



“Inevitable Grottoes”: Modern Paintings and Wasted Space

Maura Coughlin

In the visual culture of late nineteenth-century Europe, a rare form of landscape representation depicts the awkward voids and wastelands of stone quarries. Although images of actively worked quarries are common in French, Dutch and British art from the seventeenth century onward, a depleted quarry, once abandoned, was rarely a painter’s subject. Like a mineshaft, a quarry is a potentially troublesome hole: it can collapse or fill up with debris and run-off water; it can breed noxious vapors, disease-bearing insects, or the eighteenth-century variant, miasma (Corbin 23). A disused quarry is a ruinous space that sits in an uncomfortable relationship with modern consumption as a reminder of its cost. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, land artist Robert Smithson was drawn to working with similarly problematic sites (neither pristine and rural nor encultured urban spaces): “infernal regions—slag heaps, strip mines, and polluted rivers.” He explains that there are no pre-existing aesthetic categories for this sort of landscape “because of the great tendency toward idealism, both pure and abstract, society is confused as to what to do with such places. Nobody wants to go on vacation to a garbage dump” (155).

A former wasteland on the outskirts of Paris that was transformed into the Buttes Chaumont Park, and a handful of late nineteenth-century paintings of quarries in rural Provence by Vincent Van Gogh and Paul Cézanne are just these sorts of “infernal regions.” The land of Buttes Chaumont had been a series of

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26 IJCS

carved out quarries, an execution ground, and a garbage dump: a death-soaked, abject wasteland that was reconfigured as a monument of modern bourgeois Paris, completed for the International Exposition of 1867: a spectacle of engineered nature ripe for consumption. Cézanne's and Van Gogh's Post-Impressionist quarry paintings both trade on exhausted natural resources located on the nation's provincial margins. Both park and paintings weave together complex relationships of nature and modernity, consumption and waste.

In his infamous mock-travelogue describing the industrial wasteland of Northern New Jersey in "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic" Smithson asks, "Has Passaic replaced Rome as The Eternal City?" (74). As he seemingly free-associates all that crosses his path during one day of anti-picturesque tourism, details of his account underscore this as a parodic Grand Tour. A clipping from a copy of the *New York Times* carried with him on the bus that day reads "Art Themes and the Usual Variations." This headline is above the image of an *Allegorical Landscape* (then on view at an art dealer). This ideal landscape by failed nineteenth-century American painter turned inventor Samuel F.B. Morse is a strategic foil for Passaic's entropic ruins. Smithson interprets the industrial wasteland outside of Manhattan as containing "*ruins in reverse*, that is—all the new construction that would eventually be built. This is the opposite of the 'romantic ruin' because the buildings don't *fall* into ruin *after* they are built but rather *rise* into ruin before they are built" (72).

Critic Lawrence Alloway sums up Smithson's New Jersey as "one of the places where the geological network of faults and the human network of waste penetrate each other to form a solitary landscape" (128). Smithson's "mesh of collapsing systems" (Alloway 128) breaks down a dual way of thinking (the world out there vs. the world of the art object) into a reconceived experience of a place and its layers of accumulated history. These ideas informed his "site selection studies" that he termed *Nonsites*: they include earth rock and sand samples from quarries, mines and gravel pits; the entropic mess that is the desolate byproduct of modern consumption and construction (Reynolds 100). Smithson presented his *Nonsites*, or indoor earthworks in bins and other structures, and accompanied the material with maps and charts, linking together indexical material samples, his selected outdoor sites, and many modes of representation. In the *Nonsites*, Smithson developed dialectical relationships between the space of the gallery and places out in the world. Importantly, he did not attribute greater relevance, authenticity, or indexical truth to either place. The nonsite was not the postmodern "nonspace" of globalized sameness and disorienting ubiquity; it was rather a radical reconception of artistic centers and peripheries in which the space of the gallery was put into critical dialogue with the external world.¹

Historian of landscape architecture, Elizabeth Meyer, writes on the limitations of the binary mode of thought endemic to discussions of landscape such as nature/ culture, female /male, figure / ground, suggesting that, like Smithson, we ought to think in engaged and compound terms such as "figured ground," "articulated space," and so on ("Expanded Field" 52). "It is the back and forth



thing” (178) was the succinct way that Smithson put it. In the next part of this essay, I argue that his model provides a lens through which we can read later nineteenth-century visual representations of wasteland without resorting to simple oppositions of centralized urban modernity and nostalgic rural stasis.

In the immediate aftermath of 1848, at a time when paintings of peasant labor were commonly taken to be radical references to the newly enfranchised vote, backbreaking labor in the stone quarries that ringed the city of Paris was artistic



Fig. 1. Jean-Francois Millet. *The Quarriers*. 1846-47. Oil on canvas. Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio. Gift of Arthur J. Secor, 1922.45. Image Credit: Toledo Museum of Art.

fodder for mid-nineteenth-century realism (Nochlin, *Realism and Tradition* 50-1; Clark, *Absolute Bourgeois* 78). *The Quarriers* by Jean-François Millet (1847, Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio) depicts recent peasant immigrants at work on the city’s outskirts, their bodies pitted against the resistance of stone (fig. 1). In a similar vein, Gustave Courbet paints rural *Stonebreakers* (1849, formerly Dresden, destroyed 1945) reduced to the mechanical process of crushing rocks for modern roads (fig. 2). This peasant labor is not rural; it is not timeless; it is not explained away by the fatalistic rhythms of the seasons or the demands of the earth. Breaking rocks for roads is a modern cliché of grinding toil, of the chain gang, of waged slavery. In modern France, the bodies of rural immigrants were worked and worn out like beasts of burden to build Paris. Fourierist poet and folklorist Max Buchon characterized the two quarriers in Courbet’s *The Stonebreakers* as “the alpha and omega, the sunrise and sunset of that life of drudgery.”² In 1851, radical Republican author Auguste Luchet makes an explicit link between urban modernity and the quarriers’ exploitation in an article dramatically titled “Those who die that we may live: the Quarriers of the Fontainebleau Forest” (n.p.). Because newly paved urban roads are relatively easy to clean, Luchet explains, the urban improvements of the past several years have kept the city free of infection. Yet this benefit has come at a high cost to the



Fig. 2. Gustave Courbet. *Stonebreakers*. 1849. Formerly Dresden, Germany, destroyed 1945.

unseen quarry workers on the city's outskirts who live savage, impoverished, and brief existences (in the same rural setting, he caustically adds, that delights Parisian painters). As Alain Corbin tells us, stoneworkers who brought health to the city's streets were thought to be at great risk from the unhealthy vapors they encountered in stone quarries; many took precautionary measures such as the wearing of prophylactic sachets of camphor and garlic to protect against subterranean fumes (64).

Although the demands of urban construction in Paris voraciously consumed outlying raw materials such as stone, sand, and clay dug from the ground, the city's growth depended equally on the integration of various forms of waste. Landscapes were moved, removed, mined, and filled; wastelands were created, capped, ignored, and sometimes represented in the process. Under Napoleon III's right-hand man, Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann, prefect of the Seine, Second Empire Paris came into being as a modern feat of consumption, using up newly quarried materials on its outskirts and then reclaiming and incorporating formerly wasted space. Thus as the city rose rebuilt from its demolished medieval neighborhoods, it also assimilated the *terrain vague* of its edges. In north-east Paris, the denuded hills of Belleville, known as *Les Monts Chauves*, had served for many centuries as a repository for some of the most abject urban substances. From the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries, this was the site of the notorious gibbet of Montfaucon. One could ordinarily find there up to sixty corpses swinging in the wind. The scraped and scarred land was pocked with exhausted gypsum and lime quarries that served as hideouts for French Foreign Legion defectors and for gypsies. From 1781 onward it served as the city's only dump, which received hundreds of square meters of human waste daily along with thousands of animal corpses from the *abattoirs* of La Villette. Commenting



on the mingled associations of “filth and crime” at Montfaucon (Pike 236), Haussmann’s landscape designer dubbed the residents of this place “the worst bohemians of Paris” (Ernouf and Alphand 314-15) effectively excluding and compressing culturally fringe lifestyles into marginalized and wasted space.

Long after the resources of the hills had been spent, generations of Paris’s trash and sanitary sewage were dumped in the remaining pits (Pike 236; Pinkney 101). Other holes served as mass graves for those executed at the gallows and for agitators killed during times of civil unrest (Meyer, “Park” 19). Characterized as the “epicenter of stench in Paris” in sociologist Alain Corbin’s magisterial social history of smell, *The Foul and the Fragrant* (31), Montfaucon’s amalgamated waste led to an extreme fear of the soil for many of the city’s inhabitants. In the words of literary critic Anne McClintock, abjection has this ability to dissolve boundaries formerly assumed secure, “inhabiting the cusp of domesticity and market, industry and empire, the abject returns to haunt modernity as its constitutive, inner repudiation: the rejected from which one does not part” (72).

Centuries of accumulated death and decay on this dump and potter’s field were efficiently and imaginatively repressed in time for the Paris Exposition of 1867: the event that Walter Benjamin dubbed the most “radiant unfolding” of “the phantasmagoria of capitalist culture” (8). The brand new twenty-three hectare park of Buttes Chaumont, the jewel in the crown of Haussmann’s plans for the restructuring of Paris, completely transformed the wasteland to an urban pleasure spot. For many historians of landscape design, this is the “most dramatic early example of the art of landscape to re-create shape and form from apparent waste” (Jellicoe and Jellicoe 257). Displacing land on a grand scale, modern landscaping denied the accretion of corpses, sewage, and miscellaneous trash at its core and went hand in hand with Haussmann’s displacement of 350,000 lower class Parisians to the city’s margins. Capping a wasted landscape, saturated with filth and decay, with carted-in topsoil and a romantic fantasy of the picturesque was thoroughly in line with the Baron’s symbolic reordering of Paris (Clark, *Painting of Modern Life* 50).

Although half the size, the Buttes Chaumont park cost twice that of the Bois de Boulogne and took three years to build; all stops were pulled out in the inclusion of a lake, a waterfall within a grotto (clad with false stalactites), winding woodland paths, a pseudo-Grecian temple, and a suspension bridge from which many suicides have been launched (Pike 241; Pinkney 101). (It is no wonder that this simulacrum of nature was later a Surrealist haunt). The invention of the Buttes Chaumont park is read by art historian Nicholas Green as an “official legitimization of the wholesale *re invention* of nature which had been distinctively articulated in and around the Paris of the 1830s and 1840s” (69). Conversely, Meyer persuasively argues that this park was a showcase of modern technological ingenuity rather than a nostalgic replica of nature (“Park” 20). Using modern steel-reinforced, cast concrete to refer to classical gardens of the past, engineer and landscape designer Adolphe Alphand wed an urban architecture of present and past. Like François Mitterand’s grand projects of the 1980s, the

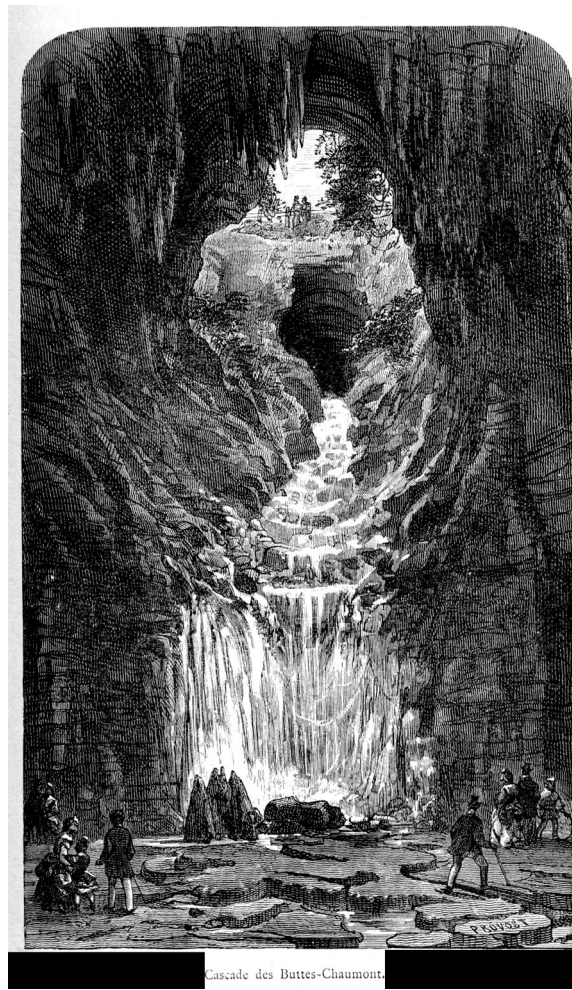


Fig. 3. Adolphe Alphand. Illustration from *L'art des Jardins, Parcs, Promenades*. Paris: J. Rothschild, 1886: 173.

icient sewers occasionally failed, such as the one known as the “Stink Hole” whose rupture in 1802 flooded the streets of downtown Paris (Rice 158-59). An eighteenth-century report warned of a similar problem in the neighborhood of the future park, that “near the refuse dumps of Montfaucon there was already a danger of ‘streams forming under the earth that were large enough and continuous enough to infect the wells in the neighborhood and suburbs, and to damage the strata of the earth or the foundation of dwellings’ [and] [...] great risk that ‘fetid material from the sluices’ would penetrate the soil and infect the sites of future buildings” (Corbin 24).

Within Buttes Chaumont is one (repressed) reference to its mingled undercurrents: this is a limestone cavern or grotto that connects the present fantasy to the

Second Empire’s spectacular conversion of waste to pleasurable landscape was a monument to the modern industry and artistry of the French (Meyer “Park”; Komara).

As were the Hills of Belleville, so too was the substructure of central Paris extensively quarried (leaving behind the catacombs as future receptacles of bodily remains). Because this practice caused the ground above to occasionally collapse, it was halted in the late eighteenth century.³ Further anxiety about the unruly underground was brought on by failures of the city’s very fabric to absorb refuse: to cite a few horrors, the overcrowded mass grave of the Cemetery of the Innocents in central Paris burst its walls in 1780 (into the cellar of a nearby home) and the pre-Haussmann inefficient sewers occasionally failed, such as the one known as the “Stink Hole” whose rupture in 1802 flooded the streets of downtown Paris (Rice 158-59). An eighteenth-century report warned of a similar problem in the neighborhood of the future park, that “near the refuse dumps of Montfaucon there was already a danger of ‘streams forming under the earth that were large enough and continuous enough to infect the wells in the neighborhood and suburbs, and to damage the strata of the earth or the foundation of dwellings’ [and] [...] great risk that ‘fetid material from the sluices’ would penetrate the soil and infect the sites of future buildings” (Corbin 24).

Within Buttes Chaumont is one (repressed) reference to its mingled undercurrents: this is a limestone cavern or grotto that connects the present fantasy to the



land's geologic and cultural history (Meyer, "Park") (fig. 3). Whereas abandoned urban quarries were eyesores, the romantic form of the natural or artificial grotto was said to have a universal appeal to picturesque taste. In his memoir, Haussmann explains that because the public demands an "inevitable grotto" in each major park of Paris, he had Alphand build them in the Bois de Vincennes and the Parc Monceau, with the most imposing in Buttes Chaumont (Pinkney 97). The logic of the Buttes Chaumont, according to Meyer, is not wed to the ordering, regularization, and geometry of Haussmann's plan for Paris; it rather follows from a process of sedimentation in which urban space was recycled, civilized, and then re-imposed upon the existing structure of the city ("Park" 21). The case of the grotto is exemplary for it simultaneously reuses the void of the quarry hole and denies its former function as a receptacle of waste.

Because the groundwater was corrupted, the new artificial lake was lined with concrete to block the upward seepage of unthinkably putrescent fluids and a canal was diverted to feed its waterfall. The grotto (fig. 3) as depicted in Alphand's 1885 study of parks (173) artificially evokes the majesty of a pure natural spring. The illustration resembles Gustave Courbet's *Source of the Loue* series (1864) that locates a pure and natural water source powerfully emerging from stony land: the artist's own place of origin and wellspring of his "authentic" peasant genius. Courbet's *Source* paintings are often discussed as overtly vaginal, a point made unmistakable in dialogue with contemporary artist Kiki Smith's print *Fountainhead* (1991, Museum of Modern Art, New York) that depicts menstrual flow on a monumental scale. This blunt analogy may well serve to inform the cleaned-up abjection of Buttes Chaumont's grotto that inadvertently recalls the bodily waste deposited in its former quarry pits.

But for all its spectacular modernity, Buttes Chaumont was never a favorite subject for Second Empire or Third Republic artists, who generally shunned Haussmann's new green spaces (Gache-Patin 110). Clare A.P. Willsdon persuasively argues that in their images of the old gardens of the city, Impressionist painters place an "emphasis on 'Baudelairean' values, in which nostalgia for what has been lost, rather than unquestioning espousal of the 'modern', or of 'renewal', are at stake" (110). Unlike the beloved and threatened older parks such as the Luxembourg Gardens (which were not entirely spared the path of the boulevards), Haussmann's new parks were resoundingly criticized for their complicity in transforming Paris into a glittering city of shopping, cafés, artifice, commercial newness and regularity by Emile Zola, Victor Fournel, and other prominent journalists (Willsdon 113; Locke 76; Benjamin 146). Fournel in 1868 decried Haussmann's engineered destruction of old streets, courtyards and gardens (qtd. in Benjamin 146); journalist Louis Veuillot similarly lamented that in Paris "the quarry-stone has killed the garden" (1866, qtd. in Willsdon 113).

For Edouard Manet, Berthe Morisot, Camille Pissarro, and later the Neo-Impressionists Georges Seurat and Paul Signac, a landscape of modern life was found on the edges of Paris—in the *banlieue*—a hybrid and mongrel place whose nature was in the process of ambiguously shifting from rural outskirts to either suburban periphery or industrial fringe (Clark, *Painting of Modern Life* 147-



Fig. 4. Vincent Van Gogh. *The Hill of Montmartre with Quarry*. 1886. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

204; Rubin 149-161). While living in Paris in 1886, Van Gogh preferred the *banlieue* to the Haussmannized pleasures of the city center. He painted desolate works there like *The Hill of Montmartre with Stone Quarry* (Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam) (fig. 4): an image of urban expansion in which stone blocks lie as yet unused in the uneven foreground as the city consumes its landscape. Cézanne lived in Paris on and off for many decades; he too had little interest in celebrating either its pleasurable modernity or old-world charm. On the rare occasion that he worked from the city around him, he chose sites that were industrial, awkward, and brutal, such as the back view of *Paris: Quai de Bercy* (1872, Portland Museum of Art) (fig. 5). Yet Cézanne's rural landscapes from this period are no more idealized, as seen in the oddly scarred landscape of *The Railway Cutting* (1870, Neue Pinakothek, Munich) (fig. 6). Like Van Gogh's Paris quarries, the association is clear: just as stone builds the city, cut earth hastens the train. Later in their careers, when both paint disused quarries in Provence, when they find and frame them as landscape motifs, their practices invert or quite literally "trash" many long-held academic principles regarding the making of an ideal landscape, the parameters of which I briefly outline below.

In early nineteenth-century French painting, artists who subscribed to the academic hierarchy of genres sought to elevate landscape above the mere imitation of nature by the inclusion of small-scale mythological narratives and the quotation of classical architectural forms. French Academician Pierre-Henri de

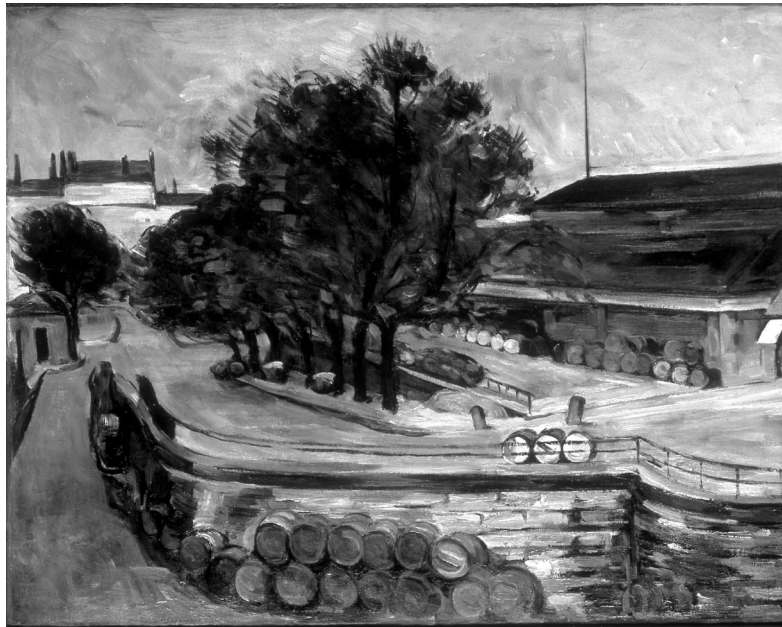


Fig. 5. Paul Cézanne. *Paris: Quai de Bercy*. 1872. Portland Art Museum, Oregon. Museum Purchase: Private Donors' Fund.

Valenciennes advocated that aspiring painters make open-air sketches of the Italian countryside near Rome to serve as the ideal backdrop for classical narratives. Picturesque travel was thus at the heart of the classical painter's education: many generations of Northern European artists traveled to the Mediterranean to make contact with the landscape and architectural ruins of the ancient world (Watson). The resulting historical landscapes (churned out for many years following Grand Tours) were fantasy pastiches of mismatched, anachronistic parts, rather like the sculpted land of Buttes Chaumont or the reproduction of the *Allegorical Landscape* by Morse that Smithson carries with him to Passaic.

In the 1830s in France, a few artists rejected this practice of making idealized constructions, and instead sought out French architectural and topographic landmarks (Thomas). Little is known about Georges Michel and Paul Huet who painted on the grimy outskirts of French cities, but legend has it they sometimes set their easels on rubbish dumps like those of Les Monts Chauves (the trash never makes it into the picture) (Adams 45-48). Realist landscapes by Courbet from the 1850s and '60s, titled with provincial sites (previously unheard of in urban art centers) had troweled-on paint that evoked the visceral materiality of stone, moss, water, and foliage. Their materiality speaks of the physical character of his native region—the Franche-Comté. Courbet made this crudity his signature declaration of an artistic practice rooted in provincial place.

As art historian Linda Nochlin notes, "At the root of realism is this innate 'materialism' of the man of the country, who is at home with mud and manual



Fig. 6. Paul Cézanne. *The Railway Cutting*. 1870. Oil on canvas. Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Neue Pinakothek, Munich, Germany. Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

labor, and is aware, from his earliest days, of the physical contact of man and the material world” (Nochlin, “Courbet” 37-38). Peasant labor as pictorial subject and as a metaphor of artistic practice had forged the public personas of Millet and Courbet who had been alternately mocked or celebrated as provincial peasants, worker-painters, or crude, smearing stonemasons. Both Van Gogh and Cézanne had forged their own identities in emulation of these realist “peasant painters.” In Provence, neither Van Gogh nor Cézanne bothered much with ancient or medieval ruins or other picturesque ways to deal with place, even when surrounded by ruins of the classical and medieval past (Jirat-Wasiutynski, “Antimodernism” 182). Instead, they both turned to their own “inevitable grottoes” in Provence: these were its ubiquitous quarries, some of which were first worked in Roman times. The theme of the quarry provided a particularly unsentimental way to deal with a rural, worked landscape. For both artists, this was an apt response to realist landscapes of mid-century.

Whereas abandoned urban quarries were eyesores in need of urban planning and “greening,” similar rural sites were easily forgotten or overlooked. The quarries chosen by Van Gogh and Cézanne are unremarkable places about 75 kilometers apart: prosaic and forlorn absences in the arid landscape that served to build nearby towns (Athanasoglou-Kallmyer 170). They are depicted neither as refuse dumps nor industrial zones: these desolate, ruined landscapes have been left to natural processes of entropy. Trees grow improbably from rock; in time, their roots will crack through and further reclaim the land. Unlike Millet’s *Quarriers* or Courbet’s *Stonebreakers* that immediately provoke dialectical relationships of city and country, of labor and consumption, the later quarry landscapes are not spectacles of human exploitation or laments for lives gone to waste.



Fig. 7. Van Gogh. *Entrance to a Quarry*. 1889. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Less obviously the result of modern intervention than Cézanne's *Railway Cutting* or Van Gogh's Montmartre quarries, these later images may be read as dialogical meditations on worked earth that re-imagine their sites of cultural intervention. Thinking again of Smithson's critical dialogue of sites and nonsites, these are rural spaces that obliquely reference the forms, or senses of place, that their removed matter has given rise to elsewhere.

After having represented the "coexistence of tradition and modernity" in several works in Arles in 1888, in which "industry and railyards [are] [...] a prominent backdrop to manual labor" (Jirat-Wasiutynski, "Antimodernism" 183), Van Gogh paints two versions of an *Entrance to a Quarry near Saint-Rémy* (fig. 7) in Provence in the summer and fall of 1889 that continue this dialogue of city and country. His letters from this period declare an alliance of both his saturated color and the textures of his paint to the making of "counter-images to the drained, over-refined modern life of Paris" (Jirat-Wasiutynski, "Antimodernism" 178). Unlike the drab skies of his Montmartre stone quarries on the urban fringe, here his animated paint surfaces describe phenomenological qualities of rock hit by scorching sun, pools of shadow in overhangs, and scrubby swirling underbrush. One summer previous, Van Gogh articulates this rough provincial aesthetic as an intervention in urban taste, writing, "What a mistake that Parisians have not



36 IJCS

acquired a palate for crude things, for Monticellis, for earthenware. But there, one must not lose heart because Utopia is not coming true” (277).

Writing on the first version of *Entrance to a Quarry* (1889, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam) Van Gogh notes the emotional effects of its color: “to my mind the somber greens go well with the other tones; there is something sad in it which is healthy, and that is why it does not bore me” (qtd. in Pickvance 119). The notion of a “healthy” crudity had informed his early and strange painting *The Potato Eaters* (1885, Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum) of which he writes:

It would be wrong... to give a peasant picture conventional smoothness. If a peasant picture smells of bacon, smoke, potato steam—all right, that’s not unhealthy... If the field has an odor of ripe corn or potatoes or guano or manure—that’s healthy, especially for city people... To be perfumed is not what a peasant picture needs. (qtd. in Sund 95).

Just like the dirt or smells of the *Potato Eaters*, the abject sadness of a worked and deserted quarry was just the thing that needed to be put under the nose of an urban viewer.

Using the quarry as a mutable, yet historical feature of the landscape was compatible with Van Gogh’s interest in representing alternative spaces of modern life. Vojtech Jirat-Wasiutynski writes on the artist’s engagement with non-metropolitan and regional centers such as Saint-Rémy and Arles, describing his interest in features of the landscape such as cypress trees and olive groves: naturally occurring ‘monuments’ that typified the cultural landscape of Provence. In Roman times, cypress trees were planted on graves as long-living obelisks. Standing Provençal olive groves had outlasted several centuries; together as natural and enduring monuments they seemed to “fuse past and present in an enduring continuum”; the artist thus “‘found’ a living continuity from classical past to contemporary present in rural Provence” (Jirat-Wasiutynski, “Olive Trees” 666). Van Gogh’s notion of the natural monument echoes in Smithson’s ironic proposition that the spectator alone determines a monument’s cultural value. Thus it is in the found monument, the “alternative modernity” (Jirat-Wasiutynski, “Antimodernism” 180) of the worked quarry landscape, rather than the “timeless” picturesque ruin, that Van Gogh also claims the Southern landscape for modern painting.

Cézanne’s subject, Bibemus quarry (fig. 8), had been named by its use as a drinking spot for hunters (Athanassoglou-Kallmyer 170). The ongoing exploitation of this quarry’s reddish-gold sandstone to build the city of Aix had inadvertently created this “monument” to male bonding outside of cultural confines. He worked at Bibemus Quarry on the outskirts of Aix-en-Provence several times from 1895-1902. Instead of observing a scar in the earth from afar, as in the awkward, early *Railway Cutting*, Cézanne’s quarry paintings in Provence take us below ground level. Down in Bibemus he reveals an intimately known Provençal landscape: a negative architectural form “found” in the chasm below ground that could easily be overlooked or passed by. Without any horizon but the pit that surrounds us, we look up the crazy surfaces of the subterranean quarry



Fig. 8. Paul Cézanne. *The Quarry at Bibemus*. 1895. Folkwang Museum, Essen, Germany. Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

wall, stepped and cantilevered by its absent stone. It is more or less parallel with the picture plane, not foreshortened or reclining before us; not quite behaving as flat land should. Instead of the idealized, rationalized historical landscape that Valenciennes prescribes, it courts associations with built structures like moats, tanks, graves, tombs, or cellar holes. The rock wall stands as evidence to past activity, an unintentional, unbuilt earthwork: the indigestible remains of devoured land. The most intriguing of the series, *Bibemus Quarry* (1895; Museum Folkwang, Essen), was painted in a style that has been credited as the origin of cubism; it was bought by a German art collector who had visited Cézanne at his home in Aix-en-Provence.⁴

Because Cézanne painted there, Bibemus quarry and its unintentionally sculpted rock forms were located and documented. On an indexical treasure hunt in the early twentieth century, art historian John Rewald sought out many of Cézanne's motifs, photographing the quarry just before it was reworked (501). For the large centennial of Cézanne's death in 2006, staged viewing platforms were installed in Bibemus quarry in an effort to develop tourism to his actual landscapes (Storemyr). Van Gogh's remnants of rock have also been found and cataloged (Pickvance 150). But these traces tell us very little.

In 2006, several paintings from Bibemus Quarry were displayed side by side at the "Cézanne in Provence" exhibition at the National Gallery, Washington. Shortly after seeing this show, by chance, I encountered an exhibi-



38 IJCS

tion of the large-scale photographs of heavily worked stone quarries by the contemporary Canadian photographer Edward Burtynsky. Burtynsky describes his subject matter as

an organic architecture created by our pursuit of raw materials. Open-pit mines, funneling down, were to me like inverted pyramids. Photographing dimensional stone quarries was a deliberate act of going out to try to find something in the world that would match the kinds of forms I held in my imagination but had never seen in real life - the idea of inverted skyscrapers (Burtynsky 9).

Like Smithson's Passaic, New Jersey, the quarry site gives imaginative rise to the monument built elsewhere whose form depends upon this void in the earth.

When I returned to Cézanne's quarries, and the Essen painting in particular (and was thinking about the imagined position of its spectator), the visceral pull of this land seemed to read as a presence, one with a phenomenological sense of a looming, engulfing void. Burtynsky's comments on his quarries both return to Smithson's notion of "ruins in reverse" and strikingly articulate the sense of unintentional architecture that I read in Cézanne's images. If, as anthropologist Mary Douglas tells us, a cultural perception of dirt is signified by matter out of place (36), can matter displaced on a scale like this signify differently? Can it create its own sense of place? The modernity of Cézanne's Essen painting is not merely a set of aesthetic implications of brushstrokes that self-consciously state their evident flatness and their disengagement from subject matter (thereby exciting would-be cubists). Rather than rejecting urban modernity as subject matter, this painting's strange engagement with the consumption of a rural landscape manages to speak to the demands of urban centers past and present and to demonstrate the sedimentation or entropy of their wasted spaces. As a critical, spatial dialogue of centers and peripheries, it synthesizes an emphatically modern style and an anti-nostalgic approach to a rural landscape.

A quarry is an unintentional monument to continual use of the landscape, a boring into the earth rather than a form rising from it. Reading these painted quarries as entropic monuments, through Smithson's dialectics of monuments and ruins, sites and nonsites, allows us to position them as encultured landscapes, at once historical and modern, metropolitan and provincial. Like the park of Buttes Chaumont that reveals modern architectural technology through its simulation of the natural, the quarry paintings of Van Gogh and Cézanne are complex "ruins in reverse": aestheticized modern monuments constructed by the painters, monuments not to past accomplishment, but to modern consumption.

Notes

This paper was first presented at the *Modernity and Waste* conference, held at the University of St Andrews, Scotland in June 2006; an earlier written version of this essay will appear in the collection of its conference papers, *The World Turned Inside Out*, edited by John F.M. Clark and John Scanlan (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, forthcoming). I am grateful to the many constructive comments I received from conference participants at St Andrews, especially Steven Connor. Translations from



the original French are my own unless otherwise noted.

¹ For the complexity of Smithson's evolving theories of site and non-site, see Reynolds 135.

² For the full text of Buchon's advertisement for Courbet's exhibition in Dijon (1850), from which this quote comes, see Clark, *Image* 162-64.

³ The photographer Gaspard-Félix Tournachon, known as 'Nadar' writes in an essay on "Le Dessus et le Dessous de Paris" that bodies exhumed from urban cemeteries were dispersed and their memories obliterated in the catacombs. Twelve workers were employed to arrange the bones into patterns that ordered the formerly abject, removing any bodily specificity. Formal tours of the catacombs began in 1874. See Rice 159-164.

⁴ *Bibemus Quarry* was in the Folkwang museum collection in Essen in the early twentieth century but was deaccessioned by the Nazis, as was all "degenerate" modernism, and later was repurchased by the museum.

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40 IJCS

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