

THROUGH A SHIFTING LENS: THE PHOTO CRITICISM OF FRANCIS WEY

by

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(Under the Direction of Alisa Luxenberg)

ABSTRACT

Although brief, the French writer Francis Wey's acknowledgement and criticism of photography in the 1850s was among the earliest aesthetic analyses of the new medium. This study will explore his unusual affinity for paper photography, how his attraction toward the new medium echoed Realist concerns with the tangible, the contemporary, and the real, and his abrupt abandonment of the subject.

INDEX WORDS: Francis Wey, Nineteenth-century photography, Charles Nègre, Gustave Courbet, Realism

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Charles Nègre's 1851 photograph, *Le Petit Chiffonnier*, or, *The Little Ragpicker* (Figure 1), features an adolescent boy leaning against a large basket and languidly turning to face the viewer. Although the boy's facial features are obscured by shadow and the grainy, gauzy nature of the photograph, Nègre does not deprive the viewer of a thorough visual description of the subject. With dirty, tattered pants and a hat sitting crookedly atop his head, the boy's lower-class status is unapologetically apparent. Nègre did not depict his subject in a manner that arouses sympathy or pity, but rather, stays neutral. The figure stands on a cobblestone street against a hazy background, and turns toward the viewer or camera with an air that borders on indifference. Although the boy is the subject of the composition, he is pushed into the mid-ground by a stone bench that dominates the foreground. Even his basket enjoys as much prominence as his figure. Through this arrangement Nègre further objectified his subject. He placed equal if not increased emphasis on inanimate objects that separate the main subject of his photograph from the viewer's space.

On the 18th of May, 1851 the journal of La Société Héliographique in Paris issued Francis Wey's commentary on the photography of the French painter and photographer, Charles Nègre. In this issue of *La Lumière*, the French novelist and critic, Wey, offered ardent praise of Nègre's photograph, *The Little Ragpicker*, in one of the more critical and aesthetic considerations of the new medium.

... a remarkable proof of flexibility and the diversity of photography. His *Little Ragpicker* is both solid and airy like a drawing by Bonvin: it is the most skillful and most fleeting ébauche. A bare wall, a hazy background, two blocks of stone, on one of which the hero of the picture sits and rests his basket: that is the entire setting; there is nothing complicated about it. The head, covered with a wretched cap, is carefree, contemptuous and cunning; the shirt of this urchin-Diogenes is softly blurred by a ray of sunlight; the pants are patched, torn, split and mended enough to make Murillo and the author of *The Stonebreakers* jealous. Nègre's *Ragpicker* is no longer a photograph; it is a deliberately organized composition, executed with all the qualities foreign to the daguerreotype.¹

This favorable review not only stands in contrast to much of the critical reception of photography at the time, but also marks a change in Wey's own thoughts on the medium.

Here, Wey praised Nègre for his ability to compose a pleasing, artistic image in such a simple and painterly manner in a photograph, but just a few months prior, Wey did not attest to the medium's capacity for independent, artistic expression. Instead, the

¹ Francis Wey, "Album de la société héliographique," *La Lumière*, (18 May 1851): 104. translated by, James Borcoman, *Charles Nègre: 1820-1880* (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada, 1976), 17.

"...une preuve remarquable de la souplesse, de la diversité des ressources de la photographie. Son *Petit Chiffonnier* est à la fois solide et vaporeux comme un dessin de M. Bonvin: c'est la plus habile et la plus fugitive ébauche... Un pan du mur, un lointain estompé, deux blocs de pierre, sur l'un desquels le héros du sujet s'assied et dépose sa hotte: voilà toute la mise en scène; elle n'a rien de compliqué. La tête, coiffé d'une méchante casquette, est insouciant, dédaigneuse et narquoise; la chemise de ce Diogèngamin est moelleusement ouatée d'un rayon de soleil; le pantalon, largement indiqué, est bariolé, crevasse, fendillé, rapiécé, à rendre jaloux Murillo et l'auteur des *Casseurs de pierres*. Le *Petit Chiffonnier* de M. Nègre n'est plus une photographie; c'est une composition pensée et voulue, exécutée avec toutes les qualités étrangères au daguerréotype."

critic had emphasized the photograph's role in assisting the artist in the pursuit of original compositions in more traditional fine art media such as painting and sculpture, "Photography is the faithful translator of nature, and to the original artist this new invention offers unforeseen resources, but he must surpass it, and to surpass it, the artist must not only translate, he must interpret as well."² In Wey's earlier words, photography acts as a mere instrument in the larger artistic process, but falls short of artistic merit in that it only mimics nature and fails to offer an original point of view. The artist must interpret, not simply copy, the photograph into his painting or sculpture in order to create a successful and harmonious composition.

Although Wey is often cited as a critic who embraced this new medium with open arms,³ it is important to understand his unconventional thoughts regarding photography, and to do so one must consider them in the context of his larger work. A close study of his political commentary, novels, and art criticism offers insight into his opinions of photography. His acknowledgement of the potential for originality and aesthetic qualities in a photograph seemed to be rooted not only in his penchant for innovation, but also his propensity for the real, the physical, the contemporary, and the immediate.

The nineteenth century welcomed a dynamic discourse on the new medium that would foster debate for decades to come. While most recognized photography's obvious utilitarian benefits for accurate documentation, the medium's relationship to the

² Francis Wey, "De l'influence de l'héliographie sur les Beaux-Arts," *La Lumière* (9 February 1851): 2, trans. James Borcoman, *Charles Nègre: 1820-1880* (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada, 1976), 17.

³ Art Historians such as Margaret Denton, Emmanuel Hermange, and Anne McCauley all cite Wey as one of photography's advocates in their articles, "Francis Wey and the Discourse of Photography as Art in France in the Early 1850s," *Art History* (November 2002): 622-648, "La Lumière and l'invention de la critique photographique 1851-1860," *Études Photographique* (November 1996): 89-108, and "Caricature and Photography in Second Empire Paris," *Art Journal* (Winter 1983): 355-360, respectively.

fine arts was contested. Art critics such as the French poet Charles Baudelaire lamented photography's negative impact on the fine arts, stating that, "the ill-applied developments of photography, like other purely material developments of progress, have contributed much to the impoverishment of the French artistic genius, which is already so scarce."⁴ Many viewed photography not as an art form, but as an admittedly-useful instrument that had the frightening potential to render the artist's eye irrelevant. Art historian Aaron Scharf summarizes these early fears about photography with this question: "Will the artist not be driven to starvation when a machine usurps his functions?"⁵ Wey rejected such fear in 1851 in his description of *The Little Ragpicker* but still believed that photography would have an "immediate and profound influence"⁶ on the fine arts. Wey did not view photography as a potential bane to art's existence that would hinder genius, but rather as a catalyst for innovation. He acted as an advocate for the medium, and his simultaneous interest in Realist painting could help to explain his unusual opinions in 1851.

Born in 1812 in Besançon, France, Wey divided his writing efforts between fiction, linguistics, travel commentary, and art criticism. Holding official positions in Besançon, such as Inspector General of Departmental Archives and president of the Société des Gens de Lettres,⁷ Wey was described in 1855 as, "an aesthete, a man of

⁴ Charles Baudelaire, "The Modern Public and Photography," *Salon of 1859*, trans. in Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger, eds, *Art in Theory 1815-1900* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 667.

⁵ Aaron Scharf, *Art and Photography* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1974), 26.

⁶ Francis Wey, "De l'influence de l'héliographie sur les Beaux-Arts," *La Lumière*, 9 February 1851, in André Rouillé, *La Photographie en France: texts et controverses, une anthologie, 1816-1871* (Paris: Macula, 1989), 108. "...est appelée à exercer dans le domaine de l'art une influence immédiate et profonde," All translations my own unless otherwise noted.

⁷ Charles Jean-Baptiste Jacquot Mirecourt, *Francis Wey: Précédé d'une lettre à Eugène Sue* (Paris: G. Havard, 1855), 6.

good, education, one of the gentry.”⁸ In Paris, Wey helped found and belonged to the Société Héliographique, whose publication *La Lumière* provided an outlet through which he could voice his opinions on photography. The group boasted members such as painter Eugène Delacroix, pioneer in optical devices Charles Chevalier, photographer Hippolyte Bayard, and critic Jules Champfleury, and holds great significance in the history of photography. Although formed more than ten years after photography was made public in 1839, the Société Héliographique was one of the first organized associations for the new medium, and it defended photography as a medium that—at the very least—had the potential to make a work of art.

The twentieth- and twenty-first century discourse on nineteenth-century photography differs from that of the 1800s in that it concedes the artistic potential of the practice. While scholars often cite Wey’s writings on photography to support their own arguments regarding nineteenth-century photography, his pertinence to the discipline of photographic criticism is often understated. He aligned the new medium with Realist paintings that, although controversial, were still recognized as fine art. I will examine the writings of Wey, the context in which they were conceived, and their aesthetic and social implications that help to tie them to those of French Realism. While a close study of his writings published in *La Lumière* will be foremost to my argument, I will explore other genres through which Wey exercised his voice on aesthetics. For example, Wey’s serial novel, *Le Biez de Serine*, is particularly interesting because it makes specific reference to a provocative Realist painting.

As a close friend of the Realist painter Gustave Courbet, Wey corresponded with the artist throughout his career. Their communication likely strengthened their

⁸ Jack Lindsay, *Gustave Courbet: His Life and Art* (London: Bath Adams and Dart, 1973), 39.

relationship, and Wey often rose to Courbet's defense when the artist came under scrutiny. In a discussion with Wey in 1849, the French painter Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres referred to Courbet's works as "lost values," or "sacrificed gifts,"⁹ and in the same year the critic Théophile Gautier warned Wey against any involvement with the Courbet, saying: "You'll take under your wing something with no resemblance to yourself. You'll see. That man will do you harm."¹⁰ Although Wey found their observations to be legitimate, he did not follow their advice and maintained his relationship with the painter. In return, Courbet often confided in Wey about his work, and seems to have valued the opinion of his friend. In an 1848 letter Courbet explained his painting *The Stonebreakers* (Figure 2) to Wey, who would later include a version of this letter in his 1850 novel *Le Biez de Serine*, which features characters based on the figures in the painting. Their involvement in each other's work reflects a mutual respect. Wey admired Courbet for featuring the lower class in his paintings as well as for presenting the viewer with the real as opposed to an idealized historical or religious narrative. This admiration was more fully realized in Wey's novel *Biez de Serine*, which was published one year after the completion of Courbet's painting *The Stonebreakers*.

Although enthusiastic about the new medium, Wey was a discriminating critic. Margaret Denton discusses Wey's writings on photography, and more specifically, his preference for the paper calotype over the daguerreotype, which consisted of a polished silver-coated copper plate. She argues that Wey preferred the paper process of photography for its tendency to showcase the photographer's hand, as opposed to the

⁹ Jack Lindsay, *Gustave Courbet: His Life and Art*, (London: Bath Adams and Dart, 1973): 56.

¹⁰ Lindsay, 55.

intricate, unabashed detail of the daguerreotype.¹¹ Denton maintains that the subjectivity of the paper process granted it artistic potential in Wey's mind, but does not consider any additional implications of his preference for paper prints, such as their aesthetic similarities to Realist painting. This study will contend that Wey's attraction to photography extended beyond the physical and visual characteristics of the paper process and was rooted in the Realist taste for the real, the tangible, the contemporary, and most importantly the socially and politically relevant.

Wey's belief that the medium could be a form of artistic expression was an uncommon opinion in France in 1851.¹² Wey's criticism on photography has overshadowed knowledge of his other work, but his opinions on the medium resonate in it. A more comprehensive study of his various writings will reveal a commonality among Wey's views on art, society, and politics that were reflected in certain Realist paintings and photographs.

¹¹ Margaret Denton, "Francis Wey and the Discourse of Photography as Art in France in the Early 1850s: 'Rien n'est beau que le vrai, mais il faut le choisir,'" *Art History* (November 2002): 622-648.

¹² For example, Baudelaire's scathing comments on photography are mentioned on p. 4.

CHAPTER 2

WEY AND LA SOCIÉTÉ HÉLIOGRAPHIQUE

In 1839, just after photography's public introduction, Francis Wey viewed photographs by Hippolyte Bayard, who, although not a recipient of the same recognition as fellow Frenchman Daguerre, was one of the most sophisticated and adventurous of the medium's early practitioners. He developed his own unique process of direct positives on paper, and on 14 July 1839 he put thirty of these works (Figure 8) on display for a benefit to aid earthquake victims in Martinique. Twelve years after this exhibition, Wey finally published his opinion on them in the May 1851 issue of *La Lumière*,

The direct proofs bore little resemblance to the results of the daguerrean process. They resembled nothing I had ever seen. And not knowing how they had been obtained, I would have attributed them to witchcraft. Even knowing the means of their production, I cannot explain at all why they are so strange, nor how, with the peculiarities that distinguish them, they achieve their ideal perfection. One contemplates these direct positives as if through a fine curtain of mist. Very finished and accomplished, they unite the impression of reality with the fantasy of dreams; light grazes and shadow caresses them. The daylight itself seems fantastic, and the peculiar sobriety of the effect renders them monumental. This method is powerful enough to do away with any kind of conventional prescription for photography, even the extremes of black and white. ...The photography of M. Bayard contains the most radical criticism of schools of draftsmen

founded on the dry rigor of contours. Air plays on these images with so much transparency and envelopes the foreground so completely that images appear at once distant and complete.¹³

With these comments, Wey offered not only praise, but also aesthetic analysis. He read the images' effect as unsettling, and even unnatural, likening the images to witchcraft and proposing that they somehow serve as a connection between fantasy and reality. Wey noted these effects as differing from the daguerreotype, which lacked the "fine curtain of mist" and instead, offered the viewer completely legible detail. Despite his confusion, Wey recognized these photographs as an artistic feat, "finished and accomplished," "monumental," depicting the very air surrounding the forms. Here, Wey saw Bayard's photographs as an explicit challenge to artists who favored contour or form over atmosphere and light, and he used traditional artistic vocabulary to emphasize his point. But why, if these images were so impressive in 1839, did Wey delay in making public his remarks for twelve years?

Although one of photography's most outspoken advocates, Wey did not spend his entire career writing about the medium. In fact, he wrote on the process for only a short stint from about 1851-1853. What caused this temporary activity to occur on the part of our critic? After all, photography had been public for more than ten years before Wey penned any response to it. What, in 1851, led him to publish his opinions and then to abandon them? To limit the origins of his photo criticism to any one experience, factor, or occurrence would be misleading, but Wey's involvement in La Société

¹³ Francis Wey, "Album de la Société Héliographique," trans. in *Art of the French Calotype*. edited by André Jammes and Eugenia Parry Janis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983): 4.

Héliographique in Paris is a logical place to start, since it emerged at the same time as Wey's photo criticism.

In order to understand Wey's critical interest in the photographic process in the 1850s, it is necessary first to examine La Société Héliographique, the group with which he was so actively involved.¹⁴ Little is known about this early organization devoted to the practice and discussion of photography in Paris, but its founding in January 1851 involved members of diverse backgrounds, including artists, scientists, and writers who shared their technical secrets and held social functions that centered on the viewing of photographs.¹⁵ This interaction resulted in a rich, yet informal discourse on the new medium.¹⁶ Photo historians Lemagny and Rouillé analyze the creation of the Société Héliographique against the backdrop of the Great Exhibition in London in 1851. At the Crystal Palace, London held the first major exhibition of photography, though no society or journal dedicated to photography yet existed in Britain. Thus began a sort of back and forth competition between the two nations with the French answering to the Great Exhibition with the privately funded Société Héliographique, and when the London Royal Photographic Society was founded in 1853, British photographer Roger Fenton noted in the inaugural address that the Société Héliographique and its publication, *La Lumière*, had served as catalysts to the creation of this London organization. Roger

¹⁴ According to André Jammes and Eugenia Parry Janis, *The Art of the French Calotype* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983) 39, La Société Héliographique was not originally established as a group dedicated to providing a venue for the discourse on the new medium. Originally a dining club, members met once a month to cultivate a sense of community among novelists, painters, poets, illustrators, and artisans. The Société Héliographique officially formed in 1851 and consisted of a smaller offshoot of the original dinner club. With a more specialized mission, the group was "classed as a society of scholars and friends dedicated to the integration of science and the arts where the main goals were friendship, free exchange, and facilities to encourage a full explanation of photography."

¹⁵ Laurie Dahlberg, *Victor Regnault and the Advance of Photography: The Art of Avoiding Errors*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 34-37.

¹⁶ Jean Claude Lemagny and André Rouillé, *History of Photography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 29-31.

Fenton had visited La Société Héliographique in 1851, and apparently was impressed. Fenton had been studying painting and drawing in the studio of Paul Delaroche, and he also learned the wax paper photographic process invented by Gustave LeGray.¹⁷ While the Royal Photographic Society received royal support (Queen Victoria was an enthusiastic patron of photography), this sort of funding was not available to the French organization because it emerged under the Second Republic.

The Société Héliographique's relatively democratic discourse may have encouraged public writing on the medium and by our critic, Francis Wey. Francis Wey was indeed an active member of the Société Héliographique, and the heterogeneous group would have had differing approaches or vocabulary, perhaps foreign to others, in discussing photography. These men, who usually worked in isolation, could now collaborate in exploring the photographic process in an environment that encouraged progress and innovation. The group's steadfast dedication to photography would certainly have inspired Wey to express his own admiration for the medium.

The Société Héliographique provided not only a community within which Wey could share his interest in photography, but it also published *La Lumière*, in which Wey could publicly verbalize his opinion. The Société Héliographique disbanded in 1853, but the journal endured until 1861. Published weekly, *La Lumière* offered criticism of the photographic work viewed by members of the society, and presented science and art as two areas that were not mutually exclusive. Francis Wey's contributions to the publication were essential to its impact, according to Jammes and Janis, and had a lasting effect.¹⁸ As the scholar Emmanuel Hermange argues, before the publication of

¹⁷ Mary Warner Marien, *Photography: A Cultural History*, (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2006), 100.

¹⁸ Jammes and Janis, 42.

La Lumière, photographic criticism did not exist in France, and he traces its beginnings to the invaluable contributions made by Wey and its editor Ernest Lacan. Hermange identifies Francis Wey as the member of the Société Héliographique who possessed the most literary skill and was the first to offer a critical vocabulary for the medium that is still, in part, used today.¹⁹ Just as Delacroix could have offered his artist's perspective to the group, Wey could bring his writer's viewpoint to the photographic discourse at the Société Héliographique.

The organization adopted a rather democratic dynamic in the manner through which they viewed the photographs. Photographs were then rarely on display in any sort of public venue; at the Société Héliographique members circulated albums of photographic prints amongst themselves. Wey commented on the album's role within the organization, stating simply, "Our albums are our Salons."²⁰ This declaration established a division between photography and the status quo, but in using the word "Salon" Wey also equated photography and fine art. By comparing these photographic albums to the official regular exhibition of contemporary fine art, Wey implied that he considered the photographs themselves to be fine art. His careful review of Bayard's works and his descriptions of them as "finished and accomplished," "ideal," and participating in a "radical criticism of schools of draftsmen founded on the dry rigor of contours," signal a primarily aesthetic approach to interpreting the photographs.

Wey used traditional artistic language in his criticism, but the members of the Société Héliographique did not approach these photographs in a conventional way. The

¹⁹ Emmanuel Hermange, "La Lumière et l'invention de la critique photographie 1851-1860," *Études Photographiques* (November 1996): 89-108.

²⁰ Francis Wey, "Album de la Société Héliographique, MM Cousin, Le Secq, Eugène Piot, Nègre, Leblanc et Bayard," *La Lumière* (18 May 1851): 57, "Nos albums sont nos salons."

compact and portable nature of the albums would have allowed for a more intimate, yet objectifying way of viewing these images than did the crowded and imposing walls of the Salon for the paintings and prints hanging there. Members of the Société Héliographique could potentially touch, handle, and confront the photographs as objects rather than as large illusions of other worlds. These albums functioned differently than the traditional way in which art was seen. This very tactile way of viewing a photograph resonates in some of the language employed by Wey. His description of *The Little Ragpicker* (Figure 1), for example, drew attention to its “solid and airy,” quality. These two contradictory words emphasize the way in which Nègre achieved a textural and tangible effect. Wey noted the direct quality of the photograph, whose entire setting consists of “Two blocks of stone, on one of which the subject sits and rests his basket,” yet it also acknowledged its complexity of texture and tone as these weighty solid forms are juxtaposed against a “hazy background.” Wey drew attention to the “softly blurred,” clothes of the boy by describing them as “patched, torn, and split,”²¹ in language that is far from soft. This verbal contradiction matches the diverse range of textures suggested by Nègre’s image; the careful arrangement of the few forms did not go unnoticed by Wey who claimed that the image was, “no longer a photograph; it is a deliberately organized composition...”²² Wey did not attribute the success of the photograph to happenstance, or to be a mere reflection of nature. Instead, he gave full credit to Nègre for his creation and vision, and thus acknowledged the photographer as artist.

Wey offered his most careful descriptions to paper photographs, not to daguerreotypes. This tendency is interesting considering that French involvement with

²¹ Francis Wey, “Album de la société héliographique.” *La Lumière*, (18 May 1851): 104, trans. in Borcoman, 17.

²² Ibid.

early photography during the 1840s, was dominated by daguerreotypy, perhaps not surprisingly, since it was invented by a Frenchman Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre and free for all to use. The 1850s, however, witnessed a rise in the popularity of calotypy, the paper-negative process introduced by Englishman William Henry Fox Talbot in 1839. According to photo historian André Gunthert, many French critics admired Talbot's method, but on a technical rather than aesthetic level, and though familiar with it, they had not studied his photographs.²³ Fitting into Gunthert's assessment, Wey did not directly review Talbot's work, but as demonstrated by his review of Nègre's *Little Ragpicker*, he seemed to admire the aesthetic qualities associated with the calotype, whose term originates from the Greek root *calo*, meaning beauty.

The grainy, gauzy appearance of the photographic images produced on paper stood in stark contrast to the precise and polished image of the daguerreotype. Because the daguerreotype used silver-coated copper plates, it allowed for sharply focused, more precisely detailed images than did the paper negative process. While daguerreotypy produced a direct positive image onto the silver-coated plate, the paper process had two phases: a negative phase and a positive one. Light-sensitive paper would be placed into a camera and exposed, and upon removal the paper would be immersed in a solution that would cause the latent negative image to appear. From here, a direct positive image could be printed from the negative. The coarse fibers of the paper in both the negative and the positive phases of the process meant that the paper prints lacked the sharp contours and legible details that the daguerreotype offered. Hippolyte Bayard's (whose exhibit our critic viewed in 1839) technique was

²³ André Gunther, "La reception française de l'oeuvre de W.H.F. Talbot," *History of Photography* (Summer 2002): 119-123.

unique in that it circumvented the negative phase of the calotype and instead produced a direct positive print on paper. As a result, his images have a more textural quality than the daguerreotype, but he did not have the opportunities available to the photographer in the printing phase. Thus, the discrete methods practiced by Nègre and Bayard produced images possessing common aesthetic qualities that were different from those of daguerreotypes, and these distinctions attracted Wey's critical attention.

While the public often responded enthusiastically to the jewel-like clarity of the daguerreotype,²⁴ Francis Wey preferred the calotype's more atmospheric and even ethereal nature. As Wey described Nègre's *Little Ragpicker*, paper photography seemed closer to painting or drawing than did the daguerreotype. In the March 1851 issue of *La Lumière*, he wrote that the daguerreotype had a mechanical appearance due to its unnatural clarity, overwhelming amount of detail, and its tonal flatness, while paper photography could, "reproduce nature in tonal masses rather than detail."²⁵ Wey related his comparisons of the differences between the daguerreotype and the calotype to the age-old dichotomy of form versus color which "justif[ied] the theory of sacrifices, and giving [the daguerreotype] the advantage to form, and to [paper photography] the opposition of tones."²⁶ This discussion, which was widespread in artistic circles had begun to play a role in photographic discourse. Delacroix, a member of the Société Héliographique, was more of a colorist, and held an affinity for the calotype. Wey agreed and aligned the best photographs (i.e. paper prints) with colorism, "It is the colorists who have made the laurels blossom on barren soil and to this purpose let us

²⁴ Borcoman, 14.

²⁵ Francis Wey, "Album de la société héliographique." *La Lumière*, (18 May 1851): 104, trans. in James Borcoman, 18.

²⁶ Francis Wey, op. cit., 108. "...justifiant la théorie des sacrifices, et donnant ici l'avantage à la forme, et là aux oppositions de tons."

note that photography in its best products today gives us expression to the panegyric of schools consecrated in color.”²⁷ Paper photography’s frequent inability to reproduce a great degree of sharp detail forced the photographer, in Wey’s opinion, to demonstrate his own hand and choice in the process.

In May 1851, Wey acknowledged that the photographer played a greater role in the creation of his images than he once thought, stating, “photography does not destroy the personal feeling of the artist: he must always know how to choose his subject; he must know how to choose the effect that will be most in harmony with its subject.”²⁸ With this statement, Wey seemed to admire Nègre’s ability to draw upon his training as a painter and to apply this artistic knowledge to photography. For example, Nègre sometimes “sketched” on the paper negative, exerting artistic control over the final positive print.²⁹ Unlike his earlier opinion that a painter should use photographs only as reminders of the subject, Wey here commended Nègre for applying his aesthetic knowledge to create an artistically successful photograph. For Wey, Nègre demonstrated that both photography and painting applied the principles of fine art.

In the same May 1851 issue of *La Lumière* Wey wrote about five small views (Figure 3)³⁰ of Chartres made by Nègre,

[The] sites [are] so well chosen that the best landscape painter would not have found better. They were made at the close of the day,

²⁷ Francis Wey, “Theorie du portrait-I,” *La Lumière*, (27 April 1851): pp.46, trans in André Jammes and Eugenia Janis, *The Art of the French Calotype* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 96-97.

²⁸ Wey, “Album de la société héliographique,” *La Lumière* (18 May 1851): 104, trans. in James Borcoman in *Charles Nègre: 1820-1880* (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada, 1976), 18.

²⁹ Borcoman, 22, Notes that the negative of one image of the photographer’s father (Figure 6) shows pencil shading at the end of the bench and on the ground to the right, which further dramatized the shadow.

³⁰ Wey wrote specifically of a photograph entitled *Evening*, which is no longer extant. *Chartres, Mill on the Eure* is, however, from the same set of prints.

which certainly adds to their undoubted charm. One of the three, entitled *Evening*, shows a complete sky, against which, outlined in silhouette, are the trees surrounding the gable of a farmhouse completely submerged in shadows: night is approaching, and the twilight shadow of a plum tree struck by a fading ray of light is scarcely discernible on the ground. In the depths of the shadows, where it seems one might be able to sink one's hand without encountering the paper, are lightly drawn a thicket of elders, a window with a glimpse of a face, a wheel barrow, and a cart which one can scarcely see and yet no detail is missing. It is from the sky that the landscape receives all of its beauty, all its harmony, as though it were a painting by Berghem or Karel Dujardin.³¹

Wey acknowledged these photographs as independent works of art in that they demonstrated Nègre's technical and compositional skill. Wey noted that Nègre made these exposures at the close of the day, an unusual choice in calotypy given the low light, but one that for him contributed "charm" to the photographs. Nègre's inclusion of a "complete" blank sky did not weaken the impact of the photograph; rather he used it to delineate the farmhouse gable. More specifically, Wey seemed to appreciate Nègre's emphasis on the physical, tangible *things*, as evinced by his verbal attention to these

³¹ Wey, "Album de la société héliographique," 107. trans in James Borcoman, *Charles Negre: 1820-1880*, pp.23-24. "...sites si bien choisis que le meilleur paysagiste n'aurait su mieux prendre sa place. Trois de ces paysages ont gardé quelque peu des tons du ciel. Ils ont été copiés au jour décroissant, ce qui d'ailleurs leur ajoute un charme incontestable. L'un des trios, intitulé *le Soir*, nous présente un ciel complet, sur lequel se dessinent en silhouette des arbres entourant le pignon d'une ferme entièrement submergée par les ombres: la nuit approche, et la projection crépusculaire d'un prunier frappée d'un rayon expirant ne s'empreint plus sur le sol qu'en teintes affaibles. Au fond de ces ténèbres où l'on pourrait plonger la main sans rencontrer le papier, se dessinent vaporeusement des buissons de sureau, une fenêtre où l'on entrevoit quelqu'un, une brochette, un tombereau que l'on remarque avec peine et dont on perd aucun détail. Le ciel donne à ce paysage toute sa valeur, toute son harmonie, comme il ferait dans un tableau de Berghem ou de Karel Dujardin.

objects. These photographs act as a part of the artist's own creative process as well as a testament to the significance of the objects in front of his camera lens.

CHAPTER 3

PHOTOGRAPHY, PAINTING, AND PARISIAN POLITICS

Wey's taste for the calotype cannot be attributed solely to its often grainy and tactile nature. The gritty, textural quality emphasized the lowly subjects that were frequently featured in the prints receiving Wey's praise and attention. This subject matter played a role in the social and artistic discourse of the mid-nineteenth century, which put class tensions at the forefront of the political scene, tensions that were reflected frequently in contemporary art, literature, and even photography.³² Wey's own privileged position as a member of the gentry meant that he was no bohemian, and T.J. Clark describes him as a "man of the center."³³ As a member of the upper class, and a writer and friend to controversial³⁴ artists such as Gustave Courbet, Wey was in an unstable political position. As his writings will evince, Wey encouraged social and political change that afforded rights to more of the population, but he was wary of those who brought about this change. He actively participated in the discussion of a reconciliation between the classes, but he enjoyed the advantages of his social status. His concern for harmony possibly arose from a desire to protect his own privileges, but he acknowledged the sacrifices that the upper class and bourgeoisie would have to make in order to maintain civility with the lower classes. Wey's interest in class conflict and resolution was beginning to take shape in his writing during the late 1840s and 1850s, and it was

³² Timothy J. Clark, *Image of the People: Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 9.

³³ Clark, 53. Here T.J. Clark points out that Wey did, in fact, fight against the insurgents in the June Days, and helped to save Rémusat's, (the former Chamberlain to Napoleon Bonaparte) young son.

³⁴ In his book *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*, Clark contends that Courbet was not as revolutionary as he is often perceived. Although he often exercised his political voice, he shied away from revolutionary action for most of his life. He did not participate in the Revolutions of 1848, and retreated to rural Ornans soon thereafter.

photography (more specifically calotypy) that offered the writer an opportunity through which to approach these pressing issues.

Parisian class conflict burgeoned in the first half of the nineteenth century and gained momentum with the Revolution of 1848. Nicknamed the “Bourgeois Monarch,” the French King, Louis Philippe ruled from 1830 to 1848, and he excluded the lower and middle classes from the political arena. His policies stood in stark contrast to Great Britain’s, whose Reform Act of 1832 extended voting privileges beyond male landowners. The disenfranchisement of the French lower class paired with an economic depression sparked a revolt in February of 1848, which chased Louis Philippe out of France and into neighboring England.³⁵ A more liberal Second Republic emerged in France in 1848, but the lower and middle classes could not unite under a common cause. The new progressive provisional government failed to win the support of both the upper and working classes, and the bourgeoisie could not maintain control alone. Elected president in 1850, Louis Napoleon dissolved the National Assembly, and through a coup d’état his reign as sole emperor of France began in 1852.

Amidst these conflicts, Wey contributed his own words to the powerful discourse on class relations. In his 1848 book, *Manuel des droits et des devoirs: dictionnaire démocratique*, Wey provided exhaustive definitions for the terms and ideas related to the rights and duties of French citizens. Wey’s definition for democracy stated,

Democracy is a government where sovereignty is exercised by the people.

The word has a more liberal sense and is firmer than the substantive,

republic, which is the name of a government in the hands of several

³⁵ For a summary and outline of the Revolutions of 1848, see Timothy Clark, *Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France 1848-1851*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973).

individuals. A republic may be oligarchic if authority belongs to but a small number of people, or aristocratic if the power is divided among the privileged class. Such republics are susceptible to forming a collective tyranny...³⁶

His words betray a preference for the more liberal idea of a democracy over a republic, which he claimed could dissolve into “tyranny.” He further demonstrated his liberalism with his positive definition of socialism: “It puts to use changes in our way of life brought about by the course of political events; it regularizes, it organizes, it improves, but it avoids losing whatever influence it might have, and refrains from the use of force.”³⁷ These words were especially relevant in 1848, a year that witnessed two uprisings: in February and June. Although allies in February, the bourgeoisie and the lower-class were at odds almost immediately after Louis Philippe fled France. The bourgeoisie traded the rights of their former collaborators for political power, and this betrayal sparked a second, though unsuccessful, revolt among the lower classes. While Wey’s definition of socialism applauded the political events that brought about change, he chastised those who used force to enact change. His definition of *Strike* highlights his resistance to violent change: “When the workers, with the aim of imposing a wage increase, stop work, they substitute violence for equity, and in many cases provide the exploiters of capital with a powerful argument.”³⁸ Furthermore, he unfavorably

³⁶ Francis Wey, *Manuel des droits et des devoirs*, 8. “La Démocratie c’est une gouvernement où la souveraineté est exercée par le peuple. Ce mot a un sens plus libéral et plus arrêté que le substantif, *république* qui dénomme une gouvernement entre les mains de plusieurs individu. Une république peut être oligarchique si l’autorité n’appartient qu’à un petit nombre de personnes, ou aristocratique, si le pouvoir est le partage d’une privilégiée.

³⁷ Francis Wey, *Manuel des droits et des devoirs*. trans.by T.J. Clark, *Image of the People: Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 69.

³⁸ Francis Wey, *Manuel des droits et des devoirs*. trans.by T.J. Clark, *Image of the People: Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 69.

characterized the insurgents with this definition: "One of a band of soldiers who dare not acknowledge any leader, a criminal horde without a flag, without principles, who dare to kill but not to proclaim their aims....Such was the deplorable situation of the rioters in June 1848."³⁹

Wey's positive view of socialism in the abstract, and approving words for the political events that bring about change, along with his hostility toward those who actually brought about change through violent means, imply a conflicting set of principles. As did many of his contemporaries, Wey expressed his political ideas, but was hesitant to participate in the act of revolution; instead, he encouraged behavior that would avoid revolutionary change. In his book, *The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France, 1848-1851*, T.J. Clark proposes that such ambivalent positions arose from the discomfort and fear that the bourgeoisie experienced in their alliance with the lower classes to triumph in February 1848.⁴⁰

Wey's words encouraged a reconciliation between the classes, but he maintained that *all* must contribute toward this goal. For him, all would benefit, as socialism granted particular interests as well as protected the interests of all. Wey warned that liberty presents more duties than it does freedom, and that the citizens of France have an obligation to maintain the liberties they are afforded.⁴¹ The Revolution of 1848 granted universal suffrage to French males, and although he dissolved the National Assembly, Louis Napoleon did not retract this right. Wey, however, recognized the potential denial of such rights if the French people failed to unite, and seek equality through the

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Timothy Clark, *Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France 1848-1851*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), pp. 9-11.

⁴¹ Francis Wey, *Manuel des droits et des devoirs: Dictionnaire démocratique*, (Paris: Librairie Paulin et le Chevalier, 1848), 2.

cultivation of a sense of brotherhood.⁴² In his *Manuel* Wey stated that, “fraternity” implied the completion of the precept of the Gospel: ‘Love each other.’⁴³ Wey offered a conventional biblical adage, but then asked his fellow citizens to interpret it even more liberally by striving not only to refrain from harming their fellow man, but to help him as well. This equitable, brotherly attitude was also reflected in the the Société Héliographique, whose members recognized the advantages of a cooperative attitude in order to achieve progress in photography.

Some French artists also voiced a response to the social tensions that existed, and shared Wey’s sentiments for a reconciliation between the classes. Art historian Timothy Clark draws attention to the growing and evolving relationship between art, politics, and social tensions around 1850. He proposes that during the mid-nineteenth century, the State, the public, and critics alike recognized the political potential of fine art. Painting, which was once dominated by a decorous agenda was now simultaneously, “encouraged, repressed, hated, and feared.”⁴⁴ Courbet wrote in an 1850 letter to Wey, “I must free myself from governments. My sympathies are with the people, I must speak to them directly, take my science from them, and they must provide me with a living.”⁴⁵ Artists such as Courbet, Daumier and Millet continued to depict the lower class on a large scale and in a frank, often unattractive manner, despite protestations by critics such as Théophile Gautier. Millet even quipped that he wondered if the

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Francis Wey, *Manuel des droits et des devoirs*, 3. “La fraternité implique la réalisation de précepte de l’Evangile: <<Aimez vous les un les autres.>>...L’Evangile dit: <<Ne fais pas à autrui ce que tu craindrais que l’on te fit.>> Cette leçon ne va pas au delà du sentiment individuel: elle interdit le mal...La fraternité veut plus encore; elle nous dit: <<Fais pur tom frère ce que tu souhaiterais qu’il fit pour toi.>>.”

⁴⁴ Timothy J. Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 9.

⁴⁵ Gustave Courbet, Letter to Wey, 1850, trans in Petra Chu, *Letters Of Gustave Courbet* (Chicago and London:University of Chicago Press, 1992), 118.

government would think that the socks of one of the peasant girls in his painting was emitting too much of a “popular odor.”⁴⁶ Art historian Neil McWilliam points to the emerging alliance between art and labor in mid-nineteenth-century Paris and argues that they enjoyed a symbiotic relationship in which advances of one would inevitably affect the other.⁴⁷ Thanks to Realism, fine art now placed the working class front and center, confronting the dominantly upper-class audiences at the Salons. Many acknowledged this influential change taking place in a world of painting, but Wey acknowledged it in photography as well in his praise of Nègre’s careful depiction of the everyday objects in a manner equal to his depiction of the human figure. As a groundbreaking new medium, photography’s ability to depict the current and the everyday offered a new perspective that was socially and politically relevant. Photography’s availability to the public and compulsion to depict the contemporary provided a frame through which Wey and others could view their rapidly changing society. In 1851 Wey acknowledged photography’s role in the churning social and artistic climate when he wrote that, “photography is the seed of a revolution against the system of banality at the profit of reality.”⁴⁸ Wey was speaking to an aesthetic revolution in which a reality rooted in the real, the tangible, and the contemporary would replace the tired, worn ideal that presented the viewer with heroic historicism, and his use of the term “revolution,” set the remark in the context of the social and political unrest of the

⁴⁶ Millet in Moreau-Nelaton, *Millet raconté par lui-même*, (Paris, 1921), p. 109, trans. in Clark, *Image of the People: Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 9.

⁴⁷ Neil McWilliam, “Art, labour, and mass democracy: debates on the status of the artist in France around 1848,” *Art History* 11 (March 1988): 64-87.

⁴⁸ Francis Wey, “Du naturalisme dans l’art, de son principe et de ses conséquences,” *La Lumière*, (6 April 1851): pp. 34-35, in *La Photographie en France*. Edited by André Rouillé, (Paris: Macula, 1989): 115-116, “Photographie est le germe du révolution contre le système des poncifs au profit de la réalité.”

day. This embrace of the real is reflected in Wey's own preferences in photography that centered on the secular, lower-class, non-narrative, and the everyday.⁴⁹

Charles Nègre's photographs establish a link between the classes that attracted Wey's attention. Nègre's photographic oeuvre often featured stonemasons, chimneysweeps, and other members of the working classes. The photographer represented street dwellers clutching their tools or standing next to their portable organs and vending carts. Nègre's 1853 photograph, entitled *The Organ Grinder* (Figure 5), features an elderly man playing his instrument for two young children in the streets of Paris. The man's fatigued, vacant expression is markedly disconnected from the distant stares of the children who seem to listen to his music. The young listeners look not at the man, but rather at his instrument. There is no exchange of gazes between the figures, and the old man is objectified in a way that equates him with his skill or trade. The organ is strapped to his body, rendering the musician and his instrument one and the same, and his blank facial expression also attests to his inhumanity. The organ grinder's objectification is further emphasized in visual qualities common to both the man and the other objects. The man's wrinkled skin and faded jacket possess a weathered textural quality that is rhymed by the worn barrels that assume a provocative prominence in the composition. The technical limitations of photography would have

⁴⁹ For further discussion of the modes of expression that played a role in this revolution, see Anne McCauley, "Caricature and Photography in Second Empire Paris," *Art Journal* (Winter 1983): 355-360. In this article she cites Wey in her attempt to consider photography as a means of social commentary in Second Empire Paris. McCauley draws a parallel between the new medium and the more explicitly political mode of expression; caricature, "Both forms of imagery were seen as attacks on the fine arts, to which humor was just as unwelcoming as ugliness, or 'realism,' as it came to be called in the 1850s. It is no accident that the same decade which saw the birth of a new school of painting with Courbet as its self-proclaimed head also witnessed a revival of interest in caricature and a proliferation of photographic studios." Although these two types of images may be viewed as aesthetic opposites—one provides a seemingly accurate representation of reality, and one is explicitly "skewed—caricature and photography both strayed from the falsely heroic subject matter often chosen in conventional painting, and they focused on the common man in a way that celebrated his familiarity.

required the figures to hold their poses for a minute or longer so that the negative could be sufficiently exposed. Their static poses further objectify them and equate them to the other objects in the scene.

Along with his photographic depiction of people on the margins of society, Nègre also represented those who enjoyed his own social standing. Nègre's 1851 photograph of his father (Figure 6), for example, features the subject in the same setting as another print entitled *The Little Ragpicker* (Figure 5), and was completed in the same year. His father is portrayed sitting on the same stone bench, alongside the same building, and facing the same direction. Nègre's father wears a respectable black overcoat and top hat, whereas in the other photograph, the young boy is dressed in tatters. The boy slumps against his basket and turns to look toward the viewer; the older gentleman grips his cane close to his chest and stares confidently ahead. The figures themselves could not offer a clearer contrast, but the artist chose to depict them in the same setting. The stone bench that juts out toward the viewer enjoys prominence in both pictures and the prints wash the distance in the same grainy haze. Despite its generality, the setting has been identified as the Quai Bourbon,⁵⁰ Nègre's place of residence, suggesting that Nègre himself saw it as a mixed-class neighborhood in mid-nineteenth-century Paris. The fact that these two photographs depict members of two different social classes in the same location could have been quite provocative at the time. On the other hand, Nègre chose not to depict the two figures in the same frame, implying that he recognized a disconnect between the classes despite their proximity to one another. His photographs could have offered a degree of social relevance to Wey in a manner that the decorous, historic, or religious paintings often exhibited in the Salon would have

⁵⁰ Borcoman, 27.

fallen short. Photo historian Robert Sobieszek points out that Realism and photography could cause controversy by their lower-class subjects treated in a frank, unidealized way.⁵¹ Both photography and Realist painting predominantly represented contemporary and, more importantly heretofore, trivial subject matter in an unembellished manner. Before Wey began publishing his opinions on photography, he had cultivated a friendship with the Realist movement's leader, Gustave Courbet.

⁵¹ In his article, "Historical Essay," in *French Primitive Photography*, Alfred Stieglitz Center, (New York: Aperture Incorporated, 1970): p.8, Robert Sobieszek states that, "After the revolutions of 1848 there occurred a concern for everyday subject matter second only to the Dutch genre paintings of the seventeenth century...the most progressive critics claimed that traditional subject matter was no longer applicable to modern life; the language of Classical Antiquity and of Christianity could no longer be understood by the spectators of the Second Empire. What was needed was a pictorial style that dealt with modern man and his social environment. To this end both Realism...and photography provided pictorial solutions."

CHAPTER 4

WEY, COURBET, AND REALISM

Realist art resists a clear definition. Scholars such as Linda Nochlin⁵² and Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner⁵³ have attempted to define and redefine Realism within and at times in opposition to a certain set of parameters. A thorough study of the scholarship on Realism, however, reveals several characteristics that most art historians can agree on. Realist works often depict modern or contemporary subjects, especially those of the lower-class, from non-narrative, emotionally neutral viewpoints in unconventional compositions and spaces, and a visibly material means of the production rather than slick illusionism of academic training. With these characteristics in mind, this chapter will demonstrate the similarities between Realist works and Wey's own aesthetic preferences.

The connection between our critic and the Realist movement is most apparent in his relationship with Gustave Courbet. Both men were originally from the Franche-Comté prior to establishing themselves in Paris in the late 1840s. The two friends exchanged letters throughout their careers, and Courbet even completed a portrait of his dear friend in 1850. Their correspondence signals Wey's involvement in Courbet's oeuvre, and some of Wey's other writing demonstrates an alliance with Realist ideas and principles. Wey's close attention to the everyday and the tangible in his writing mirrors Courbet's aesthetic concerns. Wey greatly admired the work of Courbet, and one of the artist's works served as inspiration for Wey's novel, *Le Biez de Serine*, which

⁵² Linda Nochlin, *Realism*, (New York: Penguin, 1971).

⁵³ Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner, *Romanticism and Realism: The Mythology of Nineteenth Century Art*, (New York: Viking Press, 1984).

was originally published in 1850. It is in this work that we see a significant use of Realist language that was very much rooted in the ordinary and the tangible.

In November 1849, Courbet wrote to Wey about his most recent painting, *The Stonebreakers* (Figure 2):

I stopped to contemplate two men who were breaking stones on the road. It is not often that one encounters the most complete image of poverty, and so, right then and there, I got the idea for a painting. One side is an old man of seventy, bent over his work, his sledgehammer raised, his skin is burned by the sun, his face is shaded by a straw hat. His pants, of a coarse material are patched everywhere, and inside his patched clogs his heels show through socks that were once blue. On the other side a young man with dusty hair and a swarthy complexion. His filthy and tattered shirt reveals his sides and arms. A leather suspender holds up what is left of his trousers, and his muddy leather shoes show gaping holes on every side. The old man is kneeling, the young man is standing behind him energetically carrying a basket of broken stones. Alas, in that class that is how one begins and that is how one ends up. Scattered here and there is their gear, a hod, a hand barrow, a hoe, a farmer's cooking pot, etc. All of this takes place in bright sunshine, in the middle of the countryside beside a ditch next to the road. The landscape fills the canvas. Yes M. Pisse, we must drag art down from its pedestal. For too long you have been making art that

is pomaded and “in good taste.” For too long painters, and even my contemporaries have based their art on ideas and stereotypes.⁵⁴

Courbet’s painting illustrates the perpetual plight of the lower class by featuring both an old man and a young boy in his work, signaling the cyclical nature of poverty. Courbet created a description of the figures that equates them to the inanimate objects that surround them. Just as the man’s hat is worn from use, so is his skin by the sun. Furthermore, the various tools included in the scene are synonymous with the figures who hold them; the title of the painting could refer to either the human figures or to their instruments. This objectification of the man and boy highlights the inescapable plight of these laborers, and Francis Wey would soon elaborate on their plight in his novel *Biez de Serine*.

Wey, obviously affected by Courbet’s painting, featured the artist’s words in his novel, *Le Biez de Serine*, which in 1851 Gautier called “the finest study of peasants that we have seen since Balzac.”⁵⁵ Courbet’s words served as the description for Wey’s own characters, a father and son forced into a life of physical labor. In an exploration of the social implications of another of Courbet’s paintings, *Les Desmoiselles du Village*, art historian Diane Lesko cites Wey’s novel as a response to the French political upheaval of 1851-52. Peasants migrated to Paris in search of work, and the gap between the bourgeoisie and the lower class in the city was widening, resulting in a reciprocal sense of alienation and fear. In the midst of this upheaval, Francis Wey’s

⁵⁴Courbet, Letter to Wey, 12 December 1849, trans. in Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, ed. *Letters of Gustave Courbet*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 89-90.

⁵⁵ Clark, *Image of the People*, 116.

novel, *Biez de Serine* appeared in serial form in the Paris newspaper, *Le National*,⁵⁶ and Courbet would have known it and embraced its hope for a reconciliation between the classes.⁵⁷

The venue in which Wey chose to publish his novel reflected his and Courbet's mild socialist opinions informing both the *Stonebreakers* and *Le Biez de Serine*. Founded in 1830, *Le National* had undergone several changes to its political stance before publishing Wey's novel. Upon its conception, it voiced its support for Louis Philippe, but at the establishment of the Second Republic in 1848, it aligned itself with the moderate republican majority. At the time of the novel's publication, the newspaper held a socialist position, which eventually led to its ban by Napoleon III in December 1851.⁵⁸ The novel's focus on a poor family living in rural France matched *Le National's* political sympathies for the lower class. In Wey's words, "the bosses often forget that harm to one party means bad times for the other, and if you paralyze the man who works the field, capital itself is made sterile."⁵⁹ Wey recognized the connection between all men, despite their class, and that when one suffers, they all share the misery.

The story follows the life of Babet, Thomas, and their seven children. The family lives on a small farm on the Serine River, and the children are deprived of education so that they may work on the farm. Despite their unfortunate lot, the family appears

⁵⁶ *Le National* published Wey's novel under the title *Biez de Serine*, but the Parisian publishing house, D. Giraud, issued a bound copy in 1852 entitled *Le Bouquet de Cerises*. The latter title translates to "Bouquet of Cherries," and the former is a bit more unclear. According to *An Etymological Dictionary of the French Language* by Auguste Branchet, "biez" translates to mill-race, or a channel or stream, and "Serine" is the name of the river near Thomas and Babet's home.

⁵⁷ Diane Lesko, "From Genre to Allegory in Gustave Courbet's *Les Desmoiselles de Village*," *Art Journal*, (Spring 1979): 174.

⁵⁸ Louis Guéry, *Visages de la presse: La présentation des journaux des origines à nos jours* (Paris: Éditions du Centre de formation et de perfectionnement des journalistes, 1997).

⁵⁹ Francis Wey, *Le bouquet de cerises; roman rustique*, (Paris: D. Giraud, 1852), 118, trans. in T.J. Clark, *Image of the People: Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 117.

tenacious, and acts with integrity. They live a very meager life (they can afford only to buy one pig per year, and no wine), yet they never complain.⁶⁰ Wey's sympathy for the lower class in rural France becomes even more apparent when his narrator states that the provinces have no distractions or opportunities to offer the poor, while Paris has museums, libraries, and public gardens that were free to all.⁶¹ Thomas, who had been renting a farm from the notary of the district, Crochot, loses it to unfortunate circumstances and must break stones for a living. He explains his plight,

I was struck down by sickness, and I just could not keep up my rent on the old basis, and M. Crochot wanted it raised! ...I decided to end the whole thing right away and sell what goods I had to my neighbor Jean-Denis. I made a bit of money, which helps keep us alive; for this job and Jean Grusse's would not do, after the tax men have got at us.⁶²

Wey presents Thomas's misfortune as no fault of his own, but rather as a result of the higher classes' lack of sympathy for people like him. Crochot does, however, regret his decision to let his tenant go, and eventually grants the family their farm, stating, "The bourgeois, or some of them...fail to see that the ruin of the peasant farmer rebounds on them."⁶³ Thus, the novel delivers a message of reconciliation, which earlier appeared in Wey's 1848 *Manuel*. The figures from different social classes in this novel are able to settle their differences to the benefit of all parties involved.

⁶⁰ Francis Wey, *Le bouquet de cerises; roman rustique* (Paris: D. Giraud, 1852), 5.

⁶¹ Wey, *Le bouquet de cerises*, 48.

⁶² Francis Wey, *Le bouquet de cerises; roman rustique*, (Paris: D. Giraud, 1852), translation by T.J. Clark, *Image of the People: Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982):117.

⁶³ Ibid.

This work of literature is especially relevant to understanding Wey's aesthetic tastes because it takes Courbet's *The Stone Breakers* as the visual counterparts to its protagonists. Perhaps the most striking aspect of the book is Wey's ability to describe ordinary scenes in such a manner that he paints a visual picture for his reader. The opening paragraphs focus on the everyday items of a country kitchen, including casserole dishes, pots, and the like: "...the kitchen, brilliant, lively, lends itself to chatting and awakens the appetite. The bright fire, that sparkles, illuminates by its rays the pots hanging from the wall and is reflected in silvery shapes on the white dishes that adorn the sideboard."⁶⁴ Wey's attention to everyday objects and their material physicality points to a shared emphasis with Courbet. In *The Stonebreakers* Courbet treated human figures as objects in a still life, affording the same thick pasty brushwork and neutral earthy palette to the stones and other inanimate objects as to the figures. This work can be compared to still lifes in Courbet's oeuvre in that it establishes a concrete connection between the viewer and the purely physical world instead of presenting the viewer with a heroic, historical narrative. By paying such close attention to texture, and refusing to idealize the subject or harmonize the forms, Courbet forced the viewer to confront life-size, coarse, working-class figures.

The most revealing chapter in Wey's narrative is the one entitled "The Stone Breakers," in which he described a barren landscape in vivid detail. He treated the month of August as he would a character, carefully describing the foliage, the light, and the treetops as victims of the brutally hot season,

⁶⁴ Francis Wey, *Bouquet de cerises*, 1. "...la cuisine, brillante, animée, dispose à causer et réveille l'appétit. Le feu clair qui pétillonne illumine de ses rayons les casseroles accrochées à la muraille, et se réfléchit en facettes argentées sur la vaisselle blanche qui garni les rayons du dressoir."

Fitful, ungrateful and surly like a steward, August removes the sap from the trees that cease to grow, dries up the fountains of water, dries up the meadows and covers them with dust, destroys the flowers, sterilizes the soil, and surrounds the countryside in a monotonous tone.⁶⁵

Wey captured the reader's attention by creating a dry, desolate, and oppressive scene with descriptive words, just as Courbet used color and texture to confront the viewer with a real and tangible interpretation of desolation and oppression. The novel goes on,

The sky is dull, the sun like a heavy leaden cover, the dry wind, which depletes the men as well as plants, replied with a fantastic inequality of storms or fair weather, the sudden cold or sweltering heat, the drought or rain, and often everything together, suffocating humidity with the heat of ovens.⁶⁶

Both Wey and Courbet created an oppressive setting that was meant to suggest their characters' oppressed social status. Courbet achieved this effect through the use of a high, minimal horizon line collapsing the pictorial space, and similar, neutral, nondecorative colors for both the figures and the earth and rocks, while Wey described the merciless setting as all encompassing and thus, inescapable.

Charles Nègre presented his subjects in a similarly neutral, unidealized manner, but in his 1853 photograph, *Stone Mason Kneeling* (Figure 7), one has an image of a manual laborer at work. Although the figure meets our gaze, his face is obscured by the

⁶⁵ Wey, *Bouquet de cerises*, 141, "Quinteux, inégal et bourru comme un économe, août supprime la sève aux arbres qui cessant de croître, il tarit l'eau des fontaines, dessèche les prés et les couvre de poussière; il abat les fleurs, stérilise la terre, et enveloppe les campagnes d'une teinte monotone."

⁶⁶ Ibid, "Le soleil est terne, le soleil pesant comme un disque de plomb; le vent aride, qui épuise les homes aussi bien que les plantes, répartit avec une inégalité fantasque les orages ou le beau temps, le froid soudain ou la chaleur accablante, la sécheresse ou la pluie, et, souvent tout ensemble, l'humidité avec la suffocante ardeur des étuves."

shadow of his hat, and the materials surrounding him are depicted in varying degrees of focus. For example, the figure's hands and left foot, the cobblestone, and the stone slabs are blurred, but the figure's left hip, elbow, hat, and the wall behind him are more sharply defined. The varying degrees of focus and textures for the figure and his materials levels the differences between them, as Courbet did for his painting. This egalitarian approach to the human and the object parallels Courbet's own painted depiction and Wey's verbal descriptions. Courbet's paintings, Nègre's photographs, and Wey's novels did indeed share a similar way of seeing and depicting their surroundings that emphasized the everyday and the material in a way that made their works relevant to Realist sensibilities in the 1850s.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Wey published two travelogues in the 1850s that seemed to offer a Realist perspective. His emphasis on everyday subjects and detailed description of the lower class even amidst well known historical monuments is certainly intriguing, but my research did not lead me to a clear answer as to whether this kind of perspective in travelogues was out of the ordinary.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND PARTING QUESTIONS

In her article “Photography’s Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View,” Rosalind Krauss warns a twentieth century public against hastily reading nineteenth-century photographs as artistic and against the application of an art historical vocabulary to early photography. She contends that during the previous century most photography was viewed or enjoyed in an entirely different context or way than fine art, and few photographers, especially before the 1880s, considered themselves to be artists. She cites prominent photographers such as Fenton who made photos for a decade, then suddenly abandoned the practice for reasons that are unclear, and asks whether we should consider nineteenth-century photographers as having an oeuvre. We do not apply so liberally the word “artist,” to someone who paints or sculpts for a decade then returns to his or her previous profession, and thus she argues that our perception of nineteenth-century photography is often skewed.⁶⁸ Krauss’s observations could be applied to the photo criticism of Francis Wey, which seems to have lasted little more than two or three years. Although he seemingly shifted his attention toward the medium just as quickly as he shifted it away, should we label him a photo critic?

Wey was first exposed to paper photography at Bayard’s exhibition in 1839, but he did not lift his pen to comment on photography until 1851, a time when he apparently saw the medium as most relevant to his interests and perhaps to the changing world

⁶⁸ Rosalind Krauss, “Photography’s Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View,” *Art Journal* (Winter 1982): 311-319, Krauss’s article was written in response to Peter Galassi’s groundbreaking exhibition and catalog, *Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography*, Exhibition Catalog (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1981).

around him. During the years between 1851 and 1853 Francis Wey dedicated several texts to photography in *La Lumière*, and his photo criticism of Bayard, Nègre, and various others arose in tandem with three crucial turning points in his environment: the 1848 revolution and the founding of the Second Republic; his own involvement in the Société Héliographique; and his witnessing of Courbet's Realist innovations.

This study has examined Wey's affinity for paper photography originating in 1851, but the question remains open as to why he ceased to publish on this medium after 1853. In a letter to Wey in 1852 Gustave Courbet closed his correspondence with this statement: "You go with the ebb and flow, I stick with my principles."⁶⁹ This single sentence by Courbet could help to explain Wey's brief yet ardent support of photography. While Courbet may have considered himself to be a man of principle, he perceived Wey's views to be capricious and perhaps opportunistic. Wey's auspicious decision to publish on the medium attests to his recognition of calotypy's social, political, and aesthetic relevancy. Wey's affinity for paper photography may have been brief, but our critic's taste for the new medium stemmed from a steadfast attraction toward the real, the contemporary, and the material.

In their study of the French calotype, André Jammes and Eugenia Janis note the sudden drop in the popularity of the process. In 1851 the wet collodion glass plate negative process appeared, restoring the sharp precise detail to the image, and after the 1855 Universal Exposition there is a notable decline in the number of adherents to paper negatives, as almost no professional studios worked with them.⁷⁰ This dip in

⁶⁹Gustave Courbet, Letter to Wey, 1 January 1852, trans. in Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, *Letters of Gustave Courbet* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 104

⁷⁰ Jammes and Janis, 100-101.

practice of the paper negative could help to explain Wey's abandonment of photo criticism.

As quickly as Wey had dedicated his attention to the fairly new medium, so did he abandon his fervor for photography. He did not, however, abandon his underlying penchant for the real, the contemporary, and the tangible that had once led to his affinity for photography. Wey's 1867 review of the life and works of the French painter Hippolyte Bellangé divulges his preference for the artist's rendition of a contemporary subject. In the first paragraph of the review, Wey claimed that an artist's commitment to a portrayal of such subjects is a difficult, yet noble task (Figure 9). While many artists of the nineteenth century, as he pointed out, ignore the modern subject, Hippolyte Bellangé was one of the few who successfully rendered it in his work.⁷¹ Wey admired Bellangé's attempts to imitate life in his works, and just as he praised Nègre for his ability to compose a photograph in the manner of a colorist, he praised Bellangé for his ability to render color in a harmonious manner.⁷² Wey saw Bellangé's effective depiction of contemporary battle scenes as well composed works of art that embraced the present in exchange for the glorification of the past.

In a similar manner, Wey's vocal support of Gustave Courbet surfaced in 1849 at the commencement of the painter's notoriety. "After ten years of ...poverty, hardship, and obscurity... here he is—a painter, and very nearly a master already."⁷³ Wey chose this moment of notoriety to align himself with Courbet, and both men benefited from the friendship. Indeed, Wey did shift the subjects of his writing in order to fit more closely

⁷¹ Francis Wey, *Exposition des oeuvres d'Hippolyte Bellangé à l'école impériale des beaux arts: Étude Biographique*, (Paris: École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts, 1867): 2.

⁷² Wey, *Exposition des oeuvres d'Hippolyte Bellangé*, 3.

⁷³ Wey, *Le National*, (7 August 1849), trans. in Clark, *Image of the People*, 23.

with the "ebb and flow," or taste and politics of the times. He did not, however, abandon his writing or his attraction toward the tangible and the contemporary, and his shifting focus was a consequence of his engagement with the most contemporary concerns.

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Figure 1: Nègre, *The Little Ragpicker*, 1851.



Figure 2: Courbet, *The Stonebreakers*, 1849.



Figure 3: Nègre, *Chartres: Mill on the Eure*, 1851.



Figure 4: Nègre, *The Organ Grinder*, 1853.



Figure 5: Nègre, *The Little Ragpicker*, 1851.

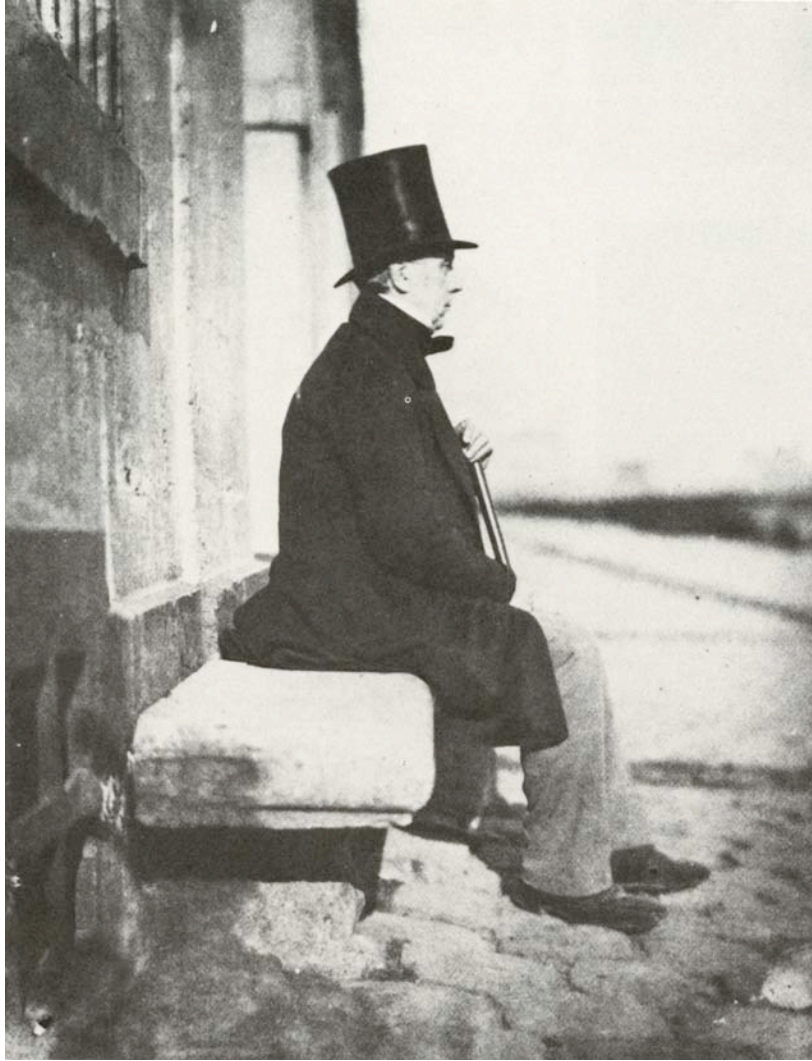


Figure 6: Nègre, *The Artist's Father*, 1851.



Figure 7: Stone Mason Kneeling, 1853.



Figure 8: Bayard, *Group of Statuettes in Plaster*, c. 1839.



Figure 9: Bellangé, *Grenadier of the Guard*, 1859.