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Bakhtine

ET L'AVENIR DES SIGNES

AND THE FUTURE OF SIGNS

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Answers First, Questions Later : A Bakhtinian Interpretation of Monet's Mediterranean Paintings

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Introduction

Let me begin by addressing the multivalences of the title I have given this essay. Having lectured on Monet and other Impressionists for 19th century art courses, I have never felt the kind of passion for his work that I feel (for example) for the Russian avant-garde or certain strains of contemporary art that wrestle with the impact of electronic technology. For years I have been convinced that it is very hard to see Monet's prodigious production outside of its commodification. If an artist's work is well-known and well-circulated through T-shirts, baseball caps, cookbooks, wrapping paper, etc., what happens when we look at the "real thing?" Is it any longer possible to view Monet's art with fresh eyes? From his early to late works, Monet's paintings have proven to have remarkable staying power in the public imagination and continue to offer considerable visual pleasure.

I propose to introduce a new vocabulary into the discourse around Monet. While I thoroughly enjoy the close analysis of images, I wish to open another kind of window onto Monet's painting. Consequently, while I refer to particular paintings in my discussion, I mainly hope to engage the reader's appreciation of new interpretative possibilities for art that may already be familiar. The value of such an approach became apparent for me during a recent symposium on Monet held on the occasion of a new exhibition of the work he did during three journeys to the Mediterranean : in 1884 to Bordighera and the Italian Riviera ; in 1888 to Antibes ; and in 1908 to Venice. During that symposium, I attempted to explain some of Bakhtin's concepts to an audience hitherto unfamiliar

with his work, while the exhibition itself, "Monet and the Mediterranean," obliged me to reassess my own interpretation of Monet's art.

Scholars generally engage in a range of approaches to Monet's art¹: they continue to analyze the formal power of his painting; they examine the critical reception and the formative role of the critics themselves in shaping Monet's popularity; or they examine the curious lack of markers in his work of the increasing industrialization and the effects of World War I that he witnessed in his mature years. In comparison to the approaches taken by most art historians, I propose a more philosophical or theoretical appreciation.

It is certainly well-known that Monet was neither interested in, nor articulate about, theory. As he wrote to the English art critic Evan Charteris in 1926, "I have always had a horror of theories; my only merit is to have painted directly from nature, seeking to render my impressions of the most fugitive effects" (quoted by Broude 1991: 75). A comparison of his correspondence with that of another artist such as Camille Pissarro reveals that Monet's personal letters explain very little in terms of his own ideas, while Pissarro wrote much about the social, political, and artistic events of his life — along with reflections on the role and nature of art in capitalist society (Spate 1992: 11). Monet's work was not impelled by ideas, but by empirical experience. This process of encountering and representing empirical reality may not have been theoretically guided but it was nonetheless profoundly dialogical.²

The present essay is structured as a conversation of sorts between Monet's Mediterranean paintings and the ideas put forward by the Russian moral philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin. This will allow me, I hope, to see Monet with different eyes (an appropriate task given the injunction to look and look again that the exhibit "Monet and the Mediterranean" implicitly expressed). My title, "Answers First, Questions Later," also suggests another agenda. We often assume that we have the answers about Monet, that our critical discourse is adequate to the descriptive and analytical tasks at hand. His work, however, is capable of ongoing interpretation. In particular, the philosophical language developed by Bakhtin offers a new set of questions with which to query Monet's painting. By focussing on such concepts as answerability and dialogue, outsidedness and the chronotope, as well as unfinalizability, in relation to Monet's Mediterranean paintings, I hope to broaden the scope of the conversation about Monet's contribution to the history of painting and Bakhtin's contribution to the interpretation of visual art. Bakhtin's concepts, which are slowly finding their way into the vocabulary of art historians and critics, might well offer us ways to articulate what impressionists, as well as later post-impressionist and symbolist artists, were after.

A few comments are in order about Bakhtin and Monet, whose lives overlapped one another. Bakhtin was born in 1895 and died in 1975. I

was drawn to his writing a decade ago when I read "Iskusstvo i otvetsvennost'" (later translated as "Art and Answerability"), an essay he wrote in 1919 at the age of twenty-four. Having been interested in the religious and moral overtones of the nineteenth-century debate about "art-for-art's-sake" versus "art-for-life's-sake," I was immediately attracted by this short two-page essay in which Bakhtin clearly locates himself in the "art-for-life's-sake" camp. Art and life, he says, should answer for each other. Without recognition of life, art would be mere artifice ; without the energy of art, life would be impoverished. One of the most significant points of intersection between art and life is the human act or deed, *delo* or *postupok*. The work of art is a particular example of this *postupok*.

Over the following five and a half decades before he died, Bakhtin wrote many books and essays. If one adds the writings of others in his circle — such as Valentin Volshinov and Pavel Medvedev — Bakhtinian material ranges across an astonishing array of disciplines : literature and literary theory ; history ; aesthetics ; axiology ; biology ; theology ; and psychology. Bakhtin's own writings began to appear in print in the 1960s and since then his name has been associated with concepts such as carnival and dialogue, or dialogism.

Claude Monet's name cannot be separated from the overall movement of Impressionism. This last evolved in France as a democratic movement and went through several phases.³ It began in the 1860s ; entered a more publicly mature, though still scandalous, phase in the 1870s : and by the 1880s, had become an aesthetic force, even though some critics still derided it. In 1866, Paul Cézanne articulated two important themes that came to define the Impressionist position : the artist's inalienable individuality, and the right to be seen by the public (Pissarro 1997 :18). The movement was based on the sharing of ideas, techniques, compositional recipes, and even the act of painting itself, with a number of artists working together, sometimes even painting the same scenes. A common style evolved for a time, one that involved loose brushwork and the juxtaposition of unusually bright colours. Monet isolated himself by the time of the sixth Impressionist group exhibition in 1881, preferring to work alone.

Monet was born in 1840. From 1870 (the year he married Camille) he restricted his work to landscape. Then, in 1878, Ernest and Alice Hoschedé and their six children moved in with Claude and Camille Monet and their two sons in Vétheuil. Both families faced serious financial problems. In 1879, Monet's first wife, Camille, died. In 1881, Alice took her six children and moved in with Monet ; then in 1883, they moved to Giverny. By the mid 1880s, Monet's financial luck began to change as his work was increasingly exhibited and bought. Alice died in 1911, Monet in 1926 (for a more detailed chronology, see Stuckey 1985 :11-26).

Monet's first Mediterranean trip was in 1883-84 — to Bordighera on the Italian Riviera — for ten weeks. Monet took this trip on impulse with Renoir. During his sojourn he concentrated on two motifs, the sea and the Mediterranean light — although others emerged as well: exotic aspects of the region such as palm trees, the Moreno garden, views of the mountains surrounding Bordighera, and later, the area around Monte Carlo. The second trip took place in 1888 when Monet visited Antibes. It is not clear why he took this trip. He spent most of his time alone choosing as his main theme the relationship between what is paintable and what must remain "unpaintable". In letters to Alice, Theo van Gogh, and others, Monet wrestled with several problems: with his serial procedure (painting more than one picture of a single subject from different vantage points and under differing circumstances); with the whole issue of the relative incompleteness of his work; and with how his happiness was linked to his identity as an artist. His third trip in 1908 was to Venice with Alice. By the time of this trip, Monet was heading a considerable business which included international sales of his paintings, especially in the United States. One hundred and twenty-five paintings survive from his three sojourns to the Mediterranean, and most of them are small enough that he was able to pack them under his arm as he set out for the villa garden, the shore, or the canal.

Answerability and Dialogue

In order to grasp the dialogic nature of Monet's work, we must first describe Bakhtin's understanding of the phenomenology of the self and self-other relationships in the context of such concepts as answerability. We must also see how Bakhtin's early work later developed into a dialogic way of thinking. Unlike some of his contemporaries (Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Henri Bergson, for example), Bakhtin's goal was not to create a moral or philosophical system. Most of his essays are predicated on the presupposition that the human being is the centre around which all action in the real world, including art, is organized. The "I" and the "other" are the fundamental categories of value that make all action and creativity possible. Bakhtin identifies the mother as the first "other," but each of us needs other others to become persons.

In a 1914 photograph of Monet's studio (plate 1), one can see — on the left side of the desk — photographs of some of his answerable others. In addition, all the empty chairs evidence the others upon whom he depended for his public success. While Alice Hoschedé and critics (and friends) such as Gustave Geffroy and Octave Mirbeau were Monet's primary others, they were never directly represented in his work.⁴

In Bakhtin's early essays, his sense of the relationship between self and other was expressed with the concept of answerability. Art and life answer to each other just as human beings answer each other's needs and inquiries in time and space. Answerability was Bakhtin's way of

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Monet's studio, 1914

naming the fact that art, and hence the creative activity of the artist, is always related — *answerable* — to life. For him, the idea that we are answerable — indeed obligated — through our deeds is the basis of the architectonic structure of the world and the basis of artistic creativity. In this sense, his interpretation of creativity emphasized the profound moral obligation we bear toward others. Such obligation is never solely theoretical, but is an individual's concrete response to actual persons in specific situations. Because we do not exist alone, as isolated consciousnesses, our creative work is always answering to the other, if only we could recognize these answers as such. Answerability contains the moral imperative that the artist remain engaged with life ; that the artist answer for life. At every point, Bakhtin insists upon obvious ethical aspects of creativity : namely, that as bodies existing in real time and space, we are responsible, answerable, and obligated toward other human beings in and through the creative process.⁵

To what extent can we speak about answerability in Monet's painting ? Answerability, as responsibility or moral obligation toward others, and expressed as an individual's concrete response to actual persons in specific situations, does not seem to have been Monet's concern. His attention was turned more to issues regarding his own commercial success than to such specifically ethical concerns. The critic Clement Greenberg, in a now famous essay from 1957, characterized Monet as a self-promoter, a publicity seeker, and a shrewd businessman. More recently, Virginia Spate has noted that Monet's art works may well have been shaped by his desire for their consumption as luxury objects, which in turn shaped their increasing preciousness (Spate 1992 : 12). He was not concerned, as were some of his 19th century predecessors, with how art was connected with life, or with the theoretical implications of his painting practice. Although we might not be able to speak of answerability in the sense that Bakhtin, in the early essay, used the term, we can acknowledge, however, that there are dialogical aspects to Monet's work, some of which are directly discernible in particular paintings, others for which we need to know more about his life.

In his book on Dostoevsky, when he began writing about dialogue and the dialogic, Bakhtin developed a linguistic interpretation of the process of answerability. Bakhtin's concept of dialogue seems to lend itself to facile application. Every person has a common sense understanding of what dialogue is : someone talks, someone else listens and responds. An artist enters into dialogue (in actual, historical, or mythological time) and expresses something about a particular place, person, or event. Bakhtin, to be sure, meant more than this with his conception of dialogue. He used the concepts of dialogue and the dialogic in at least three distinct ways (Morson and Emerson 1990 : 130-33). First, and most specifically, dialogue refers to the fact that every utterance is by nature part of a larger dialogue. An utterance can never be an abstract

entity but must occur between two persons : speaker and listener, or creator and audience. It is always directed at somebody in a living, concrete, unrepeatable set of circumstances. Joachim Pissarro (1997 : 22-24) has identified several levels of dialogue in Monet's painting that fit within this first conception. At the most fundamental level, Monet engaged in an internal dialogue with the physical world that subsequently provided the motifs for, and pictorial elements of, his paintings. Physical elements such as the light and wind, vegetation, mountains and the sea, and palace façades functioned as his interlocutors. Although Bakhtin did not actually recognize the physical environment as a possible other, Monet clearly did and his paintings express this recognition (see, for example, his *Grand Canal* series of 1908, plate 2).

Monet also engaged in a dialogue with the past, especially with those artists who dealt with the Mediterranean (as well as with his contemporaries such as Auguste Renoir, Edouard Manet, Berthe Morisot, James Whistler, and John Singer Sargent, among others). More specifically, his dialogue with Alice Hoschedé — through letters written during the first two Mediterranean visits and during her life and journey abroad with him — was extremely important for his artistic production. While Alice may have been his primary dialogical other, we should nevertheless not underestimate the formative effect of Monet's dialogue with another group : his critics and dealers. This range of dialogues shows that the self is never autonomous, but always exists in a nexus of formative relationships.

Dialogues as I have been describing them here — as utterances that are always directed to someone in unique situations — can either be monologic or dialogic in their disposition, and this is the second sense in which Bakhtin uses the term. Although Bakhtin's discussions sometimes lack clarity, a dialogue that is monologically disposed is one that becomes empty and lifeless. As he wrote in his "Notes Made in 1970-71" : "[t]ake a dialogue and remove the voices..., remove the intonations..., carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, [and] cram everything into one abstract consciousness..." (Bakhtin 1986 : 147).⁶ Bakhtin argued, moreover, that modern thought has been dominated by this kind of monologism and, in particular, by monologic conceptions of the truth. Dostoevsky, he observed, was the first truly polyphonic writer who was able to think through paradoxes, differing points of view, and unique consciousnesses. To be polyphonic, verbal communication and social interaction must be characterized by contestation rather than by automatic consensus.

Can brush strokes be read as polyphonic ? Is there not a unique kind of visual contestation of colour or directionality that expresses a dialogic and polyphonic sensibility — where rose and blue and gold meet and interact ? On another score, is there not an implicit dialogue in Monet's serial procedure itself, where he painted the same scene

under differing conditions, seeking to show that perception is never singular? In Bordighera, Monet painted from a number of slightly different vantage points: he utilized objective differences such as weather, lighting, the sea, and vegetation; formal differences such as size, finish and colour; and he employed subjective differences in mood. While in Venice, he began to try new approaches, seeking to eliminate time as a variable in his paintings so that he could concentrate on the interrelationships between the atmosphere, light, and colour. Monet altered his original serial practice (painting more than one picture of a subject from different vantage points and under differing circumstances) by painting the same place at the same time each day. The *Wheatstacks* series of 1890 (sometimes called Grainstacks or Haystacks) was the result of his earlier experiments on the Mediterranean (Pissarro 1997: 20).

The existence of polyphony presupposes the third general sense of dialogue. Bakhtin understood life itself as dialogue:

To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium. (Bakhtin 1984: 293)

Dialogue, in this sense, is an epistemological process: only through dialogue do we know ourselves, other persons, and the world. Monet's dialogue at this level has indeed left us a considerable legacy of perception and knowledge about the world.

Outsidedness and the Chronotope

In his work, Monet not only expressed a profoundly answerable and dialogic relationship with persons and with his environment, but his painting can also be seen as an extended meditation on time, duration, and change. There were several different dimensions to his experience of time during the Mediterranean journeys that often conflicted with one another and could not be reconciled (Pissarro 1997: 32). There was the emotional and psychological time related to his separation from Alice; his worries about their future together; and the anxiety created by his need for time to work. He also experienced the flow of natural time — time made visible in the phenomena he studied — such as the changes in light, weather, or tides. Of course, these phenomena frustrated him without end because their ephemerality made representing them very difficult. And then there was Monet's pictorial time, the literal time it took him to work out a series or to complete a study or painting (as in his many paintings of the Ducal Palace or the Grand Canal in Venice). In addition, part of the time-frame of Monet's work could be called mechanical or industrial time, which, for the most part, he avoided representing (Spate 1992: 10). His painting may thus be

seen as a form of resistance to the forces of industrialism, a fact that may also account for its ongoing popular appeal into the late 20th century.

Bakhtin would have called all four of these types of time — if indeed we can be allowed such a typology — “small time.” By this term he meant “the present day, the recent past, and the foreseeable [desired] future” (Bakhtin 1986 : 169). Contra small time, he posited another category for understanding the temporal nature of cultures and cultural artefacts. “Great time” would be, in his words, the “infinite and unfinalized dialogue in which no meaning dies” (*ibid.* : 169). For many admirers, Monet’s work has already entered great time, simply because of its immense and ongoing popularity. But, as Bakhtin suggested, the ability to perceive “great time” is based not on a grand historical meta-narrative, but on a nuanced appreciation of outsideness and the subtle use of various chronotopes.

With the concept of outsideness, *vnenakhadimost'*, Bakhtin wanted to show that the self and the other are only knowable because of boundaries ; boundaries that frame and define the self over against others and the world. The creative activity of the artist is also possible only because of these boundaries. The artist works on the temporal and spatial borders of the outer body, as well as on the axiological boundaries of inner life. This border existence enables the artist to create new visions. By finding an approach to life from the outside, a new image of the world can be formed.

I see this quality of outsideness articulated in Monet’s work in a particular way. Cities, and urban life in general, need an other — an outside that functions not only to demonstrate what cities can and cannot offer, but that also functions as both a foil and a frame (Clark 1984 : 198). The countryside provides that outside standpoint. By the time of his first Mediterranean sojourn, Monet had clearly turned away from the untidiness of urban change, preferring to explore what each new environment offered in terms of different pleasures. Perhaps, as T.J. Clark has observed, nature possessed a consistency that nothing else did (*ibid.* : 180, 182). How curious it is, however, that what Monet chose to capture on the canvas was change itself. Many 19th century landscapes (John Constable’s 1821 *Hay Wain*, for example) were celebrated for their orderliness and domesticity. But Monet represented elements that could never be domesticated, and this paradox — built upon change and domestication — was, of course, his challenge in the new Mediterranean environments.

With the concept of the chronotope, Bakhtin gives us a language for further specifying the nature of Monet’s relation with particular times and unique places.⁷ The chronotopé is a useful concept based on a principle that is easy to understand : there is no experience outside of space and time, and both of these always change. Change is therefore

essential. Subjectivity and created objects are always constituted differently — something we clearly know from Monet's painting. In short, all conditions of experience are determined by space and time, which are themselves variable. Within any situation there may be many different chronotopes, values and beliefs, but what the idea of the chronotope shows is that those values and beliefs derive from actual social relations anchored in time and space.

How do we gain an understanding of a chronotope that is different from our own? If a work of art is only understood in relation to the local and particular (something new historicists are especially keen to trace), then it will ultimately die or be of only narrow scholarly significance. An art historian or critic (and viewers in general) must recognize not only his or her own chronotope, but also the unique chronotopes of the artist and object. Only then can one give an object a place in great time. Historians therefore straddle two chronotopes — their own and the historical context of the work — and this double chronotopicity necessitates recognition of one's essential outsidedness.

Where dialogue describes the process and practice of communication and the relationship among selves, the concept of the chronotope describes the time/space nexus in which life exists and where creativity is possible. This intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships is aesthetically expressed in literature, and can gain prominence through variations in genre. For instance, the epic (Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, or the Gilgamesh story) is characterized by a chronotope that values a national heroic past; it remains rooted in tradition, and an impassable temporal distance separates it from the present. By contrast, the novel, with a world (and worlds) still in the making, is usually rooted in experience much closer to the present, experience that unfolds in multilayered consciousness. The chronotope of the novel expresses an open-ended relationship to the future, one that is lacking in epic literature.

In analyzing paintings, we can, no doubt, incorporate some of these literary insights, but we must use the chronotope somewhat differently. Certainly we could talk about the chronotopes of various genres of painting (the following examples are primarily from Monet's century): in history painting, or in the neo-classical and romantic spin on history painting, such as Jacques-Louis David's 1794 *Oath of the Horatii* or Eugene Delacroix's 1827-28 *Death at Sardanapolous*; in religious or mythological subjects, such as Ivan Kramstov's 1872 *Christ in the Wilderness* or Thomas Cole's 1842 series, *The Voyage of Life*; in portraiture, such as Ilya Repin's 1887 and 1901 portraits of Tolstoy; or in landscape, such as Fitz Hugh Lane's 1862 *Ipswich Bay* or Isaac Levitan's *The Lake Russia* of 1899-1900. Each of these genres could be examined in terms of the distinct ways in which time and space are represented. It is obvious, for instance, that history painting expresses a different self-con-

sciousness about historical events than does landscape painting or portraiture, even when a particular moment is evoked through a place or person.

The entirety of Monet's painting could also be interpreted as his attempt to visualize successive chronotopes, unique moments in time and space. When Monet painted Venice's Grand Canal over and over again, he was seeking to capture the fugitive changes that define particular moments. But there is another relevant sense of the chronotope as well, and this sense concerns chronotopic motifs — motifs that function as condensed reminders of particular types of time and space (see Morson and Emerson 1990 : 374-375). For instance, a castle is not just any kind of building, but is saturated with a specific sense of time and history. A bridge, too, has its own metaphoric resonances, as do the palace, and the road (as in *Cap Martin, near Menton*, 1884 ; see plate 3). Such images not only transmit all the specificity associated with particular families or particular journeys, but they also function to awaken other resonances as well : power, privilege, the sense of life itself as a path or journey, and so on. To speak of chronotopic motifs offers another way of articulating how images carry symbolic meanings.

In the end, the chronotope helps us to explain not only the fact that all that happens occurs within a nexus of answerable dialogues, but also that no artifact of culture ever exists outside of particular moments in historical time and space. Monet was, indeed, compelled by the particular moment, but curiously, his use of chronotopic relations was unlike both the epic and the novel. Unlike the epic, most of his paintings seem to have no historical past, and unlike the novel, they also seem to have no future. His images exist in a timeless present ; even Venice is represented ahistorically. We see in his work of succession of brief chronotopes, unrepeatable moments in time and space. Much of his expressed frustration concerning the finish and completion of his paintings was a function of this fundamental characteristic of his process.

Unfinalizability

The reasons for Monet's frustration can be described quite succinctly with the concept of unfinalizability. This term appears quite often in Bakhtin's writing and in a variety of contexts. As Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson observe :

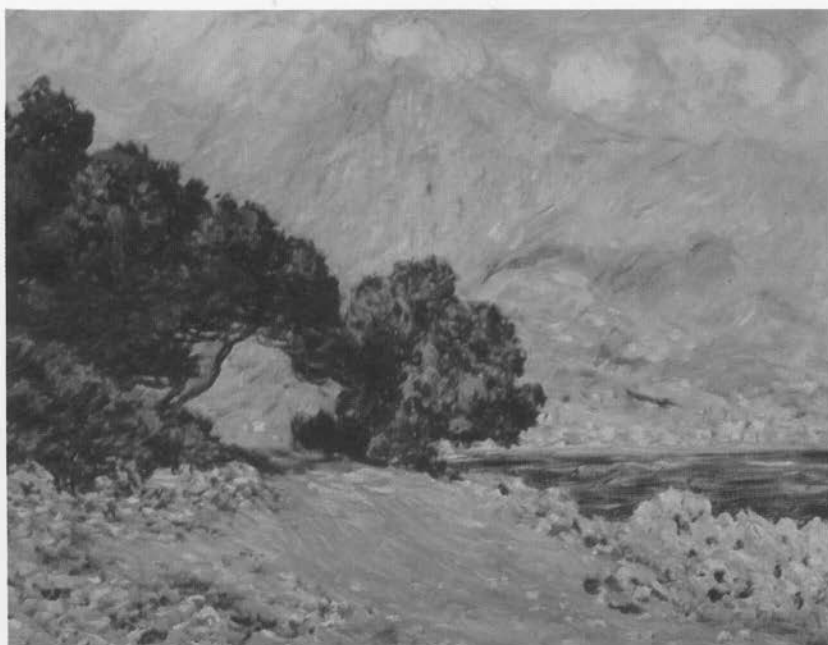
[unfinalizability] designates a complex of values central to his thinking : innovation, 'surprisingness', the genuinely new, openness, potentiality, freedom and creativity... His paraphrase of one of Dostoevsky's ideas also expresses his own : 'Nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future'. (*Ibid.* : 36-37. See also Bakhtin 1984 : 166)

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Claude Monet, *Grand canal*, 1908, Boston Museum of Fine Arts

3



Claude Monet, *Cap Martin, near Menton*, 1884, Boston Museum of Fine Arts

In Bakhtin's formulation, this sense of freedom and openness applies not only to works of literature and art, but it is also an intrinsic condition of our everyday lives. Such creativity is ubiquitous and unavoidable. For Bakhtin, as I have noted, it cannot and should not be separated from one's responsibility toward others and toward the world.

Clearly, the concept of unfinalizability does not help us to specify further differences in the levels of completeness in Monet's painting or between the *étude* and the *tableau*.⁸ But I think it does offer a more inclusive concept than what we have previously used when thinking about Monet's larger agenda. When is a work finished? Can it ever be truly finished? When is a critical perspective or audience reception complete? Monet preferred to call his paintings "completed" rather than "finished." He called them "works that I decided not to touch again" (Pissarro 1997 : 38). Such language suggests that he intuitively had his own version of Bakhtin's concept of unfinalizability. The fact that Monet's paintings continue to generate so much scholarly and public interest also verifies the central insight afforded by Bakhtin's concept.

What can ever be fully finalized? There is always a tentative quality to one's work, one's action, and to life itself. Unfinalizability comprises at least two distinct meanings: the ways in which we need others in order to finalize ourselves; and the ultimate unfinalizability of all things, events, and persons. Art and life are, in the end, open-ended. Even though a person's life is finalized in death, that person's work lives on, to be extended and developed by others (an insight we certainly know to be valid vis-à-vis Monet's work). The creative process, too, is unfinalizable, except insofar as an artist says, somewhat arbitrarily, "I stop here." Monet's use of seriality, including the ways he began to change his process, emphasizes the uniqueness of each moment and each painting in terms of subject matter and time — aspects such as time and day, weather, wind, light, the colour of the sea, tidal level, and other perceivable details. His decision to stop painting could never be final and conclusive, and this inability to stop was something with which he would wrestle throughout the later decades of his life. Some Monet scholars dismiss his Venetian paintings because he did not stop soon enough! But precisely because it is always open to change and transformation, artistic work can be a semiotic model for the possibility of change in the larger world outside the studio. Indeed, unfinalizability gives us a way to speak about the problems of representing our "ceaselessly changing world" through the lens of our diverse and ever-changing subjectivities (*ibid.* : 20). The fact that Monet's life work seems to be — at least from one standpoint — about representing that open-ended flux, is certainly another part of its enduring legacy.

In concluding, I should like to offer one last observation about the worlds that Monet and Bakhtin inhabited. Each man expressed in his art (if not always in life), a profound optimism, a benign view of the

world, and a thorough lack of gloom, even under conditions of economic or political adversity. Monet's letters may express his effort, his discontent, his struggles, and his fears regarding whether or not his paintings were adequate to the tasks he set. From the 1880s, they do not represent the pervasive industrial changes of the period — the chimneys and smokestacks, the factories and stultifying labour that the population was forced to endure ; or later, the Great War. Bakhtin, of course, lived in exile in Siberia through the worst parts of Stalinist repression, and was forced to work in relative obscurity as a bookkeeper and a high school teacher, while some of his closest friends were murdered or sent to die in the gulags of the Russian Far East. In our world, their optimism can be refreshing. Whether it be during the long northern winter or the blistering southern summer, under Republican democracy, totalitarian regimes, or lawless anarchy, we need visions of light and reminders that all life is, and must remain, open to dialogue, change, and transformation.

Notes

- 1 Among the major Monet scholars whose work has influenced my own understanding, I wish to mention Richard Brettel and Joachim Pissarro (1992), Norma Broude (1991), John House (1986), Steven Z. Levine (1994), Joachim Pissarro (1990 and 1997), Richard Schiff (1986), Virginia Spate (1992) and Charles Stuckey (1985).
- 2 As far as I know, this aspect of his work was first noted by Pissarro (1997 : 22ff.).
- 3 There are many fine introductions to Impressionism, including Broude, Denvir, Herbert, Rewald, and Roos. In *Monet and the Mediterranean*, Pissarro (1997) also offers a good brief introduction, especially p. 17-18, 19, 25.
- 4 In *Monet and the Mediterranean*, Pissarro has done an admirable job of identifying and describing Monet's complex relationship with his dealers and critics. In Charles Stuckey's *Monet* (1985), many of the significant early reviews and essays about Monet have been usefully collected.
- 5 For a detailed explication of Bakhtin's ideas on answerability, outsidedness, and unfinalizability, see my *Bakhtin and the Visual Arts* (1995).
- 6 Although Bakhtin was talking about dialectics here, the statement deals with the larger process of monologization.
- 7 Bakhtin's most important text on the chronotope is his essay, "Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel" (1981 : 84-258).
- 8 In *Nature into Art*, John House (1986) deals extensively with the problems surrounding Monet's "finish" and "finishing." See especially chapters 9 and 10.

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Abstract

This essay is structured as a conversation between Monet's Mediterranean paintings and the ideas of the Russian moral philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin. In particular, the philosophical language developed by Bakhtin offers a new set of questions with which to query Monet's painting. By focusing on concepts such as answerability and dialogue, outsideness and the chronotope, and unfinalizability in relation to Monet's Mediterranean paintings, the author hopes to broaden the scope of the conversation about Monet's contribution to the history of painting and Bakhtin's contribution to interpreting visual art.

Usually scholars engage in a range of approaches to Monet's art. They continue to analyze the formal power of his painting : they examine the critical reception and the formative role of the critics themselves in shaping Monet's popularity : or they may examine the curious lack of markers in his work of the increasing industrialization and the effects of World War I that he witnessed during his mature years. Bakhtin's concepts, which are slowly finding their way into the vocabulary of art historians and critics, offer new ways to articulate what impressionist artists such as Monet, as well as post-impressionist and symbolist artists, were trying to accomplish.