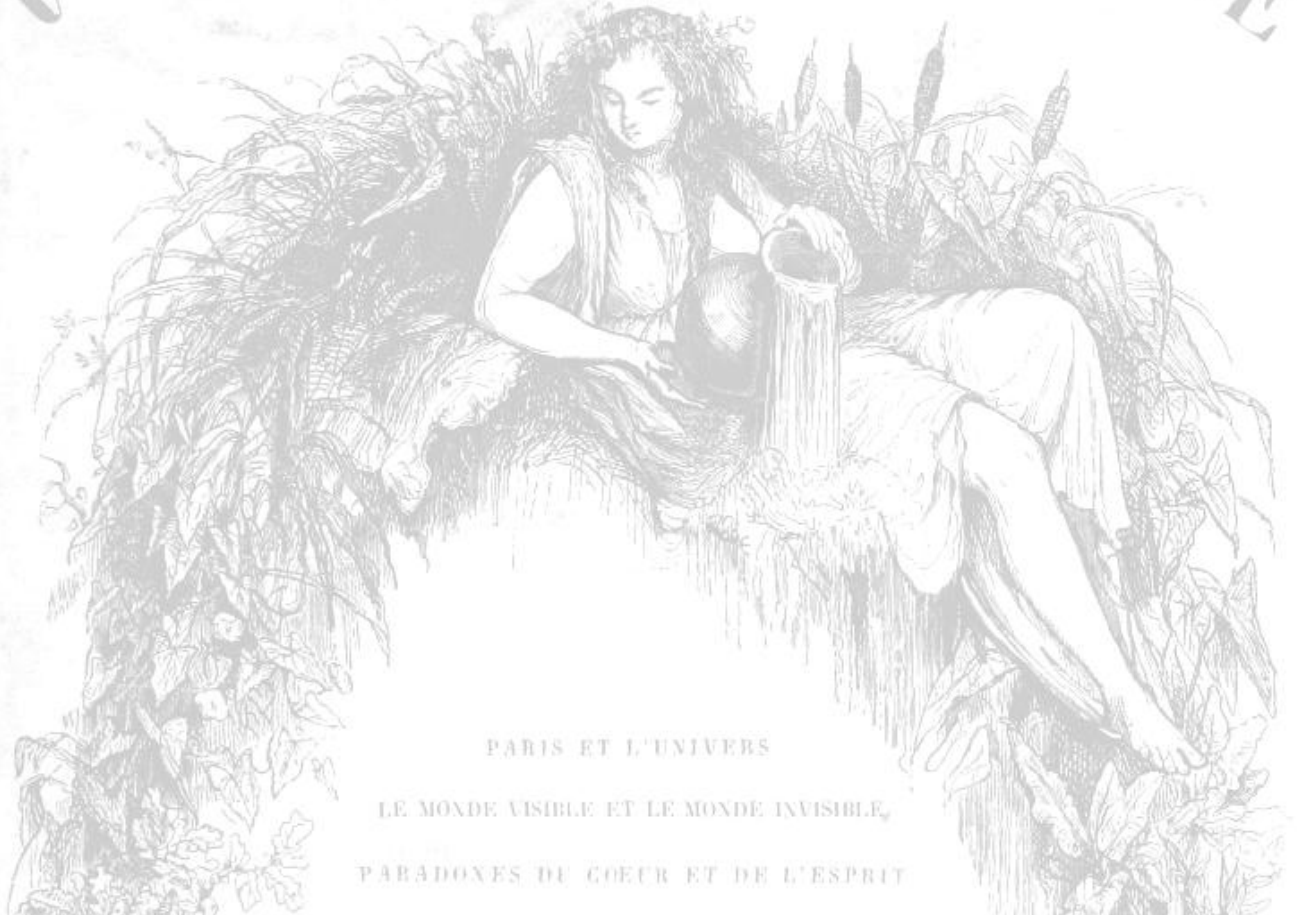


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Journey in Nineteenth-Century French Art
Criticism

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THE 'VOYAGE AU SALON': THE VIRTUAL JOURNEY IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH ART CRITICISM

Philippa Lewis

Abstract

Spatial relations are engrained in the language of criticism: in the vocabulary of perspective, proximity ('close reading', for example), and emotional distance or detachment. While this metaphorical vocabulary is commonplace today, for many nineteenth-century French art critics, questions of geographical distance and proximity, and the transition between the two, were particularly urgent. This chapter will focus on the 'voyage au Salon' [journey around the Salon], a rubric employed in journalistic criticism of Second Empire France. This trope speaks, by definition, of the navigation of space. But where does the metaphor come from? How do its uses and implications relate to the shifting realities, expectations, and anxieties surrounding the journey in this age of steam travel, tourism, and colonial expansion? Most importantly, what does this say about the Salon? By investigating the discourse surrounding travel at this time, I seek to recapture the lost resonances of the motif. First, I examine the most evident reasons for the popularity of the *voyage* metaphor, namely the increasingly international focus of the exhibition, resulting from both international artists and subject matter. I proceed to identify the underlying reasons which, by touching on the aspects of modern travel regularly criticised by cultural commentators, suggest an implicit critique of the Salon itself. These include the speed, banality, and boredom of the prototypical modern journey, as well as its progressive 'virtualisation', which divested travel of its difficulties, and, according to certain ideological interpretations, educational, moral, and spiritual benefits. However, I also show that alternative modes of travel emerged in reaction to these modern developments: the *voyage en zigzag* [journey in zigzags], for example. The journey exists, then, as a paradoxical and ambivalent metaphor in this period: often associated with the superficial and clichéd, it can, with certain qualifications, also be used to connote originality, excitement, and invention.

Key words: nineteenth-century, France, Salon, art, criticism, journalism, journey, travel, distance, metaphor

Spatial relations are engrained in the language of criticism: in the vocabulary of perspective (our point of view or 'vantage point' on the art-object), proximity ('close reading', for example, the mode of literary analysis promoted by the New Critics), and distance. Distance is often used figuratively as a way to conceptualise apparent detachment and disinterestedness in the critical process. In his polemical 'Against Detachment', for example, Walter J. Slatoff fuses the spatial with the psychological when he equates 'distance' and 'detachment', arguing that distance is 'more likely to make things in both art and life appear orderly and beautiful, to obliterate discordances and blemishes. Distance allows us to be spectators and contemplators of spectacles in which actual or emotional involvement would be painful or dangerous'.¹ While this metaphorical vocabulary is commonplace today, I shall suggest that for many nineteenth-century art critics, distance and proximity, and the transition between the two, were critical states with particular resonance. The concern with positioning and movement visible in much criticism of the time is grounded in a culture which was witnessing an increasingly mobile, globalised, and

international art world, one in which geographical space, and notions of physical proximity and distance were frequently provoked by the subject of a landscape painting or the nationality of a painter.

This article seeks, then, to illuminate the place of travel in art criticism. It argues that much critical language in mid nineteenth-century France drew on both the literary and visual culture surrounding travel, and shows how this was connected to anxieties surrounding speed, distance, and time, detachment from home, and adaptation to foreign cultures.² To do this, I shall focus on the figurative ‘voyage au Salon’ [journey around the Salon], a rubric which featured in the popular press, *presse féminine* [female press], and children’s press as well as the art press, and which speaks by definition of the navigation of space. Salons and exhibitions, being popular visitor destinations, did involve literal journeys but it is the metaphorical voyage which I shall be concerned with here. Why is this metaphor used in relation to the art-critical process? How do its uses and implications connect to shifting expectations and anxieties concerning national and international travel, and the practical reality of the journey in this age of steam travel, tourism, and colonial expansion? Most importantly, what does this say about the Salon? By investigating the culture surrounding travel at this time, I seek to recapture the lost resonances of the motif, and the lost points of intersection between travel and art. I concentrate on the period of the Second Empire (1852-1870) which saw both the spread of steam travel in France and across Europe, and the proliferation of French newspapers featuring art and Salon criticism; the *voyage* rubric does, however, predate and outlast the era, and earlier or later examples will be included where appropriate. I shall begin with a brief introduction to the Salon and a survey of Salon criticism. I shall then examine the most evident reasons for the popularity of the voyage metaphor, namely the increasingly international focus of the exhibition, before moving on to identify the underlying reasons which by touching on the aspects of modern travel regularly criticised by cultural commentators suggest an implicit critique of the Salon itself. These reasons include the speed, banality, and boredom of the prototypical modern journey, as well as its progressive ‘virtualisation’, which divested travel of its difficulties, and, according to certain ideological interpretations, its educational, moral, and spiritual benefits. Yet I also intend to show that alternative modes of travel emerged in reaction to these modern developments, and were adopted by art critics: the *voyage en zigzag* [journey in zigzags], for example, which describes a journey luxuriating in diversions, sidetracks, and detours. The journey exists, then, as a paradoxical and ambivalent metaphor in this period: often associated with the superficial and clichéd, it can, with certain qualifications, also be used to connote originality, excitement, and invention.

Navigating space at the Salon

The Second Empire witnessed a surge in the popularity and frequency of the Paris Salon, France’s state-sponsored exhibition of contemporary art. This, combined with the rapid growth of the press, led to a new form of journalistic art criticism, often serialised over several issues of the same paper. A survey of criticism published throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in France shows just how extensively the number of Salon reviews increased in the mid-nineteenth century, and also reveals trends and shifts in the focus and presentation of these reviews. For the years 1699-1827, for example, archival work has located some 1,357 examples of Salon criticism, usually published in the form of pamphlets, averaging 10.6 reviews a year. However, for the period of the Second Empire alone, on average 90 reviews per year were published, evidence of a dramatic increase in journalistic output.³ Salon reviews were far from being limited to the major artistic and cultural journals, *La Revue des deux mondes* [The Review of the Two Worlds], for example, or *L’Artiste* [The Artist], and most newspapers, regardless of their target

audience, political allegiance or specific area of interest, would produce some form of *compte-rendu* [summary], albeit briefly, infrequently, and written by a non-specialist. ‘Niche’ newspapers were keen, as Neil McWilliam writes, to adapt ‘standard journalistic form, such as the Salon [review], to reflect the interests and identity of their national audience’, leading to what McWilliam labels ‘eccentric’ forms of Salon review: for example, phrenological, gastronomic, and maritime surveys or readings of the works on display.⁴ As we shall see, the journey motif can be seen to fall under this category of ‘eccentric’ or themed review.

The eighteenth-century Salon review was regularly presented as a ‘réflexion’ [reflection], ‘observation’, ‘description’, or summing up of the ‘sentiments’ or ‘idée générale’ [general idea] provoked by the paintings, although a diverse range of more formalised frameworks, including poetic or dialogic forms, were also employed. The emphasis was on the cerebral and static, and the category closest to the ‘voyage’ at this point was the ‘promenade’: unsurprising, given that visitors would traverse through the Salon *à pied* [on foot]. While the emphasis on the bodily experience of criticism (the walk) over the cerebral (the analysis) appears to reflect the physical demands of the ever-expanding Salon space, I would suggest that at this stage the ‘promenade’ has more in common with the slow-paced, reflective ‘promenade philosophique’ [philosophical promenade], inspired by Rousseau’s *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* [*The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*] [1782] than with a journey. In his 1875 *Voyage au pays des peintres* [*Journey to the Land of the Painters*], however, Mario Proth emphatically addresses his reader: ‘En route et pas de faiblesse [...] Car c’est un voyage, non une promenade que nous entreprenons’ [En route and toughen up [...] Because it’s a journey, not a stroll, that we’re undertaking].⁵ What is it, then, which turns a visit to the Salon from a leisurely, reflective stroll into a full-blown voyage in the course of the nineteenth century, and what are the implications and effects of this shift in metaphor for the critic and reader?

It is during the 1840s that these changes first begin to appear, in the form of allusions to speed and travel in the art and Salon criticism of a range of journalistic and literary texts. ‘Le Salon au galop’ [‘The Salon at the Gallop’] of *Les Ecoles* [*The Schools*] in 1840, ‘Voyages et croquis autour du Salon de 1845’ [‘Journeys and Sketches around the Salon of 1845’] in the *Gazette de la jeunesse* [*The Youth’s Gazette*], and ‘Les Impressions de voyage de la famille Ballot au Musée, par Bertall’ [‘The Family Ballot’s Travel Impressions at the Museum, by Bertall’] of *L’Illustration* [*The Illustration*] in 1847 all demonstrate this shift from promenade to voyage. In the subsequent two decades we also see, amongst others, Charles Tillot’s ‘Voyage au Salon de 1852’ in the short-lived *Revue des voyages* [*Journey Review*], and Edmond About’s *Voyage à travers l’exposition des beaux-arts* [*Journey Across the Beaux-Arts Exhibition*] in 1855. A number of ‘voyages au Salon’ appear in 1859: Emile Cantrel publishes a ‘Voyage en zigzag à travers l’exposition’ [‘Journey in Zigzags Across the Exhibition’] in *L’Artiste*, claiming the need for a guidebook for ‘un voyage comme celui que j’entreprends’ [a journey like the one I’m undertaking],⁶ while fashion magazine *La Gazette rose* [*The Pink Gazette*] features the ‘Salon de 1859. Coup d’œil en train express’ [‘The Salon of 1859. Glance from an Express Train’]. In the case of the *Gazette rose*, the metaphor of travel, specifically by express train, is then extended in the article. For example, introducing the work of artist M. H. Vetter, the critic addresses his imaginary female companion, and (implied) female reader: ‘Encore une petite station, madame; faisons aussi une halte à l’hôtellerie de M. H. Vetter’ [Let’s get out at this station, Madam, too; we’ll also stop at M. H. Vetter’s hotel]; each artwork surveyed is conceptualised as a stage of, or stop on, a train journey.⁷ The *Gazette rose*, however, is something of an exception in this regard. In the majority of cases the metaphor is not explored explicitly past the opening lines of the article, testament to what Anne Leonard calls the ‘fast-paced, scrappy journalistic milieu of mid

nineteenth-century Paris', in which copy had to be produced too quickly and haphazardly to leave much time for coherency, extended reflection or polish.⁸ Most of these reviews go on to follow the conventional order of the Salon layout, which either results in an analysis by category or genre, or, as in Théophile Gautier's *Abécédaire du Salon de 1861* [*ABC of the Salon of 1861*], an A-Z of artists, and the 'contrastes curieux [qui] naîtront sans doute des hazards alphabétiques' [the curious contrasts that will doubtless be produced by alphabetical chance].⁹ In this way, the *voyage* exists, on a smaller scale, much like the *physiologies*, or mock-ethnographic studies of Parisian social types which were popular in the 1830s and 1840s, but in which the significance of the title was rarely considered or exploited.¹⁰ Miranda Gill writes that 'the very term "physiology" testifies to the prestige of the medical profession in nineteenth-century French culture. The genre implicitly claimed to be an anatomy of the social body and a diagnostic reading of its symptoms.'¹¹ In much the same way, the journey metaphor implicitly testifies to the topicality and appeal of the *voyage*: flagged in the headline of these reviews, it functions as a hook to attract the reader's attention. Although rarely voiced by the *salonnier* [salon critic], multiple reasons for the birth and establishment of this critical trope can be suggested, which I shall consider here. These are, I propose, far removed from the Classical and Romantic conceptions of the journey: the metaphorical journey of life, or journey as process of self-discovery.¹² Instead, these metaphors refer to the particularities and technologies of travel at this time, and the ambivalence surrounding the modern journey.

The 'painter-voyager' at the Salon

The initial motivation for the journey analogy can be seen to lie in the changing nature and content of the Salon. Throughout the nineteenth century, the art world became increasingly international in character and outlook. Gautier's art journalism, widely read and respected at the time, if less so today, regularly cites the *peintre-voyageur* [painter-voyager or travelling painter] as a modern phenomenon which would lead to a new genre of so-called 'ethnographic' landscape and figure painting, and the subsequent regeneration of the French school in the wake of Neoclassicism. In a Salon review dedicated to the work of Eugène Fromentin of May 28, 1859, Gautier describes 'la peinture ethnographique' [ethnographic painting] as the much-needed replacement for history painting, noting that this trend, 'plus conforme à nos mœurs et au mouvement de la science se développe aujourd'hui dans l'art, recrutant des adeptes à chaque Salon' [more suited to our habits and the direction of knowledge, is developing nowadays in art, and recruiting skilled new practitioners at every Salon] (see Fig.1 for an example of an 'ethnographic' painting by Fromentin exhibited at the 1859 Salon).¹³ As a genre that depicted the peoples and landscapes of foreign countries, typically the Middle East or Africa, 'ethnographic painting' was enabled by and thus tied to both the French colonial project and developments in transport, particularly steam travel.¹⁴ In a passage which frames art in the language of stasis and movement, Gautier describes how visual art in its recent incarnations had been 'réduit à l'immobilité. Alors la Vapeur est venue, qui lui a dit: "Prends ta palette, je t'emmène et je te ferai voir du pays"' [reduced to immobility. So Steam Power came and said to it: 'Bring your palette, I'm taking you and I'm going to show you what's out there].¹⁵ As Roger Benjamin notes, the power of this genre to substantially regenerate the art world was, however, fiercely contested by certain critics at the time who attacked its practitioners on the grounds of 'escapism, lack of patriotism, abhorrence of social realities, [and] technical conservatism'.¹⁶ Jules Castagnary, for example, a principle opponent, is credited with coining the dismissive term 'Orientalist' to describe the trend in 1864. Nevertheless, the appeal of the genre remained and some ten years later, Mario Proth praises the figure of the 'artiste voyageur' [artist-voyager], adding that 'la

littérature des voyages offre seule aux écrivains français une voie nouvelle et vraiment créatrice. De même le salut de l'art français' [It is only travel writing which can offer French writers a new and truly creative path. The salvation of French art is the same].¹⁷ Proth evokes the success and popularity of *la littérature des voyages* [travel writing] to support his argument in favour of *l'art des voyages* [travel art]; given the overlap between art and literature in this period, readers of his Salon would doubtless also be familiar with this literary genre, and appreciate the analogy.



Fig. 1: Eugène Fromentin, *Une rue à El-Aghouat* [A Road in El-Aghouat], oil on canvas, 1.42m x 1.02m, Musée de la Chartreuse, Douai. Source: John Zarobell, *Empire of Landscape* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University, 2010), p. 76.

Whether approved of or otherwise, the regular Salon thus obtained an international feel through the subject matter of many of its paintings. It should be noted that the popularity of foreign landscape paintings led many artists unable or unwilling to travel abroad to fashion landscapes based on others' first-hand depictions and descriptions, resulting in what were effectively imagined or fantasy landscapes. For example, neither Gros nor Ingres travelled in the Middle East or Africa yet both produced major 'Orientalist' paintings; many of Delacroix's 'Orientalist' works precede his travels in Spain and North Africa. Moreover, even those painters such as Fromentin who *did* travel abroad and who stressed the fidelity of their observations often

idealised and romanticised their subject matter, conditioned by and simultaneously conditioning French fantasies about life abroad. Yet, in addition to ‘ethnographic’ paintings by French artists, the Salon also began to exhibit an increasing number of works by artists from abroad. In a review of the 1847 in *L’Illustration*, signed AJD, it is suggested that travel technologies will facilitate the movement and transfer of art objects and aesthetic ideas, and lead to an increasingly cosmopolitan art experience. Anticipating ‘l’influence des chemins de fer sur les beaux-arts’ [the influence of the railways on visual art], the journalist writes: ‘Il est aisé de prévoir que la rapidité et la facilité de ces nouvelles voies de communications permettront aux produits artistiques aussi bien qu’aux produits industriels de se porter un jour d’un bout à l’autre de l’Europe [...] Les expositions au lieu d’être exclusivement nationales prendront un aspect cosmopolites’ [It is easy to predict that the speed and ease of these new transport systems will allow artistic products as well as industrial ones to one day be carried from one end of Europe to the other [...] Instead of being exclusively national, exhibitions will become cosmopolitan].¹⁸ Some ten years later, the critic’s predictions and conflation of the artistic and industrial are realised with the 1855 Universal Exhibition, at which a large number of international painters were represented, illustrating nation and national school. Displaying a vast range of both industrial and cultural goods, the Universal Exhibition attracted a larger and more international audience than the annual Salon. Given the ubiquity of both international artists and international tourists, then, a trip to the Universal Exhibition did become a form of multicultural experience for French visitors, and did result in an engagement with the landscapes of other countries and visuals of other cultures, albeit altered or mythologised in some way to please French tastes for, and expectations of, the ‘authentic’ or ‘primitive’.¹⁹ For Gautier, writing in *L’Artiste*, the Chinese collection exhibited at the Universal Exhibition ‘vous fait franchir pour quelques instants la muraille de la Chine’ [lets you cross the Great Wall of China for a few moments].²⁰ Visiting it, ‘vous vous trouverez en pleine Chine’ [you find yourself in the middle of China], a metaphor that relies on the metonymic conflation of a part or product of a country for the whole.²¹ This is initially the most obvious reason for the adoption of the figurative journey around the Salon. In his analysis of artist Léon Belly’s work in his *Abécédaire du Salon de 1861*, Gautier writes: ‘On doit la reconnaissance aux artistes qui nous rapportent, sur des toiles fidèles, les aspects des pays lointains [...] On aime à faire avec eux ce voyage de l’œil qui ne coûte rien et qui ne fatigue pas [...] M. Belly a bien mérité des cosmopolites sédentaires; il leur accroche l’Egypte au mur de l’exposition’ [We owe thanks to those artists who bring back views of far-off lands on faithful canvases for us [...] We like to accompany them on these voyages of the eye which cost nothing and do not tire us out [...] M. Belly has done well by these sedentary cosmopolitans; he hangs Egypt up for them on the wall of the exhibition] (See Fig. 2 for an example of a painting by Belly exhibited at the 1861 Salon).²²



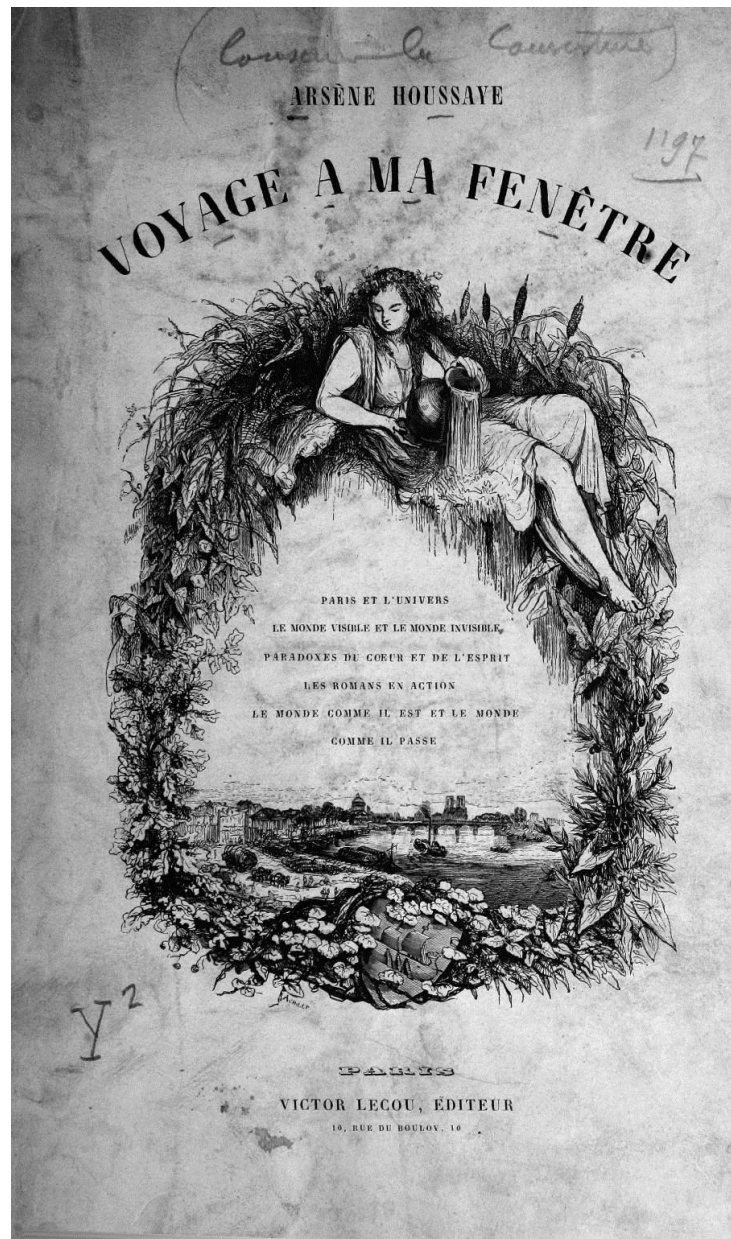
Fig.2: Léon Belly, *Pèlerins allant à La Mecque* [Pilgrims going to Mecca], 1861, oil on canvas, 1.61m x 2.42m, Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Source: en.wikipedia.org.

‘These voyages of the eye’: a very modern voyage

The ‘voyage of the eye’ or visual voyage of the ‘sedentary cosmopolitan’ described by Gautier may appear oxymoronic, yet it refers to a new mode of experiencing travel which altered what was culturally understood by, and encapsulated in, the term ‘voyage’. This new mode relates to what, in a modern-day context, Paul Virilio and Christopher Pinney refer to as the increasing virtualisation of the journey.²³ This is evident in the nineteenth century in an expanding visual and textual travel culture which enabled consumers to embark on ever-greater varieties of vicarious journey, which ranged from imagined travels around Paris with the ‘physiology’ ‘physiologie’, to fantasy experiences of more far-flung locations produced by the diorama or panorama.²⁴ For example, Gautier’s trope of the virtual voyage ‘of the eye’ was frequently used in the press to describe the experience of visiting dioramas. These large-scale, spectacular reproductions of foreign landscapes, pioneered by Louis Daguerre, were immensely popular throughout the mid to late century. Certain writers used the image straightforwardly; journalist F. Chatelain in *Le Messager des dames* [The Ladies’ Magazine] writes that ‘M. Daguerre a exposé son nouveau tableau de la Forêt noire; nous engageons nos lectrices à se mettre en route pour ce joli voyage’ [Mr Daguerre has revealed his new tableau of the Black Forest; we urge our readers to set out on this lovely voyage].²⁵ Others, however, were well aware of the comic potential of this static movement which became the object of biting satire in both the press and literature. *L’Artiste*, for example, mocks the ‘typical’ Parisian bourgeois or virtual traveller who ‘sans être exposé [...] à aucun danger pouvait, assis sur un bon siège bien rembourré, voir passer devant lui tout à son aise les cinq parties du monde connu. Ce sont là de ces voyages comme le bourgeois de Paris aime à en faire’ [who without being exposed [...] to any danger, sitting on a comfortable,

well-padded seat, can see the four corners of the known world pass before his very eyes. These are the kinds of journey the Parisian bourgeois likes to make].²⁶

As discussed earlier, travel-writing as a genre also flourished in the nineteenth century, with the rise in travel experienced amongst literate groups, and voyages of scientific exploration linked to colonial enterprise. Travel historian Ann-Gaëlle Weber has counted some 6,113 *récits de voyage* [travel accounts] published between 1800 and 1899, compared with 3,540 in the eighteenth century.²⁷ Travel as practice increasingly involved testimony and documentation; it was through this documentation that the French public experienced ‘virtually’ what it might mean to travel. By straddling the domains of art and literature, the art-critical *voyage* functions as a form of travel account, and a palimpsest of virtual journeys and their record, both textual and visual. Many literary writers, including Gautier and Baudelaire, produced both art criticism and travel writing, and often blurred boundaries between the two: Gautier, like Baudelaire, alludes to virtual journeys in his criticism, and Baudelaire’s notes for *Belgique déshabillée*, a work unfinished at the time of his death, include judgements on Belgian beaux-arts and architecture. In the specific case of the ‘voyage au Salon’ rubric, the reader experiences at second hand the critic’s passage or journey through the Salon, imagining the multi-sensory experience of the exhibition as a whole, its smells, sounds, tastes, and textures, as well as the visual experience of the paintings, which the critic has transposed into text. The critic’s own experience of ‘ethnographic’ paintings is, of course, itself a vicarious, second-hand experience of the painter’s travels, real or imagined. Reading the ‘voyage au Salon’ thus implicates the reader in a dizzying, escalating, chain of journeys within journeys, inspired by, but qualitatively and formally differentiated from, each other. Furthermore, as a journey through an enclosed, delimited space, the ‘voyage around the Salon’ can also be seen to participate in the literary subgenre of the parodic travel account, which grew up alongside travel writing, exploiting the humour and ironies of the modern journey. In Xavier de Maistre’s 1794 *Voyage autour de ma chambre* [Voyage Around my Room], a blueprint for later works like Arsène Houssaye’s 1851 *Voyage à ma fenêtre* [Voyage from my Window] (see Fig.3), the mock-travel account does not recount the narrator’s movement through a distant and unknown, possibly dangerous, geographical location, but rather restricted movement through a familiar and safe space. This is the case with the *voyage au Salon*, which inevitably adds a layer of irony to the rubric and the journey it narrates. How significant is this ironic aspect? Who or what is the object of its irony? To answer this question, I shall consider further the criticisms of new means of travel and transport in nineteenth-century France, and then suggest ways in which these new means might be suitable metaphors for discussion of the Salon.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Fig.3: Frontispiece from Arsène Houssaye, *Voyage à ma fenêtre* (Paris: V. Lecou, 1851). Source: gallica.bnf.fr/ Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Voyage (and criticism): must be done quickly

Even in the domain of ‘real’ travel, things were changing. The shifting connotations and associations of travel are perhaps best summed up by Gustave Flaubert’s satirical definition of ‘voyage’ in his *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* [Dictionary of Received Ideas] as something which ‘doit être fait rapidement’ [must be done quickly].²⁸ As James Buzard has demonstrated, the increased ease and rapidity, and decreased cost of travel resulting from the birth of the steam train, led many writers, members of the cultural if not financial elite, to repudiate what they saw as a banal transformation of a once challenging, and thus improving and noble endeavour.²⁹

Previously, long-distance travel had been esteemed for its exclusivity, undertaken only by those who were brave enough, who could afford to, or who needed to, for personal, educational, or professional purposes. Given the length and difficulties of travel before steam, a journey was conceived of as a test of human strength, commitment, and endeavour. Yet, in the age of steam, even real travel was seen to be becoming ‘virtualised’, turning into a mere leisure activity for the amusement of the masses; Baudelaire’s verse poem ‘Le Voyage’ of 1859 satirises those ‘cerveaux enfantins’ [childish minds] who still believe in the redemptive quality, and perpetuate the Romantic rhetoric, of travel in the modern age.³⁰ The rejection of speed amongst many cultural ‘tastemakers’ in this era is what many attacks on technology reveal even today: an ethical and moral attachment to difficulty and slowness. Speed was, of course, valorised by some: the visual effects of speed would become central to Impressionism in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and, in the context of his essay ‘Le Peintre de la vie moderne’ [1863], Baudelaire praises the modern side of beauty, fleeting and fugitive. Yet for many, speed connoted the various phenomena of carelessness, greed, impatience, and laziness, whether in the realm of travel or, crucially, art appreciation and criticism. In general, bourgeois visitors to the Salon were often mocked for their apparently superficial interest in art; Daumier’s caricatures, published in newspapers like the ‘Charivari’ or ‘Journal Amusant’ [Amusing Journal], are exemplary in this regard. As regards art criticism, the haste and inevitable superficiality of the reviewer’s survey were often admitted to; for example, in the titles of the ‘Salon au galop’ [The Salon at the gallop] or the ‘Salon de 1859. Coup d’œil en train express’ [The Salon of 1859. Glance from an Express Train], in which the specific reference to the express train highlights the importance of speed both for modern conceptions of the journey, and for an approach to the Salon. Why would this be? The ever-expanding size of the exhibition is one reason why rapidity became essential for the critical process: ‘Songez-y donc: tant de kilomètres de toiles!’ [Just imagine it: so many kilometres of canvases!] writes Proth, or as Gautier recalls, somewhat tiredly, ‘3,146 tableaux balayés de l’œil en une demi-journée’ [3,146 paintings glanced at in the space of half a day].³¹ This was combined with spatial and temporal constraints for journalists with strict word counts and deadlines; critic Du Rouvray admits that ‘le temps et l’espace nous ont contraint à une liste rapide et insuffisante’ [time and space has constricted us to a rapid and insufficient list].³²

In certain reviews, however, such self-confessed rapidity also serves to create an impression of vitality, immediacy, and, paradoxically, self-importance on the part of the critic, particularly when it is considered that another factor in the hurried treatment of the Salon was the increasingly dubious quality of its works. The French art world in the first half of the nineteenth century was dominated by the work of Ingres and Delacroix, two painters who epitomised the two mainly predominant, albeit opposing, French schools: Neoclassicism and Romanticism.³³ However, by the mid-century most critics began to bemoan what was labelled a growing heterogeneity, eclecticism, and worrying lack of cohesion amongst the French painters exhibiting at the Salon. The diversity of landscapes produced by the Orientalist school, although highly praised by some critics, was seen by others to be a major factor in this aesthetic incoherence. The 1859 Salon, for example, was considered particularly weak, with many critics in agreement with Charles Baudelaire’s damning assessment in his *Salon de 1859* [Salon of 1859]: ‘Que dans tous les temps, la médiocrité ait dominé, cela est indubitable, mais qu’elle règne plus que jamais, qu’elle devienne absolument triomphante et encombrante, c’est ce qui est aussi vrai qu’affligeant’ [That for all time, mediocrity has dominated, is beyond doubt, but that it reigns more than ever, and has become absolutely triumphant and cumbersome, is as true as it is painful].³⁴ The critic of the *Gazette rose*, in an address to his fictitious female companion and, simultaneously, implied reader, explains the reason for the speed of the journey, conflating travelling, writing, and

reading: ‘Pardonnez-moi de vous promener si capricieusement, mais il y en a tant de ces peintures qu’il faut que j’en passe, et des *plus mauvaises*’ [I apologise for walking you about so capriciously but there are so many paintings that I simply must pass by some of them, some of *the even worse ones*].³⁵ As the quality of the Salon worsened, criticism was becoming a matter of routine; a process to be got through as quickly as possible: akin, therefore, to travel.³⁶

The mobile observer

The critic-in-motion can be seen, furthermore, to intersect with the wider phenomenon of the mobile observer who, since Walter Benjamin’s readings of the Baudelairean *flâneur*, has come to be seen as paradigmatic of the modern age. What Ann Leonard calls *rêverie* or ‘absorption’, an eighteenth-century value, was under threat in the modern, urban era: evolving methods for displaying, viewing, and engaging in commercial activity surrounding artwork made sustained contemplation of any one object difficult.³⁷ Jonathan Crary puts it well, in relation to Benjamin’s interpretations:

Perception for Benjamin was acutely temporal and kinetic; he makes clear how modernity subverts even the possibility of a contemplative beholder. There is never pure access to a single object [...] Even the concealed space of the museum cannot transcend a world where everything is in circulation [...] The observer of paintings in the nineteenth century was always also an observer who simultaneously consumed a proliferating range of optical and sensory experiences.³⁸

Gautier’s rather queasy experience of the 1861 Salon presents perception and critical judgement alongside, and as part of, other sensory events: ‘Voilà à peu près ce que l’on peut discerner dans une première tournée, à travers le coudolement de la foule, le tapage des couleurs, les exhalaisons alcooliques des vernis frais, qui finissent par vous griser et vous faire mal à la tête’ [This is just about all that you can glean from a preliminary round, through the elbows of the crowd, the din of colours, and the alcoholic emanations of the fresh varnish, which end up by getting you drunk and giving you a headache].³⁹ The difficulties of dynamic perception for critical assessment are indicated again in the *Gazette de la jeunesse* [The Youth’s Gazette]: Du Rouvray explains how the jury awarding prizes makes ‘des choix [...] à la hâte, au milieu de la fatigue et de l’éblouissement causées par le passage’ [choices [...] in haste, in the midst of the fatigue and the blinding gleam caused by walking about].⁴⁰ The difficulty of concentrating or paying undivided attention to any particular work called for compromised or at least adapted viewing techniques for the critic, ones which were likely to be the object of criticism and satire itself: Gautier himself admits that at first he can only pick out those works ‘qui se détachent d’elles-mêmes de la muraille et vont au-devant du regard’ [which leap out from the wall and catch the eye], giving an unrepresentative and superficial impression of the Salon.⁴¹ It is also the case that the *reader* of the art review would be engaged in this circulating world. The popular press, in which much art criticism appeared, was designed to be read quickly, somewhat carelessly, and in certain cases even while in motion or transit: modern criticism and its consumption was, for better or for worse, becoming an increasingly mobile process.

The journey in zigzags

The ambivalence around the new connotations of the journey resulted in a desire to create alternative travel methods. Here, as a final example of how specific travel practices map onto critical practices at this time, I want to focus on one variety in particular: the journey in zigzags.

The model of the *voyage en zigzag* [journey in zigzags] can be seen to have developed in an effort to escape the increasing ease and subsequent boredom of travel. Used by Rodolphe Töpffer as the title for his illustrated account of travels in Switzerland of 1836, the *voyage en zigzag* is a journey which clearly resists, and deviates from, any linear logic or direct itinerary, and, in contrast with the prevalent notion of the functional voyage which ‘must be done quickly,’ luxuriates in its unsystematic and spontaneous route. Certain travel-writers deliberately emphasised the originality and eccentricity of their journey; Gérard Nerval begins his 1851 *Voyage en Orient* [Voyage in the Orient] with the claim that, when travelling: ‘J’aime à dépendre un peu du hasard’ [I like to depend on chance a little].⁴² This apparent eschewal of method can be seen as posturing, a deliberate rejection of the capitalist, ‘bourgeois’ values of cost and time efficiency. The physical embodiment of this in the journey has its counterpart in the literary digression, a narrative technique which is perhaps more often associated with the eighteenth century but still found in the nineteenth century. The digressional *zigzag* as a critical strategy is used in two particular instances to discuss the Salon of 1859: Cantrel’s ‘Voyage en zigzag à travers l’exposition’ [‘Journey in Zigzags Across the Exhibition’] in *L’Artiste* [The Artist] and E. Bonnet’s ‘Promenade en zigzag à travers le Salon’ [Promenade in Zigzags around the Salon] published in *La Causerie* [The Chat]. Cantrel evokes the metaphorical voyage at various points throughout his review, although without extended discussion. It is in reference to the artist Auguste Clésinger that he can be seen to suggest parallels between travel and critical strategies most overtly, writing that ‘l’originalité des ses œuvres attire-t-elle toujours les réprobations des enthousiastes du grand chemin battu’ [the originality of his works always attracts the reprobation of enthusiasts of the beaten track], the ‘the beaten track’ here synonymous with ‘received opinion’ and at odds with the original and independent ‘voyage en zigzag’ which Cantrel professes to practise.⁴³

Bonnet’s article makes these parallels more explicit, and opens out the discussion to include the question of impartiality:

Quelle que soit son impartialité, le critique est toujours sûr d’embarrasser sa route de quelques mécontents après chaque exposition; mais cette perspective n’a rien qui nous effraye. Sûr de n’appartenir à aucune coterie, à aucun système, de ne subir l’influence d’aucun cénacle, ni même d’aucune camaraderie d’atelier, nous nous promènerons à travers toutes les écoles, sans nous croire obligé [...] de décrier par cela son rival ou ses adversaires.

[However impartial he is, the critic is always likely to have his path encumbered by some grumblers after each exhibition; but this perspective does not frighten us. Certain of not belonging to any coterie, any system, of not being influenced by any cenacle, not even any friendship, we will walk amongst all the schools without feeling obliged [...] to denigrate anyone’s rival or their opponents].⁴⁴

Here, zigzag travel imagery is used, firstly, to signal the unsystematic route the critic will take through the Salon, the order of paintings assessed based on a series of associations: ‘Dans la même salle [...] Non loin du tableau [...] Dans la même gamme de couleur [...] Notre course nous amène [...]’. [In the same room [...] Not far from the paintings [...] In the same shade [...] Our path leads us [...]].⁴⁵ More significantly, however, it is used to highlight, metaphorically, the independence and disinterest of the critic’s judgement. Uninfluenced and unrestricted by any aesthetic or political allegiance, it is the organic movement of the ‘course’ and his or her own momentum which guides the critic, not any preconceived preferences, ideological or educational

imperatives, or dictated itinerary and constructed narrative of the Salon committee. Art critic Proth writes of his survey that ‘voyage est l’expression juste. Je n’ai ni le désir, ni le droit d’entamer un cours d’esthétique [...] Ce sera un voyage d’impressions, aussi naïves que possible’ [Journey is the right expression. I have neither the desire nor the right to give a class of aesthetics [...]] This will be a journey of impressions, as naïve as possible].⁴⁶ While the naivety alluded to here may well be *faux* [false], this phrase is indicative of the multiple, and competing connotations which were becoming attached to the ‘voyage’ at this time: it could allude to a brief, conventional, and uninspired transition from A to B or, with certain qualifications, a deliberately unsystematic and unpremeditated, idiosyncratic flow of impressions and associations. The value of the critical ‘impression’ can, moreover, be seen to relate to the rise of Impressionism and its aesthetic valorisation of the visual ‘impression’, tied to the new sensory and cognitive experiences offered by modernity.⁴⁷

Conclusion

Through a range of examples, I have shown how Salon criticism and its consumption became linked to movement and travel in the mid to late nineteenth century. Modern means of transport and modes of travel were evoked increasingly regularly as metaphors for the experience of visiting the exhibition. The range of public opinion associated with these means of transport can be seen to implicate the Salon, its visitors, and critics in these same debates. Although the travel vocabulary is not always explicitly extended or glossed by the critic, this linguistic and cultural trend is telling as it belies significant shifts in the content of work exhibited in Paris in the nineteenth century, in travel practices, and in viewing practices. Often, I suggest, travel imagery worked to highlight and critique the scale and quality of the Salon, and the speed this demanded of the viewer; it could also be used to mock or satirise those vicarious voyagers attending it, or, even worse, those simply reading about it. Yet, the variety of travel practices in the century meant that the figure also provided critics with a new way to conceptualise alternative approaches to the Salon, approaches which eschewed its organising principles and cultural narratives and sought originality and novelty even where it was increasingly hard to find. Travel could result in constricting clichés and commonplace views, yet it still retained the potential to challenge. It is this versatility which explains the hold the *voyage* continued to exert on the French imagination at this time, and its pertinence and popularity as a critical trope.

Notes

¹Walter J. Slatoff, ‘Against Detachment’ in *College English*, Vol. 32: 3 (National Council of Teachers of English, 1970), p. 256.

²Literature and visual art share many common themes in this period, one of which is travel; Eugène Fromentin, for example, produced both paintings and novels inspired by his travels in Algeria. While this article is interested in the combined effects of literary and visual travel culture, which inevitably come together in art criticism, it should be remembered that writing or reading about travel is ultimately a different experience from producing and consuming visual representations of it, and any analogies made between the two should be understood with this in mind.

³1,619 reviews were published under the Second Empire. Additional reviews may have been written in the eighteenth century but not preserved. See *A Bibliography of Salon Criticism in Second Empire Paris*, ed. by Christopher Parsons and Martha Ward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), and *A Bibliography of Salon Criticism in Paris from the Ancien Régime to the Restoration, 1699-1827*, ed. by Neil McWilliam, Vera Schuster, and Richard Wrigley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁴Neil McWilliam, *A Bibliography of Salon Criticism in Paris from the July Monarchy to the Second Republic, 1831-1851* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. X.

⁵Mario Proth, *Voyage au pays des peintres: Salon de 1875* (Paris: H. Vaton, 1875), p.7.

⁶Emile Cantrel, 'Salon de 1859. Voyage en zigzag à travers l'exposition' in *L'Artiste*, 19 June 1859 (Paris), p.113. Accessed online: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k220838d/f121.image.r=L%27Artiste%20Paris.langEN> [24 August 2013].

⁷Olivier Lavoisy, 'Salon de 1859. Coup d'œil en train express' in *La Gazette rose*, 1 May 1859 (Paris), p. 143. The male name Olivier Lavoisy is widely considered to be a pseudonym for female writer Juliette Cuvillier-Fleury.

⁸Anne Leonard, 'Varieties of Attention: A (Mostly) Nineteenth-Century View' in *Looking and Listening in Nineteenth-Century France*, ed. by Anne Leonard and Martha Ward (Chicago, Smart Museum of Art: 2007), p.3.

⁹Théophile Gautier, *Abécédaire du Salon de 1861* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1861), p.15.

¹⁰For more on the physiology see e.g. Valérie Stiénon, *La Littérature des physiologies* (Paris: Garnier Classiques, 2012).

¹¹Miranda Gill, *Eccentricity and the Cultural Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 73.

¹²On travel and Romanticism see e.g. Simone Vierre, 'Le Voyage initiatique' in *Romantisme* No.4 (Paris: Armand Colin, 1972), pp. 37-44 or more recently Carl Thompson, *The Suffering Traveller and the Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007). The ideal Romantic journey was one in which physical and mental challenges resulted in increased self-knowledge and spiritual growth. This moral economy is satirised in Baudelaire's prose poem 'La Gateau'. See also James Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to Culture, 1800-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

¹³Gautier, *Exposition de 1859*, ed. by Wolfgang Drost and Ulrike Hennings (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1992), p. 38.

¹⁴See e.g. John Zarobell, *Empire of Landscape: Space and Ideology in French Colonial Algeria* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 2010).

¹⁵Gautier, *Exposition de 1859*, p.38.

¹⁶Roger Benjamin, *Orientalist Aesthetics. Art Colonialism and North Africa, 1880-1930* (Berkley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), p. 25.

¹⁷Proth, *Voyage au pays des peintres*, p. 25.

¹⁸A.J.D, 'Beaux-Arts – Salon de 1847' in *L'Illustration*, May 8 1847 (Paris), p.155.

¹⁹See e.g. Natalia Majluf, 'Ce n'est pas le Pérou', or, the Failure of Authenticity: Marginal Cosmopolitans at the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1855' in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 32: 4 (The University of Chicago Press, 1997).

²⁰Gautier, 'L'Art Chinois' in *L'Artiste*, Oct 7 1855 (Paris), p.74. Accessed online: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k2208282/f92.image.r=L%27Artiste%20Paris.langEN> [24 August 2013].

²¹Gautier, 'L'Art Chinois', p. 71. Accessed online: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k2208282/f89.image.r=L%27Artiste%20Paris.langEN> [24 August 2013].

²²Gautier, *Abécédaire du Salon*, p.50.

²³See Christopher Pinney, 'Future Travel: Anthropology and Cultural Distance in an Age of Virtual Reality; or a Past Seen from a Possible Future' in *Visual Anthropology Review*, Vol. 8: 1 (Society for Visual Anthropology, 1992), pp. 38-55; Paul Virilio, *Polar Intertia* (London: Sage Publications, 2000).

²⁴On 'virtual travel' in nineteenth-century Britain, and its relationship to literary culture, see Alison Byerly, *Are We There Yet? Virtual Travel and Victorian Realism* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2012).

²⁵F. Chatelain, 'Diorama. Vue pittoresque de la Forêt noire' in *Le Messenger des dames*, 25 April 1833 (Paris), p.76. Accessed online: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5446417k/f4.image.r=messenger%20des%20dames.langEN> [24 August 2013].

²⁶'Diorama' in *L'Artiste*, Series 3, Vol. 4 (Paris, 1843), p. 230, cited in Bernard Comment, *The Panorama* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), p.131.

²⁷Anne-Gaëlle Weber, 'Le Genre romanesque du récit du voyage scientifique au XIX siècle' in *Sociétés et représentations*, No. 21 (Publications de la Sorbonne, 2006), p.61, n. 2.

²⁸Gustave Flaubert, *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1997), p.126.

²⁹See Buzard, *The Beaten Track* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

³⁰Baudelaire, 'Le Voyage' in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, ed. by Jacques Dupont (Paris: Flammarion, 1991), p. 185.

³¹Proth, *Voyage au pays des peintres*, p.7; Gautier, *Abécédaire du Salon*, p.14.

³²Etienne du Rouvray, 'Voyages et croquis autour du Salon de 1845' in *Gazette de la jeunesse*, Series 4, No. 14 (Paris, 1845), p. 108. Accessed online:

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k890795z/f4.image.r=Gazette%20de%20la%20jeunesse.langEN> [24 August 2013].

³³ On Classicism and Romanticism in post-Revolutionary France, see e.g. Norman Bryson, *Tradition and Desire: From David to Delacroix* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984)

³⁴ Charles Baudelaire, 'Salon de 1859' in *Œuvres Complètes II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 610.

³⁵ Olivier Lavoisy, 'Salon de 1859. Coup d'œil en train express' in *La Gazette rose*, 1 June 1859 (Paris), p. 172.

³⁶ The Salon and its flaws become a subject for literature later in the century; see e.g. Zola's *L'Œuvre* of 1885.

³⁷ See Anne Leonard, 'Varieties of Attention', 2007.

³⁸ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), p.20.

³⁹ Gautier, *Abécédaire du Salon*, p. 13.

⁴⁰ Etienne du Rouvray, 'Voyages et croquis autour du Salon de 1845' in *Gazette de la jeunesse*, Series 4, No. 12 (Paris, 1845), p. 89. Accessed online:

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k8907936.image.langEN.r=Gazette%20de%20la%20jeunesse> [24 August 2013].

⁴¹ Gautier, *Abécédaire du Salon*, p. 14.

⁴² Gérard Nerval, *Voyage en Orient* (Paris: Bossard, 1927), p.17.

⁴³ Emile Cantrel, 'Salon de 1859. Voyage en zigzag à travers l'exposition' in *L'Artiste*, 26 June 1859 (Paris), p. 129. Accessed online:

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k220838d/f137.image.r=L%27Artiste%20:%20journal%20de%20la%20litt%C3%A9rature%20et%20des%20beaux-arts.langEN> [24 August 2013].

⁴⁴ E. Bonnet, 'Exposition de 1859. Promenade en zigzag à travers le Salon' in *La Causerie*, 24 April 1859 (Paris) p. 3.

⁴⁵ E. Bonnet, 'Exposition de 1859' in *La Causerie*, 1 May 1859 (Paris), p. 4.

⁴⁶ Proth, *Voyage au pays des peintres*, p.6.

⁴⁷ Jules Castagnary first discusses the technique of the 'impression' in his review of the 1874 Impressionist exhibition, "Exposition du Boulevard des Capucines: Les Impressionnistes," *Le Siècle* (29 April 1874), 3. For a study of the 'impressionistic' technique in the visual arts see e.g. Richard Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism: A Study of the Theory, Technique and Critical Evaluation of Modern Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

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