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## INTRODUCTION

# THE REALITY OF OTHERS

We fathom you not—we love you. WALT WHITMAN

Around 1914, Claude Monet's dealer brought him a mysterious painting (fig. I.1). It depicted a duck pond in vibrant colors, painted in the artist's signature style. The dealer wanted to know whether Monet had painted it. Yes, the artist replied, he remembered painting something very much like it forty years ago, at a pond near his house in Argenteuil. But, he added, Pierre-Auguste Renoir had been there, too, seated alongside him. The two artists had worked shoulder to shoulder, portraying the same view. Perhaps this work was his. The dealer then took it to Renoir, but he was equally puzzled, equally uncertain. The mystery was only solved to everyone's satisfaction once Monet dug out a second painting of the same view, which was signed and dated to 1873 (fig. I.2). If he had painted that one, then the other must be his friend's. To prevent future confusion, Renoir added his name to the unsigned work.<sup>1</sup>

This story seems to prove how strictly the impressionists adhered to Monet's rule: "Paint what you really see."<sup>2</sup> It was more than a motto; it was a command, an obligation, a commitment to "reproduce nature without interpretation or arrangement."<sup>3</sup> It was an ethical rejoinder to the presumptuous idea that nature was deficient and the hubristic

Details of fig. I.1 (*left*)  
and fig. I.2 (*right*).



FIG. 1.1. Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *The Duck Pond*, 1873. Oil on canvas, 50.5 × 61 cm. Dallas Museum of Fine Art. The Wendy and Emery Reves Collection.

belief that artists could correct it. Monet proclaimed he had never done otherwise. On one of his very first days in art school, when his bewildered master, scrutinizing the young man's drawing of a nude, had proclaimed the feet too big, Monet shrugged, "I can draw only what I see."<sup>4</sup> No wonder, then, that forty-one years after he had painted the pond with Renoir, Monet could not tell who had authored it. If he and Renoir had done their jobs right, then the paintings should not show *Monet's* pond or *Renoir's* pond but simply the pond, the *real* one, common to both men.

In this account, the impressionists practiced a form of realism. "Paint what you really see." Not what you have *learned*, not what you *feel*, not what you *like*, but what you *see*. They were, as Henry James wrote, "Partisans of unadorned reality," believing that "the painter's proper field is simply the actual, and to give a vivid impression of how a thing happens to look, at a given moment."<sup>5</sup> They sought the world "as she is, superb and real, without premeditated arrangements, without falsification of her features and her flesh."<sup>6</sup> Its maxim



FIG. I.2. Claude Monet, *Duck Pond, Argenteuil*, 1873. Oil on canvas, 47.3 × 56.2 cm. Private collection.

heard this way, impressionism entailed an *impersonal* approach that demanded the artist's neutrality vis-à-vis his frank, just-the-facts fidelity to the absolute reality of things, a quasi-mechanical registration of everyday life in the modern city. "Monet is only an eye," grunted Paul Cézanne, "but what an eye."<sup>7</sup> They sought, in other words, to render the world as *objectively* as possible, to show reality as it really is.

This argument, however, prompted an immediate retort, for there was another valid way to hear the same imperative—not "Paint what you really *see*" but "Paint what *you* really see." Not what *I* see, not what *we* see, not what *one* sees, but what *you* see. Its maxim heard this way, impressionism was then cast as an art of *personal* experience, the painting of how things look to a given subject. To convey their individual personalities, artists should not merely paint their objects—an apple, a landscape, a man—but also communicate their most intimate and private way of seeing the world. If art was, as novelist Émile Zola insisted, "a corner of the world seen through a temperament," then the more unflinching,

the more unique, the more *personal* the artwork, the better it would be.<sup>8</sup> They sought, in other words, to render experience *subjectively*, to show things not in themselves but as they appeared within the matrix of experience.

If we hear Monet's motto as "Paint what you really *see*," then his inability to tell whether he or Renoir had painted the pond made that work an indisputable success. But if we hear it as "Paint what *you* really see," then it was just as indisputably a failure. For in the latter doctrine, what mattered above all was that Monet saw and expressed the world *differently* than Renoir did, that each man's work embodied his individual personality. In that case, what did it mean that Monet and Renoir could each look at the same painting and not know which of them had painted it? When paintings stand in for their makers, an artist who fails to recognize his work fails to recognize *himself*.

But it is not quite right to say that Monet and Renoir did not recognize their works. Rather, what each faced in the painting was not himself, not Monet or Renoir, but their relationship. If each saw the pond through the lens of temperament, that temperament was not merely individual but relational. Their works were impressions of the world not as it looked to one man, nor to anyone in particular, but of how it appeared when seen alongside a friend. The paintings were neither personal nor impersonal, but thoroughly *interpersonal*.

## PAINTING SIDE BY SIDE

At critical points in his development, Monet would go into the field with another artist, plant his easel alongside his fellow's, and paint the same view, side by side. When he was eighteen, Monet made his first known painting shoulder to shoulder with his teacher, Eugène Boudin. From there, a series of such encounters punctuated his career. Having learned what he could from Boudin, Monet began painting beside Johan Barthold Jongkind, synthesizing the approaches of these two mentors. In 1863, he entered art school, where he worked alongside other students from the same models. Disillusioned with its dogmas, he left the classroom with a new gang of peers: Frédéric Bazille, Alfred Sisley, and Pierre-Auguste Renoir.

Over the next decade, this coterie pioneered the mode of painting we now call impressionism. For their most daring leaps, Monet and his fellows found strength in one another; their collective project advanced at pivotal moments by working side by side. Painting beside his peers enabled Monet to formulate, clarify, and enrich his artistic position, which culminated in 1874, when the impressionists mounted their first independent exhibition. In the years leading up to that decisive debut, he painted with his fellows more consistently and frequently; in the years afterward, more rarely and sporadically.

The story of this practice is thus a tale of formation—of both the man and the movement. As we flip through the works in Monet's catalogue raisonné, from the first entry to the 1,983rd, his evolution feels coherent, progressive, even inevitable. But each time Monet planted his easel next to one of his fellows, he was not taking a step on a predetermined road but rather paving its course as he went. Working side by side with his collaborators,

he was pushed and pulled in directions he might not otherwise have followed, just as he tugged his friends along with him. Monet became Monet because others made him so.

When painters paint together, they face some practical decisions. How far apart should they sit? Should they share pigments or keep them separate? If one paints with small brushes, should the other use larger ones? If one finishes first, should he sit and wait for his companion? Behind these choices lies a deceptively simple question: If two painters paint the same thing, how similar should their paintings be? For the impressionists, this question had outsized stakes. If their works were too similar, they risked effacing their artistic personalities. But if they were too different, they risked losing touch with reality.

The artists thus sought a tenuous balance between similarity and difference, visualizing profound tensions between self and other, individual and group, perception and reality. Side-by-side paintings present these dualities without dualism. They uniquely hold opposites in tension and show their interrelation. As he worked alongside others, Monet explored how personal style fractures the world into individual impressions, impressions that nonetheless point beyond themselves to a shared, public reality.

## MONET AS A PERSON

A subject as famous as Monet needs little introduction.<sup>9</sup> A century after his death, he continues to fascinate an unusually wide public. His paintings have become globally recognizable. His home at Giverny is an international tourist destination, where thousands of people wait in long queues, their pilgrimage culminating in a gift shop bursting with Monet merchandise. His cultural cachet not only sells mugs and umbrellas but makes the actual paintings fail-safe investments for the world's richest buyers. This astonishing popularity has made the name "Monet" a shorthand for creativity itself, a model for the branding sought by corporate advertisers. In my view, the paintings alone cannot explain the hold that Monet has on us. It has to do not just with the works but with the *man*, with the sense that his art gives us access to *him*. Thus, eager publics gravitate toward the gossipy aspects of impressionism, as chronicled in best-selling histories of their romances, rivalries, and fallings-out.<sup>10</sup>

It would be all too easy for me, as a very *serious* scholar, to wave away these stories and dismiss their surprisingly pervasive appeal as gift-shop history, too easy to groan that salacious anecdote obscures historical context and mystifies technique. But we must not overcorrect, must not dismiss the biographical out of hand. There is a good reason why we want to know about the impressionists' lives, for their art doggedly pursued the connection between experience and representation. Monet's practice of painting with others manifested his recognition that painting is a social activity, a site where private life becomes public. And that recognition was essentially historical, keyed to the specific problems of nineteenth-century modernity.

If, as one theorist puts it, artistic innovations constitute "structured responses to social contradictions," then here is the contradiction that mattered to Monet.<sup>11</sup> He felt a need,

often desperate, for the company of others, remarking that, in the presence of good friends, “nature begins to become beautiful, it ripens, it becomes more varied.”<sup>12</sup> And he complained of crippling loneliness, begging his friends to visit him: “I have such a need for the feeling of friendship, if you were to know how sad I am in my depths—but I do not want to dwell upon this subject; come see me soon, won’t you?”<sup>13</sup> Yet he also felt a desire, often frustrated, for total solitude, insisting that he could only work alone: “As much as I found it agreeable to be a tourist with Renoir, I find it grating to work together in pairs (*à deux*). I have always worked better in solitude from my own impressions.”<sup>14</sup> Ultimately, he felt deeply ambivalent: “It would be better to be totally alone, and yet, alone there are things one cannot discover.”<sup>15</sup>

To dismiss these confessions as personality quirks would misleadingly disentangle them from the world that gave them meaning. Monet’s oscillation between feeling others as a crushing burden and a balm for his soul related to his specific historical position (bourgeois male, living in Paris and Normandy from 1840 to 1926) and the identities (friend, husband, father, artist) he inhabited. His combined dependency on and wariness of others points to an essential feature of modernity, an increasingly widening difference between being-in-the-same-place as someone else and actually being *with* them.<sup>16</sup>

## SIDE BY SIDE BUT NOT TOGETHER

We could muster an endless stream of epigrams attesting to the strangeness of this new world. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels pondered the “uninterrupted disturbance of all social relations” by which “man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.”<sup>17</sup> Poet Arthur Rimbaud exalted in the liberating anonymity of metropolitan life, “these millions of men who have no need to know one another.”<sup>18</sup> And philosopher Hippolyte Taine warned that capitalist individualism was dissecting society into “abstract beings and individuals set side by side.”<sup>19</sup>

In their paintings of crowded streets, cafés, ballets, brothels, and resorts, the impressionists sought the means to picture this world, to translate into paint what these writers rendered in words. Thus, the dominant approach to impressionist painting, the social history of art, interprets the movement as responding to a pivotal change in European society, an upheaval tautly explained by Meyer Schapiro.

As the contexts of bourgeois sociability shifted from community, family, and church to commercialized or privately improvised forms—the streets, the cafés, and resorts—the resulting consciousness of individual freedom involved more and more an estrangement from older ties; and those imaginative members of the middle class who accepted the norms of freedom, but lacked the economic means to attain them, were spiritually torn by a sense of helpless isolation in an anonymous and indifferent mass.<sup>20</sup>

This view has its iconic images, a blank stare conveying “the poignancy of contact with urban strangers” in Édouard Manet’s *Plum Brandy* (fig. I.3), or the “fragile aloneness” of

“the anonymous city dweller” in Gustave Caillebotte’s *Young Man at His Window* (fig. I.4).<sup>21</sup>

It is hardly accidental that we have adopted this analytic vocabulary from nineteenth-century Europe, from Marx and Engels, Émile Durkheim and Georg Simmel, that is, from the very world we seek to understand. Alienation, anomie, anonymity—we continue using these terms to define modern life as cold, impersonal, and indifferent.<sup>22</sup> That we still feel their force, that they continue to resonate with our everyday lives, indicates how much we still live in a world shaped by nineteenth-century concerns.

But if we accept this view of modernity as sufficient, we miss something essential.<sup>23</sup> The fragmenting forces of modern life also produced counterforces—opposite, if not equal—toward intimate connections. The more one’s everyday relationships became impersonal, the more one demanded of one’s remaining personal relationships.<sup>24</sup> As the upheavals of economic capitalism, demographic urbanism, civic secularism, and political liberalism destabilized previously secure, impersonal identities, *personal* qualities increasingly defined the modern individual’s sense of herself and of others—and still do. We want our friends to value us for our unique blend of personal qualities (patience, humor, etc.) not for attributes (professional prospects, familial prestige, etc.) that we take as incidental to who we really are. In short, we want to be seen, valued, and loved for *ourselves*. Intimacy salves the wounds of modern life.

And yet, by staking so much on interpersonal closeness, we risk a devastating form of disappointment. That is why, I take it, so many of the most powerful narrations of modern alienation concern the closest of relations. Gustave Flaubert invoked a group of friends “walking along side by side, in silence,” brooding on their diverging ways of life, feeling a “great, dark gulf separating them.”<sup>25</sup> Zola lamented the fate of lovers who “trudge on side by side without ever meeting,” remaining perpetual strangers despite “clinging tighter and tighter to the other in their burning desire to attain something beyond mere possession.”<sup>26</sup> And Guy de Maupassant mourned the emotional abyss separating confidantes: “Our great torment in life is that we are eternally alone, and all our efforts endeavor to escape this solitude. I speak to you, you listen to me, and we are both alone. Side by side, but alone.”<sup>27</sup>



FIG. I.3. Édouard Manet, *Plum Brandy*, 1877. Oil on canvas, 73.6 × 50.2 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon.



FIG. I.4. Gustave Caillebotte, *Young Man at His Window*. Oil on canvas, 116 × 81 cm. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.



These scenes personalize the social forces of modern life. They stage a scenography of withdrawal, in which men and women realize the dissatisfaction of their personal relationships when physically closest, side by side, the very proximity of their bodies forcing them to confront their opacity to one another. In these moments, when others seem forever out of reach, social alienation presents itself as a failure of knowledge. We then express the untenable requirements of modern sociality using epistemic terms, voicing our disappointments in a language of skepticism.<sup>28</sup>

## IMPRESSIONISM AS SKEPTICISM

At the end of the nineteenth century, Maupassant's phrase, "side by side, but alone," inspired a commentary by a critic named Wladimir Karénine, who lucidly traced the failure of modern intimacy to its skeptical roots, showing how moments of disappointment derive, in philosophical terms, from the world's bifurcation into subjective experience and objective reality. Her analysis opens with the following scenario: "We are at a table, a glass of wine before us. We both look at it, but we perceive it very differently."<sup>29</sup> The instant our eyes encounter the object, our minds transform what we see into diverse "sensations" and "impressions" that we can never compare or reconcile. We cannot know what we think we know, for our perception never lifts the veil of experience to reach the thing itself, which fractures into as many kaleidoscopic impressions as there are perceiving eyes.

Reading this passage with Monet in mind, I find it speaks to something I have long found mysterious about the most powerful definition of impressionism, the one offered by critic Jules-Antoine Castagnary at the first impressionist exhibition in response to Monet's *Impression, Sunrise* (fig. I.5): "They are impressionists in the sense that they render not the landscape, but the sensation produced by the landscape."<sup>30</sup> Okay, but we do not ordinarily mean something different by "That is a picture of a landscape" versus "That is a picture of the way a landscape looks." The latter sounds strange and redundant. After all, is not *any* picture a picture of how something looks? How could it possibly be otherwise? By what criteria could we distinguish a picture of a thing from a picture of the sensation that thing makes? Under what circumstances would we want these two phrases to mean two different things?

The image of the glass offers an answer. We need "impression" and "sensation" to explain how a single object fractures among multiple perceivers. By defining impressionism as a turn from the landscape to the sensation produced by the landscape, Castagnary prioritized the diversity of perception among its various artists, building this feature into its rationale. For the concepts "impression" and "sensation" to be so much as intelligible, they must designate the idiosyncrasies of personal perception.<sup>31</sup> And yet, the critic warned, if we resign ourselves to accepting these varying impressions, foregoing any assessment of their relative correctness or ambition to capture the truest among them, we are left defenseless, "powerless to formulate anything except personal fantasies, subjective, with no echo in general reason, because they are without guardrails or any possible verification in reality."<sup>32</sup>



FIG. 1.5. Claude Monet, *Impression, Sunrise*, 1872. Oil on canvas, 48 × 63 cm. Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris.

## FROM SKEPTICISM TO SOLIPSISM

If we cannot know a simple glass, a familiar object seen in optimal conditions at close range, how much less can we know the complex, diverse, and elusive beings we call “other people”?<sup>33</sup> As we doubt the doubt to its end, our minds turn to our most intimate companions, and what began as dispassionate philosophizing becomes an urgent fear. “The more profound our love,” Karénine warned, “the more terrifying the sentiment that the soul of the other is, for us, nothing but a shadow.”<sup>34</sup> I say to my wife, “I love you.” She replies, “I love you too.” But we can never know that we mean the same thing, for we might have different and inexpressible concepts of love.<sup>35</sup> Having denied that we can know even those we hold most dear, Karénine leaped fully into the skeptical abyss: “Man cannot escape his *self*, cannot abstract himself from *his eyes, his ears, his nerves, his brain*. He is their eternal slave, imprisoned in them like an impenetrable carapace, just as, outside of him, each trapped in their own individualities as in so many shells, are other human souls.”<sup>36</sup>



FIG. 1.6. Édouard Manet, *The Balcony*, 1868–69. Oil on canvas, 170 × 124.5 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

This passage thus traces the path, which logic apparently compels us to follow, from an impressionistic model of experience (that is, as the perception not of things but of appearances) to solipsistic retrenchment. This solipsism holds that because we have different impressions of the same objects, we each inhabit a unique and inaccessible reality, the chasms among which divide us from one another, such that we can encounter other people only as shadows. And, if that is the case, then we never know them at all. As projections of the self, they are neither *other*, for they originate in me, nor *people*, for they make no special claim upon me. We then resign ourselves to a solipsistic mood, shrugging with Charles Baudelaire: “Who cares what reality lies outside of me, if it helps me to live, to feel that I am and what I am?”<sup>37</sup>

I suspect that if Karénine had seen the works that Monet painted with the other impressionists, she would have considered them proofs of her opening gambit, concrete visualizations of the fractured glass. If we accept her argument, we will see side-by-side painting as picturing how we all pull at the fabric of reality, ripping it along the

seams of subjectivity. The practice would then seem an especially caustic example of what Jonathan Crary calls—in reference to Manet’s *Balcony* (fig. 1.6)—nineteenth-century modernism’s effort to visualize “the evaporation of a cohesive world that is perceived collectively . . . the noncoincidence of one’s inherence in the world with anyone else’s.”<sup>38</sup> To look at two different paintings of the same thing would be to enact the skeptical view that we are each trapped within our isolated selves, such that *my* reality is not *your* reality.

## COMMUNITIES OF IMPRESSIONS

And yet, the same scenario that unleashed this cascading skepticism—two people seeing the same glass differently—also contains an antiskeptical response. If that realization can shock our faith in a public world, it can equally illustrate the opposite possibility, can occasion our capacity to *communicate*, which I mean in its root sense of “to make common,” to form a community, the action of sharing a world.<sup>39</sup> After all, we can recognize the difference *as* a difference only within a common language, rooted in a collective form of life, which allows me to explain what I see and thus enables you to realize that it is different from what you see.<sup>40</sup>

In the same way, the differences between two paintings of the same thing emerge only within a shared, historically determinate conception of painting as an art. Only if we agree that paintings picture the content of perception—which, as we shall see, became a commonplace in mid-nineteenth-century France—can we treat the differences among them

as evincing a split among our perceptions of reality. Once we notice this agreement, we recognize that the practice of painting together does not dramatize our inaccessibility to one another but, on the contrary, formulates the accepted bounds within which we disagree. For to see Monet's and Renoir's different paintings of the pond as *different* paintings of the pond is also to see them as different paintings of *the pond*, that is, of a common, public world.

In this way, painting together dramatizes the insufficiency of claims to self-sufficient knowledge. Even our most basic candidates for such knowledge, sensations or impressions, involve our relations with others, for only in a community can I take my impressions to be *of* objects and not free-floating phantasms.<sup>41</sup> Thus (as Terry Pinkard writes, glossing G.W.F. Hegel), “appeals to an ‘impersonal reason’ that supposedly transcends all particular social practices turn out to fail on the terms that they set for themselves and to imply that they themselves must be understood as historically embedded forms of reflective social practice.”<sup>42</sup> If we accept this view, it follows that, when two people see the same thing differently, “there is no way to reconcile these two subjective points of view into a third, more objective [one].”<sup>43</sup> If these subjects are really to know the world, they must do so in and through each other, must understand themselves as linked by “a common, social project . . . that could count as something into which they must reconcile their own viewpoints.”

Painting together was such a project, a reflective, historically determinate social practice that, qua practice, embodied a view of its own significance.<sup>44</sup> As they painted, the impressionists compared their works with one another and the world they shared, each acting as the other's beholder. Their process thus modeled a critically interpersonal conception of painting, one that reimagined the artists' relations to other people. Instead of treating the smallest unit of experience as one lonely self confronting an empty reality, they conceived it as already involving others, as already *social*. When painting this way, they introduced another point into the relation between mind and world, replacing a bidirectional opposition with a form of triangulation, deriving the world from its simultaneous appearance to two experiencing subjects.

## KNOWING AND BEING KNOWN

When Castagnary warned that the impressionists would descend into merely subjective fantasy, he put the issue in terms of *knowledge*. By all accounts, Monet himself described his project in similar terms, as in Lilla Cabot Perry's oft-quoted reminiscence: “He said he wished he had been born blind and then had suddenly gained his sight so that he could have begun to paint in this way without knowing what the objects were that he saw before him.”<sup>45</sup> By distinguishing the impression that is seen from the world that is known, and by embracing the former while disavowing the latter, artists like Monet sacrificed knowing at the altar of seeing and so unleashed the skeptical avenger. In assessing this threat, we might assume that knowing others is a more specialized instance of knowing anything at all, what happens if we substitute a person—say, Monet's wife Camille—for “landscape” in Castagnary's formula: he renders not Camille but the sensation produced by Camille. Yet this substitution changes everything. It takes us from a problem of *knowledge* to one of *acknowledgment*.<sup>46</sup>

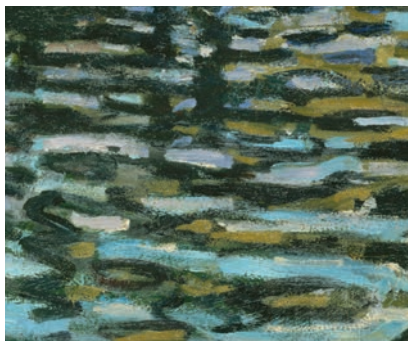


FIG I.7. (Detail of 5.1) Claude Monet, *La Grenouillère*, 1869. Oil on canvas, 74.6 × 99.7 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, H. O. Havemeyer Collection. Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer.

This difference emerges, for instance, between the opening and closing images in Karénine's skeptical recital—first, the divergent impressions of the glass; second, the lovers who cannot speak their love. What troubles us in the former is that it drives a wedge among perceivers and so implies the limits of what we can know. Yet what troubles us in the latter is not that I doubt that I love my wife (I know that I do) but rather the fear that she might not love *me*. Once we notice this difference, we realize what we really want—not only to *know* the other but also to *be known*. We want others to affirm our sense of ourselves, to take us for the people we take ourselves to be, to acknowledge us.<sup>47</sup>

*This* is the deep form of skepticism unleashed by the social forces that Marx, Rimbaud, and Taine invoked, by the disintegrating, anonymizing, atomizing pressures of capitalism, urbanism, and liberalism, and by the intimate counterforces they provoked. For the more intensely personal our relationships, the greater our need for acknowledgment. *This* is what we mourn in the scenes of disappointment narrated by Flaubert, Maupassant, and Zola, for the terror of being “side by side, but alone” is not only that I cannot know another but that there is some residual, forever inexpressible part of myself that even my closest friends do not recognize in me.

Yet in staging this yearning, in making it available, these authors refuted the solipsism their characters felt. For once I recognize their confessions as my own, as revealing the secret that I took to be mine, I come to understand their inventive means of representing our shared disappointment as a way of overcoming it, of denying the supposed disjunction between inner intentions and outer actions.<sup>48</sup> Think of Baudelaire, listening to Richard Wagner and sensing “this music was *mine*,” and finding in Edgar Allan Poe “not only subjects of which I had dreamed but whole *sentences* thought by me, and written by him.”<sup>49</sup> In these moments, art does not overcome skepticism by letting me peer into the mind of the artist but in making me feel that the artist has gazed into mine.

I have claimed that when Monet painted with others, he asserted their shared access to a common reality, each corroborating his partner's experience and so staging the world's availability to knowledge. But he also practiced *acknowledgment*, recognizing his partner for the person that he was. If (as we shall see in chapter 1) style was supposed to manifest subjectivity, and if the artist's style changed as he worked alongside others, then he made that subjectivity responsive to theirs.<sup>50</sup> When painting alongside Renoir, Monet's style became more Renoir-like, Renoir's more Monet-like (figs. I.7 and I.8). In this attunement, the artists showed each other that they were known, that their unique, subjective outlook could be shared and recognized. Only when each saw his work as seen by the other could he realize what it really meant. Thus, what Monet called his “impressions” were not *inside* of him but *between* him and his companions, between his work and theirs. Their perception did not preexist their interaction—divided into what Monet saw

and what Renoir saw. Rather, it was transformative—what Monet saw *with* Renoir.

When we are with other people, we see things differently. I mean this not metaphorically but literally. Experimental psychologists have confirmed that our sensory-motor systems process objects differently when we know that others are looking at them too.<sup>51</sup> Some qualities become salient; others fade into the background. I find such experiments interesting, not as transhistorical claims about human biology, nor as revealing some surprising fact, but quite the opposite. The results are compelling because they are obvious—so obvious that, without such novel ways of reminding ourselves, we risk overlooking their wondrousness. When I invite guests to my apartment, I imagine what they will see

when they arrive, imagine myself seeing through their eyes. Though I have spent thousands of hours in my living room, I suddenly notice things—a chip in a plate, a smudge on the wall—I had never seen before. This heightened awareness becomes even more definitive when I look at other people looking, which leads me to look at what they are looking at. Describing such moments, one philosopher writes, “the other’s intentionality sweeps us up and turns us away from the person herself and toward that which she intends.”<sup>52</sup>

These are everyday expressions of acknowledgment. For to imagine oneself as another is to recognize her existence as a fellow person, that is, as categorically different from other things in the world, someone who also perceives reality, who may do so differently than I do, but whose experience must be considered as valid as mine. Thus, when the impressionists painted together, they acknowledged one another’s singular way of perceiving things.

Unless grounded in common practices, however, this recognition threatens to splinter the world into multiple realities, into *my reality* and *your reality*. In painting what they saw in their burgeoning personal styles, each conveyed the uniqueness of his vision and so brought the other into his experience. But as they self-consciously melded their approaches, as they experimented with one another’s technique, each also acknowledged that *the other was real*. They thus taught us how, far from suggesting an unbridgeable divide, the difference between your experience and mine attests your existence not as an object of my projection but as a subject with whom I live. Painting together, the artists disclosed *the reality of others*.

## MONET’S PHILOSOPHY

Implicit throughout this book is my conviction that artistic practice can count as a philosophical enterprise. Let me now briefly defend that position and say what I do and do not mean by it. One might conceive art as revealing what truly *is*, some deep reality that lies beyond appearances.<sup>53</sup> We find such a position, to give one especially pertinent example, when Kaja Silverman calls photography the world’s way “of revealing itself to us—of



FIG 1.8. (Detail of 5.2) Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *La Grenouillère*, 1869. Oil on canvas, 66.5 × 81 cm. National Museum, Stockholm.

demonstrating that it exists, and that it will forever exceed us,” an “ontological calling card” revealing that “*two is the smallest unit of being*.”<sup>54</sup> I recognize in such words something closely approaching what I most dearly want to say: that the world exists, that artworks can show us that it exists, and that what they show us is its irreducibly relational character.

But my conception of art’s philosophical value is somewhat different. What I seek from artworks is the truth not of being in general but of our historically determinate social practices, of what Stuart Hall calls those actions that “carry meaning and value for us, which need to be meaningfully interpreted by others,” those meanings “produced and exchanged in every personal and social interaction in which we take part.”<sup>55</sup> Accordingly, the practical importance of artmaking includes not only process and technique (what brushes and pigments to use, how to size the canvas, etc.), but also the ways that artworks help us to understand our everyday self-conceptions, what we do when we describe opinions as “subjective,” celebrate originality, and take ourselves to act as free individuals. These truths are not hidden unless in plain sight, such that we find them by embracing the ordinary, attending to how such once obscure ideas have soaked down to the fibers of common sense to shape our everyday lives.<sup>56</sup>

I thus emulate Hegel (more specifically, the nonmetaphysical readers of Hegel, especially Robert Pippin) in believing that artworks have a distinct power to manifest our historically determinate collective self-understanding.<sup>57</sup> Or, in Castagnary’s more extravagant phrasing: “Society is, as the philosophers say, a moral being that cannot know itself directly and, to become conscious of its own reality, must exteriorize it.”<sup>58</sup> This view holds that we can misunderstand our own intentions, claims, and values, and that, when this happens, it leads to breakdowns in social life—as in the modern dissatisfactions of skepticism and intimacy, of knowing and being known.<sup>59</sup> In such instances, we face the frailty of our categories, realize that we can fail to live up to our own self-ascriptions, to mean what we thought we meant or be who we thought we were. We then need self-reflective social practices to show us who we really are—which is not always who we take ourselves to be.<sup>60</sup>

This way of putting things, however, may misleadingly invert the causality. For our practices do not preexist the “we” who practice them. Rather, this first-personal plural subject emerges only in and through such practices, which bind us in a common form of life. “We” ebbs and flows with each utterance, for I can identify with one we-claim while disclaiming another.<sup>61</sup> To say “we” is thus to invite an everyday form of skepticism, that we are all so different from one another that we cannot meaningfully conceive of ourselves as a plural subject. But it is also to solicit identification, to test our capacity, across our many differences, to acknowledge the collective form of life that we call modernity.<sup>62</sup>

This is precisely how I understand the philosophical significance of the impressionists’ collective project: as furnishing social self-knowledge by visualizing the character, contradictions and all, of the world they held in common. In their practice of painting together, we discover the dynamic interdependence of personal relationships (e.g., Monet’s and Renoir’s) and the communal norms that give them meaning. For once a society has institutionalized its roles and self-understandings—in modern conceptions of friendship, for example, by which we live out our normative conceptions of individuality and

subjectivity—its members have no choice but to take a stand on them, to accept or refuse their claims, which they do in their everyday actions.<sup>63</sup> Thus, Hegel observes that we assess the truth or falsity of the concepts that really matter to us by measuring them not against an external object—as when we test our belief that it is raining by going outside—but against themselves, as in our everyday judgments, whether our friends are *true* friends or, relatedly, whether artworks are *truly* artworks.<sup>64</sup>

Here, philosophizing requires the social facts so essential to art history. The historical forces that shaped impressionism—capitalism, liberalism, and so on—give higher-order structure to what Pippin calls the “historically achieved, common like-mindedness . . . inseparable from complex (ultimately recognitive) relations of social dependence” that constitute modern life.<sup>65</sup> And, insofar as we share that like-mindedness with the artists whom we study, feel their problems as our own, then to learn who *they were* means learning who *we are*—such that our “we” also includes them.<sup>66</sup>

## ART HISTORY, SOCIAL AND SOCIABLE

While many of the works that Monet painted side by side with others have become individually famous, the practice itself has remained obscure. It has not been altogether ignored—most authors discussing Monet’s paintings of La Grenouillère, for instance, also reproduce their counterparts by Renoir—but rather taken for granted, either treated as a curiosity or discussed only in reductively biographical terms. The only detailed treatment, Barbara Ehrlich White’s *Impressionists Side by Side* (1996), provides essential information about the whens and wheres but avoids interpretation.<sup>67</sup> Otherwise, scholarly attention to side-by-side painting (chiefly by Joachim Pissarro and, more recently, T. J. Clark) has focused exclusively on the crucial pairing of Cézanne and Pissarro (figs. I.9 and I.10).<sup>68</sup> The lessons these artists teach are absolutely singular and cannot be generalized to the other impressionists.

The practice has proved elusive, in part, because we lack documentation. Apart from a few strategically told anecdotes (e.g., Monet on Manet and Renoir), only one known source relates in depth what it was like when artists painted together (critic Théodore Duret watching Gustave Courbet and Camille Corot, with which I begin chapter 1). We thus lack many practical details about how far apart the artists sat, how they timed their work, and so on. Barring the discovery of some new document, this gap in the historical record will not be filled. Another avenue would be technical analysis, which would determine whether the artists shared materials. So far, however, the works’ dispersion across the globe, in public and private collections, means that we often have a cornucopia of information on one (usually the Monet) and none on the other.<sup>69</sup> Until such analysis is done, we must content ourselves with looking as attentively as possible at the paintings before our eyes.

Compared with the breadth and diversity of Monet’s life and work, my time frame is narrow, my scope focused. It examines, as thoroughly as possible, a small selection of works that Monet painted alongside other artists, made between 1858, when Monet began painting landscapes, and 1874, the year of the first impressionist exhibition—a sixteen-year slice from





FIG. 19. Paul Cézanne, *La Côte Saint-Denis à Pontoise*, ca. 1877. Oil on canvas, 65.4 × 54.2 cm. Private collection.

an eighty-six-year life. This phase in Monet's work contains several coherent and well-known plotlines, especially his growing commitment to outdoor painting, his move from Normandy to Paris to Argenteuil, and his turn away from Manet-style figure painting.<sup>70</sup> It therefore behooves us to ask how Monet's embrace of and turn from working with others relates to these better-told story arcs. How did this practice inform his decisions to adopt some realist conventions and refuse others, his sense of what it meant to paint from the motif, and his conception of the difference between people and landscapes? Those questions (and the accounts of these intersecting stories given by other scholars) inform this book throughout, sometimes shaping the narrative implicitly, other times surfacing for explicit reflection.

By restricting my focus to works that Monet painted with others, I de-emphasize two of his best-known projects, his series paintings of the 1890s and the water lilies that he painted in Giverny. In these later endeavors, Monet offered related but distinct takes on the same underlying issues of isolation and community, individuality and collectivity that he confronted while working alongside others.<sup>71</sup> Their tactics are sufficiently different,



FIG. 1.10. Camille Pissarro, *The Côte des Bœufs at L'Hermitage, Pontoise*, 1877. Oil on canvas, 114.9 × 87.6 cm. National Gallery, London.

however, that I shall touch on the later works only when they bear directly on my core examples of side-by-side painting.

Like most scholars of impressionism, I consider the prominence of female impressionists to be one of the most interesting, important, and lasting reasons for the movement's continued relevance to art history. Moreover, issues of sex and gender—and the feminist writing thereon—are essential to the account of interpersonal vision that I am seeking to develop, as I address at length in chapter 5. And, as Anthea Callen has persuasively argued, the practice of plein air painting, both before and after impressionism, was culturally coded as a gendered practice that “enabled men to carve out an almost exclusively masculine territory.”<sup>72</sup> It is thus doubly disappointing (if not exactly surprising) that, as far as we know, Monet painted side by side only with other men.

It is true that, from the early 1880s, Monet's stepdaughter, Blanche Hoschedé, would sometimes accompany him into the field and paint nearby.<sup>73</sup> As we shall see in chapter 1, he painted a portrait of her working alongside another artist—and, significantly, this was



FIG. I.11. Berthe Morisot, *The Cherry Picker*, 1891. Oil on canvas, 154 × 84 cm. Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris.



FIG. I.12. Eugène Manet, *The Cherry Tree*, 1891. Watercolor over graphite on folded paper, 36.8 × 23.5 cm. Private collection.

the only time he depicted side-by-side painting. But, in keeping with his valorization of originality, Monet refused to give her lessons, advising her simply: “Look at nature and paint what you see.”<sup>74</sup> And, for her part, she deliberately chose not to paint beside him. When she joined Monet in the field, she would plant her easel at least thirty feet away and select appreciably different motifs.<sup>75</sup> She worried that a direct comparison of their very similar styles would always subordinate her to her already-canonized stepfather, insisting that her place was not “in the shadow but in the light of Monet.”<sup>76</sup> He seems to have agreed. One houseguest at Giverny confirmed that, though “they both like to work together,” Monet insisted that “she ought to work away from him.”<sup>77</sup>

Despite Monet’s not painting alongside female artists, I wish to deny emphatically that side-by-side painting was an exclusively male practice. His colleague Berthe Morisot, for example, painted alongside Renoir in 1890 (see figs. 5.18 and 5.19). She also painted regularly with her sister, Edma Pontillon; daughter, Julie Manet (see figs. 7.12 and 7.14);

and husband, Eugène Manet (figs. I.11 and I.12).<sup>78</sup> In fact, according to Julie, Morisot and Eugène fell in love over the course of a summer spent sketching side by side.<sup>79</sup> Because some of these works directly impact several of my larger arguments, I break chronology to discuss them in chapters 5 and 7.

This book joins a wider renewal of interest in Monet's early work, which, taken in toto, has shifted from the exclusive formalism that characterized earlier investigations to more iconographic explorations of people, things, and places.<sup>80</sup> More broadly, I take up the obstinate problem of subjectivity in nineteenth-century art, pushing into the breach opened by some of the field's most innovative writers.<sup>81</sup> I especially hope that this book be read alongside Andrei Pop's recent study of symbolism, which treats even such apparently fantasist artists as Odilon Redon as affirming a "philosophical realism affirming the existence of a world prior to representation."<sup>82</sup> Most of all, I emulate some essential studies of specific interpersonal relationships. These include Bridget Alsdorf's of Henri Fantin-Latour's group portraits, Susan Sidlauskas's of Cézanne's portraits of his wife, and André Dombrowski's of Cézanne's relations with Manet and Zola, to name three I find particularly inspiring.<sup>83</sup>

These authors demonstrate how local relations among artists and their intimates contained in miniature social conflicts between individual and group, self and other, and did so at a moment when their meanings were still in flux, not yet fully conceptualized by the nascent social sciences. Rather than working backward from a notion of "society" existing prior to social action, these studies develop more fluid, processual accounts of sociability and socialization that include not only top-down forces (e.g., capitalism, individualism, urbanization) but also the bottom-up relations (rivalries, marriages, associations) that constitute everyday experience.<sup>84</sup> They thus bridge what once seemed discrete modes of historical contextualization: on the one hand, intellectual histories of subjectivity and, on the other, social histories of modern life.<sup>85</sup> Together, they constitute a sociable turn, committed, as Alsdorf exhorts, to treating relationships as a "*structure*—rather than simply a context" for artistic meaning.<sup>86</sup> That, in short, is what I aspire to do and what the artists *themselves* did when they painted together.

## PRÉCIS

This book begins by asking why painting side by side seemed to hold such promise for the painters of Monet's time. While artists have sketched together since at least the seventeenth century (figs. I.13 and I.14), the practice took on new significance in Monet's lifetime, when new developments in painting and the invention of photography prompted reevaluation of fundamental artistic criteria.<sup>87</sup> After introducing some preimpressionist instances of side-by-side painting, I spend the bulk of the chapter tracing what I call the "parable of the painters," wherein two artists scrupulously copy the same thing only to find that their paintings look different. The parable, I shall argue, offers an image of subjectivity that establishes the stakes of painting together, revealing how its claims were understood and evaluated in Monet's time and milieu. Moving between the concepts deployed in variations on the parable and concrete examples from impressionist painting, I show how

Monet's practice formulated an antiskeptical position, whereby comparison serves as a mode of intersubjective communication and, hence, corroboration.

The remaining six chapters analyze, in chronological order, works made side by side. In each, I show how one group of paintings works through a single problem: the beholder, originality, individuality, and so on. While I schematically separate them, they are, of course, intertwined.<sup>88</sup> After all, they hold a structure in common: they are all essentially interpersonal, all preoccupied with how persons become themselves in and through their relationships. For that reason, they all also describe not statuses but norms, such that Monet could succeed or fail to realize them—to successfully address a beholder or have a perspective, to be original, individual, natural, or even human.

Chapter 2 finds Monet alongside Boudin in 1858, realizing how side-by-side painting solicits a different way of conceiving the beholder, one that enabled the artist to challenge existing conventions of composition as he recreated the formative experience of watching his teacher paint and comparing his work to the world. In so doing, he made the relation of artist to beholder a concretely interpersonal one, modeled on that of looking together at the same motif. Chapter 3 shows how, working with Johan Barthold Jongkind in 1864, Monet confronted the dichotomy between originality and influence in both the artistic and cultural realms. Rejecting romantic conceptions of his Norman homeland as an uninfluenced, authentic country, he turned instead to a conception of originality as ignorance. Chapter 4 uncovers the contexts of Frédéric Bazille's work side by side with Alfred Sisley in 1867, as well as two related paintings, Renoir's portrait of Bazille painting his view and a landscape by Monet depicted within Renoir's portrait. Together, these works portrayed individuality as socially produced, informed by their collaborative studio practice and reacting against the official studio where the artists met.

The next three chapters reevaluate Monet's impressionism via the problems of sexuality, perspective, and humanity. Chapter 5 joins Monet and Renoir at La Grenouillère in 1869, where the artists reflected on their own relationship by exploring the concept of society, asking how natural are social relationships. For Monet, the question emerged from his urgent efforts to integrate figures into their environments; for Renoir, from his lifelong quest to represent the naturalness of women and of heterosexuality. Converging at La Grenouillère, each found a solution in the other, depicting interpersonal relationships to explore their own artistic companionship. Chapter 6 meets Monet and Sisley in Argenteuil in 1872, when they confronted contemporary challenges to perspective (especially photography and Japonisme) in heavily perspectival paintings, picturing gaps between the appearance and actuality of things while also proposing a way of retaining access to reality. Chapter 7 concludes with two pairs of works painted near Monet's home in 1874: Manet's and Renoir's side-by-side portraits of the Monet family and Manet's of Monet painting, which embeds a side-by-side view of the Seine into a metacommentary on Monet's practice. I argue that Manet recoiled from the ethical consequences of Monet's commitment to paint only what he saw, which, he believed, could not accommodate other people's humanity and the claims it makes upon us. I end by asserting that the practice of painting together enacted a different mode of acknowledgment, Monet's attunement to his partner manifesting his recognition of the reality of others.



FIG. I.13. Jacob van Ruisdael, *View of Deventer*, ca. 1650s. Black chalk and gray wash on paper, 124 × 225 cm. British Museum, London.

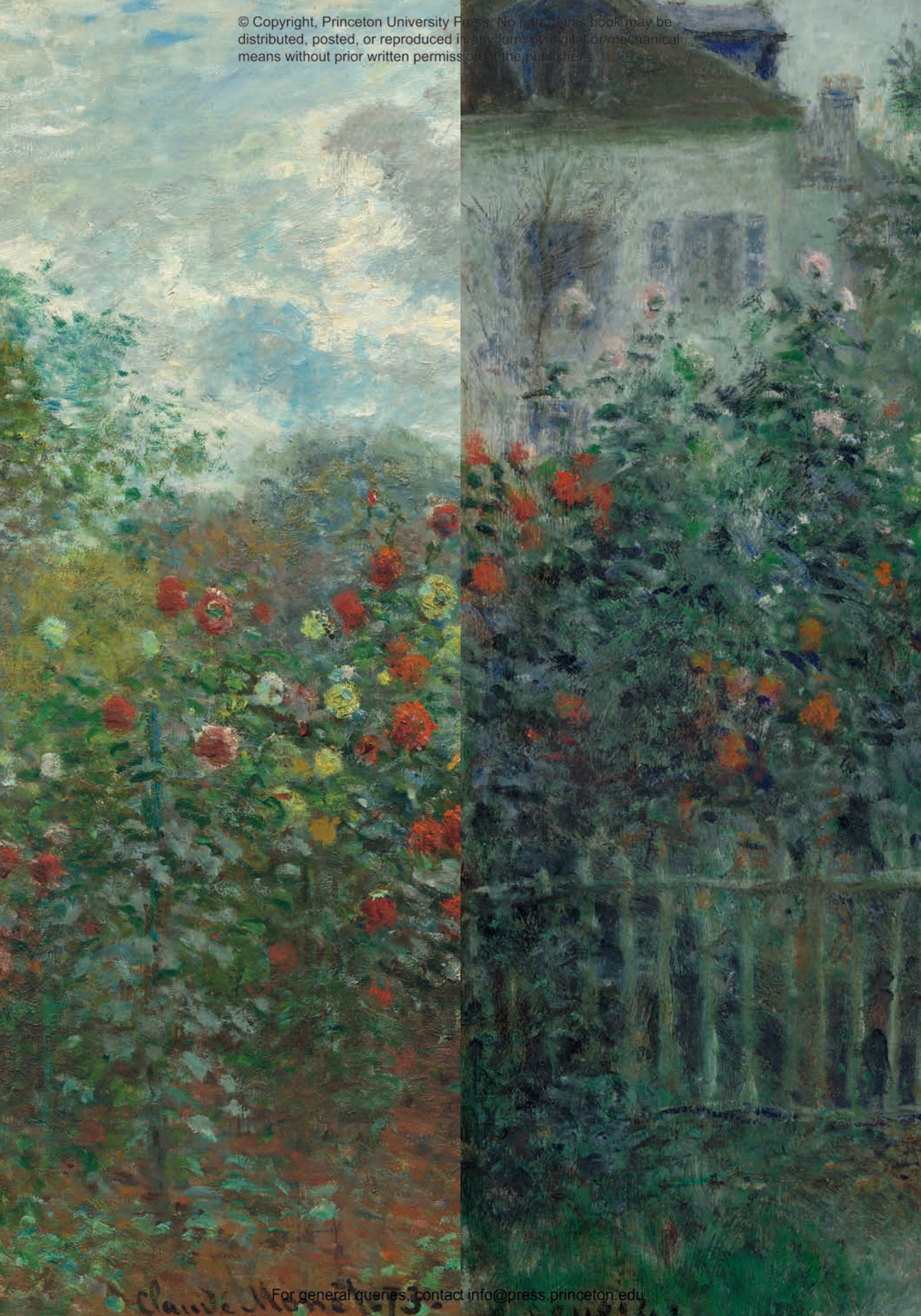


FIG. I.14. Meindert Hobbema, *The Church Called Bergkerk and Water Mill at Deventer*, ca. 1680. Charcoal and black ink wash, 16.8 × 29.5 cm. Petit Palais, Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris.

## EPITOME

I care about Monet's paintings because they speak to a common concern that links his time to mine, him to me, the combined sense of isolation and intimacy that peculiarly characterizes modern life and gives rise to doubts about knowing and being known. So long as this skepticism remains authorized by our broader social practices, no artwork can defeat it once and for all. But Monet manifested, acknowledged, and thus worked through the lived-out implications of our doubts, showing us what it might mean to transcend them.<sup>89</sup>

Painting side by side, he and his group pictured both how we see the same world *differently* and that it is *the same* world that we see. In doing so, they wrestled with that core contradiction in modern experience: on the one hand, our belief that we are all distinct individuals who see things in our own unique ways; on the other, our conviction—which sometimes falters and is then felt as a wish—that we are all bound by a common condition and shared destiny.<sup>90</sup> In what follows, as we turn our attention to the fruits of their efforts, let us join in their endeavor and share in their world.



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