Jew, representing the encounter of the Jew with two burghers of the town, which was later to serve as the frontispiece of Champfleury’s *Histoire de l’imagerie populaire.*”

While Nochlin’s identification of prototypes has been important to our understanding of Courbet’s “artistic position” during the development of Realism, of greater importance is the existential revelation Courbet eludes to in the composition, one even more crucial to his conception of Realism; that of the “new” status of the artist. Courbet’s composition in *The Meeting* is a coded representation of the shift in

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power between the artist and his patron, in this case Bruyas, a requisite circumstance to his independent exhibition.

Moreover, it is through examination of Quillenbois’ cartoon of *The Meeting* that the full implications of Courbet’s apprehension of a complete claim on freedom—from the dictates of the State, the Institute, and what was really important to his status as an artist and all those who followed him into the market economy, independence from his patron—become clear. Quillenbois depicts the artist’s messianic public image as a narcissistic and vain Assyrian king who pretentiously claimed the dominant role in the relationship with Bruyas. This is reiterated in the caption accompanying the caricature which refers to the three wise men in Christian scripture who travelled long distances to bring gifts to the baby Jesus in Bethlehem. Bruyas and his servant stand in for the three wise men who came to ‘adore’ the king of the Jews, Jesus: ‘The adoration of M. Courbet, a realist imitation of the adoration of the Magi’.

What all art historical analysis of Courbet’s paintings have in common, is the recognition of the link between Courbet’s programme for the independence of art (more particularly himself) as expressed in his letters to Bruyas shortly before the invention of *Le Réalisme*, and the personification of that ideology in his painting. Quillenbois’ cartoon depicts something art historians have so far failed to realise or acknowledge, that his painting also embodies an ideology deeply embedded within the economy of modernity. *The Meeting* reveals Courbet’s self-knowledge: everything about his image is, as if he had produced an advertisement for the avant-garde artist of the future. Further, the mid-nineteenth century caricature which appeared in response to Courbet’s self-promotional phenomenon of 1855 discloses the art
world’s knowledge of this ideological construct – Courbet as a brand – only to be confirmed through the prophetic caption that announces the new kind of artist of the future – the globalised artist brand, the Andy Warhols and the Damien Hirsts, who will be adored and revered as modern nobility, as celebrities.

Jack Lindsay calls the moment when the three men meet “his arrival”, referring to Courbet’s arrival at that moment. Rubin describes the new relationship model: “He and Bruyas personified sets of principles or, better, roles. When brought together they could save the independence of art, and ultimately the world.” Quillenbois’ drawing illustrates the watershed moment when the “career of the artist became the focus of the system”. Art historians see in this painting Courbet’s sense of self, while Quillenbois’ caricature embodies the public-perception. Courbet is presented by Quillenbois as the artist-brand, whereas Rubin argues for “Courbet’s self-image as worker-artist or master-painter”.

In 1867 Max Bouchon referred to Courbet as “a man of art and a man of business”. Le Men writes that at the time Courbet was “by then out to meet the requirements of the market and the collectors.” Courbet continued to be popular with his portraits, hunting scenes, animals in landscapes and snow-covered landscapes locally, and with paintings of the sea nationally and in Normandy. By far his landscapes became the most popular, and according to Rubin, “the primary basis for Courbet’s eventual success at the business end of art”. And with the connections he made through van Wisselingh in Belgium, Holland and Germany he continued his trips there in search of patronage.

While Bouchon’s statement above refers to Courbet’s strategic niche marketing and his ambitious, commercial, private exhibition, it concurs with Quillenbois’ acerbic satirical commentary in his cartoon of the *The Meeting, or Bonjour M. Courbet* (21 July 1855). Courbet declared: “I wish nevertheless to affirm that I have had only myself as a teacher and that my life’s most constant effort has been devoted to the preservation of my independence.” In a letter to Bruyas he makes an exaggerated claim for this

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493 Ibid., 184.
495 Ibid.
independence as that of art and ultimately the world.497 “I am winning my liberty, I am saving the independence of art.”498 However, I argue that the veiled connotation of the painting revealed in Quillenbois’ caricature is an extraordinarily prophetic expression of the re-defining of the relationship between artist, collector and public that became a feature of twentieth-century art.

Meissenier and other Academicians had already shown the artist’s ability to ascend the Parisian socio-economic demographic hierarchy through the prestige and monopoly of the Academy. However, Quillenbois’ cartoon illustrates that shift in roles way beyond what any nineteenth century theoretician could possibly have imagined at that time. Nearly 100 years before Greenberg would critique high art’s entry into the mechanisms of the mass market, Courbet is presented by Quillenbois as the object of adoration – a celebrity to be worshipped. Quillenbois has drawn the art world’s distant future, a time when artists would no longer perform as the servants of a small and powerful elite, but rather the servants of a more persuasive phenomenon, that of celebrity and the wealth that customarily accompanies it.

Had The Meeting been presented at the annual Salon, or perhaps in his studio, the inference of the relationship between Bruyas and Courbet would not have been as barbed as Quillenbois’ caricature clearly spells out. In the context of Le Réalisme, The Meeting was seen as vulgar self-promotion of the artist, an attempt to use painting to reflect the artist’s authority. Lindsay says that when shown it appeared a ridiculous piece of self-glorification. The critic About wrote:

M. Courbet has carefully stressed all the perfection of his own person, even his shadow is graceful and full of vigour; it displays a pair of calves such are seldom met with in the world of shades. M. Bruyas is not so flattered; he is a bourgeois. The poor servant is humble and self-effacing as if he were serving mass. Neither master nor valet casts a shadow on the ground; there is no shadow except for M. Courbet; he alone can stop the rays of the sun.499

Courbet challenged a significant iconic cultural symbol of France, the great tradition of French art, and the institution upon which it grandly stood, the Ecole des Beaux Arts. He uprooted the convention that held history painting at its pinnacle. In its place, he thrust his Realism; images of everyday ordinariness, spiked with deliberate and antagonistic political zest. However, to bring about such an artistic revolution did not go unchallenged and without repercussions for the public identity Courbet had carefully groomed for himself. His challenge to the art institutions was played out on two very

499 Lindsay, J., 1973, Gustave Courbet His Life and Art, 117.
public fronts: in the galleries of the prestigious Salon and in the pages of Parisian newspapers where art writers and caricaturists took aim at his self-promotionalism, his new painting style and what they regarded to be vulgar themes. The unplanned consequence of such continuous derisive public attention was to securely embed Courbet, to position him into an “emotionally charged relationship” with the audience and stakeholders for art, but also, and most importantly, in the social environment of the general public audience watching from the sidelines through the humorous reports in newspapers. Courbet and his art inverted art’s focus from the independent work of art to its producer, the artist, opening the way for the artist to become the commodity. This could only have happened through branding dynamics.

Courbet is therefore a central figure in market capitalism as well as the history of art and advertising with his use of the brand system. He drew on the functioning of advertising to promote his painting, which fostered the emergence of a new audience for modern art. His career serves as the genesis of a new politico-aesthetic era in French painting. His claim on the role “master-artist” occurred at a crucial moment in the transition of control for the production and distribution of art when the powers of commercialisation relieved the Academy of the direction for French art. The market for art would come to control art’s direction.

And so, and in relation to Le Réalisme as a launch, Courbet brought before the public a new kind of art, one that both openly challenged traditional academic supremacy (another feature to become prescriptive of the avant-garde) in the representation of art and artists identities. For the first time, Courbet presented art as a commodity with its own set of defining attributes (rather than an ancient compendium of rules), with a brand equity (value) unconnected to the Academy’s own historical matrix, yet linked to the authority in the artist’s name.

Courbet’s accomplishment was not simply one of marketing. A successful brand requires a requisite product. Courbet certainly had the talent to produce interesting paintings. However his brand as the revolutionary went much further than this at the time. To succeed, his art also had to be revolutionary. While Courbet’s place in the canon of art and his influence on the subsequent generation of Impressionists is not

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501 Market capitalism and its new ideological matrix no longer valued the artist as an elite learned professional whose worth was measured on technical virtuosity in depicting prescribed subject matter. The Academic institutional system focused on what the Whites called “the river of canvases”, where each painting led an independent existence as a separate entity with its own reputation and history”. It was the picture, not the artist, around which the official ideology centred. A certain static grandeur was associated with each individual work. The figure of the artist had an analogous static quality. The Academic aim had been to place him in the empyrean, a grand figure of learning. See White and White (1965) Chapter 3, specifically, 88.
contested, it is they who are now generally recognised as inaugurating the revolution of modernism. The revolutionary nature of Courbet’s aesthetic achievement, which goes hand in hand with his reshaping of the role of the artist and the market, has been enormously underestimated.
PART THREE

Art Overlooks Advertising

The life of our city is rich in poetic and marvellous subjects. We are enveloped and steeped as though in an atmosphere of the marvellous; but we do not notice it.

—Charles Baudelaire, *On the Heroism of Modern Life*, 1846.\(^\text{502}\)

7. ADVERTISING AND THE COMMODITY

*Le Charivari* of 1836 has an illustration showing a poster that covers half a house front. The windows are left uncovered, except for one, it seems. Out of that a man is leaning while cutting away the obstructing piece of paper.¹⁰⁴

These days, a good many houses in Paris appear to be decorated in the style of Harlequin’s costume; I mean a patchwork of large green, yellow, [a word illegible] and pink pieces of paper. The bill-stickers wrangle over the walls and come to blows over a streetcorner. The best of it is all these posters cover one another up at least ten times a day.

—Eduard Kroloff, 1839.¹⁰⁵

The artist, imposing his private vision on the world, fashions a modern subjectivity, shaped by the conflicting conditions, perceptions and aspirations of the new Parisian culture.

—James Rubin.¹⁰⁶

Nowadays, Paris is nothing more than an immense wall of posters. It is studded from chimney to pavement with squares of paper of all colours and sizes, not to mention the graffiti. . . . In any street, arcade, or alleyway where there is . . . room on a wall, you can see the trophies of daguerreotypes reflecting myriads of bourgeois of all ages and forms, spread out with an intolerable complacency.

—Victor Fournel, journalist and critic, 1858.¹⁰⁷

Advertising was a significant component of nineteenth-century Parisian culture, yet remains largely unseen within the art of that period. Realist and Impressionist credo was committed to meticulous observations from contemporary life of the modern urban-industrial complex, yet the painted images do not include representations of advertising despite it being a manifest aspect of modernisation and a constituent feature of the urban landscape already embedded within contemporary metropolitan culture.

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¹⁰³ *Le Charivari* was a humorous, but not political, illustrated daily newspaper in France published between 1832 and 1937.
I have argued that Courbet perfected the art of self-advertisement that became the basis of avant-garde promotion in the twentieth century from Picasso to Damien Hirst, and I have suggested that he was largely inspired by, and used to brilliant effect, the new platform for publicity provided by the newspaper. However, despite his Realism, Courbet never depicted advertising itself, which by his time had become part of the architectural fabric of Paris. This can be explained by the simple fact that Courbet never painted the Parisian environs in his Realist depictions of “cultural self-imaging”.\footnote{Faunce, S., 1993, \textit{Gustave Courbet}, Harry N. Abrams, Inc.: New York, 8.} This is perhaps the main reason why he is not usually associated with modernism. The same defence cannot be made of his followers, the Impressionists. In this respect, this chapter is largely about something that isn’t there. In other words, I’m writing about a significant moment of visual art history that has been painted out, overlooked, ignored, indeed, even written out of historical investigation. Advertising, in all its forms, grew to such an enormous presence in major cities and towns that it caused a public sensation, even by the first half of the nineteenth century, in the industrialised countries where the printing industry experienced a revolution due to technological advancement. Yet, those painters art history promotes as the aesthetic storytellers of Parisian social precincts depicted fleeting moments of modern life in city spaces stripped bare of the printed and painted ephemeral, commercial messaging.

The following pages argue that Impressionist paintings contradict the claim of its artists to depict modern life in all its forms. Impressionism, we’re told by the artists, their critical supporters and theorists of modernism to this day, was the depiction of the “contemporary” moment, the everyday scenes from everyday life.

Such was Courbet’s success that he quickly inspired a new generation of artists that became closely associated with the emerging modernity. All independent minded artists were encouraged to partake in the “evolution of the modern French school” as the art critic Théodore Duret explained in his review of the first group Impressionist exhibition in 1878, and “to introduce the reality of the street”.\footnote{Durranty, E., \textit{The New Painting, Impressionism 1874-1886}; Cited in Harrison, C., Wood, P., with Gaiger, J., eds., 1998, \textit{Art In Theory 1815-1900: An Anthology of Changing Ideas}, Blackwell Publishers: Oxford, 579.}
According to art historical accounts, accumulated since Mallarme’s essay on new art in 1876, and subsequently developed by generations of art historians, Impressionism was a set of representative subjects and aesthetic devices employed in transcribing contemporary scenes, in an “attempt to translate the modern world”.510

We’re told that Impressionism was the depiction of the contemporary moment, as experienced by the artists, in the inexhaustible supply of modern metropolitan locations linked to the new social order and practices accompanying Paris’s vast socio-cultural transformation that occurred during the nineteenth century. In Linda Nochlin’s words: “It was in an urban milieu that this new structure of art was made manifest, and nowhere more vividly than in representations of the very essence of the urban experience, the metropolitan panorama: the streets and boulevards.”511 However, in my research into the evolution of the relationship between modern advertising and modern art, a cornerstone proposition of this thesis, I was extremely surprised, baffled even, to find so few references to street signage, posters, promotional hoarding, or any other form of advertising, incorporated into the compositions of Impressionist painting during the 1870s and 1880s. In her recent examination of the encounter between Impressionist painting and Parisian consumer culture, Iskin asks the question: “Were the painters of modern life equally incapable of representing the developments associated with consumer culture in their paintings?” Further, she observes the parallel developments of avant-garde art and mass consumption were of a kind “radically different from any previously known”,512 and asks: “Did the painting of Manet and the Impressionists criticize or approve of Parisian consumer culture, or was it detached from this crucial aspect of modernity?”513 This chapter aims to address such issues in its examination of the apparent omission of advertising from Impressionist depictions of urban, commercial

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510 Ibid.
locations.

Just as there is a logic in the expected structure of iconic scenery – sand on a beach, heavy grey clouds in a storm, shimmering water of a river landscape – and just as Tissot’s lawn is scattered with leaves in *The Letter*, 1876-8 (Figure 73), to convey the view and atmosphere of a Victorian garden in autumn, for example, advertising in all its colourful forms was the vivid host to Paris’ luxurious commercial activity during the nineteenth century.

Commercial signage and enticing messages were present on boulevards, in the arcades, along streets, and on the walls of buildings across the metropolis. Advertising was part of every community’s daily consumption of products, newspapers and magazines that came to be distributed from newstands on almost every city corner. Advertising aesthetics was on the walls, bars, mirrors and tables of cafés and theatre restaurants. Gilded signs and enticing window displays beckoned the passers-by as consumers turned essential, needs-based shopping chores into delirious addictions of want. Skillfully rendered graphics identified one retail establishment from another and punctuated architecture’s grey stone austerity with colourful messages of commodification: ‘new’, ‘buy’, ‘sale’, ‘exclusive’, ‘latest in fashion’, ‘vogue’, ‘limited stock’, ‘new season’, ‘world’s best’, ‘miracle.’
My particular concern lies in accepted definitions. Nochlin’s characterisation is a prime example, of what Impressionism means: the artistic expression of the modern spirit through the impartial observation of the effects of light on form – a sort of scientific Realism in accord with the scientific spirit of the age – and its complimentary form, the aesthetic engagement of the urban experience. The critical issue under consideration here, is, that any cursory review of the urban landscapes or vistas of Impressionist images, what Rubin terms “experiences of the modern city,”[^514] fails to provide any depiction of advertising’s impact upon the streetscapes of the time that other forms of visual and written evidence indicate had reached collosal levels. Yet so visually overwhelming had advertising become at this time that government intervention was needed, taking the form of print taxes and legislation. The locales that critical discourse claims were the focus of Impressionist observations though, are stripped bare of commercial text and image. The iconography of Impressionism’s city locations suggests that forms of advertising did not exist beyond a

[^514]: Rubin, J., Courbet, 29.
basic typographic style of street signage.

The circumstances contributing to Impressionism’s emergence hinge on the codified structure of middle-class sensibilities of the Second Empire. After Courbet thrust Realism upon the French art establishment, a modern and ever growing sentiment developed in art to withdraw from the Salon and the École’s Neo-classical grip on the direction of painting, towards Realism’s and Naturalism’s sincerity for art that reflected one’s own time and viewpoint: “To be able to represent the customs, the ideas, the appearance of my own era according to my own valuation,”\(^{515}\) declared Courbet. In France at mid-century there was a pungent consciousness of change toward the expression of artistic freedom and the challenges it would afford,\(^{516}\) a theme that became incorporated into the art of the coming generations. Courbet’s one-man assualt nurtured an avant-garde art movement.

Édouard Manet first demonstrated the ambivalence of an artist being both a realist after Courbet and a Baudelairian dandy who relished all the amusements that the sophisticated city of Paris had to offer with his depictions of urban bourgeois entertainment and leisure. While he did not exhibit with the Impressionists, Manet greatly influenced the direction of French painting toward a “modern reality”\(^{517}\) from which Impressionism evolved: “His growing reputation during the 1860s and his resolute individualism provided a new role model for the serious artist,” and therefore he is seen as progenitor to Impressionism and father figure to its artists.

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\(^{517}\) Baudelaire, C., ‘Peintres et Aquafortistes’ originally appeared in *Le Boulevard*, 14 September 1862. Cited in Hanson, 1.
More than other Impressionists, Manet and Degas responded to the modern ideal through manifestations of city vistas; either fleeting moments of lively enjoyment in public venues, as exemplified by Manet’s *Music in the Tuileries Gardens*, 1862, or a more private experience where the viewer is brought hard up against the subject with a commitment to spontaneity and the expression of feeling from the subject that transcribes the “essence of human life.”

Degas’s *Absinthe* is a superior example of the latter. Manifest urban cosmopolitanism became a pre-occupation for a focussed aesthetic of new art during the 1860s and 1870s. Paintings such as *Rainy Day, The Absinth Drinker, Route de Gisors at Pontoise in Winter*, and *Women on a Café Terrace*, aestheticise the public locations of Paris – the urban spectacle – as modern manifestations of Marx’s classic commodity culture of the nineteenth century shaped by the modernised infrastructure and new social patterns that emerged as a result of it. Impressionism in one form or another pays homage to bourgeois sensibility through subject-matter, location, sense of optimism, and taste in art. For, as Baudelaire maintained in his *Salon of 1845*, it was important to indulge the new ruling class of Europe, for “one must please those at whose expense one means to live.”

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519 Linder, C., *Fictions of Commodity Culture From the Victorian to the Postmodern*, 13.
Notwithstanding the declarations to aesthetic manifestations of modernity, there is no evidence of advertising in these streetscape studies, either as part of the mise-en-scène or as the focus of the paintings’ subject matter, despite advertising’s development over the course of the nineteenth century into a metaculture – an inescapable presence, indeed a defining attribute – of aesthetic and social transformations stemming from France’s economic prosperity. Like the renovated public territories – parks, boulevards, cafes, bars, theatre and the department store – advertising had become a location of social structure and intercourse that art’s literary peers in France as well as England had already identified as a luminous symbol of the modern era, an entrenched modality of the collective imagination and a source for inspiration to express the human condition. In its efforts to “create consumer demand where none existed before,” advertising increasingly “integrated the consumer within a rich and complex web of social status and symbolic meaning.” New public spaces of the Second Empire became a stage upon which people could flaunt their relations with objects, at the same time becoming advertisements themselves, as if they’d jumped right off the pages of La Mode Illustre, (Figure 81).

The spectacle of the commodity

Advertising became a definitive aspect of the urban landscape as it developed with industrialisation, modernity and commodification. The free market economy based on an industrial marketplace oiled the wheels of massive unprecedented social change. Thomas Richards’ representation of nineteenth-century commodity culture elucidates the fluid nature of the commodity’s impact on how commerce was conducted but also on “supporting systems of distribution and exchange” when he says, “fundamental imperatives of the capitalist system became tangled up with certain kinds of cultural forms, which after a time became indistinguishable from economic forms”. The relationship people had to commodities had changed forever. Advertising became the prime medium through which the commodity came to saturate society, exciting desires, yet strangely denying satisfaction. Sut Jhally’s comments shed light on the commodity as an institution of social agency:

Because humans are not confined to pure utility in their use of objects, the messages of the marketplace (advertising) must reflect the symbolic breadth of

521 Linder, C., Fictions of Commodity Culture From the Victorian to the Postmodern, 12
523 Linder, C., Fictions of Commodity Culture From the Victorian to the Postmodern, 4.
525 Linder, C., Fictions of Commodity Culture From the Victorian to the Postmodern, 3.
the person-object relation. The symbolism of advertising reflects a deep felt human need.526

The confrontation between literary text and advertisement represents a crucial moment in the nineteenth century. Until then advertisement and hype (puff) had been confined to the workshop or the private home through subscription newspapers. Now it was descending into the streets and spreading over the city’s facades. The street vendor’s cry that could still make Proust dream was gradually making room for the “brouhaha” (tintamarre) of writing.527 Thus, the urban landscape became a sort of paper city, a capital, to quote Balzac in Ferragus, “clothed in billboards”.528

During the course of the nineteenth century advertising developed into an industry complicit with capitalism and its commodity based economy and culture. Throughout the last two decades of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries improved industrial technologies created an increasing excess of commodities. They became the cause of labour migration, the object of advertising, the source of prosperity, and importantly, the key to social control. By the mid 1850s commodities of all kinds were being exchanged and consumed in unprecedented quantities across France and continental Europe. Richards points out, “the commodity became and has remained the one subject of mass culture, the centrepeice of everydaylife, the focal point of all representation, the dead centre of the modern world”.529

527 Tintamarre is a word of the period. Along with Le Charivari, Le Tintamarre was a satiric newspaper (1843-1910) devoted to – as its subtitle indicates – “the critique of advertisement” and “the satire of hype.”
emerged as the biggest exporter of mass-produced products by mid-century, and France came to specialise in the luxury and highly-skilled craftsmanship commodities, Paris became a commodity in itself, a glittering destination for nationals and foreign tourists, the capital of all the delights and excitement of the modern era. Victor Hugo’s remark in *Les Misérables* reflects the ecstasy in Paris as a commodity sign and exchangeable signifier: “All that can be found anywhere can be found in Paris.”530

The key to commodity culture, as Marx argued, is to create wants and then transform them into needs. Thus, the success of commodity culture is dependent on a messaging system with considerable influence and reach – advertising. Without its power to elicit desire in people’s minds, particularly for everything “non-essential,” there would not have been the saturation of symbolic representation of commodities in any large metropolis such as Paris and therefore the extraordinary growth in its specialist markets. Advertising, through its hoarding, signage, mobile proselitisers the sandwich men, and posters, was the functional and aesthetic component that enlivened the great city’s renovation, a key component of the industrialisation process that elevated Paris to “the world capital of fashion, art, and literature, and of life’s pleasures”, as Willms poetically described.531

Throughout the 1850s and 1860s Louis Napoleon implemented the civic modernisation of Paris, giving a concrete form to its new social order.532 Class distinctions came to be based upon consumption patterns and the conspicuous display of commodities. “Faces are eclipsed by clothes, feelings by landscapes”533 lamented the Goncourt brothers in their journal. Shoes, trousers, matches, soap, perfume, wine, liquor, gloves, hats, paintings, porcelain, champagne, jewellery, chocolates, furniture, linen, ribbons and dresses; all were increasingly produced throughout the early decades of the nineteenth century at rates never seen before. Commenting on the constitution of a mature capitalist economic order, Christopher Linder suggests that the commodity was at the heart of the establishment of the free market economy and its accompanying new modes of production and the advanced systems of distribution and exchange that supported it: “Produced at unprecedented rates, exchanged in unprecedented numbers, and consumed in unprecedented volumes, commodities soon became the prominent, visible markers of industrial and market expansions in the decades leading up to the


nineteenth century." In Paris, more than any other European city, the commodity was responsible for stimulating great spectacle and economic prosperity.

The new boulevards created their own forms of spectacle, through the hustle and bustle of carts and public conveyances over newly macadamized surfaces (which some radicals thought were designed to prevent them from converting cobblestones into barricades). The arrival of the new department stores and cafés, both of which spilled out onto the sidewalks of the new boulevards, made the boundary between public and private spaces porous. The proliferation of cabarets, circuses, concerts and theatres, and popular opera houses produced a frenzy of popular entertainment.

As Harvey points out above, the new public spaces of Paris, delivered under Napoleon’s plan to modernise the city became locations of sociability that brought people out of their private domains into communal and commercial territories to stroll, relax, shop, and importantly, parade one’s good taste and class. What you wore symbolically identified how you lived. The boulevards and parks, like the cafés, restaurants, department stores, and theatre, were transformed into places to see and to be seen: “It became a fashionable necessity for them [women] to stroll the boulevards, window-shop, buy, and display their acquisitions in the public space rather than squirrel them away in the home or in the boudoir.” The new territories became spectacles in themselves with the hustle and bustle of increased pedestrian and carriage traffic,

534 Linder, C., *Fictions of Commodity Culture From the Victorian to the Postmodern*, 4.
shoppers, site seers, fashionable ladies and gentlemen: “The sociality of the masses of people drawn to the boulevards was now as much controlled by the imperatives of commerce as by police power.”  

Retailing in Paris became a city-wide concern with Haussmann’s open system of streets that linked “previously self-sufficient neighbourhoods” into thoroughfares of easy access for increased traffic and pleasurable strolling. Willms explains how the renovated central districts virtually delivered potential customers right to the doors of the department stores where Zola set his novel Au Bonheur des dames (The Ladies Paradise): “those new avenues, where the bustling crowds of the fin de siècle moved along in broad sunlit spaces.” Willms continues his insightful discussion of mid-century retailing in the department stores of Paris in the early days of their establishment and the psychological power they held over the wills of their customers:

In calculating large sales with relatively small profit margin, the stores were not aiming to democratise their customers. They counted on a bourgeois public in whose breast two souls were in conflict: one desiring the decorative and ostentatious luxury exemplified by Haussmann’s facades, and the other upholding the virtues of thrift.  

Before merchandising as a term for the presentation of products in a retail environment was even created, or indeed before Marx had begun his analysis of capitalism, department stores in Paris had identified the need to glamourise and luxuriate the buying experience in order to attract the attention of pedestrians and entice them to become purchasing customers who reacted on impulse rather than satisfying the simple need of daily life. To this end stores began what we refer today as executing fully integrated marketing campaigns utilising available technologies and media. In a time before the omnipotent electronic forms of radio, television and digital technologies, this was limited to print, including newspaper, pamphlet, brochure, catalogue, leaflet, and poster advertising, and contracted street criers who called out advertising messages as they walked the streets and boulevards. The forms of print had the capacity to transmit copious amounts of product information and to make striking impact through the use of colour reproduction. Printed commercial messages were everywhere in the major metropolises. Willms elaborates: “The milling crowds were attracted by the large delivery trucks, with the stores’ names on their sides in giant letters, and carrying posters announcing the latest special offers.”

Women were

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536 Ibid.
538 Ibid.
539 Ibid., 285.
considered at particular risk from dazzling advertising narrative that spoke to all females irrespective of class and age. In his novel Zola makes sharp observations of what he saw as a democratising of products by retailers by endowing luxuries with a mysterious “illusory quality of uniqueness and exclusivity” aimed directly at women and their seemingly insatiable desires. In the following passage the fictitious proprietor of a department store, Mouret, explains current retailing philosophy to a baron that Willms suggests is evidently modeled on the civic planner responsible for Paris’ renovations, Baron Haussmann:

They had awoken new desire in her weak flesh, they were an immense temptation to which she inevitably yielded, succumbing in the first place to purchases for the house, then seduced by coquetry and, finally consumed by desire. By increasing sales tenfold, by making luxury democratic, shops were becoming a terrible agency for spending, ravaging households, working hand in hand with the latest extravagances in fashion, growing ever more expensive. . . . “Get the women,” he said to Baron, laughing impudently as he did so, “and you’ll sell the world.”

As the commodity took hold of social interaction through the spectacle of urban movement and encounter in those special places recently constructed, advertising, as its chief proselytising agent, generated its own commercial idiom that saturated the streets

540 Ibid.
and retail environments, unrelentingly. The atmosphere of first the arcades, then the department stores, and along the footpaths lined with boutiques and specialist shops, was an exciting and surprised-filled experience where treats and luxuries were on offer everywhere. The distinguishing atmosphere of retail aesthetics was enjoyed by the passing reader as much as the shopper:

It takes only a minute, only a step, for the forces of attraction to gather; a minute later, a step further on, and the passerby is standing before a different shop. . . . One’s attention is spirited away as though by violence, and one has no choice but to stand there and remain looking up until it returns. The name of the shopkeeper, the name of his merchandise, inscribed a dozen times on placards that hang on the doors and above the windows, beckons from all sides.542

Commercial signage had an astonishing ability to encapsulate the essence of the modern. For advertising’s character was shaped from new factories and workplaces where new technologies and scientific innovation produced more and more new commodities.

Fournel describes the state of commercial coverage as it pervaded the capital by mid century:

Nowadays, Paris is nothing more than an immense wall of posters. It is studded from chimney to pavement with squares of paper of all colours and sizes, not to mention the graffiti. . . . In any street, arcade, or alleyway where there is . . . room on a wall, you can see the trophies of daguerreotypes reflecting myriads of bourgeois of all ages and forms, spread out with an intolerable complacency.543

To further increase impact, advertisers began using colour illustrations in their advertisements, images that their prospective audience could relate to – depictions of people just like themselves in situations that made the product seem a pleasurable experience and a part of the everyday. Richards comments on the burgeoning array of commodities: “There were so many new things, and so many new words naming them.’544 He continues:

Everywhere the commodity teemed with signification – so much so that Marx, in his famous chapter in Capital on commodity fetishism, had to shift metaphores every few sentences to do justice to its ubiquity and plasticity as a form of representation.545

542 Benjamin, W., Arcades Project page 60. Originally from Schilderungen aus Paris (1822-1823), in Gesammelte Schriften (Hamberg and Frankfurt am Main, 1862), vol. 3, 46-49.
543 Hamon, P., Expositions: Literature and Architecture in Nineteenth-Century France 133
545 Ibid., 2-3.
Advertising, like the commodity, was an interactive component of the modern city, people engaged with it: they read it, ignored it, framed it, hung it on their walls, submitted to it, objected to it, argued over it, were informed by it, persuaded by it, discussed it, believed it, tripped over it, wrapped their rubbish in it, and hung on every word of it. Together with its close ally, the journalist, advertising had the power to invent
fashion, give rise to social patterns and fads, strengthen and build personal and corporate reputations, destroy them, create mythic histories for brands, infuse them with distinct heritage to invoke comfort and security,\textsuperscript{546} invent nobility, effect social relations, bestow authority, increase consumption, mould social conduct,\textsuperscript{547} embed belief, invent tradition and ritual, confirm social ranking, bestow status, open markets, develop consumer cultures, expand product territories, build and communicate with mass markets and therefore, stimulate economic progress.

Advertising was a form of communication: the dissemination of information by a sender to an unknown receiver, that evolved into a powerful form of discourse with the authority to transform the products of manufacture into fetishishes – objects with “supernatural powers” that could bestow “a life-like autonomy and subjectivity of its own”.\textsuperscript{548} Advertising transformed the simplest of objects into dream-like experiences of pleasure as advertisers came to realise just how important the commodity had become as the linchpin of their economic growth.

Champagne is a fascinating example of the commodity’s power for charismatic myth-making with the ability to bestow perceived aristocratic aura upon its consumers. A social group keen to emulate the aristocracy’s consumption patterns, the bourgeoisie appropriated the “tradition and honor but also the respectibility and status of the brand”\textsuperscript{549} of sparkling wine. Historically, at least since the mid-nineteenth century, champagne advertising has presented the expensive beverage as one invested with powerful symbolic capital: “Associations with royalty, nobility, and the ‘exceptional powers or qualities’ of ‘celebrities’\textsuperscript{550} created desire in the minds of the bourgeois. Moreover, Guy explains that connecting champagne to “an ‘upscale’ clientel played on the desire of bourgeois consumers to distance themselves from the lower classes”.\textsuperscript{551} Champagne advertising “did not call on the middle-class ethos of frugality and self-denial, but appealed to consumers’ aspirations and desires to go beyond the mundane social realities of the ‘bourgeois century’ ”.\textsuperscript{552}

Through its commercial idiom, fast developing into a language all its own, commercial literature became a trope of modernity, “enforcing its own codes of social


\textsuperscript{547} Ibid., 218

\textsuperscript{548} Linder, C., \textit{Fictions of Commodity Culture From the Victorian to the Postmodern}, 107.


\textsuperscript{550} Ibid., 219.

\textsuperscript{551} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{552} Ibid.
reading”. For Marx, whose analysis of capitalism corresponds with the rise of advertising, the mediation of society by the commodity meant “the personification of objects and the representation of persons by things”. What you owned, wore and consumed, in other words how you responded to the discourse of advertising, became a social map for reading people. Wicke writes: “Within that period, advertising can retrospectively be seen to have become an institution – a centre of knowledge production, a determining economic site, as well as a representational system comprising a vastly heterogenous set of individual artifacts.”

Commodities needed marketing. Industries experiencing growth and technological advancement required information dissemination to consumers. New products and existing brands requiring regeneration, needed to be presented to the public. The new burgeoning ranks of the middle classes had inadvertently become willing and fashionable “bearers of

Figure 89. Jean-Ignace-Isidore Grandville, 1844, Fashionable people represented in public by their accoutrements. Caricature from *Un Autre Monde*.

Figure 90. Charles Marville, *Rue de Breteuil*, c.1865.

Figure 91. (*Right*) Singer Sewing Machines advertisement, c. 1885. Musée des Arts Décorants.

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554 Linder, C., *Fictions of Commodity Culture From the Victorian to the Postmodern*, 15.
the spectacle,” as à la mode trends began with their tastes for luxury. Au Bon Marché (1852) and the Louvre (1855) department stores needed to make an impression, promote new products, entice new customers, tempt merchandise trial . . . advertise. The illustration *Distraction d’un Afficheur*, shows how inventive advertising bureaus had already become by the early decades of the nineteenth century in optimising space, any space available with which to advance their clients’ position in the market.

Advertising, in one form or another ‘descended on the streets’ and ‘spread over the city’s facades’ to dominate the streetscapes of Paris, as indeed, it did in many other major cities. Advances in print technology and increased advertising revenue made newspapers and magazines available to more people, “transforming them from an elite to a popular medium”. Lotteries and give-aways were effective incentives to increase readership, and new techniques in paper manufacture made print affordable to almost every reader. Chu explains: “with the introduction of such weeklies as *Le Figaro*, readers had access to a new, more engaging public forum of the latest news in culture, fashion, sports, and social gossip, as well as essays and short stories”. The small newspaper kiosk (Figure 77) sprung up on city intersection corners, accompanied by town criers, and morris columns kept the buying public up-to-date on community information, shop and café openings, entertainment guides for ballet and opera, political rallies, et al.

557 Ibid., 212.
559 Ibid., 6.
560 Cylindrical advertising columns on street pavements designed to display printed promotional material.
Sandwichmen (Figure 92) channeled pedestrians toward Le Bon Marche’s Spring bargains. Around the corner on Boulevard St Germaine Aristide Bruant’s cabaret show competed for wall space with *Fleur de Lotus* at Folies Bergère.

Layer upon layer, coloured paper messages were posted to announce an opening, a star attraction, a new fashion, the end of a battle, or a ships’ docking time. The regularity and sheer volume of advertising messages became part of one’s daily routine. “Each of the posters tries to outdo the others by using loud colours and big print.”561

Photographic evidence of Paris during the second half of the nineteenth century, shows advertising’s commercial literature as a pervasive component of the urban scene, producing what would be (as we are confined to the black and white reproduction of photographic technology of the time) colourful treatments on every available surface. The knock-on effects of industrialisation caused significant advances in advertising technologies’ new forms of visual communication, evident in all quarters of the city. As much a part of metropolis spectacle as any other evocative form of public modernity, advertising, like street lighting or crinoline dresses and cotton bonnets, had become a part of Baudelaire’s atmospheric “public splendour”562 of Paris.

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By ‘modernity’ I mean the ephemeral (lasting only a short period), the fugitive (elusive), the contingent (depending on a future as yet unknown), the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable (unchangeable).


A great deal of art historical discourse about Impressionism focuses on the genre of landscape. However, although landscape painting was popular with collectors...
during the mid-to-late nineteenth century, it was in Impressionism’s other inspiration, the urban environment, that the impulse of a modern experience could be expressed more completely. For it was in the city, more specifically the city of Paris, that the tempo of modern life was most pronounced. And it is part of the mythologies of modernity and modernism that the most intimate and innovative engagements with the newly emerging contemporary society occurred in Paris.

Commencing during the 1760s through until the second half of the nineteenth century, the industrial revolution in France ushered in a wide range of developments that brought lasting changes to all aspects of city and rural existence, and which has come to be known by one word: “modernisation”. Together with Napoleon’s imperial dream of urban planning consolidating prestige building and an integrated transport system, modernisation transformed Paris into the “economic motor”564 of France and the cultural mecca of Europe.

Charles Baudelaire, a friend of Courbet’s in the formative decade of the 1840s, first raised the notion of this new urban experience to an aesthetic ideology, linking it to the idea of modernity – the conceptual explanation that defines the change in social organisation which occurred during the first half of the nineteenth century as a result of industrialisation and the commercialisation linked to it.565 In the poem, Le Cygne (The Swan) from his symbolist collection of poetry in Le Fleurs du mal Baudelaire laments the change: “Old Paris gone (the form of a city changes faster, alas, than the heart of man).”566

At the same time that Courbet was formulating his assault on the Parisian artworld, Baudelaire first conceived of a modern experience while considering the modern in expressly artistic forms, articulating such ideas in his Salon of 1846. In the closing statement of his review, entitled, ‘On the Heroism of Modern Life’, he admonished the sentimentality and conservatism espoused by the juste milieu, and encouraged artists to look beyond the studio and the comfortable pattern of tradition’s “idealization of ancient life”, to a more local beauty on offer in the present time: “what I am happy to find in all [the bourgeoisie and their fashion], or almost all of them, is the moral and aesthetic feeling of their time.”567 Here, Baudelaire uses contemporary costume (the fashion of the bourgeoisie) to explain his expression of the modern

565 Baudelaire was one of a number of writers who observed social changes and shifting patterns of existence due to modernisation. Edgar Allen Poe in America, Charles Dickens in England, Soren Kirkegard, and Zola. See Harrison, C., Wood, P., with Gaiger, J., (eds) 1998, Art In Theory 1815-1900: An Anthology of Changing Ideas, 146.
566 Willms, J., Paris Capital of Europe: From the Revolution to the Belle Époque, 253.
as a condition that, like beauty, is eternal while constantly changing with the passing of time, and therefore stands as a symbol of the essential quality of always being present and contemporary. He had identified “the big-city landscape” as a notion of “modernity” to be linked with visual art: “the painter, the true painter to come, will be he who wrests from the contemporary scene its epic side and show us, through colour and line, how great and poetic we are in our ties and polished boots.” To Baudelaire, carefully observed social settings of everyday life in the capital, and the Parisians themselves who acted them out, were the very substance of modernity. From the pageant of fashionable gatherings of elegantly attired bourgeois, to the workers and criminals overlooked by prosperity, everything was to be observed with acute awareness. All the transient existances were there for the artist who opened his eyes without the prejudices of the past, to acknowledge nobility in the unexpected, to recognise a modern form of heroism, one that was accessible and real instead of mythical and distant as traditional art espoused.

It was to these social changes and new modes of existence that Baudelaire focused his self-conscious supposition that this new urban condition contained as much allure and beauty in its “pageant of fashionable life and the thousand floating existences” as any other time in the past. There was now a new Paris, the modern and fashionable

metropolis that butted tight up against an old capital where the rays of gilded signage from the renovated prescincts did not shine.

Paris is still that monstrous marvel, that astonishing assemblage of movements, of machines, of thoughts, the city of a hundred thousand novels, the centre of the world.
—Honoré de Balzac, *Ferragus* 1833-1835.570

We have to grasp the spirit, the soul, the features, of things and beings.571
—Honoré de Balzac, *The Unknown Masterpiece*, 1845

Even before Baudelaire, Honoré de Balzac first saw the rich poetry emerging from the daily life of modern Paris: “Could you really grudge, spending a few minutes watching the dramas, disasters, tableaux, picturesque incidents which arrest your attention in the heart of this restless queen of cities?” “Look around you” as you “make your way through that huge stucco cage, that human beehive with black runnels marking its sections, and follow the ramifications of the idea which moves, stirs and ferments inside it.”572 The popularity of his realist novels and essays in serialised form during the second half of the 1840s proved, as Harvey asserts, that the modern was as potent a wellspring for creative expression as legendary heroes and ancient tales of the human condition. Baudelaire certainly was impressed:

All his characters are endowed with the same vital ardor as himself. From the summit of the aristocracy to the dregs of the proletariat, all actors of his comedy grasp more violently after life, are more vigorous and cunning in battle, more patient in misfortune, more greedy in enjoyment, more angelic in devotion, than the comedy of the true world shows them to be.573

An emerging modernity prompted a new range of subject matter that, according to Baudelaire, challenged traditional art forms. This Baudelarian philosophy was expressed in an aestheticisation of the city by writers such as Hugo and Zola, who, like Balzac,574 found the intimate locations of Paris’s districts to be a natural setting and

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574 Balzac is one of the first to have divined the power of the advertisement and, above all, the disguised
inspiration for their work. To Émile Zola the street became the location for his novel *Nana*,\(^{575}\) the story of Anna, a streetwalker who rises from destitution to high-class *cocotte*. She is a representative character of the thousands of isolated and marginalised “existences” of the working classes. She also was an important subject in the paintings of Manet and Degas.

For these writers and painters of modern Paris modernity did not just open up interesting subjects, it also provided a worldview, a new myth or paradigm of identity. In a sense, Paris had become an aesthetic commodity, and its artists “devoted … to advertising the delights of the capital, its theatrical entertainments, its exhibitions and its streets”.\(^{576}\) Zola wrote,

> I love the horizons of the big city with all my heart. There is an enormously rich source here; we must create a modern art without parallel. The sunny boulevards swarm with people, the squares are luxuriantly green. And depending on whether a ray of sunshine brightens Paris, or a dull sky lets it dream, it resembles a joyful or a melancholy poem. This is art, all around us. A living art, an art still unknown.\(^{577}\)

With an expanded mass of urban dwellers came new forms of social organisation and patterns of material life. One of these, consumption, is critically important to understanding how advertising came to be such a rudimentary component of modernisation and how deeply interconnected all the other defining attributes of modernism were in creating the atmosphere for the modern experience. At this particular moment, consumption had reached levels never before seen in Paris. Retailing, restaurants and entertainment – as locations for leisure and unrestricted social interaction – underwent enormous growth in diversity as well as number: “distinctions were made between work-time and leisure-time, and these distinctions in turn linked to an awareness of crowded streets, enticing shop-windows and accelerating forms of transport and communication.”\(^{578}\)

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\(^{575}\) *Nana* tells the story of Anna Choupeau’s rise from streetwalker to high-class *cocotte* during the last three years of the Second Empire. The story ends with Nana living on the streets at the beginning of a life of prostitution.


Baudelaire’s *flâneur* engages painters

It’s not surprising then that the new subject matter, the spectacle of Paris, as seen and felt by the *flâneur*, already a central theme of literary circles, came to possess the imagination of painters. Analysis of modern social experience became the visual parallel to Zola’s “striking prose painting”, as Willms refers to the writer’s literary depictions of the city’s *essence*. Haussmann’s new precincts provided locations that attracted crowds that then became intoxicating spectacles that interested painters in the boulevards and streets, exotic bars, café theatres, parks, and most of all, the exhilarating atmosphere of change. It was in the spirit of the new age that this change was felt – an alluring experience of modern myth in the making, that Manet, then the Impressionists, celebrated in their urban studies. These artists became infected with the Realist call of Daumier, ‘one must be of one’s times’ – “*Il faut être de son temps.*”\(^{579}\)

Malinowski said in relation to the meaning of myth, it was “to be equated with its *use*; it was not what members of a culture [or subculture] *say* about a myth, but what they *do* with it which is important”.\(^{580}\) According to Baudelaire, in the case of modernity, the doer was the *flâneur*, a gentleman stroller who walks aimlessly through city streets in order to experience the aesthetic magic of the new social order, “a man who understands the world and the mysterious and lawful reasons for all its uses”.\(^{581}\) This man judged the exact distance from which he could be part of yet detached from the urban pulse in order to most fully appreciate its sublime sensation. This idea of semi-immersion became the aesthetic credo of the Impressionists.\(^{582}\) Why then did the Impressionists ignore advertising if it played such a prominent, if not defining, role in modernity? Was it to get the requisite distance of the *flâneur*, so as not to lose oneself in the crowd?

Not withstanding, Baudelaire’s notion of modernity finds exemplary expression in advertising, which, besides being ever-new, is ‘ephemeral’, ‘fugitive’, ‘contingent’ and, like art, is paradoxically also eternal and immutable because it will always be the enduring and glorious herald of our relationship with objects. Further, the scope of its subject matter is extremely broad, from Monet’s depictions of modern industry in *Argenteuil, the Bank in flower*, 1877, to Degas’s explorations into binocular vision in the illuminated, yet acrophobic, *Miss La La at the Cirque Fernando*, 1879. Together they showed an

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\(^{582}\) Ibid.
underlying enthusiasm for a new kind of art that extracted images of ‘the everyday’
directly from the artists’ own lives and those of the audience they aimed to attract, the
bourgeois—though in this emerging bourgeois world of consumption, consumers from
different social classes mixed, unfettered by the polite laws of social stratification. Yet,
excised from views of this new world of consumption was its ideological and
vocalcentre, advertising.

The new aesthetic idiom of the
Impressionists – the painters of modern life –
did not include the transitory messages of the
marketplace’s pleasure and convenience
despite being a defining characteristic and
major motif of the modern society that Baudelaire was to describe in his defining essay
“The Painter of Modern Life”.

The contradiction: the omission of advertising from Impressionism

As we have seen, advertising knew no bounds, neither geographic nor socio-
economic. It covered the walls of Haussmann’s renovated territories just as it had
always existed throughout the corridors of old Paris. Commercial messages became
larger and more colourful; the invention of offset printing in 1875 increased print
production capabilities while reducing costs. Further, as we have also seen, it was an
integral part of modern life that an emerging avant-garde of independent-minded artists
embraced. Why then is the visual language of advertisement absent from the urban
iconography of impressionist metropolitan landscapes?
A simple comparison between Gustave Caillebotte’s painting, *Paris Street: A Rainy Day* – a work closely associated with Impressionism – and a painting by the realist, Charles De Groux, *The Coffee Mill*, from around the same time, will elucidate what I call Impressionism’s *differentiated naturalism*. Both Caillebotte’s and De Groux’s paintings depict life on the street during the Second Empire’s renovation of Paris, yet only one acknowledges the existence of advertising by incorporating it into the streetscape. The
setting of Paris Street is a six-way intersection, most likely along rue de Rivoli, one of Haussmann’s showcase junctions of urban transformation. This was a busy central city location where business and retailing co-existed alongside cafés and restaurants, the ideal scene for bourgeois strolling.

Paris Street, is regarded as a defining example of urban Impressionism. It depicts key forms of Baudelaire’s model of modernity, the experience of the modern city, inhabited by the human “by-product” of the modern society – the bourgeoisie – who, through their new lifestyle patterns, transformed social experience. At the same time this self-consciously Baudelairian dogma is a pristine promotional image for the Emperor’s dream of Paris as the Western capital and celebration of “a new form of Empire”. Its taut composition and atmospheric detail are indeed masterful, as is the overall construction of the “rigorous geometry” that balances the image.

Are we to take Paris Street: A Rainy Day’s depiction of contemporary life as a documentary recording of the renovated quarters, or to use T. J. Clark’s phrase, “the strict adherence to the facts of vision”, or do we accept its composition as a subjective summary of the artist’s phenomenological experience? For in the consideration of these ideas, we find ourselves retracing Greenberg’s reasoning when he says, “Impressionist painting becomes more an exercise in colour vibrations than representation of nature”. Can we perhaps accept such images of urban modernity as “truthful renderings” that accommodates both an objective representation to “transfer the actual visual experience”, as well as a subjective one, as Rubin and Shiff subscribe to? Or should we persist with deeper questions that ask, if this is the “natural world”, why did Caillebotte, as others also did, omit the advertising signage that photography from the era, indeed the same intersection even, proves was an indelible part of the locality?

The critics at the time who reviewed the third Impressionist exhibition in 1877 were in accord in their verdicts of Caillebotte’s Paris Street. They declared him a “genuine talent,” who offers “striking Realism” and that “It gives an idea of what photography will become when the means are found to reproduce colours with their full intensity and

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subtlety". However, they too identified a chink in the ideological armour of Impressionist philosophy, that by 1877 had become slick propaganda – what Caillebotte failed to include in his rendering of the scene, causing some to question his work as Impressionism. *Paris Street: A Rainy Day*, had no rain. The critic for *L’Événement*, complimented Caillebotte’s skills in his appraisal, then questioned the truthfulness of his ‘adhering to the facts of vision’ in this work regarded at the time as *en plein air*: “Again, this is very well drawn . . . only Caillebotte has neglected to provide any rain. That day the rain seems to have left no impression on him at all.” Roger Ballu writing for *La Chronique des Arts et de la Curiosité* is explicit as he confronts the labelling of the movement head on, “Is Caillebotte an Impressionist, for example, in his large canvas entitled *Rue de Paris – Temps de pluie*? The open umbrellas are all of a uniformly silvery tint, yet the rain is nowhere to be seen.” And still there is no writer, critic, or indeed artist, who noticed the wholesale omission of advertising from these urban depictions.

In contrast to *Paris Street: A Rainy Day*, De Groux’s *The Coffee Mill* (before 1870) is a rare but informative view of advertising’s claim on the precincts of Paris. In a worthy spark of Realism, this little known painting stands as a document of the extent of advertising’s coverage in the city. Unlike many of his Impressionist contemporaries who focused on characters outside the mainstream of bourgeois culture, De Groux’s socially conscious study of human issues presses us hard up against urban misery located in a landscape some distance from Caillebotte’s rainy intersection. De Groux captures the urban poor and their misery in a land where the *flaneur* did not venture. *The Coffee Mill* lays out in woeful detail the dark and shadowy streets of old Paris, which served as precarious lodgings for its disadvantaged families.

Five adults and two children come together around a street fire to seek refuge from the cold. The overall run-down and dirty environment, no doubt a working-class precinct, is further emphasised by the peeling advertising posters and notices on the wall, a metaphor perhaps of the condition of the painting’s central figures. De Groux has chosen to situate his characters centrally in the composition, where he also places the wall of dilapidated and peeling out-of-date advertising. A direct connection is made between the debris of a city gripped by the commodity and the human remnants of a capitalist economy deprived of life’s necessities, and of justice that cements the deepening void between the classes.

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590 Ibid.
Unlike Degas’s *L’Absinthe*, or Manet’s *At the Café*, where the artist has constructed a composition using friends to pose as the main characters (in *At the Café* the man and woman sitting at the bar were friends of Manet’s – the actress Ellen André and Henri Guerard, engraver of note593), *The Coffee Mill* is no tableau. It is reportage art that deals with contemporary life rather than portraying it in any idealised form, al la Courbet. More akin to Millet’s *The Gleaners* (1857), this is urban naturalism where there is none of Baudelaire’s heroism. This curious picture shows the complementary opposite to bourgeois Impressionism – *Music in the Tuileries Gardens*, for example, widely regarded as one of the most compelling and exemplary depictions of the set of Baudelarian ideas underpinning Impressionism. *The Coffee Mill* and *Tuileries* are yin and yang of Haussmann’s rebuilding program. The self-conscious, fashionably dressed garden patrons sit at the heart of Parisian industrialisation, the center-point from which De Groux’s cold and most probably hungry peasants are measured in their dispossessed and marginalised roles. As yin and yang are complimentary opposites within a greater whole, the street in *The Coffee Mill* shows one component of what advertising sees as a seamless whole in its seizure of public spaces and human desires.

De Groux was not the only artist to represent advertising. For example, Le Quesne’s 1897 painting *Allegory of Advertising* is a loaded metaphor on the burgeoning consumerism and its most audacious herald, advertising, at its height of gripping Paris.

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The allegorical figure of advertising is surrounded by an assortment of crowded commercial mediums; the newspapers of Europe and America, along with wheeled and human billboards in the background square. The plinth of the statue has been plastered with poster bills. The female figure of advertising, the symbolic representation of Delacroix’s Marianne from *Liberty Leading the People* is barely earthbound by the strength of the balloons’ pull as she releases them into the air printed with brand names promoting everything from the department stores the Louvre, Pygmalion and Samaritaine, theatre performances and museum shows.\textsuperscript{594}

Photographic evidence from around mid-century supports Le Quesne’s symbolic representation of commercial discourse and its blanketing of Paris. From one observer: “Windows, signs, advertisements, doors, façades, all rise, widen and become silvered, gilded and illumined. It is a rivalry of magnificence and stateliness which borders on madness.”\textsuperscript{595} This is how Edmondo de Amici began his description of the streets of Paris when he wrote of the distinguishing “beauty” of its city, the Baudelarian “epic side” of modern life, with the enthusiasm and acute observation of the poet’s excited child, in his travel book to promote Paris in 1878, the year of the Exposition Universal.

De Amici’s account substantiates Baudelaire’s 1846 modern aesthetic in promotional rhetoric. The Italian writer observed the “form and colour” of the “public splendour”\textsuperscript{596} within what he called “the metropolis of metropolises”\textsuperscript{597} as if viewed for the first time in a state of Baudelaire’s “newness”.\textsuperscript{598} For Baudelaire had reasoned in his seminal essay ‘On the Heroism of Modern Life’, that the “pageant of fashionable life” was available to all who opened their eyes. I suggest de Amici recognised the public majesty that according to the poet existed in the present, in the same way as it had in past ages when “ancient life was a great parade.” The modern beauty of Paris that de Amici saw was the liveliness he felt as he wandered through the vast city distracted by the réclame (advertisement) that he felt was so overwhelming in its dazzling magnificence:

Here is no substantial beauty; it is a species of theatrical and effeminate magnificence, a grandeur of ornamentation, excessive and full of coquetry and pride, which dazzles and confuses like blinding scintillations, and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{598} Baudelaire, C., ‘The Painter of Modern Life’, *Art in Theory*, 493.
\end{itemize}
expresses to perfection the nature of a great, opulent and sensual city, living only for pleasure and glory.

Here was Baudelaire’s ideal, composed as it was of the variable and yet the eternal. Every day, advertising renews itself. In its frequent changes of dress, information is updated and therefore, maintaining its role as a phenomenon of the “moment.”

If we accept the long-established aesthetic ideology of Impressionism, then we must necessarily also accept that within the urban precincts of late nineteenth-century Paris advertising didn’t exist, or find a reason for why those artists refused to paint it. One possible motive was expressed at the time. In a short review of Caillebotte’s View Across a Balcony, 1880, shown at the fifth impressionist exhibition that year, Paul Mantz writing for Le Temps is palpable in his scathing judgment of the graphic letters the artist dared incorporate into his urban setting: “Five capital letters in gold, intrusive despite the distance, place themselves in the centre of the canvas and catch the attention of the spectator who does not hesitate, moreover, to admit that, among the ways to spoil his painting, Caillebotte chose the most assured.”

Closer to our time Robert Hughes echoes Mantz’ dismissal of the appropriateness of realising advertising aesthetics in Shock of the New, viewing it as incongruous in serious art of the nineteenth century: “The idea of sitting down and painting the environment of signs and replications that made up the surface of the modern city was obviously absurd.”

The negative perception advertising had acquired for itself was already a permanent topic for derision in the French press by the third and fourth decades of the nineteenth century. Daumier, Balzac and Baudelaire were, most definitely, if unintentionally, aligned with extreme conservative social commentators in their disgust at

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the intrusion of advertising into the locales of Paris. Victor Hugo speaks ironically of advertising in his travel guide Le Rhin, of 1842, “Where there are no churches, I simply look at signposts. Anyone who knows how to visit a town knows that shop signs have a great deal of meaning.”

However, it is Jean-Jacques Grandville’s Un Autre Monde (Another World) that throws advertising’s derisive status and suspicious renown into relief through numerous depictions and inferences in his illustrated of 1844. Regarded as his masterpiece, Un Autre Monde is the story of advertising’s layered, persuasive rhetoric and the engulfing social power it exerts delivered through the story of a character called Puff. Coolly received at the time, Un Autre Monde bewildered readers by its unstructured, nonsensical format of a series of complicated caricatures used to tell the story and depict Grandville’s unique, and modern, way of viewing the world.

Beneath Puff’s adventures, depicted through a series of complex images that use metamorphoses and satire, Un Autre Monde describes the commercialisation and social structure of mid-century Parisian culture. The strange “other world” that Puff inhabits is described through loosely connected cartoons of metamorphosis and inversions of real life. Twenty-three years before Karl Marx, Grandville had identified the link between the exchange-value of objects and the political economy of social messaging. He illustrated such universal symbolic practices in his caricature of French society. In this clever drawing of the social proclivities within the Salon experience, Grandville depicts the art connoisseur as a bourgeois mole; perhaps he even intends for us to assume the critic is sight-impaired, as is the real-life animal, and blind to any form of innovation or change to art? The mole tips his hat to the battle scene, that we may assume is masterfully painted in the style of the grand manner as a horse’s foreleg and head, spears, bayonets, flag and a man’s arm holding its sword, all project out of the pictorial space and into the gallery. In a caustic

Figure 108. Jean-Ignace-Isidore Grandville, “The Marionettes’ Louvre” (An exhibition gallery), illustration from Un Autre Monde, 1844. P.35.

603 In the broader sense of his career as a popular caricaturist for French newspapers and journals during the July Monarchy.
comment on modernity, one of the characters in the gallery has no body at all, just clothing – a notion Grandville returns to in a number of other scenes, suggesting that who a person is, in fact, is “irrelevant to the formation of a reputation,”604 and that the code of dress is an important value system by which society measures class.

*Un Autre Monde’s* extraordinary compositions are concerned with metamorphosis and reversals of the natural order: “Grandville’s complex and fabulous images are about multiple transformations, inversions and voyages”.605 The narrative has a “mise-en-abyme” structure, or, a “story within a story format,”606 that while portraying the adventure and journeying of the main character “Puff”, is an extended allegory for the rise of commercialised culture and the role played by advertising as a sociological construct, the “dense locus of signification”607 it had already become within the first half of the nineteenth century. In one caricature, fashionable people are portrayed ‘bodiless’ in public by their clothes and accessories (Figure 89), a notion Richards also identified in Dickens: “In Dickens’ novels furniture, textiles, watches, handkerchiefs seem to live and breathe.”608 And in another surreal cartoon Grandville has depicted social rank in literal terms of size. The dominant concern shared by Dickens and Grandville in the nineteenth century, then articulated by twentieth-century social theorists such as Jhally, Linder and Richards, that informs this argument, may be explained as having a commonality with early nineteenth-century commodity culture, “the commodity acquired an autonomous life of its own,” emerging as a “focal point of cultural representation”609 through and with advertising.

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605 Ibid., 296.
606 Ibid., 297.
608 Linder, C., *Fictions of Commodity Culture From the Victorian to the Postmodern*, 44.
609 Ibid., 45.
Puff is the key protagonist. He is everything in advertising that critics of the time loathed: a self-promoter, journalist, and, importantly to this argument concerning the negative impact advertising managed to build for itself in Parisian society, a charlatan whose business ventures, like that of Phineas Taylor (P.T.) Barnum’s, were questionable.

The late eighteenth century through until the mid nineteenth was a time of hucksters and quacks, when unscrupulous persons travelled the countryside selling medicines, potions and nostrums said to cure all forms of illness and medical conditions. It was the time of the small packaged product, when developments for “the latest” and the “newest” “this” or “that” occurred daily, developed on the laboratory bench, kitchen sink, workroom floor and factory office. Important to the prevailing mood of cynicism for vendor speech, was the existence of no governmental infrastructure to separate the authentic breakthroughs in analgesic medicine and concentrated beef stock powders from the hucksters nostrums and coloured flour concoctions. This was also the moment for unregulated quackery and pseudo-science in the marketplace, always on the ready to dupe a new unsuspecting audience, cashing-in on human weakness and vanity. Philippe Hamon, in his work, *Expositions*, argues that the middle decades of the nineteenth century were a “crucial moment” in the schism between literary text and advertising:

> Until then advertisement and hype (*puff*) had been confined to the workshop or the private home through subscription newspapers. Now it [advertising] was descending into the streets and spreading over the city’s facades. The street vendor’s cry that could still make Proust dream was gradually making room for the “brouhaha” (*tintamarre*) of writing. Thus the urban landscape becomes a sort of paper city, a capital — to quote Balzac in *Ferragus* — “clothed in billboards.”

Interestingly, Hahn explains in her footnotes that ‘*Tintamarre*’ was a newspaper published between 1843 and 1910, associated with “the critique of advertisement” and “the satire of hype”. Puff is an idiom for promotional claims and journalistic puffery where an editorial piece contains unsubstantiated and exaggerated claims. According to Hahn, *puff* was a popular word at the time, and, as there were no uniform commercial codes to control absurd and hyperbolic claims, it became part of a system of “monosyllabic and expressive onomatopoeias with negative connotations” along with *toc*, *chic*, and *krach*, terms all referring to a “world of emptiness”, of “wind” and “void”, or “fakes” and lies.

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611 Ibid.
612 Ibid.
613 Ibid.
There is also a positive reason why it might be argued that the impressionists ignored advertising: the impressionists never claimed to depict an objective reality. Theirs was a subjective truth: the scene as they saw the light reflecting off its forms. George Hamilton went further when he emphasised the non-objectivity of this subjective truth:

If Manet’s genius could be reduced to a formula, it might be stated as his gift for extracting from the undifferentiated visual whole of everyday life just those aspects which we see and feel as qualitatively “modern” rather than chronologically “contemporary”.

In this spirit, Anne Hanson makes a critical deduction between images that merely render a scene with a repertoire of devices like *mise-en-place*, and those that transcribe a visual experience. In reference to Manet’s *Music in the Tuileries Gardens*, 1862, the artist’s first major work in which he deployed the thematic template for depicting his own “intimates and contemporaries”, Hanson asserts: “Here is the essential difference between the realistic or naturalistic rendering of a contemporary scene and the depiction of modern life.” Hanson’s rationalisation for the difference between the two kinds of perception concerns an illusive quality with which she believes Manet has imbued *Concert’s* pictorial space, the “magical connotations to a life committed to progress, improved by science”. It is, she argues, conveyed through the clothing of the group gathered there in the park. In other words, Hanson believes the essence of modernity captured in that single moment depicted in *Tuileries* is made manifest through the fashionable attire of its subjects. That is, she contextualises fashion as a defining motif of modernity using a comparison with other forms of clothing: “There is something essentially traditional about the clothing of regional types, and timeless about the clothing of the poor, but the participants of Manet’s *Concert* are dressed *à la mode*, and one realises that they will all be wearing new clothing for next season’s concerts.”

Yet advertising is the quintessential expression of fashion, it is *à la mode* and imbued with the “magical connotations to a life committed to progress, improved by science”. Perhaps this is why at the end of his life Manet, alone of the impressionist generation, was drawn to depicting advertising.

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614 Hanson, A. *Manet and the Modern Tradition*, 206.
615 A French phrase meaning “putting in place”, usually associated with professional kitchens referring to organising and arranging the ingredients and equipment/utensils to be used in the preparation of a meal.
616 Hanson, A. *Manet and the Modern Tradition*, 36.
617 Ibid.
618 Ibid.
619 Ibid.
PART FOUR

Art’s Engagement with Advertising in Capitalism

Our Paris, the Paris in which we were born, the Paris of the 1830 to 1848, is disappearing. And it is not disappearing materially, but rather morally. Social life is beginning to experience great change. I see women, children, couples, whole families in this café (the Eldorado, a large café-concert frequented by the brothers Edmond and Jules Goncourt). Home life is disappearing. Life is becoming public again. The club on the upper levels, the café on the lower levels, that is where society and the people are ending up.

—Goncourts, 18 November, 1860.\textsuperscript{620}

\textsuperscript{620} Willms, J., \textit{Paris: Capital of Europe From the Revolution to the Belle Epoch}, 292.
8. MANET AND A BAR AT THE FOLIES BERGÈRE

Advertising and the brand as agents of capitalism Manet’s engagement with advertising.

In this chapter I compare Impressionist compositions of urban public and commercial life to those of Édouard Manet’s and argue that Manet alone identified and engaged with advertising in its capacity as a significant representational agent of capitalism and response to the contemporary and modern Parisian zeitgeist.

Degas’ *Women on a Café Terrace, Evening*, is like *Paris Street, A Rainy Day*, in that it is representative of art’s omission of advertising signage from sites where an assortment of commercial iconography would normally be found. Painted signage across shop fronts, swing-board shingles above the doors of restaurants and cafés, printed advertisements glued to any available interior and exterior spaces, and the vivid painted brands of beverages, were all a part of the commercialisation of the Parisian streets and sites of competitive exchange and human spectacle.

And there was none other more competitive market arena at mid-century than food and drink. Welcoming, brightly painted café names and beverage trademarks were, for the time, the only effective advertising medium available to beckon the hungry and draw crowds to the bar. De Amici wrote: “The whole city, in fact, is an inexhaustible, graphic, variegated and enormous decoration.” At the dinner hour, “all the gay life of Paris
pours itself out there from all the neighboring streets, the galleries and the squares”. From the direction of the Seine, “masses of people who cross the streets at the risk of their lives (from racing carriages and omnibuses), step on to the sidewalk, assail the chiosks, from which myriads of newspapers are hanging, dispute the seats before the cafés and bubble up at the opening of the streets”.621

This is Baudelaire’s Paris; the democratic restaurants, cafés, extended lunches and multi sittings for dinner. In the evenings the boulevards and streets brought people from their homes and places of work like moths to a beacon. “The emergence of restaurants and public banquets, which brought formerly private rituals into the public sphere, shifted gastronomy, including fine-wine consumption, to a central place in social life. Consumption was a status symbol, and material goods were a sign of rank.”622 However, most were “modest establishments where perfectly ordinary people wanted to gather and talk, read newspapers, and warm themselves in winter”.623 The evening’s ritual began at five o’clock in the afternoon when the newspapers were delivered to the kiosks; then at six o’clock “the residents of the Bréda and Notre-Dame-de-Lorette neighbourhoods set out to conquer the boulevards”.624 These prostitutes descended like a flock of exotic birds and settled down in the cafés along the boulevards. Here is Degas’ habitat, the site of Women on a Café Terrace, Evening.

While all three of the café pictures in this analysis are studies of the patrons and ambient locations of the café culture that Baudelaire had written so poetically of, Degas’s alone is stripped of the characteristic graphic clatter familiar to such commercial sites. Where Manet has actually featured the mark of advertising’s punctuation in his locations of Paris by framing the words of the poster in the café window, Degas seems wary to address the full existence of advertising’s messages and the impact their presence has upon the aesthetics of such commercial locations. He has left a very faint impression of large gold letters, most probably the name of the building or the establishment, along with some tiny scribbles, on the windows across the road from where the ladies sit. The scrawls are too faint and too flippant to make an impact, and depending on the quality of reproduction in the book you happen to see the image in, they may not be visible at all. Upon comparison with Caillebotte’s View Across a Balcony

624 Willms, J., Paris: Capital of Europe From the Revolution to the Belle Epoch, 290.
(Figure 107), Degas’ depiction of the café terrace’s socio-commercial atmosphere appears meager with regards to written props, the messages of business and embellished typography.

Degas’ erasure of the promotional iconography associated with advertising signage does have technical advantages however, in drawing the viewer’s attention directly to the focus of the composition, the four women. Likewise, while the dark figure that swiftly passes by the group is commonly regarded as a “rejected john”, it primarily is a compositional strategy to communicate a sense of depth that, in his absence, would have resulted in an unfortunate foreshortening of the whole composition. Degas thus focuses attention on the women and the delicately rendered colourful detail of their garments; the flowers and ribbons on top of the bonnets, the fine lace on the décolletage of the reclining figure to the far right, and the blue and white stripped brocade jackets. This tired-looking foursome is a Baudelarian leitmotif, “Women who have exaggerated the fashion to the extent of perverting its charm and totally destroying its aims”.625

As accounts of Degas’ oeuvre conventionally state, these four women are prostitutes, a thematic “obsession”626 of the artist and a contentious social issue of great interest in the popular press at the time. Degas’ “ladies” look to be relaxing, an alcoholic beverage suggesting respite from their evening shift, or a panacea for the long night ahead. There is a hint of inebriation filtering this private setting. Although his vantage point is from inside the café looking out across the street and the activities on the other side of the road, Degas has managed to confine the pictorial space to an intimate study of the prostitutes, partly by inserting three structural pillars that quarantine these “ladies of the night” from all the commotion of the city that goes on beyond their table, as if they were incarcerated. Further, the space is cut off from the pedestrian traffic and the nightlife we assume is across the road along the streets of Paris but is optically out of our reach because Degas has reduced the background shapes and figures of people walking past restaurants and cafes to monochromatic blurry shadows, diminishing the light source sufficiently to ensure the faint gold letters and window signage also remains out of our view. Degas’s painting is self-contained and therefore short of any connectedness to the existence of the street beyond the terrace, despite such socialising being a significant characteristic to modernisation and living in a modern world.

626 Rubin, J., _Courbet_, 204.
Why did Degas avoid references to commercial messages, commodity trademarks and graphic iconography of any kind? Perhaps, (and one can only surmise as no direct comments on, or references to, advertising by artists in this discussion have surfaced throughout my extensive research into the perception of advertising at the time) it is because advertising symbolized everything that the artist had come to dislike in the modernisation of Paris. Philip Nord’s discussion on Degas’s aversion to modern life\textsuperscript{627} may account for his subjective agenda and explain the omission of graphic imagery: “Degas, who relished a stroll on the boulevards, was offended by the proliferation of vulgar baubles in local shop windows. He loved the genuine article (He was an aficionado of articles de Paris and fine antiques\textsuperscript{628}) and the spectacle of so much “gilded junk” revolted him.”\textsuperscript{629}

Upon comparison with Lepère’s engraving, and Manet’s \textit{At the Café}, Degas’ composition avoids any presence of the cultural clatter and élan of the moment. By contrast, the poster in the window of Manet’s café (Figure 112) and the signage above the terrace in Lepère’s engraving penetrates the pictorial space with modalities of modernity beyond the view depicted. In these two works we are a part of an interconnected, modern metropolis that survives on the circulation of production, distribution, exchange and consumption, and all the adherent advertising accompanying them. Observing these images, we become engaged in the world beyond the cafés, quite simply, because the advertising, as a marvelously expressive and flexible form of modernity, becomes an aesthetic stimuli for the artists’ intention to situate the scene in an already constituted “modern” world.

The 1890 engraving \textit{Les graveurs du xixe siècle}, is a depiction of the front of the café Béraldi. It is a rare visual impression of the time that incorporates advertising’s vibrant painted lexicon into the natural setting. Along with Manet’s \textit{At the Café}, it stands in stark contrast to Degas’ interpretation of the same modern subject matter. While

\textsuperscript{628} Ibid.,
\textsuperscript{629} Ibid.,
Degas aims at a classical simplicity through the suppression of detail,630 his is a deliberate construction of selective signs of modernity – a differentiated naturalism.

The Rue Mosnier with Pavers, 1878

In another work by Manet painted that same year, The Rue Mosnier with Pavers, advertising signage once again penetrates the pictorial space, rearranging the atmosphere

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of the composition. The painting depicts manual labour, a subject Manet rarely painted, unlike his predecessor Courbet. Where Courbet focused upon the very physical-ness, or physicality, of the task in *The Stonebreakers* (discussed earlier), Manet’s *Pavers* is a more complex narrative of multiple themes and aesthetic devices, some of which were a part of Impressionism’s hallmark.

Typical of commentary on impressionist painting, Callen considers Manet’s *Pavers* a beautiful exploration of the impact of contrast lighting: “Here the effect of ambient, hazy light in the distance is superbly rendered, and Manet also exploits the simultaneous contrast of the colours of warm sunlight and cool shadow to give additional authenticity to the light effects.”\(^631\) Indeed, the gentle morning glow of pastel illumination in the background leads the viewer forward along the road in the direction of the horses and carriages, toward the pavers where the light softly shifts into an enveloping veil of deeper autumn hues. However, Callen fails to notice that our optical journey forward, down rue Mosnier toward the foreground and the activity of the pavers and finally out of the pictorial space, is interrupted by a large, red, shop sign protruding from the top corner of the picture.

Because the red sign is positioned at the top left side of the picture’s edge, it enhances the ocular dimension (the imposing red background, yellow type and black frame creates a dramatic tonal friction with the gentler autumn tones of the foreground patina), appearing to come between us and the pavers, and adding to the already ambiguous pictorial space. This places the painter, and therefore the observer, closer to the activity that goes on in rue Mosnier and at the same time projects a convincing image of the world.

Manet’s red signboard works to pull us as spectators (and therefore Manet as painter) back from being too absorbed and too close to the pavers. And yet, at the same time, the sign imbues a spatial ambiguity that confuses the order of distance between our position and the other elements in the composition. Additionally, the sign makes a mockery of the ridiculously disproportionate bourgeois couple, that, in fulfilling their role as a modern motif of the “*plein air* enterprise,”\(^632\) take a leisurely stroll about the city. In relation to the men hard at work this couple have been miniaturised, and when viewed together in relation to the red signboard, offer insight into Manet’s, then, well-known Republican sympathies.\(^633\) In his pictorial logic the red signboard, which reads,


\(^632\) Callen, A., *The Art of Impressionism; Painting technique & the making of modernity*, 179.

‘children outfitted to measure in the latest fashion’, becomes an allegorical device for the social and political framework within which Manet operated. Specifically, he candidly illustrates Paris’ extreme class polarisation and new art’s socialist interpretation of it in the nobility of the working class. These notions are represented by the pavers and the self-indulgent excesses of the hauté bourgeois in a demonstration of flagrant and excessive consumption in their desires for exclusive children’s fashions.

The nuanced observations of social commodification evident in *At the Café* and then Manet’s further interest in the iconography of class in *Rue Mosnier with Pavers*, are brought together in his next address to the commodity’s colonisation of social spaces, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*.

**Manet’s modernist response to Parisian commodity culture**

*A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*

… a magical society of dreams painted on canvas.
—Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*.635

Merchandise is the opium of the people.
—Situationist Graffiti, May 1968.636

Nineteenth-century critics found the presence of consumer culture in modernist painting disturbing for several reasons.

The ephemera of today become the evidential data of tomorrow.
—Dr. John Johnson, Printer to the University of Oxford, 1962.637

*A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, 1881-82, is much more than the “culmination of a series of paintings of cafés and other scenes of urban leisure”, and its depiction of social classes through the cultural and entertainment activities upon which they’re based. This is clear when we consider *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* in relation to *At the Café* and *Rue Mosnier with Pavers*, rather than as other historians have – such as Krell and Clark – in context with the study he made of it one year earlier (Figure 114), *The Plum*, of 1878,

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Degas’s *Absinthe* from 1875-6, and *Nana*, the literary work of Èmile Zola from 1880, and other depictions of peripheral social characters.

In both the 1878 works Manet’s use of advertising is an abrupt visual element with a typographic-linguistic quality that invades the traditional aesthetic space of the picture. It is also in line with his credo of naturalism—a faithful copying of what is there in front of him, and as Gombrich had said in relation to Caravaggio’s naturalism “whether we think it ugly or beautiful”.639 These three works show a progressive development in Manet’s handling of the representation of advertising within the organization of the composition – or as Simon Morley put it “the spaces and contexts within which word and image appear”.640

As we have seen, in *Rue Mosnier with Pavers*, the signboard for a children’s outfitter is a sudden and acute interjection. However, in *At the Café*, Manet’s treatment of text – as in the written words of the poster – and the other visual components in his café composition is altogether more harmonious with the rest of the composition than in *Pavers*. At the same time the legibility of the word marks challenges the pictorial arrangement by forcing our attention away from the focus of the work’s subject-matter to “read” the text (an alien typographic quality of

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640 Morley, S., *Writing on the Wall; Word and Image in Modern Art*, 20.
nineteenth-century painting) of the poster in the window as they disrupt our gaze of the three people sitting at the bar. According to Cachin, (and may I say this is one of only two references [the other is in Nochlin’s work] in the wider collection of Manet history to pay any particular interest to the exact type and meaning of the advertising in the window) the dilapidated poster advertisers a well-known clown-and-acrobat act, the Hanlon-Lees, 641 that opened at the Folies-Bergère in May 1878. Manet’s use of advertising takes on an altogether different form in *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*. In this composite arrangement the commercial symbolism is far more restrained, and yet profound, because we the viewer are thrust into a relationship with the human focus of his subject matter, the barmaid, rather than as distant observers as is our role with *Rue Mosnier with Pavers*. In *At the Café* we view the patrons at the bar from a shorter range with a certain feeling of inclusion as if we were actually present in the café at the other end of the bar. It is this more intimate connection with the human experience that makes the composition inclusive, particularly when the wife who sits at the bar with her husband matches our gaze directly.642

Considered together, *Rue Mosnier with Pavers, At the Café* and *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* reveal the artist’s developing awareness for a broader meaning of modernity conveyed through links with distinctly new commercial spaces of social interaction, places with audiences for whom commercial text had become an “urban wordscape”.643

The paintings contain advertising iconography, already established as a pervasive and defining quality of the spirit of the modern, particularly in urban spaces of consumption and socialisation. Through the selection of these three locations and his decision to *include* rather than *exclude* the textual imagery, Manet sought a new aesthetic order that contained “complex visual sensations”644 in which the modern (text) directly confronted the traditional (image) head on. These three works depict the site of “particular cultural processes and conflicts” that Callen argues were “intimately linked” in France “to entrepreneurial capitalism and its espousal of an evolutionist ideology of progress”.645

The cafés and streets, particularly those in the renovated areas, along with department stores, were a part of the democratisation linked to money-making, enterprise and class fluidity.

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641 Novelene Ross credits the Hanlon-Lees with making the circus popular in Paris, suggesting that Zola too was particularly interested in their “daredevil buffoonery”, and considered their “macabre antics as a metaphor for the savagery which lay beneath the surface of civilisation”, 76.

642 Fried’s analysis of Courbet’s reduction of the space between the “world” of the representation and the world of the beholder has greatly informed a part of the thesis here on Manet’s *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*. See “The Structure of Beholding in Courbet’s Burial at Ornans”, 635-683 for a full discussion.


645 Ibid.
Realism, as decreed by Coubet and contemporary art criticism, was not really adequate for portraying the significance of complex abstract ideas – such as capitalism or commodity fetishism, class conflict or politics of envy – within the themes of Manet’s sensibility at this time. Manet aimed to translate these new symbolic “realities” into a new avant-garde style. To do this, I argue, he took a leaf from Courbet and pieced together the essential elements in an allegorical composition.

The structure of *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*

What I aim to demonstrate is that Manet’s last major work, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, is a sophisticated reading of advertising as a requisite feature of the entrepreneurial capitalism whose emergence was enmeshed within modernity and coincided with the rise of the artistic avant-garde. While Degas, Renoir, Caillebotte and the other Impressionists built a formulaic urban coda after Manet, only Manet went a step further to transmit the codified cultural practices of the denizens objectively, within the urban locales upon which existing motifs were based, from a deeply personal viewpoint. According to Hanson, Steven Mallarmé, the poet and critic whom Manet met in 1873 and maintained a close friendship with, shared the artist’s interest for modern life, respecting his “ability to saturate himself in his own observations”.

![Image of A Bar at the Folies-Bergère](image-url)
enabling him to “extract essential qualities from a world of multiple forms”.\textsuperscript{646} His was a more intense interest than simply recording images of “pleasure, fashion and coquetry”,\textsuperscript{647} or location alone. Manet was concerned, as Ross says, “with the implications of his subject matter”.\textsuperscript{648} For, in these three pictures, where Manet has included forms of advertising as commercial iconography, the overriding theme is the operational face of city life, the interaction between the classes in locations where commodities, money and people are circulated, the bedrock of modernity.

According to Ross, “\textit{Bar} has been described as an impressionistic study of light and fugitive movement, a realistic vision \textit{la vie moderne} following the literary naturalism of Zola, and an abstract manipulation of pictorial data”.\textsuperscript{649} Against the grain of this conventional approach, Ross argues in her defining work:

Manet selected the characters and the place in the \textit{Bar} for the very reason that they represented a complex of values and perceptions which he considered essential to his identity as a man of his own time. The important culminating image of \textit{Un Bar aux Folies-Bergère} reveals Manet’s personal interpretation of popular tradition in the presentation of the Parisian cocotte as an authentic cultural heroine, a symbol of the unique sophistication and élan (momentum) vital of nineteenth-century Paris.\textsuperscript{650}

However, while concurring with the spirit of Ross’s argument, she overlooks a deeper system of symbology at work in Manet’s painting. As if he had set out to paint a microcosm of the vitality of Paris as spectacle and fête, \textit{A Bar at the Folies-Bergère} is embedded with capitalist forms of representation, the cornerstones upon which the identity of Paris was then forming. Of principle interest to this argument are the examples of advertising he has included as either a form of information transmission (brand labels on the beer, also Manet’s signature inside the brandy label) or the cultural phenomenon through which Marx’s concept of the commodity existed: “The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as an immense accumulation of commodities.”\textsuperscript{651} Significantly, the common theme running through \textit{Bar}, as well as \textit{At the Café} and \textit{Rue Mosnier with Pavers}, is the commodity’s representational qualities are coextensive with social interrelations between people of various classes. Manet may not have set out to specifically document advertising as it

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\item\textsuperscript{646} Hanson, A., \textit{Manet and the Modern Tradition}, 41.
\item\textsuperscript{647} Ross, N., 1982, \textit{Manet’s Bar at the Folies-Bergère and the Myths of Popular Illustration}, UMI Research Press, Ann Arbor: Michigan, 86.
\item\textsuperscript{648} Ibid.
\item\textsuperscript{649} Ibid., 2.
\item\textsuperscript{650} Ibid.
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descended onto the streets and into locations of socialisation and entertainment. That, we can never know. However, the locations he did choose to depict were all overtly commercial domains of social interface that on one level single out the commodity mediated through advertising’s commercial-transmissive idiom. On another level they demonstrate the plasticity of the commodity’s political exchange value that has the power to transform an object into a value bearing commodity with significant authoritative symbolism (designer clothes for children, champagne as a specifically bourgeois beverage denoting membership in the high ranks of social life), or transform living human beings into commodities of economic value (the idea of the barmaid as a cocotte).

I differ markedly though, from Ross’s assessment of Manet’s motive for featuring Suzon as the archetypical symbol of Parisian modernity. For, as she looks out of the picture space towards, but not directly at, the spectator, Suzon is no cocotte. Nor do I think she is even a grisette (one who supplements her income by part-time prostitution). Her stance, particularly her ambivalent facial expression, and then her dress code (which is quite modest with a corsage covering any hint of cleavage), all describe demoiselle de comptoir,652 the modern professional salesgirl who stands behind a counter facilitating commercial transactions. The fact that she is embedded into a still life composed of cultural symbols of a far-reaching nature beyond the picture space contrived by Manet (in a bar setting he fabricated in his studio), suggests that the

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relatively uncomplicated theme of a flirtatious barmaid is not Manet’s final word. References to all things threatening tradition abound – emblems of industry, assembly lines, technology; machine made, not man made. Symbols of commodification are significant and numerous: the bowl of mandarins is a sign for opulence and exclusivity, the carefully positioned glass with two white roses is an absinthe glass – the *apéritif* many working-class men and women had become addicted to – and the two groupings of bottles of alcohol consumed by the bourgeois, the *classes laboures*, and the tourist. Manet’s barmaid is an even more modern motif than Zola’s Nana (or indeed his own incarnation of the famed prostitute), and a new female model in the array of actors who populate Impressionist compositions.

Suzon’s modernity is linked to the new class of young men and women of service to the luxury retailing that expanded greatly with the department stores and new retail ventures located on recently renovated boulevards. The *demoiselle de comptoir* formed a part of the enormous, multi-layered class of ambitious petite bourgeoisie, and the success of retailing, indeed the service industry et al, depended upon their skills of salesmanship through seduction and enticement.653

A significant recent addition to the scholarship on this painting is Ruth Iskin’s, *Modern Women and Parisian Consumer Culture in Impressionist Painting*, in which she compares Suzon to Zola’s Denise Baudu in *Au Bonheur des Dames (The Ladies’ Paradise)*: “Denise serves customers at counters overflowing with clothes” in much the same way as Manet’s “fashionably dressed *marchande* stands behind a counter with a glittery display of bottles containing alcoholic beverages.”654 Likewise, Haine’s discussion on the evolution of the presence of women in cafés also helps contextualise a much broader role for females within the beverage industry than the inherited Baudelarian model firmly entrenched in art history through iconic images like Degas’ *Women on a Terrace, Evening* and Manet’s *Nana* of 1877. The presence of women behind the bar of Parisian cafés protected an establishment from what Haine calls “ordinary patriarchal spaces” and the “rise of the female proprietress facilitated the growth of a female clientele”.655 An entry into a multi-volume compendium of Paris life from 1834 helps situate the circumstances of women working in cafés:

653 Harvey’s discussion on the importance of psychology in the social interaction between buyer and seller within the domain of the department store is insightful as it is applicable to café culture marketing: “An army of ushers and salespeople (particularly seductive young men and women) patrolled behaviour in the interior space at the same time they sought to cater to consumer desires. The sexuality involved in this was blatant. Women therefore had a much more important role, as both buyers and sellers.” Harvey D., 2003, *Paris, Capital of Modernity*, Routledge: New York, 215-216.


Almost all cafés [operate] under the presidency of a demoiselle de comptoir. The shop’s success rests upon her. She must be cute, personable, always smile at the customer who pays for one drink or the gourmet with 20 francs in his pocket. Her eye must be nowhere and everywhere, and she must not notice the bad language and come-ons. She must repay compliments after the fashion of Madame Maintenon, who knew how to replace a roast with an anecdote. By her grace of manners, charm of figure, and good taste in dress, she must draw the customer away from the illicit marriage of coffee and chicory and adulterated cream.  

This delightful, albeit chauvinistic, description of Parisian mores within nineteenth-century hospitality and the advantages of female visibility in café culture lends support to this chapter’s proposition that Manet’s barmaid, the soulful young woman who, despite her attentive stance, appears absent and dispirited, is not a demimondaine (one considered outside respectable society on account of promiscuity). Rather, Suzon is a part of a complex symbolic paradigm of new social conventions that Manet has painted, an allegorical narrative of the great city. Here Paris is a duplex landscape of both excessive bourgeois luxury and the counterpoint of its spectacle, the existence of the city’s disinherit. Through his examination of commodity culture Manet depicts this Parisian ambiguity, one “peculiar to the social relations and events of this epoch”.  

The café culture Manet paints is awash with references to contemporary consumption and the commodity’s representational properties (advertising, fashion, etc.) that are nascent in both At the Café and Rue Mosnier with Pavers, becoming a fully realised pictorial concept in A Bar at the Folies-Bergere, through Suzon.

**A Bar at the Folies-Bergere as an allegory**

A new age, new techniques. It’s a simple matter of good sense.
—Joris-Karl Huysmans, 1879

*A Bar At The Folies-Bergère* depicts the dawn of a new epoch in which not quite everything shines. This is the era when the commodity as a mass-produced object attained its qualities of fetishism, and together with forms of its persuasive powers


(advertising and its discourse), took control of social discourse. In the first half of the nineteenth century’, writes Thomas Richards,

the commodity was a trivial thing, like one of Adam Smith’s pins. In the second half it had a world-historical role to play in a global industrial economy. In a short space of time between the Great Exhibition of 1851 and the First World War, the commodity became and has remained the one subject of mass culture, the centrepiece of everyday life, the focal point of all representation, the dead centre of the modern world. 659

From this perspective the Folies-Bergère becomes a sign of modernity and particularly of Parisian modernity, and the audience seated in the balcony is a symbol of all those who live in the embellished and gilded metropolis of extravagant excess. In this reading Suzon is the ideological and mythical figure representative of the vulnerability and emptiness that lies behind the dissolute and turbulent mask – the phantasm – of spectacle and its source, all consuming desire and want that Paris had become a shining symbol of, rather than, her conventional art historical role, as prostitute.

To Manet, the Folies-Bergère had all the hallmark features of the time: a generalisation of class, a mass of people, spectacle, big city anomic, a blasé outlook, the commercialisation of people and sex, giddy excess, glamour, and overt sexuality. Here in the mirrored and plush surroundings of the famed nightspot, social conditions and impunity of the ordered world outside were temporarily suspended as distinctions of class and rank melted away in an intoxicated and fetishised environment. Manet, Brombert writes, “was in his element there, as he had been at the opera balls: the bright lights, the laughter, the movement, the air blue with smoke, the reassuring illusion that anything was possible – pleasure, oblivion, remission.” 660

The café-concerts were exemplary spaces of modernity with all of its contradictions. Frequentied by all classes, from the proletariat to the bourgeoisie, and everyone in between, yet favouring the wealthy. These establishments became a voyeurs’ pleasure palace where people came to watch and to be watched. For just two francs anyone could partake in the luxurious human spectacle and public consumption in which people and merchandise were inexplicably interchangeable. It was the anonymity

660 The remission Brombert speaks of was Manet’s syphilitic condition, known as vénère, that was to finally take his life one year after he completed *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*.
of such socialisation that was the greatest attraction, as well as the continuous entertainment: dancers, music, acrobatics, drama and other theatre acts. Thus, the night-time playgrounds of Paris became depoliticised spaces where Marx’s mysterious human relationship, the fetishism of the commodity, were played out. Even one’s reputation became an object of trade with an economic value. Who a gentleman was seen accompanied by each evening, particularly the degree of exclusiveness of his female companion, added value to his social authority. This world of the courtesans existed in the café-theatres and night time locations such as the Folies-Bergère, and depended primarily upon the fusion of money, endless champagne and self-indulgent lifestyles sustained by industrialisation. In many ways A Bar at the Folies-Bergère is a crescendo of dynamic innovative art practice employed to depict a new form of “modern” sociality in the intimate yet detached manner required for an appropriate response to the new age’s flamboyant, yet cold, new social conventions.

Allusions to advertising in graphic or written form were not conventional features in Impressionism’s imaginative iconic range. Indeed, it would appear that Manet’s interest in realising how the “new word-landscape,” as Morley refers to the written component of advertising, fitted into urban mediations was a new development of the artist in the last two years of the 1870s. In Morley’s work, Writing on the Wall; Word and Image in Modern Art, he too has identified new art’s censure of the advertising’s text: “Time after time, the Impressionist painters blur and smudge parts of their compositions where words might have been read. Indeed, the optics of Impressionism seems to aim at a kind of verbal illegibility.” If we look to another café painting of Manet’s, Le Journal illustré, 1878-79 (Figure 119), perhaps the least typical of that genre, his “spirited execution” and rapid brushwork have reduced the frontispiece of the journal to formless abstract marks. There is no apparent interest on the artist’s part to engage in the typographic form on the cover of La Vie moderne. It would seem he has no particular interest in connecting us directly to the outside world beyond the sitting room.

Therefore, in order to make sense of what seems a sudden engagement with advertising imagery we’re led back to Manet’s innovative spirit. In a true sense of avant-

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662 It has been estimated that there were more than two hundred café-concerts, music halls and cabarets-artistiques at the turn of the century in Paris. Although they have been referred to as “theatres of the poor”, these were all inexpensive entertainments. Willms, J., Paris Capital of Europe: From the Revolution to the Belle Époche, 335.
663 Morley, S., 2003, Writing on the Wall; Word and Image in Modern Art, University of California press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, 20.
664 Cachin and Moffit catalogue, 423.
665 A recently launched periodical that covered the social, artistic and literary life in Paris. See Cachin and Moffit, 423.
garde inspiration and enterprise, it seems that Manet broke with the latest Impressionist pictorial conventionalism, and, as Calinescu defines avant-garde practice, explores “completely new, previously forbidden, horizons of creativity”. Iskin also distinguishes Manet’s singularity in his interest in metropolitan commercial life in her argument responding to Zola’s indictment “that the modernist painter could not depict contemporary Parisian commercial life”. She asserts *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* was a representation of nighttime commodity culture, a stylish entertainment marketplace that Paris came to be known by, and indeed, an artistic response to Zola’s *Le ventre de Paris*.

### Synthesis

*Bar* is a realist picture of deliberate subjective authorship—something akin to what Courbet called his *Atelier*, a real allegory—in which Manet has pieced together sections of imagery from the source location at the Folies-Bergère into a kind of montage to fit the design of his conception, in much the same way that Courbet built his enormous paintings *A Burial at Ornans* and *The Atelier* (discussed in previous section). Manet combined two separate images from the real physical world and interlocked them to produce one picture, an allegorical work that celebrates both the notion of ‘the painting of modern life’ and the sources of the myth of modernity in which he existed. Manet’s embodiment of his epoch was based upon, as Rubin wrote of Courbet’s the *Atelier*, “representations rooted in the physical”. However, Manet’s subject matter was not confined to the physical. He has also depicted ideology as a sort of other, that of the physical and the mental world.

Through the device of the mirror, Manet constructed two horizontal, yet parallel, compositions within the one image, as if representing the binary experience that constituted Parisian culture – the boulevardier veneer and the substance of the powerless working classes. Using the frame of the mirror that runs through the middle of the picture as a conjoint device, he presents the material and ideological realities of Paris, each one mediated through Suzon, both possessed by the power of advertising as

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668 Ibid., 179-183.

an integral part of capitalism’s larger theatre of consumption, where gazing or ‘just looking’ is “an active form of consumption.”  

670 Bar is a construction of two forms of Paris manifest as benevolent and malignant – at once the capital of pleasure and deep-felt alienation. This dualism is bridged by way of the pivotal role of the barmaid through whom Manet creates and explores the “realisms” manifest in the social phenomena of Belle Epoch society he depicts in the two synthesised tableaus. Like the compositional structure of an advertisement, Manet’s Bar makes a superficial claim to depict the gaiety and sophistication of the artist’s favourite nightly playground, while on another level, elucidates a range of subjects and issues that he was at that time deeply engaged with. Brombert explains:

He poured into it his entire craft and the full range of the themes that wove through his major works. It is his most complete representation of the demimonde, itself a metaphor for much of the half century during which he lived, and more personally, for disguise, deception, false identity – women whose fashionable gowns conceal public bodies; men whose impeccable tailcoats cover vice; pleasure to fill the void of unfulfilled lives, to mask the banality of sorrow, illness, death.  

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Two Suzons: dualities, doubles and opposites in depictions of Paris

The Bar’s “near focused view” (he brings the focus in so tightly, he cuts off the front of the bar) forces an engagement between the spectator and Suzon, as if we were standing at the bar waiting to be served. Fried’s analysis of Courbet’s After Dinner at Ornans addressed this same idea of proximity between the spectator and depicted personages, arguing that through the depiction of at least one figure from behind, the picture space resists closure “relative to the beholder”. It therefore “suggests the possibility that the beholder might find himself absorbed as if corporeally into the painting,” thus defying traditional perspective. As Fried wrote of Courbet’s Burial, we can say that Manet dissolves “the boundary between the space or “world” of the representation and that of the beholder, and by so doing enforces the suggestion that both are equally actual, equally present to our astounded senses.” Consequently, he directly implicates us in an ontological involvement in the painting. The significance of

670 Linder, C., Fictions of Commodity Culture From the Victorian to the Postmodern, 78.
672 Ross, N., Manet’s Bar at the Folies-Bergère and the Myths of Popular Illustration, 5
674 Ibid.,
675 Ibid.,
his pictorial space is revealed only through the participation of the spectator/observer in the same way (function) that the spectator/audience of an advertisement completes the transference of meaning from signifier to signified – it is a mental action. In this way Manet painted the performative space of ideology in the age of conspicuous consumption.

We see the Folies-Bergère, not as a “natural” scene painted by Manet, but rather as a reflected image in a large wall mirror. It is an optical phenomenon that, like a mirage, produces a displaced image, one enabling us access to a domain that nature with all her traditional perspective would not have granted.

It’s curious that Manet chose to paint one of his favourite locations through a “likeness” or reflection seen in a mirror instead of directly. The mirror acts as the space of ideology where ambiguity is not confined to spatial correlations. Manet chose specific objects for his still life – particular bottles, also particular fruit, flowers, a rather conservative looking young woman instead of a buxom barmaid in provocative dress, and an audience made up of his friends – to build his painting.

As Lewis Carroll did with his mirror in Through the Looking-Glass, Manet built a new world, his ideological expression of Parisian modernity – a modern myth.
Through the mirror, traditionally said to be a reflection of the soul, Manet presents us with several analogies and doublings in his subjective rearranging of the elements in the Folies-Bergère. The most obvious is the barmaid, Suzon. However, she is also the conduit between the two representations of the Folies and assumes the role of actor-protagonist in which the moral dualism and philosophical binary (opposition) of the allegory are bridged. Through the looking glass we are given insight to the otherwise restricted knowledge\(^{676}\) that informs the force of the statement within his allegory. Bar is a microcosm of the total structure of modern Parisian society – masks, reflections, perceptions, status, images of happiness, value systems, romance, social displacement, perceptions of self, wants and needs.

Manet’s use of the mirror to depict the space of the ideology of modernity is underscored by the fact that in real life there was no actual mirror at the bar. The critic Jules Comte, writing the Salon of 1882 for *L’Illustration*, enlightens us to the fact that Manet’s famous mirror, in which so much information is conveyed, was but another element of the artist’s *subjective idealism*.

But what strikes us first of all is that this famous mirror, indispensable to an understanding of all these reflections and perspectives, does not exist: did Monsieur Manet not know how to do it, or did he find an *impression* of it to be enough? We shall refrain from answering this question; but let us note this fact, that all of the picture takes place in a mirror, and there is no mirror.\(^{677}\)

This manufactured mirror world has the mythic structure of advertising. To quote Williamson: “a selecting of certain elements, things or people from the ordinary world, and then a rearranging and altering them in terms of a product’s myth to create a new world, the world of the advertisement. This is the essence of all advertising: components of ‘real’ life, our life, are used to speak a new language, the advertisement’s. Its language, its terms *are* the myth.” She continues, “The very means of expression . . . is the myth.”\(^{678}\)

**Suzon 1**

The first composition is a depiction of the real world in which the barmaid stands facing out of the picture. It is reminiscent of large-format poster advertising. This

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is at first glance a simple presentation of the luxurious assortment of alcoholic beverages on offer at the Folies-Bergère. It is an artfully painted still-life of commodities and their presenter, who, like contemporary advertising, is an attractive young woman in elegant attire who looks directly out toward her audience. The inviting display of aperitifs is being mediated through Suzon, which is a common psychological design system used in advertising at the time as it is still today. Her centrality to the bottles of alcohol draws her into the spectacle’s theatre of consumption as the silenced object of a different form of fantasy and desire to the one associated with the beverages. Suzon knows she is the focus of a kind of inactive mental phenomenon of consumption, one where the idea of ‘just looking and not buying’ can transform her into a commodity or object (devoid of personality and individuality), silencing her autonomy, making her just another product to tempt the hoards who come each night to partake in the intoxicating atmosphere. Lantos remarks on the glamorising in contemporary advertising, a function or trope at work in Bar: “In effect, much consumer advertising amounts to romanticising goods.” He continues, “But this romantic attitude towards objects is seen as having serious side effects for our personalities; social effect of displacing affect from people to objects and an alienating effect where the self is perceived not as a child of God or as an element in community, but as an exchange commodity.”

Suzon’s double

In the large vestibule that leads to the circular promenade, where elegantly dressed beauties of easy virtue mingle with men in dark suits, a group of women waited for arrivals at one of the three bars, behind which presided three heavily

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made-up, ladies selling drinks and love. The tall mirrors behind them reflected their backs and the faces of the passers-by. The second barmaid is Suzon’s reflection. And we can only see her from behind, the reflected image in the mirror. The composition that she inhabits is the invisible world of ideology that shows the truth of the real world. It is the death skull in the traditional mirror of vanity. From across the counter this Suzon appears to be in the process of transacting. Here, she is in all likelihood, Ross’s cocotte. We can also parallel her role in Manet’s composition with contemporary advertising theory: “Advertising purportedly fashions a new sense of values and a new set of wants, creates demand for goods to satisfy these wants, and it accustoms us to constant change rather than to stability. Advertising supposedly possesses the power to propagate or at least reinforce negative racial or sexual stereotypes.” This Suzon is symbolic of Paris as a turbulent parasitic landscape. She is the faceless victim of, as Zola termed, “all-consuming greed” and therefore silent of her function as advertisement for desire and extravagant excess. This Suzon is art history’s grisette – the dopplegänger of the front-facing barmaid in modest attire. She is even more deeply embedded in the “elaborate and sophisticated fantasies of material indulgence” than her other self. This Suzon is the material girl, resigned to her role as the object of fantasy and desire of the flesh, a commodity for sale, the prized fille everyone came to see. She is a part of the other Paris Manet frequented (and may lay the blame for his terminal illness at her feet), a fixture in “material culture’s consensual hallucination that blurs the distinction between her identity” as an individual and the value she represents, promotes, and advertises as an object for sex.

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683 Linder, C., Fictions of Commodity Culture From the Victorian to the Postmodern, 78.
684 Ibid., 79.
In keeping with his personal, and at times incomprehensible construction style, the surface of Bar resists an easy interpretation. Manet has toyed with real physical presences: he has deleted altogether the man in the top hat who would have stood face-to-face with the barmaid, obscuring our view of her if the painting was to follow a natural and logical construction (See the cartoon drawing of the natural way the picture would have looked, Figure 123). He has bended the perspective of Suzon and her mirror image. And like Lewis Carroll’s Through the Looking-Glass, he uses the mirror theme as a plot and compositional device to narrate an alternate reality, pose the question of reflection and depict the moment of truth – when consumption became a way of life.

Advertising and brands in Manet’s art

Considering the Bar as an allegorical composite of two separate images we can see Manet’s cunning twist in his depiction of contemporary Parisian mores at the beginning of the Belle Époque. In its most straightforward guise as advertising, Manet has constructed his two still-lifes on top of the counter using alcoholic beverages from mass consumerism, an increasing feature of the mid-to-late nineteenth century industrialisation. Featured are bottles of beer, champagne, crème de menthe, and brandy – the red-brown bottle in the left hand foreground corner, usually documented as cordial in discussions on this painting. However, as brandy was the second most consumed alcoholic drink after wine in Paris, it’s safe to assume that in all likelihood, Manet painted brandy bottles rather than cordial, particularly, as it’s within the brandy bottle label that he has placed his signature, itself art’s most enduring promotional tool.

It is to the bottles of beer though, that Manet has given serious consideration: he has painted an English brand of beer, Bass Pale Ale, rather than a German one. Haine’s fascinating discussion on the social construction of the drinking experience at this time is helpful in reading possible motives Manet may have had for grouping brandy, beer and champagne together as a crucial element in his complex narrative. “In contrast to brandy, beer consumption remained low until the 1850s, at which point it became a Paris craze and beer halls (brasseries) mushroomed throughout the city.”

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685 A great deal of research and print space has gone into the theorizing of the barmaid and the top-hatted gentleman and Manet’s puzzling ocular construction of the reflection in the mirror. However, that discussion lies outside the limitations of this chapter. For now, my concern resides in the multiplicity of forms of advertising he incorporated into this painting.


687 Haine, W., S., The World of the Paris Café; Sociability among the French Working Class, 1789-1914, 92-93.
comment on the social interaction that occurred in the Folies-Bergère, Manet draws our attention to the beer by detailing the label (the round white label with a red triangle). Beer had become popular, and of all the varieties then available, including many German ales, he chose a popular and iconic English beer, Bass Pale Ale – incidentally the oldest known trademark.

Manet’s choice of this particular beer raises another question about his intentions. On one level he makes a statement about the brand choices of the patrons who frequented the café. Through the placement of the beer alongside the champagne and brandy, Manet reveals that the Folies-Bergère catered to a large English contingency of tourists, at the time the largest market for visitors to Paris. Another possibility for this grouping of alcoholic beverages may be explained by Haine’s argument that the history of drinking in Paris is closely linked to the notion of social aspirations of the working class and their desire to share in the social customs of their superiors by imitating aristocratic behaviour: “In no other French and in few foreign cities did drink become the consummate art form throughout the class hierarchy that it did in Paris.”

Consumption of alcohol in the decades before World War I represented a rise in modern consumer culture, and testament to the rationalisation of the lowering of the costs of mass-produced, distributed and widely advertised commodities. With alcoholic drinks being inexpensive compared to food, this display of brandy, beer and champagne symbolises the democratic nature of the patronage of the Folies-Bergère: “Working-class drinking, in particular, had “attained a degree of intellectuality not found elsewhere.” If paydays and Mondays were times of vulgar excess, the rest of the week showed that workers felt a need to express “their well-developed sociality” on the terraces of the exterior boulevards after the fashion of the middle class. Proximity to a “rich and hedonistic” bourgeoisie had generated “an unconscious desire to enjoy café life in the same manner”.

Advertising Paris and its hedonism

On another level altogether, Bar functions as a banner for the ideology la vie parisienne in much the same way as advertising billboards operate today – one simple proposition boldly expressed, with a single presenter upon whom the audience should focus. And in the same way many brand advertisements are constructed, Bar also

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688 Haine, W., S., The World of the Paris Café; Sociability among the French Working Class, 1789-1914, 88.
689 Ibid., 89.
690 Ibid.
functions on a another level where the *contradictions* of the “cult of parisiannisme”\(^{692}\) reside and Manet’s allegory exists. Upon structural analysis of *Bar’s* “sign-systems”\(^{693}\) two distinct structures of meaning exist. The first is a readily accessed scenario, in this case, the “typical” Parisian in the famous, luxurious and scintillating location of the Folies-Berère. The next, more veiled implication is to the signifying metaphores of the barmaid’s reflection, her interlocutor, the collection of alcoholic beverages, the glass with two white roses, and importantly, the barmaid’s facial expression. Upon analysis we can piece together much more complex meaning structures that go even further to the heart of the momentary sensations of contemporary life’s social process for which *Bar* had become most famous.

Exemplary “signifying relationships” or duplexes abound. The barmaid stands in the center of a lively environment with an appetising array of products that she offers to an anonymous audience. Although she isn’t smiling, as the young lady does in the Coca-Cola poster (Figure 122), Suzon is inviting us to partake in the experience of the delights of the Folies-Bergère. She is set within the glittering environment as a merchandiser might in a supermarket in today’s highly competitive mass market. As is common practice today, a woman (usually) sets up a display for a new product, or one that is being re-launched, and offers passers-by a sample taste. Her job is to present the product in the best possible light.

The simile with contemporary modes of advertising promotion was not lost on Manet’s peers. In his review of the 1892 Salon the critic Henry Houssaye vilified *Bar*, pointing out its lowly and vulgar associations with “boulevardier illustration”,\(^{694}\) suggesting the barmaid resembled the mannequin in a “milliners’ shop windows”.\(^{695}\) While I concur with Iskin that *Bar* addresses the discourse of selling and consumption, and with her analysis of the still life as evidence of Manet’s interest in “the public and commercial life”\(^{696}\) of the time, I argue that the painting also signifies a much deeper set of ideological meanings underpinned by the economic system and its commercial discourse that drove new social convention.

Iskin also identifies *Bar* with the advertising genre, and demonstrates a link between product placement and the presence of attractive women in poster compositions from the second half of the nineteenth century: “Associating goods with a

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\(^{693}\) Williamson, J., *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising*, 9-23

\(^{694}\) Ross, N., *Manet’s Bar at the Folies-Bergère and the Myths of Popular Illustration*, 87.


beautiful woman and using both to lure spectators became a common strategy in the evolving advertising culture of mass consumption, and it is in this context that Manet’s *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* is best understood. Further, she calls attention to Manet’s signing of the painting in the lower corner of the brandy bottle label, a playful reference to the discourse of selling and consumption “that invades not only everyday goods but works of fine art as well”. I would add that in placing his signature within the bottle’s label, Manet also establishes a parallel between commercial branding and the authority of the artist’s name.

Iskin continues her discussion on the significance of the still-life bottles explaining their importance to the meaning of the composition: “Manet’s display of bottles in this painting is radically new in the context of high art and resembles less the tradition of Western still life than advertising images of alcoholic beverages visible in Paris during the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s.” Iskin thus connects the bottles in the still-life to commodity culture and “consumption in the public place”, much like the experience of the department stores. “Our view of the barmaid (and of the entire painting) is mediated through the sumptuous “still life” on the counter.” She continues, “In effect, Manet positions the painting as if it were a counter displaying goods, soliciting the eyes of the Salon spectators while ironically commenting on the work’s own commercial status.” One could go further by investigating the signifying relationships within the political economy of the sign. For example, Manet’s selection of bottles for the still life is an intriguing assortment of products that compound a number of symbols. The objects of the still-life, as the components of the painting as a whole, refer not just to commodity culture in general but also to the advertising that both drove and sustained it. Arguably Manet’s still-life is at the same time a landscape of advertising that creates a symbolic world beyond the painted space of the Bar that refers to the world beyond. Bass Pale Ale was, as it is today, emblematic of England. Even more

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698 Ibid., 31.
699 Ibid.
700 Ibid.
embedded than beer as a traditional cultural brand is champagne as a symbol of France, and as Guy frames it, “a centrepiece of bourgeois society invested with symbolic capital”. Indeed, the Folies-Bergère itself, came to be a widely recognised symbol, both within France and abroad, of Paris as the world capital of hedonistic sensation and pleasure. Manet’s painting certainly draws on and contributed to this national myth, as if a billboard for Paris. But at the same time, when the still life and all it promises is set against the melancholy of the barmaid, another symbolic world emerges – the vanitas iconography of the traditional still life. Manet’s decadent, wealthy, bohemian lifestyle came at an absolute price. Not everything shines in this his last major work. Suzon’s face indicates far more about the multifarious realities of the haven of delights, something unsettling or even ominous. It has always been assumed that Manet’s barmaid was a cocotte. Along with the bright lights, beverages of all kinds, glamorous patrons and scintillating entertainment, the employees of such establishments were a part of the sales proposition whether they participated willingly, making money on the side as a grisette, or not. It seems likely that Suzon is the latter because her body’s stance and ambivalent expression are not in accord with the atmosphere of her surroundings. Suzon is the omen of Manet’s life. She is his sentient entity, the angel of dark and light, who, in less than a year will decide his destiny – death at 51 from syphilis.

Myth (making), branding and the ideology of Impressionism

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the city and all its private and public territories permeated the thoughts of a number of creative witnesses both written and visual, all contributing to the image phantasm of Paris. In his book, Paris and the Nineteenth Century, Prendergast uses the term identity in what he calls the “enterprise of ‘writing the city’”.

Myth making is often explained thus: early nineteenth-century modernist writers built a paradigm of “universally” recognised cultural experiences and ideas of the urban developments of Paris, that for three decades provided “model” “solutions for a community of practitioners”.

From the beginning writers such as Balzac, Zola and Baudelaire were engaged in the “commodification of Paris”, quite literally they created “ ‘Paris’ as

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This potent notion of Paris as a commodity, manufactured and promoted as any other product is at the core of Manet’s painting. The mid-century identity of Paris was manufactured and advertised as any other commodity was. Manet and the Impressionists, along with promenading the boulevards, department stores and opera, embedded these ideas visually, thereby facilitating a corporeal realisation of a nationalist identity that continues to be consumed en masse today.

Through the repetition of such formalised, entrenched and ritualised ideological paradigms, cultural practices of the present become the “invented traditions” of history, in much the same way as brands construct their identities through promotion and repetition of their strongest attributes, those characteristics with the greatest “identity value” and resonance in a discourse with powerful reality-stretch capabilities, or longevity. In the following extract from her discussion on the impulse of vanguardists to “monumentalise” contemporary Parisian life, within her analysis of A Bar at the Folies-Bergère, Ross outlines the patterning of repetition that establishes doctrine, traditions of thought, and the history of Impressionist myth, effectively describing the building of Paris as an icon through aesthetic and literary ideological paradigms:

The novels of Zola, the poems of Baudelaire, the paintings of Manet and Degas, to name only a few examples, all celebrated the dominion of Paris in one way or another. Given the temperament of the individual, the city may have been portrayed as sublime in its capacity to corrupt, munificent in its bounty of sensation, eternal in its capacity for change. Paris may have been seen as elegant, vulgar, fierce, idyllic, the determinist’s prison or the bohemian’s paradise, but all her interpreters stood with Balzac in his belief that the boulevards of Paris encompassed the spectrum of human feeling and experience.

Manet and the Impressionists determined new ways of seeing and representing a painted form of the ‘dominion of Paris’. The mysterious power at work in Marx’s commodity fetishism, in which “metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties abound,” is a parallel to the contradiction within Ross’s statement of Paris, a “thing”, having “living” qualities — “an animate spirit possessed of the powers once attributed to nature”. But that is just the realm where myth and fantasy reside, in our desires that form a part of

707 Ibid.
709 Ross, N., Manet’s Bar at the Folies-Bergère and the Myths of Popular Illustration, 89.
711 Ross, N., Manet’s Bar at the Folies-Bergère and the Myths of Popular Illustration 89.
the invisible web of accumulating cultural ideologies. It is the human mental ability that connects meaning to objects and endows them with power over human logic. This ideology enables advertising’s impression and connects humans together. This is what Manet painted in *Bar*.

If we look at *Bar* as an allegorical work where Suzon is “essentially reduced to the function of a shop window mannequin, a human prop of sorts”, a promotional merchandising tool just like the bottles on display, the painting becomes a poster for the phantasm of Paris. Since then it has become the iconic cultural *brand* of Paris:

A good measure of the glamour which still accrues to Paris in the minds of foreigners may be credited to the Impressionists and traced back to their sources in popular myth. On the most superficial level, the Folies-Bergère still represents the mecca of pleasure. There is no tourist, anticipating his first visit to the city, who has not heard of the establishment, who doubts that Parisians know all there is to know about sex or that *la Parisienne* is the most sophisticated of women.

**The real face of the Folies-Bergère: Manet’s engagement with advertising, an alternate reading**

Folies-Bergère: Everything: the *Birds*, the *Tattooed Man*, *Lira* and *Nenia*, the *Martinettes*, the *Gypsies* and the *Poodle Gymnast*; and what’s this? An operetta, a balancing act: the elements of a play in five acts, but what joy! They have remained in the state of elements.

—Stéphen Mallarmé, 1874

Let’s face it, the Folies-Bergère, by the time Manet painted it, was a permanent playground for prostitutes. Despite attempts to clean up the establishment it had become famous for “its promenoirs, its garden, its constantly changing attractions, and its public of pretty women”. These popular features were sublime promotional material – information that spread virally though Paris, France and the Western world. People who frequented the café formed an integral part of its spectacle and charismatic advertising. They were themselves components of the delirious message of pleasure at the heart of entertainment venues of such kinds. As patrons shared their exciting experiences of gratification and enjoyment they further spread desire to attend. The drawing power was

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712 Linder, C., *Fictions of Commodity Culture From the Victorian to the Postmodern*, 78.
714 Mallarmé, S., *La Dernièr Mode*, 1874, Cited in Ross, 77.
democratic; everyone wanted to partake in the enjoyment of the Folies consumption paradise. The target audience may have primarily been the affluent Parisian middle-classes, connecting with each other in a social experience of “exclusivity and status”.

But, as discussed earlier, the day-to-day clientele included the working classes, the new strata of office and retail attendants known as the petit bourgeois and tourists from the provinces and further afield from around the world, all wanting to emulate the desirable lifestyle of the then famous Parisian bourgeoisie. Irrespective of any traditional advertising such as the large-format colour posters made famous by Jules Chéret and Toulouse-Lautrec, the risqué “other worldliness” of the Folies was in itself a unique selling proposition in a society based primarily upon middle-class morality and the past’s “ethos of frugality and denial.” While it may seem difficult to appreciate the powerful attraction today of such an eclectic assortment of sensations, in a time when television, radio, and the choice of supermarkets and restaurant chains did not exist, the seductive allure of the Folies-Bergère was, indeed, exceptional. The attraction of such a variety of consumable experiences – food, alcoholic drinks of every sort, dazzling entertainment exclusive to café culture, flirting, gazing and solicitation – appealed to “consumers’ aspirations and desires to go beyond the mundane social realities” of life outside in the real world. There was no limit to what you could devour at the Folies-Bergère.

Alan Bowness puts forward an interesting theory about the uniqueness of Manet’s pictorial structures, which have divided art historical opinion from the start, but lends weight to this argument that Manet’s use of advertising was, as defined in relation to Courbet in the previous chapters, an enlightened strategic gambit that emphasised his difference, originality, and provocative qualities that asserted his identity as leader of the avant-garde and embedding his brand. Speaking of the artist’s early compositions, Bowness suggests they were an effort to find a new type of pictorial arrangement, “something strikingly new.” A logical corollary then, is that in both modalities of advertising, as (intrusive) graphic form and ideological referent to forms of commodity culture, Manet found the mechanism for a new aesthetic of disruptive force as he had previously clinched with Olympia and Luncheon on the Grass. Just as Courbet before him and Picasso would 26 years later, Manet found it time for renewal, and, in quintessential avant-garde fashion, broke away from his contemporaries, the Impressionists. Against

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718 Ibid,
719 Ibid.
the tide of critical censure about the numerous compositional problems within Manet’s œuvre, Bowness argues that the sometimes bewildering perspective and “informal” groupings are not “faults”, but rather “deliberate experiments – sometimes clumsy perhaps, but bold and adventurous” (the bewildering perspective due to the use of the mirror is an example). Specifically aimed to counter John Richardson’s critical comment that “Manet’s sense of design was faulty”, Bowness argues that his “experiments” were not a result of a “defective eyesight, nor to being unimaginative where composition was concerned”. In this context we can view Rue Mosnier with Pavers, and At the Café as formal experimentalism that led to A Bar at the Folies-Bergère.

Manet continued Courbet’s enterprise of depicting contemporaneity – his world and those characters who inhabited it. Their depictions were drawn from the every day. They were unpretentious and natural, and importantly, both were loaded with social insinuation. The characters in their compositions, whether provincial mourners at a graveside, bourgeois patrons of a café seated at the bar, or roadwork labourers, all relate to contemporary social organisation in varied but significant ways. Such thematic newness was viewed by critics at the time as subversive and therefore was provocative to the establishment. This “particular brand” of Realism was the establishment of the avant-garde script, initiated by Courbet, in its innovative and political expression. Courbet set art on a trajectory (based upon authenticity) towards the modern. Manet continued along this path, also born of personal experience, as he painted his observations of the social mores and gestures of his time.

More specifically, what Manet painted was an ominous metaphor of socialization – boundless consumption and the manipulative system of code that enabled it, that which Baudrillard saw as the most important feature of advanced capitalism. Each and every one in attendance at the Folies was implicated in the processes of consumption and fetishism, and as they enjoyed partaking in the charisma of such a fashionable location, more post-modern than Realism dogma, they became active cogs in the system of advertising, giving meaning to its myths, promoting the new forms of social order that the Folies and other establishments such as the Moulin Rouge, were founding. In painting advertising at its most elemental and sophisticated force, Manet was the first artist to take it seriously and, in doing so, acknowledge its importance in the modern world.

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723 Krell, A., 200.
In the introduction to her important work Pop Art, Lucy Lippard asks the question why commercial subject matter had not been “discovered” as the total basis for fine art long before Pop art.\textsuperscript{725} \textit{A Bar at the Folies-Bergeré} personifies a complex reading of advertising not only as a “channel of expression”\textsuperscript{726} for the purpose of identity in the branding of the beverage bottles, as well as a pun for the authority in the artist’s name, but also as a mediator of social discourse and diverse behavioural codes through allusions to the ritual and symbolism in an altogether more “human” form of promotion. Advertising both drove and reflected contemporary commodity culture along with the social practices inextricably linked to it. In this respect \textit{Bar} is a forewarning of modern art’s future.

Manet is the only nineteenth-century artist to employ commercial iconography in a deliberate and sustained effort. Unfortunately, we will never know if he would have continued along this course of engagement with advertising in formulating a new outlook for his art because of his untimely death one year after the completion of \textit{A Bar at the Folies-Bergeré}. Unlike Courbet, there are not extensive journals and notes that lay out a chronology of Manet’s ideas and their development. We can, as this chapter does, identify links by showing connections and then speculating on the possible trajectory Manet may have taken. But there is no manifesto, socio-political doctrine or shared rhetoric documented. We have but a few letters and correspondences with Steven Mallarmé and others to inform us of his intentions, with the result, that Manet’s art remains ambiguous and something of a mystery. Not withstanding, in each – \textit{Rue Mosnier with Pavers}, \textit{At the Café} and \textit{Bar} – we can identify his deliberate attention to advertising as a form of commercial transmission and a “natural” component of the urban landscape. And by the very existence of more than one painting containing advertising, commercial subject matter was clearly discovered quite some time before Pop.

\textsuperscript{726} Elliott, B., \textit{A History of English Advertising}, xii.
CONCLUSION

The poster is really the art, and almost the only art, of this age of fever and laughter, of struggle, of ruin, of electricity and oblivion.
—Maurice Talmeyr, writer and art critic, 1896.  

Art criticism has generally refused to say that an object can be equated with a meaningful or aesthetic feeling, particularly if the object has a brand name.

Give a man a fish, and he’ll eat for a day. Give a world-famous English artist a fish, however, and he’ll pickle it in formaldehyde, flog it to a South Korean art gallery for $5.7 million, and trouser the difference.

Damien Hirst has been called an agent provocateur. Andy Warhol referred to himself as the ‘holy whore of advertising’, while Gustave Courbet was compared to a cannon ball for his assault on the Parisian art world. In Courbet’s wake, Manet’s partie carrée in Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe ensured him overnight fame when hostile critics like Ernest Chesneau publicly accused him of wanting to “attain celebrity by shocking the bourgeois”. Hirst, Warhol, Manet and Courbet are kindred spirits as each found fame through a similar provocative avant-garde business model formed on the proven advertising strategy to build a brand identity: in their case through deliberately provoking art world stakeholders. In each case the language of his art became indistinguishable from the promotion of the artist’s name – scandalise the bourgeoisie and their uproar will resonate your name, embed your identity and promote your brand.

This approach was not the unique accomplishment of the avant-garde. As we have seen, the artisan had always been a businessman forced to distinguish, promote and exchange his work to earn a living. Even when the painter-artisan aspired to higher ideals, business and ambition were not overlooked. Arguably the aspiration for the status and wealth of the artist, as opposed to the low-paid drudgery of the artisan, was realised through a business plan in which branding value-added their

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728 Lippard, L., Pop Art: With Contributions by Lawrence Alloway, Nancy Marmer, Nicolas Calas, Thames and Hudson Ltd.: London, 10.
729 Wife-swapping party.
product. For example, Albrecht Dürer—regarded as the greatest artist of the Northern Renaissance—operated two distinct production structures of artistic enterprise: his painting practice and a very profitable graphic print workshop run by his wife. Not unlike twentieth and twenty-first century avant-garde counterparts such as Koons, Hirst and Murakami, each of whom employs numerous artists to facilitate the outsourced manufacture of his art, the intrinsic and economic value of Dürer’s art was harnessed to the symbolism in his name. In 1497 he contracted Konrad Schweitzer as a sales representative for his popular religious and secular engravings and woodcuts in the major cities and towns outside of his home in Nuremberg.

Three years later, he engaged Jakob Arnold in the same capacity, demonstrating a high degree of business acumen for managing his art production and his artist’s identity, i.e. his brand. Dürer even transformed his signature into an enduring trademark that he applied to every work of art, both canvas and works on paper. It is as recognizable today as it was then, a prolific symbol of his unique art that continues to accrue significance through the ages.

Like Dürer, Warhol combined his artistry with astute commercial pursuits through operating the print workshop he called the Factory. Using the silkscreen as a machine, Warhol created multiple copies of Andy Warhol “originals”. The New York art critic Paul Bergin said of Warhol’s puzzling commercial-creative approach to art: “The artist apparently wants his studio to be considered more of an “art factory” than an artist’s studio in the traditional sense.” Once Warhol signed a work of art, whether or not he made it, the object was then transformed into a commodity charged with the signification attached to his name, in much the same way as when a priest turns bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ during the consecration in the Catholic mass. In both

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731 As an aside, he is referred to as “The quintessential ‘Renaissance man’” in the front jacket of Fedja Anzelewsky’s significant work, Dürer: His Art and Life.
examples objects come to have symbolic social-ideological meaning attached to their concrete form as a direct result of imagined sanctification or reification. In late capitalism, entire industries operate based upon this form of faith or belief that an object can be imbued with special symbolic value, and therefore exclusive economic value, far beyond the material and labour costs of its actual manufacture. The high-intensity promotional culture of advanced postmodernism — industries such as film, music, fashion, celebrity, gossip media, and automobiles — are typical experiences. Moreover, within the political economy of signs, which inscribes the surface of an object, commodity or work of art, the symbolic value has no concrete link to the conditions of its manufacture, yet it extends an ideological “commodity-form as power”. Koons, the Chapman brothers, Whiteread, Murikami, and countless others conventionally use art fabricators and their factories for the realisation of their art. In such systems of manufacture, the artist has no labour input beyond conceptualisation or design. Their labourers are merely “functions of capital”.

The mobility of capital is very evident in the lucrative world of international art today. In 2006 Hirst sold another tiger shark in formaldehyde to the Samsung Gallery in South Korea. According to the fishmonger, Vic Hislop, who supplied Hirst with his first shark for the 1991 work, The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living, two big tiger sharks and a great white are still in storage for his artist client.

From the moment Andy Warhol burst onto the international stage of celebrity art in the 1970s with his appearances at exclusive New York nightclubs and society parties, the man (rather, the man’s image) out-shone his art. Indeed, the work of art in the age of celebrity-as-cult has become a transmissive medium, a means for communication, a snow-dome memento of the artist’s identity. In avant-garde art the value of a work resides in its branding – its unique identifying attributes. Ever since Courbet liquidated traditional art by befuddling stalwart audiences and critics, artists have continued to re-apply his avant-garde manoeuvre using the same branding process.

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733 Something of abstract nature is turned into an object of concrete nature in people’s minds.
735 Ibid., 17.
736 Ibid.,
737 Marx, Capital, 1013.
738 Ibid.,
739 Ibid.,
This thesis has grappled with the mechanisms that facilitate the structure of meaning in the transfer of value within the economy of avant-garde art. The chronology of Courbet’s self-portrait enterprise, for example, demonstrates how the (productive) function of branding came to operate in the art domain, his role in building his brand, and how he managed the staging of its interface with art’s audience, and then finally its consumption.

What links Courbet and Manet, Warhol, and Hirst, and countless other avant-garde artists, is the proximity of their art practice to advertising and mass-media. Courbet was the exemplary pioneer. His ascent coincided with the rise of mass culture, advertising and its most pervasive herald, the newspaper. Courbet was the first artist to realise its potential as a public space of social relations, to build a name into a brand through the media. In particular, he invented the avant-garde tactic of scandal through morally shocking bourgeois sensibilities to assert his artistic agenda and promote his place in an evolving history of art. There would be little purpose for the existence of newspapers and magazines if they did not hold up the “scandalous mirror” of reflection for the delection and entertainment of the scandalmongers. Mané’s rise to notoriety can also be directly linked to the extended outcry facilitated through the newspapers’ coverage of Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe and Olympia, 1862-3 and 1863 respectively.

Manet clinched distinction by following Courbet’s lead in self-promotion through provocation, namely by depicting two dressed men in the company of two naked women as a parody of modern middle-class leisure.

Such symbiosis between the artist and the mass-media has grown and developed in the one hundred and fifty years since Courbet first used the press to leverage his brand and advertise Realism, culminating today in Damien Hirst’s abdication of traditional art practice in favour of “antiformalist rhetoric” and astute media manipulation. Hirst’s art shares a deeply embedded ideological complicity with both Courbet and Manet through their use of “promotional culture” to incite criticism by parodying an institutionalised ideology of bourgeois society, their dominant concern for the distinction of status.

Earlier this year the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence presented Hirst’s diamond encrusted skull, For the Love of God, 2007, as a ticket-price art show. My interest in this particular work is not in the artistry of manufacturing a life-size platinum cast of a

human skull covered in 8,601 diamonds, nor in its extension of the artist’s vanitas theme and exploration of the transience of human existence \(^{744}\) begun with his formaldehyde work. Rather, the notion of one of Tuscany’s most impressive Renaissance buildings in its capacity as a museum hosting a random “block buster” art event, dislocated from any particular cultural context, exemplifies the central argument of this research: that avant-garde art is an agency for promotion, and art has evolved into a form of advertising.

For the Love of God certainly invites multiple interpretations ranging from serious thematic analysis that positions it in the long history of vanitas painting or alternatively in the genre of Conceptual art, to its dismissal as hype and spectacle. \(^{745}\) Yet overlooked in such discourse is the difficulty of serious engagement with his work except in the most superficial way, if only because of the tight control Hirst himself commands over the dissemination of images and information about his art. Instead, throughout the twenty years since the very public and controversial showing of The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living in 1991, made under the patronage of advertising tycoon Charles Saatchi, Hirst seems more marketing maestro, a contemporary P.T. Barnum with a curious museum of amusements, than artistic genius. Indeed, it is perhaps this very point that is the point of his art. As the ultimate postmodern gesture, Damien Hirst has become the limit of possibilities, the “anti-aesthetic” from Baurillard’s excremental culture. \(^{746}\) In making his art into an institution of advertising, and reproducing the real in the ultimate simulacrum, he has transformed art not so much into a spectacle as a parody of the spectacle, as if this is the ultimate destination of the avant-garde manoeuvre initiated by Courbet.

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\(^{745}\) Ibid.

This dissertation has expanded our understanding of advertising as a constitutive predicate of the praxis and aesthetics of art since the earliest decades of the modern era. The dissertation begins with a description of Dürer’s approach to building his brand identity, and then gives an account of how Courbet developed a new program for art by insinuating his art and himself upon the art world, in a process that mirrors contemporary branding logic, and becoming a master French painter along the way. Courbet may have been an artist “of his own time,” and “a painter of modern life,” but his primary motivation was to claim the experience of the individual self in the world as a valid source for art. Such artistic doctrine, where the conditions of existence are transposed into “predicates of being,” is the point of Manet’s painting also. A Bar at the Folies-Bergère is a similar political statement of Realist philosophy – the translation of “the customs, the ideas, the appearance of my epoch according to my own appreciation of it” – as Courbet had claimed of the depictions taken directly from his life. Manet painted his world and the people who populate it confined within the location of his favourite haunt. And it’s through just the same simple program, to make art from one’s own life experiences, that I argue Hirst continues Courbet’s program of Realism. In his words, “I’ve always thought that art is a map of a person’s life, so it naturally changes as you change and get older.” The diamond skull’s glitzy veneer resists an interpretation beyond its vulgar economic value. However, For the Love of God was sourced from the world Hirst inhabits, a world of money and privilege. It is therefore also soaked in symbolic social code. As he explained to David Dimbleby in the BBC’s “Seven Ages of Britain” series, “you always make work from what’s around you”, and “money was around me”. For the Love of God is the perfect ideological expression for art in our advanced capitalist society. So too is the transformed painting of Stalin, which could be read as a satire on the triumph of capitalism in the birthplace of communism. The upholder of the red flag has become a red dot, the conventional art world sign that the artwork has been sold to the highest bidder. It is an allegory for the state of art as aestheticized recommodification of little more than reputation. Talmeyer was prophetic in his statement of art’s oblivion. It has, at the hands of the avant-garde, become the ultimate commodity.

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750 Ibid.,
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