

**Marnin Young, *Realism in the Age of Impressionism: Painting and the Politics of Time*, New Haven and London : Yale University Press, 2015, 272 pp., 65 col. + 75 b/w illus., US\$ 75, Cloth, ISBN 9780300208320**

**Andrea Korda**

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The Nature of Naturalism : A Trans-Historical Examination  
La nature du naturalisme : un examen transhistorique

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présentées à la galerie universitaire dans lesquelles le langage était plutôt convoqué pour définir l'idée de l'art, sa nature, sa spécificité, ses modes de diffusion dans une perspective autoréflexive. Elle se distingue également des expositions étatsuniennes *Postscript: Writing After Conceptual Art* (Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, 2013) et *Bibliothecaphilia* (MassMoCA, 2015–2016) où les questions respectivement formelles de la transposition de textes dans le langage visuel et spatial de la bibliothèque comme lieu de lecture ne permettent d'aborder les possibles herméneutiques du geste de lire qu'indirectement. Dans *Exercices de lecture*, l'attention est dirigée vers les virtualités personnelles et politiques déclenchées par le geste de lire, et ce, particulièrement pour les groupes minoritaires à qui l'exposition accorde une place importante. Ultimement, cette visée intentionnelle de sens est ce qui est donné à réfléchir dans les performances de lecture. De ce point de vue, l'exposition semble ratisser très large, mais c'est justement en multipliant les exercices qu'elle parvient pleinement à susciter une nécessaire réflexion sur la lecture. À l'ère de la «révolution numérique», le geste de lire y est moins renouvelé qu'il parvient à défendre, par le biais des arts visuels, la place centrale qui lui revient. ¶

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1. Yves Citton, *Gestes d'humanité. Anthropologie sauvage de nos expériences esthétiques*, Paris, 2012, p. 28–30.
2. Ibid., p. 29.
3. Il s'agit d'une référence au texte «L'écriture de soi» de Michel Foucault (*Dits et écrits*, tome IV, éd. par Daniel Defert et François Ewald, Paris, 1994 [1983], p. 417–432).
4. Jacques Rancière, *Malaise dans l'esthétique*, Paris, 2004, p. 38.
5. Zoe Todd, «#ReadTheTRCReport. Executive Summary: Introduction Up to Page 8», YouTube, 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=vW4Qofl3j&list=PLxPr\_Rlsv9gJWoiRx2kl-zv24r\_pu7lB8R&index=1. Ces propos sont rapportés par la commissaire dans le cartel décrivant l'espace aménagé pour le projet (sa traduction).
6. Commission de vérité et réconciliation du Canada, «Honorer la vérité, réconcilier pour l'avenir. Sommaire du rapport final de la Commission

de vérité et réconciliation du Canada», Winnipeg, 2015, www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=891.

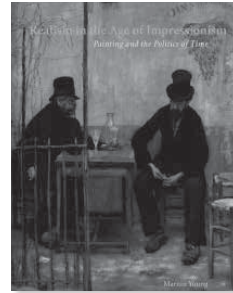
7. Ibid.
8. La notion de performativité ici fait référence aux travaux de J.L. Austin sur l'acte du discours: *Quand dire, c'est faire* [1962], trad. Gilles Lane, Paris, 1970, p. 42 et 47.
9. Walter Benjamin, «La tâche du traducteur» [1923], dans *Œuvres*, Paris, 1971, p. 270.
10. L'expression de Benjamin est reprise par Jacques Rancière sous la forme «forêt des signes» (*Le spectateur émancipé*, Paris, 2008, p. 16). Il s'agit pour le philosophe français de penser le spectateur en traducteur de l'œuvre d'art afin de déconstruire l'autorité sur l'objet que le cadre esthétique attribue généralement à l'artiste. Nous empruntons cette idée afin de souligner que les nombreuses traductions déployées dans les œuvres de l'exposition sont autant d'occasions de se repositionner en tant que lecteur sans pour autant qu'un point de vue particulier sur la lecture ne soit défendu avec autorité.

Marnin Young  
***Realism in the Age of Impressionism: Painting and the Politics of Time***  
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 272 pp. 65 col. + 75 b/w illus.  
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Andrea Korda

OF LATE, TIME SEEMS TO BE ON everyone's minds. I have been reading about the Slow Movement, slow food, and even about slow teaching. In the art world, Christian Marclay's *The Clock* has been touring Canadian cities, the 2015 UAAC Conference featured a two-part panel on the visibility of time, and a number of books on art and time have recently been published.<sup>1</sup> One of these books, Marnin Young's *Realism in the Age of Impressionism: Painting and the Politics of Time*, looks at how late nineteenth-century Realist painters responded to the quickening pace of modern life with a slower tempo of painting. The book calls attention to the various temporalities of nineteenth-century painting, offering a novel method of analysis, while also providing a reassessment of Gustave Courbet's legacy in the years immediately following his death.

In the book, Young brings together a number of artists who are typically positioned at the margins of modern art: Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848–1884), Gustave Caillebotte (1848–1894), Alfred-Philippe Roll (1846–1919), Jean-François Raffaëlli (1850–1924), and James Ensor (1860–1949). Each of the five chapters in the book revolves around a painting or paintings by one of these artists, and Young moves through the examples chronologically, beginning with the exhibition of Bastien-Lepage's *Haymaking* at the Paris Salon of 1878 and ending with James Ensor's *Russian Music*, displayed at the Salon of 1882. As indicated by the book's title, this was “the age of Impressionism,” and as a result,



accounts of this period tend to focus on the dialectic between avant-garde Impressionism and the more conservative styles on display at the Salon. One of these was Naturalism, described recently by Petra Chu as “a revised form of Realism without the political or sentimental overtones of the works of Courbet, Millet or Breton,” an approach that was “based on the direct observation of carefully staged scenes that imitated real-life situations.”<sup>2</sup> Yet Young contends that many of the paintings labelled Naturalist, such as works by Bastien-Lepage, Roll, and Raffaëlli, are in fact Realist, complete with the political overtones associated with Courbet. Key to his argument is the sense of temporality that characterizes these works, and it is according to their temporality that he differentiates among Realism, Naturalism, and Impressionism. For Young, Naturalism

“combine[s] the representation of instantaneous moments with a rendering even more detailed and finished than its Realist precedents,” while Impressionism is characterized by “the artistic ‘instantaneity’ of the broken brush mark and striking coloration.” By contrast, “Realist paintings consistently matched depictions of temporally enduring subjects—dozing peasants or repetitive labor—with a rendering designed to sustain looking over time” (9). These definitions lay the groundwork for Young’s overarching argument that “in both form and content, style and iconography, these later Realist painters sought to maintain a way of painting and of looking—slowly—that sat at odds with modernity’s ever intensifying ‘speed and immediacy’” (12).

The story of how conceptions of time were radically altered in Western European cities over the course of the nineteenth century is by now well known. E.P. Thompson’s seminal essay “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,” published in 1967, described, in a sweeping and sometimes reductive way, the shift from a rhythm of work and life based on nature to a task-oriented society dominated by the measured time of the clock and the disciplined time of the factory.<sup>3</sup> Young delves into the interesting ground opened up by the more nuanced accounts of these changes that have been offered by Thompson’s critics.<sup>4</sup> In particular, he notes that while “time in 1900 was, everyone seems to agree, more disciplined and measured than could have been imagined a hundred years earlier,” different conceptions of time coexisted during this period of transition (8). This observation underlies Young’s entire analysis, which is focused on unpacking the various temporalities brought together by his case studies. For each painting, Young shows that the tempo of the subject matter, whether work time, idle time, or leisure time, is in tension with the

tempo of its style, whether the slow painting of Realism or the quick painting of Impressionism. This tension contributes to each painting’s meaning and also determined its success or failure for contemporary critics.

Bastien-Lepage’s painting *Hay-making*, the subject of chapter one, brings together Young’s two principal concerns. This is a work that has come to exemplify Naturalism in art historical literature, yet, as Young shows, it exhibits the traits of Realism by presenting a scene of absorption—specifically, a peasant woman lost in thought—in a detailed manner that demands close, and slow, looking. The effect, Young suggests, is one of “durational temporality:” the time of the painting is slowed down and thereby seems to exist outside of the measured time of the modern wage labourer. This brings us to Young’s second concern: the politics of time. Turning to the social context of the painting, Young describes how rural work had become increasingly measured and disciplined. In this context, there are a number of ways the painting can be interpreted: does the absorbed figure uphold the myth of a peasantry living outside the temporality of modernity? Does she suggest resistance to the disciplined time of her wage labour? Or, in the context of these drastic social changes, is the whole scene unconvincing? As Young shows, the lack of consensus among critics stemmed from a disjunction between the temporality of the painting and the temporality of the modern world.

The next chapters continue in a similar manner, with Young bringing close observation of each painting into conversation with a social context marked by shifting conceptions of time. In doing so, Young claims to bring together two art historical methods: formalism, exemplified by the work of Michael Fried, and social history, exemplified by the work of T.J. Clark. Fried’s influence is felt strongly throughout the book, as Young frequently returns to Fried’s writings on modern painting for comparative

examples and conceptual frameworks (such as his reliance on “absorption”). Though invoked far less frequently than Fried throughout the book, Clark’s general influence is apparent in Young’s attention to social history and class relations, as well as in his close reading of contemporary art criticism. The influence of these two methods is emphasized by Young’s thesis, quoted above, in which he insists on the importance of time in relation to “both form and content, style and iconography.” These two strains can be seen clearly in chapter two, which examines a series of paintings by Caillebotte that were in the 1879 Impressionist exhibition and feature the artist’s inherited property. For Young, the failure of Caillebotte’s paintings results from an incompatibility between the form—specifically, the quick brushstrokes of Impressionism—and the content, which signalled the durability of the old economic order based in private property, which was “permanent, durable, and fixed” (73). The flip side of the argument is already well known: that Impressionism was well-suited to a new economic order that was “dynamic, flexible, and evanescent” (73), as shown by Impressionist paintings of the developing leisure economy.

In contrast, chapters three and four feature paintings in which the temporality of the style matches the temporality of the content. In chapter three, we encounter Roll’s *The Strike of the Miners* from 1880, a painting that deals explicitly with the politics of time in its subject matter, since the hours of the workday were at issue in nineteenth-century workers’ strikes. Here the inactivity and unproductiveness of the striking workers is matched by the stillness and “endlessly unfolding present” of Roll’s Realist style (96). Young’s argument culminates in chapter four in his discussion of Raffaelli’s *The Absinthe Drinkers* of 1881. Again, we encounter a Realist style that emphasizes duration; everything about the painting is closely observed and characterized by a sense

of stillness. The men who sit with their glasses of absinthe on the table are completely still, absorbed in a world that seems entirely apart from the fast-moving and measured time of modernity. Young compares these men, identified as *déclassés* in the original title for the painting, to Parisian ragpickers whose work fell outside the structures of modern industrial capitalism, and whose time therefore remained undisciplined. In this sense, the absinthe drinkers, who remain at the margins of society, suggest the possibility of freedom from “the tyranny of the clock” (158). As in Roll’s *The Strike of the Miners*, both the subject matter and the style of the painting resist the measured and disciplined work-time of modernity.

In the last chapter, which examines James Ensor’s paintings of bourgeois interiors, we return to a disjunction between form and content. With these examples, the fast-paced tempo of the Impressionist style conflicts with the subject of the bourgeois salon, which critics expected to offer a calm and slowly paced refuge from the quickening pace of modern life. Young argues that Ensor created this contradiction deliberately in order to critique bourgeois conventions. Though I followed happily along for the first four chapters, this final chapter felt somewhat incomplete. Young presents a strong argument about how temporality differed between social classes, but because, perhaps, of his reliance on the methods of Fried and Clark, he fails to examine how experiences of temporality may have differed for men and women at that time. That omission is felt most sharply in chapter five, where the subjects of the paintings are predominantly female. In his brief discussion of Mary Cassatt’s *The Tea* (1880), for instance, he misses an opportunity to consider how his questions about temporality overlap with and expand on earlier literature—such as Griselda Pollock’s “Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity”<sup>5</sup>—that engages with paintings of bourgeois

interiors and the gendered spaces of nineteenth-century Paris. Unfortunately, Young says very little about Cassatt’s painting, which is surprising considering that a reproduction of it is included. Perhaps the gendering of time is a topic for a whole other project, but I would have liked to see Young raise the question in relation to these paintings.

The book features an impressive 135 illustrations, and though not all illustrations will be treated equally in such a study, I question the decision to include certain images, such as Cassatt’s, that act more as punctuation than as part of the argument. Two that receive this lesser treatment are (perhaps unsurprisingly) illustrations from newspapers, and Young treats them in precisely this way—as illustrations of events rather than as mediated images. Reference is made in the text to the figure number after the event is named, but there is no discussion of the image. I find this surprising given Young’s insistence on the importance of close observation. For me, this omission raised other questions regarding the temporality of the news illustration, which, again, may be a question for another book.

At the very end of the book, Young identifies his project as one of “historical retrieval” (214). What he seeks to retrieve, of course, is Realist painting, which has been eclipsed by Impressionism and subsequent developments towards abstraction. In other words, Young is proposing an alternative to standard histories of Modernism, even alternative modernisms. This project of retrieval has also marked the scholarship on British nineteenth- and twentieth-century artists, who tend toward figuration and a greater degree of realism than the French painters who have become synonymous with Modernism.<sup>6</sup> Realism, and here I refer to “realism” of the non-Courbet variety, has typically been associated with academic painting, so-called bourgeois taste, industrial capitalism, and instrumentalism—all institutions and tendencies

that avant-garde artists and left-wing critics and art historians habitually rebel against. In contrast, Impressionism and other styles tending toward abstraction are associated with individuality, freedom, progress, and left-wing politics.<sup>7</sup> These assumptions run through the Modernist critical tradition, exemplified in the writings of Clement Greenberg (who, significantly, privileged space over time in modern painting). While Greenberg’s Modernism no longer holds sway, these associations persist in more recent scholarship in modified form. For example, in the influential book *Techniques of the Observer* (1990), Jonathan Crary sets up a dichotomy between the Modernist and the instrumental image, associating the former with a “sovereignty and autonomy of vision,” which results in formal innovations that stray from realism.<sup>8</sup> Young’s book offers a counterpoint to these entrenched ideas about realism by showing that a type of realism persisted side by side with the development of the apparently liberating style of Impressionism, and provided its own mode of resisting instrumentalism.

Of course no account of Realism’s (or realism’s) fall from favour is complete without a discussion of photography, and Young’s nuanced account of photography’s impact on Realism is an important strength of the book. He avoids blanket statements that photography’s invention forever changed painting, instead explaining that the meanings of photography shifted over the course of the nineteenth century. He pinpoints 1878—the year Eadweard Muybridge published his photographs of horses in motion—as a significant turning point. With the advent of instantaneous photographs like Muybridge’s, critics began interpreting Realism as frozen in time, much like photographic subjects, rather than as durational. Once interpreted as “photographic,” these paintings were denied the absorption and accompanying durational temporality that defined

them as Realist, and they were recast as Naturalist. The comparison to instantaneous photography also affected Courbet's legacy since, as Young explains in the conclusion, interpreting his paintings as frozen in time rather than durational deprived them of meaning in the present, and they could thereby be drained of their politics. It is as though the very possibility of an enduring, absorbed state was denied. In the end, then, the book is about the disappearance of Realism as an artistic category as well as the diminishing possibilities for absorption in the modern world.

This last point brings me to what I find most compelling about Young's argument: the connections to the present day and to current calls for a slower approach to life. In another recent book about time, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (2013), Jonathan Crary describes the intensification of modern time, so that today, in 24/7 time, we feel compelled to fill every instant with productivity, while any remaining moments are dedicated to consumption. He argues that this tendency robs us of any time to be filled by daydreaming or introspection, or what Young calls absorption. Crary writes, "Billions of dollars are spent every year researching how to reduce decision-making time, how to eliminate the useless time of reflection and contemplation. This is the form of contemporary progress—the relentless capture and control of time and experience."<sup>9</sup> According to Crary, sleeping and waiting are the only instances of empty time in our lives that offer the possibility of resistance. Crary does not say much about art in his book, leaving untouched the question of whether art can serve as a mode of resistance. Young's book fills that void, showing how the late Realist artists sought out spaces and moments that had not yet been colonized by modern, disciplined time and painted them in a way that called attention to their distinct

temporalities. The implication of Young's argument is that the beholder of these paintings—absorbed in slow looking—is also engaged in a form of resistance. Though this is not the type of book one would assign to undergraduate students, the argument is relevant to their lives and therefore worth introducing to them. Amid the endless stream of images that come our way as part of the twenty-first-century visual economy, Young's book provides a lesson in the value of slow looking. ¶

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1. Derek Allan, *Art and Time* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2013); Simona Cohen, *Transformations of Time and Temporality in Medieval and Renaissance Art* (Leiden, 2014); Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (New York, 2013); Amelia Groom, ed., *Time* (Cambridge, MA, 2013); Keith Moxey, *Visual Time: The Image in History* (Durham, NC, 2013); and Christine Ross, *The Past Is the Present; It's the Future Too: The Temporal Turn in Contemporary Art* (New York, 2012).
2. Petra Chu, *Nineteenth-Century European Art*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ, 2012), 382–83.
3. E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present* 38 (Dec. 1967): 56–97.
4. See Paul Glennie and Nigel Thrift, "Re-working E. P. Thompson's 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism,'" *Time and Society* 5, 3 (1996): 275–99. Young draws on Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism*; or, *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC, 1991).
5. Griselda Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," in *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (New York, 1988).
6. For examples, see Caroline Arscott, *William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones: Interlacings* (New Haven, 2008); David Peters Corbett, *The World in Paint: Modern Art and Visuality in England, 1848–1914* (Manchester and New York, 2004); David Peters Corbett and Lara Perry, eds., *English Art 1860–1914: Modern Artists and Identity* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2001); Pamela Fletcher, *Narrating Modernity: The British Problem Picture, 1895–1914* (Aldershot, Surrey, 2003); and Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting* (New Haven, 2007).
7. Paul Barlow, "Fear and Loathing of the Academic, or Just What Is It that Makes the Avant-Garde So Different, So Appealing?" in *Art and the Academy in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Rafael Cardoso Denis and Colin Trodd (New Brunswick, NJ, 2000).
8. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA, 1990), 150.
9. Crary, *24/7*, 40.

Vernon Hyde Minor  
*Baroque Visual Rhetoric*  
Toronto, University of Toronto  
Press, 2016  
288 pp. 51 b/w illus.  
\$85 Cloth ISBN 9781442648791

Susanne McColeman

VERNON HYDE MINOR'S *Baroque Visual Rhetoric*, an insightful study about the power of art to "convince, move, and delight" (12), draws upon the critical traditions of rhetoric and poetics to analyze painting, sculpture, and architecture from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This book consists of a series of essays, each focusing on a case study or a comparison of works, in which the author discusses how "determining ideas" (3) are conveyed through baroque art. Collectively, these do not comprise a comprehensive or systematic examination of the period, but are reflections on a relatively small selection of artworks that have profoundly moved the author.

Central to Minor's understanding of the art and culture of this period is the dichotomy between baroque and classical visual rhetoric. He characterizes baroque visual rhetoric as optimistic, awe-inspiring, vivid, grand, consoling, and frame-breaking. Moreover, the baroque artist created works that are "perceptually challenging" (48), employing sophisticated metaphors and conceits in the form of layered ontologies. He connects these qualities to the celebratory rhetoric and culture of the Jesuits in the seventeenth century, and places them in opposition to the restraint, clarity, and calmness that characterize classical visual rhetoric. The baroque style, however, declined in popularity during the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries; baroque art eventually became associated with *cattivo gusto*, or bad taste, and classical art with *buon gusto*, or good