

Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide

a journal of nineteenth-century visual culture

Robyn Roslak

Symphonic Seas, Oceans of Liberty: Paul Signac's *La Mer: Les Barques (Concarneau)*

Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide 4, no. 1 (Spring 2005)

Citation: Robyn Roslak, "Symphonic Seas, Oceans of Liberty: Paul Signac's *La Mer: Les Barques (Concarneau)*," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2005), <http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/spring05/symphonic-seas-oceans-of-liberty-paul-signacs-la-mer-les-barques-concarneau>.

Published by: [Association of Historians of Nineteenth-Century Art](#)

Notes:

This PDF is provided for reference purposes only and may not contain all the functionality or features of the original, online publication.

License:

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#) [Creative Commons License](#).

Abstract:

In 1891, Signac painted a series of five seascapes picturing boats afloat on the water off the coast of Brittany. The artist assigned each canvas an opus number and a musical title, creating a pictorial symphony in five "movements." This article explores the artistic and political significance of Signac's use of music in the construction of his seascapes.

Symphonic Seas, Oceans of Liberty: Paul Signac's *La Mer: Les Barques (Concarneau)*

by Robyn Roslak

In 1890, the art critic Félix Fénéon's biography of the neo-impressionist painter Paul Signac appeared in Paris as part of a new series on contemporary and vanguard artists and writers. [1] Most of the text was an analysis of the neo-impressionists' efforts to represent the effect of solar light upon objects using a divided, often pointillized touch and a prismatic palette harmonized around the juxtaposition of complementary colors. But in his closing paragraph Fénéon also acknowledged the inventive and abstract ends behind these "scientific" means. "A new technique," he wrote, "must correspond to a new way of seeing," [2] the result of which he described a few lines later as "authentic Reality:"

M. Paul Signac was able to create exemplary specimens of an art of great decorative development, which sacrifices anecdote to arabesque, nomenclature to synthesis, the fleeting to the permanent, and in its celebrations and its magic, confers on Nature, which at last grew weary of its precarious reality, an authentic Reality. [3]

Fénéon's poetic synopsis of neo-impressionism, quoted so often in contemporary studies that it has become nearly a cliché, was the sole critical response to the movement Signac chose to include in his belated manifesto, *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionnisme* (1899), where it appeared at the end of a chapter explaining and justifying the neo-impressionist *facture* and its decorative and evocative qualities. [4] Signac must have felt Fénéon's words legitimized the manifesto's underlying claim: that *la division*, as he called the neo-impressionist technique, made possible an art capable of transcending base materialism (Fénéon's "precarious reality") in favor of images infused with, in Signac's words, both "an overall harmony and a harmony of a moral order." [5]

Fénéon's biography singled out three of Signac's paintings as evidence for his claim that the neo-impressionists were painters of "authentic Reality." Two, *Cap Lombard, Cassis (opus 196)* (fig. 1) and *La baie de Cassis, Cap Canaille (opus 200)* (fig. 2), belong to a series of five seascapes entitled *La Mer – Cassis (Bouches-du-Rhone)*, painted in 1889 in the Mediterranean port of Cassis and exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants in 1890. The other, *Coucher de soleil, Herblay (opus 206)* (fig. 3), is one of a series of four views of the Seine and its banks entitled *Le Fleuve*, painted near the village of Herblay outside of Paris. At the Indépendants, the Cassis canvases were grouped together under the title of their series and identified individually only by their respective opus numbers, the latter of which Signac had been writing since 1887 in the lower right corner of most of his paintings in the spot usually reserved for a signature. [6] Fénéon commented in his biography on this habit of assigning numbers to paintings, implying that by avoiding conventionally descriptive titles Signac was renouncing literal content in his work. [7] Indeed, the opus numbers alone have nothing to say about the anecdotal details of the paintings to which they belong. But their reference to musical compositions suggests that Signac saw his work, in particular the river- and seascapes that dominated his output from 1888 through the early 1890s, as comparable to music, an analogy he made explicit in *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionnisme*. There, he compared the neo-impressionist painter to a composer ("the painter has played on his keyboard of colors in the same way that a composer handles the diverse instruments to

orchestrate a symphony"[8]); a single touch of color in a neo-impressionist painting to "a note in a symphony;"[9] and the experience of viewing a neo-impressionist painting to listening properly to a live musical performance ("to listen to a symphony, one doesn't situate oneself among the brass but in a place where the sounds of the diverse instruments blend in the way the composer wanted them to. After that one could enjoy dissecting the score, note by note, and in doing so study the manner of its orchestration. In the same way, in front of a divided picture, it will be advisable first to stand far enough away to perceive the impression of the whole, then stop and come closer to study the play of colored elements").[10]



Fig. 1, Paul Signac, *Cap Lombard, Cassis* (opus 196), 1889. Oil on canvas. The Hague, Gemeentemuseum
[\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 2, Paul Signac, *La baie de Cassis, Cap Canaille* (opus 200), 1889. Oil on canvas. Private collection
[\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 3, Paul Signac, *Coucher de soleil, Herblay* (opus 206), 1889. Oil on canvas. Glasgow, Art Gallery and Museum. Reproduced Courtesy of Glasgow City Council (Museums). [\[larger image\]](#)

Signac's effort to link painting and music via opus-numbered canvases lasted through 1893, but its high point came two years earlier in the summer of 1891 in a series of five seascapes he painted in Concarneau, a tiny fishing village on the southern coast of the Breton peninsula not far from Pont-Aven. Collectively titled *La Mer: Les barques (Concarneau 1891)* (hereafter called *La Mer*), the paintings are the culmination of a five-year experiment with images-in-series featuring the subject of water in the form of rivers or seas.^[11] *La Mer* is unique among them because of the musical titles Signac assigned to its individual canvases: *Scherzo* (opus 218) (fig. 4); *Larghetto* (opus 219) (fig. 5); *Allegro maestoso* (opus 220) (fig. 6); *Adagio* (opus 221) (fig. 7); and *Presto (finale)* (opus 222) (fig. 8).^[12] By identifying and arranging the images in this way, Signac was encouraging his viewers to imagine the series as a pictorial version of a symphony, which explores a melodic theme or themes variously from movement to movement in order to express contrasting emotions or ideas without sacrificing the balance and harmony of the whole. The five canvases of *La Mer* are comparable to a five-movement symphony with its characteristic pattern of alternating tempos: scherzo is fast; larghetto is slow; allegro maestoso is fast; adagio is slow; and presto is very fast. The explicitly musical titles, however, are not all that make *La Mer* more "musical" than the six series preceding it. Just as important is the formal unity of its canvases in relation to one another, the comprehensiveness of which Signac's other landscapes-in-series cannot match. The images cohere around similarly placed horizon lines which divide their surfaces into roughly equal units of sea and sky; a common color palette organized around two sets of complementaries (shades of yellow and violet, and blue and orange); and a recurring motif of fishing boats whose repetitive patterns and rhythms recall the cadence, the harmonies, and even, in their placement upon the horizontal lines of rippled water, the notation of music.^[13]



Fig. 4, Paul Signac, *Scherzo* (opus 218), 1891. Oil on canvas. Private collection [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 5, Paul Signac, *Larghetto* (opus 219), 1891. Oil on canvas. Private collection [\[larger image\]](#)

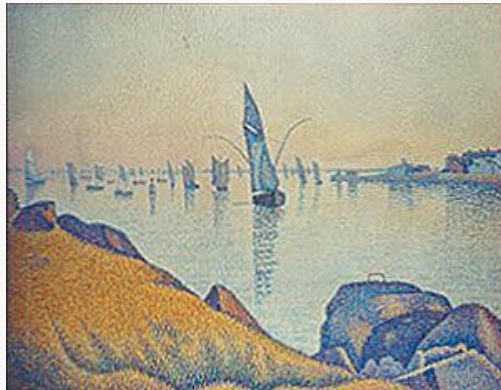


Fig. 6, Paul Signac, *Evening Calm, Concarneau, Opus 220 (Allegro maestoso) [Allegro maestoso (opus 220)]*, 1891. Oil on canvas. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.208). Photograph © 1997 The Metropolitan Museum of Art [\[larger image\]](#)

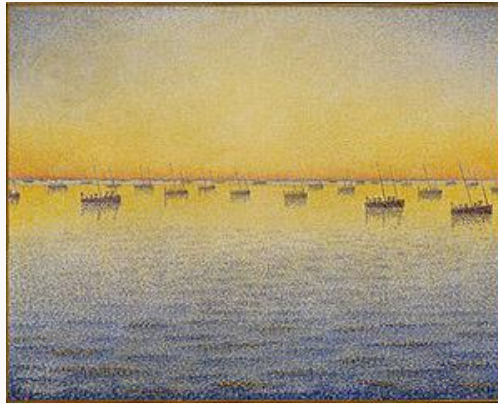


Fig. 7, Paul Signac, *Setting Sun, Sardine Fishing. Adagio. Opus 221* [*Adagio (opus 221)*], 1891. Oil on canvas. New York, The Museum of Modern Art. Digital image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, New York [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 8, Paul Signac, *Presto (finale) (opus 222)*, 1891. Oil on canvas. Private collection [\[larger image\]](#)

While creating unity among the "movements" of *La Mer* was clearly one of Signac's goals, he simultaneously highlighted their differences by depicting opposing times of day (mornings in *Scherzo and Larghetto*; evenings in *Allegro maestoso* and *Adagio*; an indeterminate time of day in *Presto [finale]*).^[14] Likewise, he arranged their boats to create a symmetrical scheme when the canvases are hung together in a row in the order of their consecutive opus numbers: *Scherzo* and *Presto (finale)*, with their boats forming a line or lines moving from background to foreground under cloudy skies, "frame" the three remaining images, in which the boats are arranged along the horizon in narrower configurations under clear skies.^[15] Thus, the series as a whole expresses "unity in variety" or "variety in unity," phrases Signac used to describe what he considered to be the chief aesthetic merits of all good art but which describe equally well the structure of symphonic music.^[16]

This essay explores the significance of Signac's use of music in the construction of his marine paintings, using *La Mer* as a case study. I begin by discussing musicality as a symbolist device for expressing and amplifying aesthetic and social ideals in literature and painting alike, paying particular attention to the ideas of Charles Baudelaire, Richard

Wagner, T odor de Wyzewa, and Charles Henry, all of whom helped shape Signac's musical idiom. Next, I discuss the paintings of *La Mer* as decorative landscapes, capable, in the minds of the symbolists and other writers familiar to Signac, of catalyzing and transforming human feeling and behavior. Following this, and building on its ideas, is an analysis of the relationship of *La Mer's* musicality, its oceanic subjects, and its emphasis on movement to Signac's well-known and openly-professed anarchist sympathies.[17] The paintings in the series intersect in particular with the geographic ideals of  lis e Reclus, an anarchist geographer whose writings Signac knew well and admired.[18] A recurrent theme in the work of Reclus and his colleagues is water, especially the sea, as a metaphor for permanent social cohesiveness and harmony, and its movement as a sign and a driver of historical progress, propelling humanity toward a future of global unity. Signac thus combined visual harmony with the ideals of musical and social harmony in *La Mer* to create a multi-faceted expression of "authentic Reality."

The Idea of Musical Art

Analogies between music and avant-garde painting were commonplace in fin-de-si cle art criticism and theory, especially among the symbolist poets and writers whose goal it was to evoke feelings and ideas indirectly through association. They and the artists they championed often turned for inspiration to the writings of Charles Baudelaire, who drew numerous parallels between sound and color. Signac, for one, developed his understanding of art and musicality in part by reading Baudelaire's *Curiosit s esth tiques and L'art romantique*, collections of essays published for the first time in 1867. He included excerpts from the 1885 editions of both in *D'Eug ne Delacroix au n o-impresionnisme*, many of which are statements proposing an analogy between color and musical patterns or arrangements (e.g. "in color one finds harmony, melody and counterpoint").[19] But *L'art romantique* also contains more nuanced references to music that do not appear in Signac's manifesto but undoubtedly were familiar to him. They pertain to Baudelaire's doctrine of correspondences, a theory of literary and artistic expression linking different modes of sensory perception.[20] The essay "Richard Wagner et Tannh user   Paris" (1861) is particularly interesting in this regard, for it suggests that the stimulation of one of the body's senses (say, the eye through color or the ear through music) can arouse an equally powerful and simultaneous response in another (thus, color can also be "heard" and music "seen"). This perceptual ability, now known as synesthesia, increases the possibility of extracting meaning from a work of art or music in those who possess it. Baudelaire also stressed that color and music, in essence rather than through objective description, could express the thoughts and feelings of an artist. "For what would be really surprising," he wrote, "would be if sound were incapable of suggesting color, colors incapable of evoking a melody, and sound and color incapable of translating ideas; for things have always expressed themselves through reciprocal analogy, since the day God decreed the world a complex and indivisible whole." [21] Thus, artists intent on producing highly effective or broadly meaningful works of art would have done well, following a Baudelairean model, to construct their works around the idea of multiple sensory stimuli.

Like Baudelaire, symbolist writers interested in highlighting the similarities between color and music linked the two in various ways and at various levels. No one, however, did so with the quite the combination of intelligibility and imagination as Louis de Lut ce, whose prose-poem "Les symphonies: Pochades impressionnistes" is close in time and spirit to Signac's *La Mer* and may well have been one of its sources of inspiration. It appeared in 1890 in *Art et critique*, a left-wing symbolist weekly that featured reviews of neo-impresionist

painting, including one written in 1890 by Signac.[22] Lutèce's "sketches," each numbered and titled with the name of a color (e.g. "I: Symphonie en bleu," "II: Symphonie en vert," etc.) are poetic descriptions of colors as they appear in the human and natural worlds. Most relevant to *La Mer* is the commentary preceding the sketches, in which Lutèce not only established analogies between color, music, and seasonal or temporal conditions, but also matched the moods evoked by nature's "colored symphonies" to specific musical tempos:

From spring to winter, from winter to spring; from dawn to dusk, from dusk to dawn; at each season of the year, at each hour of the day or night, nature never tires, striking up innumerable divine symphonies of color, now gay, now sad, now dazzling, now sober, always beautiful! Each one of these marvelous symphonies has its dominant color lavished passionately upon it and blended with love...Its favorite note, which recurs, sings, captivates, charms, is never monotone although always the same, playing either a joyous allegro, or a sacred andante, or a playful scherzo, or a sonorous finale.[23]

Lutèce extended his analogy between nature and music a few lines later in his poem by comparing particular times of day during particular seasons of the year to the tempos listed above. He equated the vivacious rhythms of a scherzo with a spring dawn, the swift brightness of an allegro with a sunny summer day, the slow pace of an andante with an autumn twilight, and the passionate strains of a finale with the bold colors of a winter sunset.[24]

When it came to discussing neo-impressionism as musical art, symbolist critics quickly realized that the divisionist technique, with its emphasis on precisely applied touches of color that remain discrete and individually vibrant even as they harmonize in the eye, lent itself easily to a comparison with the laws and formal structures of music. A case in point is Georges Vanor, who compared neo-impressionism's science, namely its basis in color theory, to the laws governing the elements of musical composition (melody, harmony, and rhythm) in his *L'art symboliste* of 1889: "[It] tends, through the observation of the reactive powers of one color on the color next to it, to compose the painting like a [musical] score of consecutive and analytical touches of tone, which they [the neo-impressionists] then orchestrate into an overall harmony." [25] Vanor's reading focuses exclusively on the similarities between artistic and musical form, bypassing altogether the issue of their ideational significance. A preference for form over content also characterizes the writings of other symbolist critics who similarly compared the physical experience of viewing a painting in the divisionist style to the perception of symphonic music. Paul Adam's analysis of neo-impressionism for *La revue rose* in 1887 is typical:

One walked up to the paintings and strove to understand the orchestration of these choruses: drops of color uniting their expressiveness for the sake of the harmony of the whole...From then on, the work would be perceived in accordance with the particular charm that belongs to listening to a symphony, where, at the same time as the combination of sounds is felt, the value of each orchestral element is experienced as a unique and vibrant force.[26]

Even Signac, who underscored the social significance of neo-impressionist painting by describing himself and his colleagues in 1891 in an essay he wrote for the anarchist

periodical *La révolte* as "pure esthetes, revolutionaries by temperament" who "give a solid blow of the pick to the old social edifice,"[27] based his comparison of neo-impressionism and music on their similar combination of rational theory and inventive practice, rather than on the ideas they expressed. The best artists, he claimed in *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionnisme*, apply color to their canvases with theoretical rigor and precision in order to achieve maximum luminosity and aesthetic harmony, an empirical working method he considered comparable to a musician's (hence his reference to Delacroix's comment that "the art of the colorist is obviously related in some respects to mathematics and music,"[28] as well as to Charles Blanc's opinion that "color, subject to fixed rules, can be taught like music").[29]

The neo-impressionist technique—unblended brushstrokes systematically applied to create harmonious wholes—is so insistent from one painting to the next that it is easy to understand why critics focused upon it and compared it solely to the formal properties of music. But Signac's interest in musicality as a model or standard for his art, especially his seascapes, was also the result of music's abstract capacity for, in Baudelaire's words, "translating ideas." Music's rational harmonies, analogous to the aesthetic harmonies of neo-impressionism, suggest rather than transmit directly their composers' ideas, much the way a translation at best approximates the form or language of the original. According to Signac, neo-impressionism's "idea" was ultimately social (as he wrote in 1902, "justice in sociology, harmony in art: the same thing"[30]), but only rarely do his paintings represent explicitly his personal convictions as an anarchist. In his essay for *La révolte*, written while he was at work on *La Mer*, he stressed that artists who wished to express themselves as revolutionaries should not, in fact, feel compelled to make overtly political works of art. "It would thus be a mistake," he declared, "committed all too often by the best-intentioned revolutionaries, like Proudhon, to make it a standard demand that works of art have a precise socialist thrust..." Instead, he believed artists should feel free to express their social consciousness indirectly, by "leav[ing] the beaten path to paint what they see, as they feel it." [31] Music and musicality allowed Signac to do exactly that, by functioning as vehicles to express the "superior, sublimated reality" that Fénéon identified in 1887 as the consummate result of neo-impressionist representation.[32]

"Superior reality" (or "authentic Reality," as Fénéon later called it) in painting has its musical parallel in the philosophy and works of the composer Richard Wagner, whose impact on late-nineteenth-century French culture, particularly the symbolist movement, was profound. Of pressing interest to the symbolist writers and artists in the orbit around Fénéon was Wagner's ideal of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art), which fused music, words, movement, and stage sets into synthetic "music-dramas" designed to stimulate as many of the senses as possible and revitalize the human spirit. The quintessential example was the composer's epic four-opera cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (The Ring of the Nibelungs) (1854-74), with its leitmotifs (recurring themes), continuous melody, and non-stop orchestration. In total it resembled a huge symphony rather than a series of traditional operas with their distinct recitatives, arias and abbreviated melodic phrases.

Among the neo-impressionists, it was Seurat and Signac who best knew and appreciated Wagner's work.[33] Signac even named two of his boats after the composer, calling the first "Manet-Zola-Wagner" and the second, one of several he owned in 1890, "La Walküre" ("The

Valkyrie," the second opera in *Der Ring*), which Fénéon mentioned in the conclusion of his biography while underscoring the importance of water and sailing to the development of Signac's painting.[34] Both artists also were familiar with the symbolist monthly *La revue wagnérienne*, founded in 1885 by the critic Téodor de Wyzewa and replete with interpretations of Wagner's work and his musical theories. Notably, Seurat and Signac each received personally from Fénéon a copy of the May 1886 issue of the review featuring Wyzewa's essay "Notes sur la peinture wagnérienne et le Salon de 1886,"[35] the gist of which anticipates Fénéon's opinions regarding "precarious" vs. "authentic" reality. It was especially significant to Wyzewa that Wagner not only understood the creative process and the perception of its results as life-giving activities, but also imagined artists purposefully creating works that would stand as alternatives to the shortcomings of the contemporary era:

Art, Wagner tells us, must create life...To see, to hear, is to create appearances within oneself, therefore to create life...And the Life which we have created—created in order to give us the joy of creating—has lost its original character. It is therefore necessary to recreate it: one must build, over and above this world of defiled, habitual appearances, the holy world of a better life: better, because we can create it intentionally, and know that we create it. This is the very task of art.[36]

A "better life" in art, Wyzewa said, necessarily had to begin with the mundane material of everyday existence (he called it "biased reality"), which the Wagnerian artist then transformed into something ideal:

But where will the artist get the elements of this superior life? He cannot take them from anywhere, if not from our inferior life, from what we call Reality...Thus is explained the necessity of Realism in art: but not a realism whose goal is only to transcribe the appearances that we believe real: [rather] an artistic reality, tearing down those false appearances of biased reality where we perceive them, and transporting them to the better reality of an unbiased life. We see around us trees, houses, men, and we suppose they are alive: but thus perceived, they are only empty shadows, covering the shifting scene of our vision: they will live only when the artist...imposes on them this superior life, recreates them for us.[37]

Wagnerian painters were those with the ability to express convincingly the "superior life" (analogous to Fénéon's "superior" or "authentic" reality) that lay beyond the unmediated world of the everyday, in paintings Wyzewa described as "emotional and musical, disregarding the objects that the colors and lines represent, taking them only as signs of emotions, blending them so that they produce in us, through their free play, a total impression comparable to that of a symphony." [38]

Wyzewa was not the only one of Signac's contemporaries who would have piqued his interest in the idea of "musical" painting as a route to envisioning or building a better life. Charles Henry, a mathematician and psycho-aesthetician with whom Signac worked closely in the late 1880s, undoubtedly played a role as well.[39] Henry not only devised a theory of linear and chromatic expression—the idea that movements upward or toward the right (whether real or represented in a work of art) as well as the colors red, orange and yellow were dynamogenous or pleasurable, while movements downward or toward the left and the

colors green, blue and violet were inhibitory or sad—but also believed that the chords of tonal music and the distinctive sounds of musical instruments were analogous to certain colors or color harmonies and, like color, could elicit feelings in a listener ranging from extreme pleasure to extreme pain.[40] He explored these ideas for the first time in 1886-1887 in three studies: "Loi d'évolution de la sensation musicale;" *La théorie de Rameau sur la musique*; and *Wronski et l'esthétique musicale*. [41] A year later he repeated their major points in a chapter on auditory sensation in *Le cercle chromatique*, a text Signac knew well. [42] While the essays and the chapter are abstruse and laden with formulae incomprehensible to anyone not thoroughly familiar with mathematical principles, one idea is easily gleaned from all of them: the elements of music, like those of visual art, exhibit contrast, rhythm and measure, and thus are not only similar to the lines and colors in an artwork but are equally evocative in terms of their dynamogenous or inhibitory qualities. [43] Moreover, Henry insisted in *Le cercle chromatique* that if artists and designers would learn to correlate their directional lines with corresponding pairs of complementary colors according to the laws of contrast, the resulting harmony would approach the elicitory richness of music. "It is plain," he wrote, "that in assigning to each direction colors separated by a variable rhythmic interval on the chromatic circle, one will obtain virtual melodies at the same time as linear rhythms, and consequently, harmonies of a thoroughly musical power." [44]

Like Signac, Henry also considered his scientific aesthetic capable not only of inducing specific emotions in a viewer or listener but also of promoting positive social change on a much larger scale, an idea he proposed for the first time in 1885 in his essay "Introduction à une esthétique scientifique:"

What science can and must do: it is to expand the agreeable in us and outside of us and from this point of view its social function is immense in these times of oppression and hollow conflict. It must spare the artist hesitations and useless attempts, by indicating the way in which he can find ever richer aesthetic elements. [45]

He addressed this subject again in an interview conducted by Jules Huret entitled "Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire," published in *L'écho de Paris* in June 1891 just as Signac was beginning to work on *La Mer*. [46] In response to Huret's opening question—"In what direction do you think the future of literature will develop?"—Henry cited the downfall of naturalism and realism and the simultaneous rise of symbolism, a movement he welcomed because of its expansive and subjective notion of aesthetic expression and communication. He told Huret:

Among the actual symbolists, several have understood, more or less vaguely, that outside of the logical boundaries of ideas there could be associative images inseparably founded on purely subjective laws. This is borne out in the fact that there can be intimate relationships between the hearing of certain sounds, the vision of certain colors, and the feeling of certain states of the soul. [47]

He went on to explain that his embrace of an art of analogy capable of stirring the emotions in specific yet also very personal ways was the result of his disillusionment with modern industrial society. The problem, he claimed, was the tendency among European nations to compete to "produce much, cheaply, and in a very short time," a material and economic goal

that demanded a single-minded and ultimately fatiguing pursuit of rational thought and behavior in order to realize.[48] As a corrective to this preoccupation with reason, Henry touted the benefits of art with symbolist tendencies. "I believe," he told Huret, "in the future of an art which would be the reverse of any ordinary logical or historical method, precisely because our intellects, exhausted by purely rational efforts, will feel the need to refresh themselves with entirely opposite states of mind." [49] His comment, which at first sounds like a rejection of scientific aesthetics, in fact signifies his embrace of the "subjective laws" of aesthetics and visual perception that artists ideally would marshal to promote in their viewers an abundance of dynamogeny, a condition he described as "continuity and unity of action" and insisted was a biological preference of the human species.[50]

Theoretically then, the more senses a work of art could dynamogenously stimulate in a viewer, listener, or reader, the more socially beneficial its role would be. "Musical" or "symphonic" painting, with its allusion to harmonious progressions of sound and its supposed power to suggest an idea(l) on multiple sensory levels without resorting to the literal or the mundane, was a promising prospect in this regard. Signac clearly understood its potential, as did many of the symbolist critics who responded to *La Mer*, including Antoine de la Rochefoucauld. In an essay on Signac published in *Le coeur* in 1893, just after he had purchased *Allegro maestoso*, he wrote: "He [Signac] knows how to extend the limits of painting and, a true hierophant, fearlessly penetrates the most ideal provinces of music. If his canvases are admirable to the eyes, their symphonies are no less charming and stirring through the miracle of luminous waves transformed into sonorous waves, complete with grandeur and majesty." [51]

Refuge and Reform: The Sea as an Ideal Landscape

La Mer recalls, in its harmonies of complementary colors, its single theme explored five ways, and the extended period of time required to experience it, a symphony with its unique but interconnected movements or a Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* with its multiple yet synthesized modes of creative expression. Contributing further to its musicality is the decorative formalism Signac employed in each of its paintings via the interplay of horizontal ripples and vertical or diagonal masts and sails; the rhythmic repetition of boats; and the plethora of simplified and flattened forms. Together, these decorative devices push *La Mer's* imagery in the direction of abstraction, a condition comparable to music's inherently non-mimetic and abstract qualities.

It is no small matter that Signac linked decorative style and music much more decisively in his landscape paintings than in his earlier opus-numbered paintings of Paris, for the symbolists believed that decorative landscapes were both unusually expressive and also capable of improving the quality of life for their modern urban viewers. Alphonse Germain explored these claims in an essay of 1891 entitled "Le paysage décoratif," which offers a definition of decorative landscape Signac would have endorsed. Germain echoed Henry's belief that an artful arrangement of lines and colors in a painting could, in and of itself and independent of what it actually described, evoke specific feelings in its viewers. He also emphasized the decorative landscape's synthetic (that is, its essential and "timeless" rather than anecdotal and naturalistic) representation of nature's varied conditions, much as we see in the canvases of *La Mer*. According to Germain:

The decorative landscape can no more represent any old jagged corner than it can an unlikely fiction, even more it is not necessary that it recall sceneography; as often as possible, it must correspond to a mood and always synthesize it—by a dominant expressiveness of *affective* lines and colorations (cheerful or melancholy, severe or smiling, according to the intended purpose of the piece)—and synthesize as well the varied effects of the seasons, the months, the times of day, the atmosphere.[52]

Germain also underscored the remedial role decorative landscapes could play in their viewers' lives, by providing them with aesthetic alternatives to the denatured landscape of the city. "Oh!" Germain wrote, "to forget the ugliness of the streets in front of the idealized, lyrical landscape that evokes the infinite! To live the illusion that is life in the illusion of an eternally gracious nature!"[53] That, surely, was an opinion Signac could not have helped but appreciate, with his move away from urban and suburban subject matter in the late 1880s toward pure landscape, and his public declaration in 1891 of the social benefits of neo-impressionism.

Just as important as Signac's triad of musicality, decorative style, and landscape in his series paintings are his subjects, most of which focus upon bodies of water, either the Seine or, more commonly, the sea. As an avid sailor whose travels along the rivers and coasts of France were as much for the purpose of sailing as they were for painting, it is little wonder that many of his plein air paintings either picture boats skimming over gentle waves or were painted from the vantage point of one of his many sailing vessels afloat on the water (for examples of the latter, see figs 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8). But images of the sea, its movement, and the movement of boats on its surface, in concert with musicality and its ideals, signify in much broader social terms when they are viewed from the symbolist perspective shared by Signac, his sympathetic critics, and the writers whose work he most enjoyed.

Like many of his contemporaries, Signac regularly left Paris during the summer and early fall months for the country's western and southern coasts, both to paint and to relax.[54] In a letter he wrote to Fénéon from Concarneau in September 1891 while he was finishing *La Mer*, he described himself, his partner Berthe Roblès, and his friend Georges Lecomte, basking together in the warmth of late summer and enjoying the views from the shore, as "wild with happiness." [55] His mood coincides with a sentiment shared by various left-wing writers who explored the sea as an antidote to modern life, from anarchists (discussed below) to the populist historian Jules Michelet, whose *La mer* (1861), a paean to the restorative properties of the sea, concludes with the claim that "renovation by nature, by air, by the sea, by a day of rest would be a thing of justice, as well as a benefit to the human race...The earth supplies you with life; it offers you the sea, the best it has, to revive you." [56] But Signac would have understood the experience of life on and along the water in more than the diversionary sense of the typical vacationer. Periodicals sympathetic to neo-impressionism and symbolism were full of references to water, especially the sea, as the embodiment of, or a catalyst for imagining, alternative, often "musical," realities. In 1890, for example, the review *Entretiens politiques et littéraires* published a prose-poem by the symbolist poet Henri de Régnier entitled "L'eau," which begins by comparing the colors of water—described musically in one instance—to precious gems and metals ("smooth running rubies, showers of amethysts, melodious waterfalls of sapphires, molten gold"), then proceeds to imagine its surface as a mirror not only of nature but also of "faces which lean over it to anticipate in it a pre-vision of another life." [57] What, exactly, constituted that life

Regnier did not specify, only that it would be lived in the future in cities characterized by beauty, logic, and centrally-located bodies of water.[58]

A similarly poetic and socially evocative view of water appeared several years later in *L'art moderne* in a travelogue entitled "Sur la mer et sous les étoiles." The anonymous author, an artist at the beginning of his summer vacation, boards a steamship in Antwerp with a feeling of relief he compares to "breathing at the surface after a long, long swim under the troubled waters of social existence." [59] Once afloat, he is mesmerized by the colors and movements of the ocean's surface, which repeatedly remind him of music. As the ship approaches the open sea, he imagines he hears "the deep notes sound on the keyboard of the waves" and describes the play of light and color upon the water as a "miraculous orchestration." [60] The sailboats passing by become, in his eyes, "ornament for the polyphonic sea," an image of accord between nature and human culture reminiscent of Signac's boats scattered in rhythmic patterns across the water in *La Mer*. [61] In this utterly remote and magnificent setting the author feels the "curtains of misery" lift from his soul and a calm peacefulness descend to take their place, along with a sense of "duty, sacrifice, and solidarities" that he attributes to the "great impressions" he has received while surrounded by water. [62]

Water as both a literal and a figurative source of escape from the disappointments of the urban-industrial world was also a theme in the writings of Guy de Maupassant, arguably Signac's favorite contemporary author (a copy of Maupassant's African travelogue *Au soleil* appears prominently in Signac's painting *Nature morte. Livre, oranges* of 1882). [63] Besides *Au soleil*, which pits the weary monotony of metropolitan existence against the freedom of life on the road and the water, Signac also read Maupassant's *Sur l'eau* (1888), a series of short stories about his travels by boat along the Mediterranean coast, and likely knew as well his *La vie errante* of 1890, a poetic travelogue set in Italy, Africa, and on the Mediterranean. The latter is especially interesting in relation to *La Mer*, for it describes the author's synesthetic experience as he lay one night on the deck of his yacht watching the shifting colors of sea and sky. Blissfully removed from the clamor and the disconcerting culture of "manufacturing and selling" in Paris, [64] and afloat in a world of seemingly "endless solitude, where the sound of murmuring worlds is deadened," he suddenly hears operatic music coming over the water and is engulfed by strong perfumes of myrtle, citron, lavender, thyme and mint. [65] At once surprised and refreshed by these sounds and smells but unable to fathom where they have come from, he suddenly recalls Baudelaire's poem "Correspondances" (reproduced in full in Maupassant's text) and the relevance of one of its lines to his experience:

Had I not just felt, in my innermost soul, the meaning of this mysterious line:
"Perfumes, colors, and sounds answer each other." And not only do they answer each other in nature, but the answer is also given within us, and they mingle "in a dark and deep unity," as the poet says... This phenomenon, however, is known to medical science. A great many articles have been written on the subject, this year even, under the title "Colored Hearing." [66]

Maupassant's experience, which he attributes in large part to being away from the city and surrounded by open water, is similar in its essence to a comment Charles Henry made in his interview with Huret regarding the symbolist or "synesthetic" literary art of the future. Henry linked this ideal art metaphorically to water, suggesting that it, and its reception, were

akin to a symbolist version of hydrotherapy, able to heal both the bodies and the spirits of increasingly enervated modern citizens:

I see in the future men fatigued by moral calculus, the problems of distribution, and so forth, who will seek repose in physical and moral hydrotherapy; yes, the extraordinary turmoil of these brains will need for their repose baths of very cosmic, universal, and elevated moral sentiments, idylls from which all reality and all contingencies will be banished.[67]

While this highly esoteric interpretation of the social utility of symbolist aesthetics bears no direct relationship to Signac's *La Mer*, Henry's trio of water, a condition of totality and harmony, and moral or social improvement nevertheless appears in the subjects, the style, and the ideological intent of Signac's series. The significance of that triad to the artist and his sympathetic critics, however, cannot be fully understood without examining the role it played in the geographical studies of Élisée Reclus and his colleagues. Reclus's metaphorical reading of the sea, in particular, considered together with *La Mer*'s musicality, would have encouraged viewers familiar with late-nineteenth-century anarchist theory to understand the series not only as an expression of aesthetic ideals but also as a politicized version of "authentic Reality."

Harmony, Social Solidarity, and the Sea: An Anarchist Trio

Just as Signac's paintings were artful and socially-conscious reconstructions of what Fénéon called the "precarious reality" of the visible world, so Reclus's geography was more than simply an effort to describe the earth's surface objectively from a disengaged, scientific point of view. Like Signac, he also understood it subjectively and imaginatively as *landscape*, altered in his mind's eye to conform to an aesthetic ideal.[68] Even his most straightforward and dispassionate geographies are laden with descriptions of landforms as visually harmonious wholes (in his massive *Nouvelle géographie universelle*, for example, he described France as a nation that "distinguishes itself, among all the countries of Europe, by the elegance and the equilibrium of its forms. Its undulating contours are harmonized in the most gracious manner with the solid majesty of the ensemble and are regularly developed in a series of rhythmic undulations.") [69] No wonder Signac named Reclus as one of the prime influences on his intellectual and political development, for Reclus's penchant for aestheticizing the earth—the anarchist Pierre Kropotkin called it "a true poet's capacity for understanding Nature" and characterized the result as a "broadly painted landscape"[70]—offered his readers, as Signac did his viewers, a selection of beautiful landscapes designed to appeal to both their artistic and social sensibilities.[71] But rather than merely describing the earth in its natural and undeveloped state as the embodiment of aesthetic harmony, Reclus also considered it a catalyst for transforming the human community, claiming that to gaze upon, let alone live within, a naturally beautiful environment would promote maximum intellectual and moral development. As he wrote in *La terre*, his first book-length geographical study, "one feels that, under threat of moral and intellectual diminishment, it is necessary at any cost to counterbalance the vulgarity of all things ugly and mediocre, where narrow spirits see the testament of modern civilization, with the sight of great scenes of the earth." [72] Although he believed many contemporary natural sites provided such ideal views, he also acknowledged how limited in number they were. For that reason, he believed it was the responsibility of each "truly civilized" individual to function "like an artist, to give the landscapes which surround him the most charm, grace and majesty," and

thus "assume part of the responsibility for the harmony and the beauty of surrounding nature."^[73]

It is tempting to think of the canvases or "musical movements" of *La Mer* as responses to Reclus's call for human intervention to increase the earth's natural beauty in an artistically sensitive manner. With their decorative style, in particular their rhythmically-moving waters, evenly-scattered boats, and limited palette of complementary colors, they picture nature and culture alike as the preserve of harmony, beauty, and equilibrium. (Even *Presto [finale]*, with its "unharmonious" detail of fishermen struggling with a broken mast during a squall, is an unusually well-ordered view, given the inclement weather; likewise, its curlicued clouds are so ornamental they belie their threat of rain.) Signac's equation of *La Mer* with a symphony further underscores its harmonic properties, while its alternating tempos remind viewers that its harmony, like a symphony's, is built out of contrast, the elements of which (line, color, time of day, weather, and movement) work together to serve a dominant theme. The goal of creating harmony through contrast is also, of course, at the heart of neo-impressionist aesthetic theory, as Seurat made clear in his terse axiom of 1890: "Art is Harmony. Harmony is the analogy of opposites, the analogy of similarities of tone, of tint, of line..."^[74] Signac, too, emphasized the importance of contrast to divisionism in an entry in his diary, by paraphrasing Eugène Chevreul's law of simultaneous contrast in words that sound as applicable to human relationships as they are to art: "For a color to be beautiful, it should influence its neighbor by harmonizing with it and subduing it, for their common benefit. From this charming duo is born perfect harmony...It is the great scientific and philosophic law of contrast."^[75]

As a staunch anarchist, Signac naturally would have understood contrast from both an aesthetic and a social perspective, for the idea of contrast as integral to harmony was a recurring theme in anarchist theory. Anarchists collectively celebrated and fought to preserve individual autonomy and difference (i.e. contrast), without which they considered their dream of freedom from human authority incomplete. At the same time, they yearned for one social condition above all others: perfect harmony between the individual and society as a whole, with one equally responsible for the welfare of the other (as Jean Grave wrote in 1884 in an essay on the structure of organizations in an anarchist future, "social interest and individual interest can never be found in antagonism in a well-balanced society").^[76] Often, anarchists imagined this social configuration as a balancing act between "variety" and "unity," the very words Signac used in his writings to summarize the neo-impressionist aesthetic.^[77] In 1887, for example, an anonymous writer for *Le révolté*^[78] described an optimally healthy social structure as "harmony, [or] order in infinite variety."^[79] Likewise, the anarchist chemist and poet André Veidaux, in an article on anarchist philosophy written for the symbolist journal *La plume*, used the phrase "variety in unity" to characterize the most highly evolved form of human society: "Society, in a word, will work [first] with the individual in polymorphous, occasional, mobile groups, [then] with a grouping of groups, homologous and equivalent...This will be variety in unity, because it is the spectacle of natural Harmony, it is the Law of Evolution."^[80]

Veidaux implies that harmony based on contrast is a condition inherent in nature itself, a belief shared by most anarchists but articulated most often and most forcefully by Reclus. It was of such importance to his understanding of geography that he titled the first chapter of

La terre, in which he discussed the fundamental structure of the earth's surface, "Les harmonies et les contrastes." There, in a nutshell, he articulated the entire premise of his work as a geographer: "The life of the planet," he wrote, "like all other life, presents perpetual contrasts alternating with perpetual harmony...Physical geography is none other than the study of these terrestrial harmonies."^[81] Indeed, throughout his career Reclus imagined geographical features, from the smallest plot of land to the entire globe, as harmonious wholes, the diverse parts of which were equally necessary in determining their distinctive character and assuring their smooth function. His description of France in *La nouvelle géographie universelle* is a case in point: "The ensemble [of the country's geographical features] continually presents a sort of harmony in its very contrasts; great is the diversity, but it all keeps its character of geographic unity."^[82] His words seem to refer only to the physical landscape of France, but Reclus always intended the whole of organic life, including humanity, to be part of his "ensemble." He optimistically insisted, for example, that the country's regional populations, which in practice often competed with or stood deliberately apart from one another, were in fact naturally harmonized merely because of humanity's innate understanding of the earth as a perfect whole: "In all the provinces [of France]," he wrote, "local diversities are already dominated by the conscience of [the earth's] superior unity."^[83] Yet he also understood the human condition realistically, noting in *La terre* that "the planet's characteristics will not have their complete harmony if men are not first united in a *concert* [my emphasis] of justice and peace."^[84]

If there was one geographical feature that Reclus imagined representing this superior, musical unity and helping it grow, it was water, a subject he began to explore in earnest in 1869 in his book *Histoire d'un ruisseau*, a charming and entirely readable account of a fictional stream and its influence upon the geographic and social landscapes surrounding it. The story has no traditional plot, for its only character is water, which Reclus traces from a spring high in the mountains to its incorporation into rivers, lakes, and ultimately the ocean. Along the way, he discusses the many ways in which humankind has utilized bodies of water throughout history. But the book, which was reissued in 1882, is more than a straightforward narrative; it is also Reclus's effort to represent the earth, using the example of one of nature's elements, as a "great teacher, [which] has not ceased to remind nations of harmony and the quest for liberty."^[85] With this in mind, he encouraged readers to appreciate water for its inherent harmony, which he often attributed to contrast, and its ability to evoke or promote social ideals. He observed, for example, how each drop of the stream's water "has its particular course, a bizarre series of vertical, horizontal and oblique curves, comprising the great meanders of the stream."^[86] Likewise, he compared the undulating banks of the stream, using an analogy Signac surely would have appreciated, to the pleasing rhythms of music ("the rounded convex and concave forms alternating along the banks: they are a rhythm, a music for the eye"^[87]), and the clarity of spring water to impeccable morals ("in all times, the transparence of the river's source was the symbol of moral purity").^[88] He also stressed the importance, especially to workers, of leisure time spent near water, whose mere presence he claimed would prevent them from "falling to the level of the beasts," and whose views would restore them in body, mind and spirit.^[89]

It is *Histoire d'un ruisseau*'s final chapter, however, entitled "Le cycle des eaux," that is especially pertinent to *La Mer*, given the series' profound aesthetic harmony, the ideals associated with its musicality, its oceanic subject, and the social role Signac would have intended it to play as a result of its divisionist *facture*. In the chapter's concluding paragraph,

Reclus compared the natural order of the hydrological cycle to the anatomical order of the human body and, ultimately, to the course of human history as anarchists hoped to see it play out:

Isn't this great circuit of waters the image of all life?...In the eyes of the anatomist, each of us...is none other than a liquid mass, a river..Just as man is considered separately, so society taken as a whole can be compared to flowing water...People mix with people like streams mix with streams and rivers with rivers; sooner or later, they form no more than a single nation, just as all the waters of the same basin end by mixing into a single river...People, having become intelligent, will certainly learn to associate themselves into a free federation: humanity, until now divided into distinct currents, will be no more than the same river, and, reunited into a single wave, we will descend together toward the great sea where all lives lose themselves and are renovated.[90]

Reclus thus understood the sea metaphorically as a sign for humanity in its most highly developed—i.e. its most anarchistic—state, when complete and lasting harmony would prevail among all the people of the earth. To him, the ocean was not only the most inherently harmonious of all the planet's geographical features (as he wrote in the abridged edition of *La terre*, "the natural movement of water is to re-establish the equality of its surface in the parts where an accidental disturbance has been produced"[91]), but was also an equalizer in a more figurative and revolutionary sense, leading him to dream of a time in the future when conflict and disorder among individuals and nations would disappear and all life would coexist in a dynamic and "fluid" whole.

Whether Signac was thinking in terms similar to these when he planned and painted *La Mer* is entirely unknown, but his political sympathies and his respect for Reclus are convincing reasons to read the series from this particular perspective. Certainly the anarchist press would have offered him other examples of writers who imagined the ocean as an instigator of, as well as a metaphor for, an advanced or anarchist society, including Léon Metchnikoff, an anarchist geographer and Reclus's personal secretary. His work often appeared in the pages of *La révolte* in the late 1880s and early 1890s, much of it excerpted from his book *La civilisation et les grands fleuves historiques*. There, Metchnikoff identified three phases of human history, beginning with the fluvial—the least "progressive"—and proceeding through the mediterranean to the oceanic or the atlantic. He linked these historical periods to geographic locations, noting that humanity would achieve its highest level of sociability only when the coasts of the continents had become the world's population centers and people had begun to travel regularly across the oceans:

Every great river leads to the sea; every fluvial civilization at its beginning must, barring destruction or being absorbed into a larger current, develop itself naturally into a more immense civilization, a communicative, expansive, maritime civilization...The transmissibility of civilizations, quite great already since the beginning of the mediterranean period, will only be able to grow when history has left the shores of the interior seas, to be transported to a more immense milieu, the Ocean.[92]

The anarchist Sébastien Faure also used water as his metaphor of choice for human progress. Writing in the summer of 1891 for the anarchist journal *L'endehors* (which Signac undoubtedly read[93]), he compared humanity to a river that begins its journey restricted by authority and ends it free and unfettered in the waters of the sea: "the human river...has Authority as its point of departure and, here filling in ravines, there submerging mountains, but ceaselessly widening its bed, it seems destined to pour its torrential waters into the Ocean of liberty." [94] Two years later, Daniel Saurin offered readers another, very similar version of water as an analog to human social organization in his book *L'ordre par l'anarchie*: "Individuals go toward the multitude, like rivers go toward the sea; for a long time they struggle, and laboriously carve out with their energy the passage that circumstances allow; then they come to the end, and, in the final peace of the Ocean, the diverse rivers mingle." [95]

Common to all these conceptions of history is the idea of movement toward ever more complex and ideal stages of social organization. According to anarchist theory, such progress or evolution was the rule of nature, the latter of which included humanity. Using Darwin's theory of evolution as proof, anarchists claimed that the evolutionary process would be facilitated by a species' biological instinct for internal cooperation (anarchists called it "mutual aid") in the interest of furthering its development. Struggle and competition certainly existed, but in the human world they were the result of private property and the individual accumulation of wealth, and therefore would disappear once capitalism was overturned. Thus, anarchists called for the working class to unite and its members to cooperate in order to overthrow the bourgeoisie, whose survival was hindered by a "primitive" competitive ethos.

Reclus explored these ideas at length in his political pamphlet *Évolution et révolution*, published for the first time in 1880, [96] but he also alluded to them in his geographical writings by emphasizing the importance of movement in general to the progressive development of life. "Everything changes," he wrote in the abridged edition of *La terre*, "everything is mobile in the universe, because movement is the very condition of life." [97] Faure echoed that claim in 1891, expanding it to include humanity: "Isn't activity an inherent need of the human organism? Organized, thinking, moving matter, gifted with electricity, warmth, and movement, cannot be immobilized without suffering progressive disintegration." [98] For Reclus, it was water above all else that embodied the movement without which life, including human life, could not progress. Equally important, he believed that regular contemplation of bodies of water, whose surfaces and shores were in continual flux, would lead to mental rejuvenation. [99] He also claimed that humans were naturally attracted to, and enlivened by, the sight and sound of moving water, a landscape prospect they would find especially pleasing if it was balanced by more static views of nature:

It is often said that a landscape cannot be truly beautiful when it lacks the simmering of a lake or the movement of running waters. Indeed, it is because man, whose life is so short and consequently so mobile, has an instinctive loathing of immobility. In order for him to feel the life of nature, his senses must show an interest in movement and noise; being able to appreciate the age-long movements of the earth's surface only through lengthy reflection, he needs the swift leaps of water gushing from cascade to cascade or the harmonious undulation of the waves; by the same token, he

also needs the contrast of the stable and the unstable, of movement and immobility.
[\[100\]](#)

Signac's *La Mer*, with its focus upon harmony and the sea, and its contrast between mobility and stasis (rippled water; boats in sail; birds in flight; fishermen straining at their oars in *Adagio*; vs. the solid shore; the immobile rocks; the boats at rest; the fortified walls of old Concarneau), intersects at many points with Reclus's anarchist ideals. Movement, in particular, was crucial to the series' conception, as its musical titles suggest. Signac chose tempos, rather than keys or other musical sounds, as the basis for his analogy between pictorial form and music, underscoring not only the movement represented on each canvas but also the movement of viewers who must proceed, visually or on foot, from one work to the next in order to experience the whole. *La Mer's* indisputable connection between music and movement, especially the rhythmic movement traditionally associated with music, is what makes it more complex and evocative than Signac's earlier marines-in-series, none of which contain musical titles or represent natural or human activity in such a measured or harmonic way. A case in point is a series of four canvases he painted along the Breton coast in 1890 in the villages of Saint-Briac and Saint-Cast, also called, collectively, *La Mer* (figs. 9–11).[\[101\]](#) In common with the series of 1891, the images cohere around a pared-down decorative style and a simple compositional scheme: a strip of sand in the foreground, the sea in the middleground, and a flat expanse of sky above. But *La Mer* of 1890 is marked by a pervasive stillness as a result of its empty skies, its smooth or barely-ruffled water, and its boats that either lie at anchor with their sails furled (as in *Saint-Cast Harbor [opus 209]*, fig. 9) or are located so far in the distance that they read only as nondescript dabs of white paint (as in *Saint-Briac. La Garde Guérin [opus 211]*, fig. 11). Movement is suggested in *Saint-Cast* by the boats in full sail and the gentle waves near the shore, but it is minimal in comparison to even the calmest image from *La Mer* of 1891—*Adagio*—in which fishermen work to position their vessels before casting their nets.

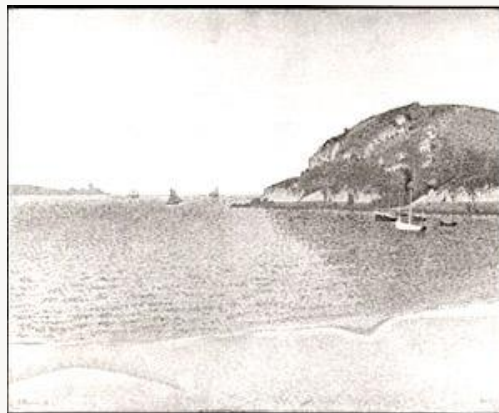


Fig. 9, Paul Signac, *Saint-Cast Harbor (opus 209)*, 1890. Oil on canvas. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts. Gift of William A. Coolidge, 1991.584. Photograph © 2004 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 10, Paul Signac, *Saint-Briac, les balises* (opus 210), 1890. Oil on canvas. Switzerland, Private collection
[\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 11, Paul Signac, *Saint-Briac, la Garde Guérin* (opus 211), 1890. Oil on canvas. Zurich, Rau Foundation
[\[larger image\]](#)

The idea of movement as the instigator of harmony, whether the aesthetic variety or the social harmony toward which humanity was continually evolving, was not only an anarchist theme but appears as well in the work of Charles Henry, where Signac would have found it discussed in a manner equally relevant to the formal properties and social intentions of *La Mer*. Henry insisted that every feeling, impulse, and act of perception was the result of rhythmic movement, either muscular or "virtual" (i.e. confined to the realm of the mind). [102] He was concerned in particular with dynamogenous movement—movement from a lower to a higher point and from left to right, or simply "continuity and unity of action" [103]—because it promoted physical and emotional well-being and was therefore beneficial to human life. Dynamogeny, he said, was a condition naturally preferred by every individual; it would therefore help propel humanity—a collectivity of individuals—toward an "era of absolute harmony." [104] This theory of movement, the anarchist thrust of which is unmistakable, [105] coincides with the movements represented in *La Mer*. It is not the directional lines in the paintings that are dynamogenous, however, for most of them are horizontal and vertical or move from lower right to upper left; rather, dynamogeny is expressed in the waves; the boats in *Scherzo*, *Adagio*, and *Presto (finale)*; and the groups of

fishermen in *Adagio* and *Presto (finale)*, all of which display continuous and unified movement.

The social resonance of that movement, like the social resonance of the musicality it also expresses, is far from explicit in *La Mer*.^[106] Yet the human elements of Signac's subject—working sardine boats and the fishermen who depended upon them for their livelihood—suggest that he wanted viewers to understand his seascapes from a social as well as an aesthetic point of view. Although Signac was an avid and highly skilled sailor who regularly participated in regattas during his summers along the Breton coast, the boats pictured in *La Mer* are vessels used for fishing rather than for sport.^[107] Regattas, in which the boats often appear to be moving together as a unit, would seem to be a suitable subject for marine paintings concerned, as Signac's are, with harmony, but as highly competitive events pitting sailors against one another they were not nearly as appropriate to *La Mer*, from the perspective of an anarchist, as the flotillas of sardine boats Signac chose to depict instead. Sardine fishing at Concarneau was an artisanal, communal, and mutually supportive enterprise, representative of the type of labor anarchists deemed ideal.^[108] Each boat was a small unit of cooperative production, controlled by five fishermen who were collectively called the *équipage*: a patron, who owned the boat and its nets, plus four hired hands (similar groups of five men are pictured in the boats in *Adagio* and in several of the boats in *Allegro maestoso*). A boat's profits were divided into two equal portions, one reserved for the maintenance of the boat and the nets and for buying bait; the other divided equally among the fishermen.^[109] The *équipage* was traditionally a stable, close-knit group of men, who fished together from year to year and were committed to assisting any among them who fell ill or were otherwise incapacitated.^[110] At the same time, however, they also identified themselves as members of the greater community of sardine fishermen, a sector of the working class in Concarneau known for its radical republicanism and its communitarian spirit.^[111]

The boats moving at identical angles in *Scherzo* and *Presto (finale)*, the groups of fishermen who pull their oars in unison in *Adagio* or work together to control their craft in *Presto (finale)*, and the boats clustered evenly along the horizon in *Larghetto*, *Allegro maestoso* and *Adagio*, are therefore vehicles for expressing not only *La Mer*'s musicality but also the communal and cooperative spirit of Concarneau's sardine fishermen. That combination of musical and human harmony would have resonated with Reclus, who compared the benefits of shared labor to the pleasing blend of rhythms and sounds accompanying a properly performed piece of music: "How much greater is the effect of rhythm," he wrote in *La terre*, "when many individuals, united for a joint task, add to the measured noise the sounds of their instruments of work. Then, none among the workers can avoid the common effort; the muscles tense themselves out of the same call for cadence; you work together."^[112] Fénéon, too, would have appreciated the human dimension of *La Mer*'s musical-cum-aesthetic harmony, for it complements the subtly anthropomorphic description of divisionism he included in his biography of Signac: "The flight of each color is free, and the solidarity of all is strict: the canvas is unified under their surge."^[113] His words conjure up an image of a flowing and cohesive multitude, akin to Reclus's "great sea" of unified humanity, where individual volition is balanced with a sense of common purpose.

It is probably safe to say that Signac did not conceive of *La Mer* with these specific interpretations in mind. But by forgoing narrative structure and naturalistic description and connecting his imagery to the abstract and intangible qualities of music, he nonetheless encouraged viewers to read the series from multiple points of view, including, but certainly not limited to, those suggested here. Two things, however, are certain: he wanted his viewers to recognize and celebrate the "authentic Reality" that his art, including *La Mer*, offered as an antidote to the "precarious reality" of the modern world; and he understood his work, of which *La Mer* is but one example, as an outgrowth of his political sympathies. Knowing this, he likely would have appreciated an article on art and revolution written anonymously in 1886 for the periodical *L'art moderne*, which singled out Pierre Kropotkin's book *Paroles d'un révolté* and Jules Vallès's *L'insurge* as consummate examples of revolutionary art. Using aquatic imagery, the author describes the public reception of these and similar works of art with an anarchist or socialist thrust, emphasizing their circuitous but ultimately successful journey from obscurity to a point of cultural recognition and influence. They begin, he says, by "enter[ing] the channel where the current of these [revolutionary] ideas rolls energetically and swiftly;" then they are swept along through "backwashes which lead to nothing," and over "small waves which come to die near the shore," until, finally, they catch "the central wave that carries them toward the high sea," the place "with all the honor."^[114]

Robyn Roslak teaches the history of modern European art at the University of Minnesota in Duluth. She has published articles on neo-impressionist theory and painting in *The Art Bulletin* and *Utopian Studies*. She is completing a book project entitled *Anarchist Geographies: Neo-Impressionist Painting and Politics in Fin-de-Siècle France*.

Email the author rroslak[at]d.umn.edu

Notes

Note: All translations are the author's unless otherwise indicated.

[1] Félix Fénéon, "Signac," *Les hommes d'aujourd'hui*, no. 373 (1890), reprinted in Félix Fénéon, *Oeuvres plus que complètes*, vol. 1, ed. Joan U. Halperin (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1970), pp. 174-179.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 176: "une technique nouvelle doit correspondre à une nouvelle manière de voir."

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 177: "M. Paul Signac put créer les exemplaires spécimens d'un art à grand développement décoratif, qui sacrifie l'anecdote à l'arabesque, la nomenclature à la synthèse, le fugace au permanent, et, dans les fêtes et les prestiges, confère à la Nature, que lassait à la fin sa réalité précaire, une authentique Réalité."

[4] Paul Signac, *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionnisme* (Paris: Hermann, 1978), p. 126. First published 1899.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 104: "...elle [une oeuvre néo-impressionniste] comporte une harmonie d'ensemble et une harmonie morale." Signac also claimed (p. 51) that the neo-impressionists were preoccupied with "the moral effect of lines and colors" ("Se préoccupant [le néo-impressionniste] ainsi l'effet moral des lignes et des couleurs").

[6] Since 1882, Signac also had been assigning opus numbers to most of his canvases as he recorded them systematically in a *cahier d'opus* (opus notebook). He continued to number his paintings this way through 1893. Paintings on which he actually wrote the opus numbers usually included his signature and a date, written in the lower left corner as opposed to the lower right.

[7] Fénéon, "Signac," p. 177. Fénéon wrote: "Signac forgoes admitting into his pictures the literal. He numbers them" ("M. Signac renonce à mettre de la littérature sous ses tableaux. Il les numérote").

[8] Signac, *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionnisme*, p. 122: "Le peintre aura joué de son clavier de couleurs de la même façon qu'un compositeur manie les divers instruments pour l'orchestration d'une symphonie." These words appear in the manifesto just a few paragraphs before Fénéon's synopsis, thus encouraging readers to understand the critic's claim that a neo-impressionist painting "sacrifices anecdote to arabesque" as both a visual and a musical reference (an arabesque is not only an abstract element of design but also a short and fanciful musical piece).

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 118: "une touche n'est qu'un des infinis éléments colorés dont l'ensemble composera le tableau, élément ayant juste l'importance d'une note dans une symphonie."

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 125: "Pour écouter une symphonie, on ne se place pas parmi les cuivres, mais à l'endroit où les sons des divers instruments se mêlent en l'accord voulu par le compositeur. On pourra ensuite se plaire à décomposer la partition, note par note, pour en étudier le travail d'orchestration. De même, devant un tableau divisé, conviendra-t-il de se placer d'abord assez loin pour percevoir l'impression d'ensemble, quitte à s'approcher ensuite pour étudier les jeux des éléments colorés."

[11] In 1886 he painted ten views of the Seine at Les Andelys; the following year he painted four seascapes set in Collioure along the Mediterranean coast; in 1888 he painted eight seascapes at Portrieux in Brittany; in 1889 he painted both the Cassis and the Herblay series; and in 1890 he painted a series of four marines in Saint-Briac and Saint-Cast in Brittany.

[12] These are the titles Signac originally gave the paintings and by which they were identified at the 1892 exhibition of *Les Vingt* in Brussels (the first time they appeared in public). Later that year they were exhibited at the *Indépendants* in Paris, where, for reasons unknown, Signac assigned them new titles and omitted their opus numbers: *Scherzo* became *Rentrée* ("Return"), *Concarneau*; *Larghetto* became *Matin* ("Morning"), *Concarneau*; *Allegro maestoso* became *Soir* ("Evening"), *Concarneau*; *Adagio* became *Calme* ("Calm"), *Concarneau*; and *Presto (finale)* became *Brise* ("Breeze"), *Concarneau* (Signac probably intended the last title to be a play on words, for "brise" also means "breaks," a reference to what has happened to the mast of the boat in the lower left corner of the painting). Françoise Cachin, in *Signac: Catalogue raisonné de l'oeuvre peint* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), lists the works by yet another set of titles which includes not only the new names, but the opus numbers and the original "movement" names as well: *Concarneau. Le sardinier* ("Sardine Boat"), *Opus 218 (Scherzo)*; *Concarneau. Calme du matin* ("Morning Calm"), *Opus 219 (Larghetto)*; *Concarneau. Calme du soir* ("Evening Calm"), *Opus 220 (Allegro maestoso)*; *Concarneau. Pêche à la sardine* ("Sardine Fishing"), *Opus 221 (Adagio)*; and *Concarneau. Rentrée des chaloupes* ("Return of the Longboats"), *Opus 222 (Presto finale)*. Today, *Allegro maestoso* and *Adagio* are in public collections, where they are called, respectively, *Evening Calm, Concarneau, Opus 220 (Allegro maestoso)* and *Setting Sun, Sardine Fishing, Adagio, Opus 221*. In my text I use the titles Signac first gave the paintings. The captions to my illustrations feature the titles assigned to the works by their current owners (if known), followed in square brackets by Signac's original titles.

[13] The first person to notice the similarity between Signac's boats on the water and the notes on the horizontal lines of a musical staff was Marie-Thérèse Lemoine de Forges in her discussion of *Adagio* in *Signac*, exh. cat. (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 1963), p. 47.

[14] Signac himself identified two of the times of day depicted in the series, via the new titles he assigned to the paintings when they were exhibited in 1892 at the *Indépendants*: *Matin* ("Morning"), *Concarneau* and *Soir* ("Evening"), *Concarneau. Rentrée* ("Return"), *Concarneau* also must be set in the morning because this was when the sardine boats at Concarneau returned to port after a night working their nets (see Bernard Cadoret et al., *Ar vag: voiles et travail en Bretagne atlantique* [Grenoble: Éditions des Quatres Seigneurs, 1978], p. iii). *Calme* ("Calm"), *Concarneau*, in contrast, was painted from the shore looking west over the water at sunset.

[15] Signac did not maintain pictorially the strict alternation between fast and slow implied by his titles. The images in the first two paintings of the series, *Scherzo* and *Larghetto*, coincide closely with their respective tempos (in the former, brisk winds and swift movement are represented by the boats in full sail and the assertive ripples of water; in the latter, lighter winds and slower movement are represented by the raised but windless sails and the more gently undulating water). But *Allegro maestoso*, which pictures a calm evening with only a trace of wind, could hardly be called a scene of rapid movement. Why Signac did not match perfectly his titles and his imagery is anyone's guess. Perhaps he originally envisioned the series as three "quieter" or calmer images framed by two faster and more energetic ones, but then decided he wanted his viewers to understand it at the same time as a musical symphony with the latter's characteristic alternating tempos (hence, his choice of titles). Or, perhaps the

lack of agreement between the tempos and what is actually represented was simply his way of personalizing his "symphony" and exercising his creative freedom, the latter of which meant a great deal to him as an anarchist (see note 31, below).

[16] Signac, *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionnisme*, p. 157: "N'est-il pas un artiste, celui qui s'efforce de créer l'unité dans la variété?" Signac used the phrase "variety in unity" to describe the neo-impressionist aesthetic in his diary in 1894. See Paul Signac, "Excerpts from the Unpublished Diary of Paul Signac," pt. 1, trans. and ed. John Rewald, *Gazette des beaux-arts*, 6th ser., 36 (July-December 1949), p. 170.

[17] Analyses of the neo-impressionists' anarchist sympathies are numerous. See especially John Hutton, *Neo-Impressionism and the Search for Solid Ground: Art, Science, and Anarchism in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994); Joan Ungersma Halperin, *Félix Fénéon, Aesthete and Anarchist in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); and Robyn Roslak, "The Politics of Aesthetic Harmony: Neo-Impressionism, Science, and Anarchism," *The Art Bulletin* 73 (September 1991), pp. 381-90. For a discussion of Signac's only overtly anarchist painting, his mural *Au Temps d'harmonie* of 1894-95, see Marina Ferretti-Bocquillon, "Au Temps d'harmonie: une oeuvre engagée," 48/14: *La revue du Musée d'Orsay*, no. 12 (Spring 2001), pp. 84-89; and Margaret Werth, *The Joy of Life: The Idyllic in French Art, circa 1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), chap. 2.

[18] In a letter written to the anarchist Jean Grave in 1916, Signac looked back over his life as a politically committed artist and recalled proudly for his friend the roots of his social conscience: "Nourished by your principles, by those of Reclus, by those of Kropotkin...it is you who have formed me" ("Nourri de vos principes, de ceux de Reclus, de ceux de Kropotkine...c'est vous qui m'avez formé"). Cited in Robert Herbert and Eugenia Herbert, "Artists and Anarchism: Unpublished Letters of Pissarro, Signac, and Others," pt. 2, *Burlington Magazine* 102 (December 1960), p. 520.

[19] Signac, *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionnisme*, p. 56: "On trouve dans la couleur l'harmonie, la mélodie et le contrepoint" (the words are Baudelaire's). For a discussion of the importance of Baudelaire's text to Signac, see the introduction to *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionnisme*, pp. 17-18.

[20] See Baudelaire's poem "Correspondences" of 1857, reproduced in *Symbolist Art Theories: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Henri Dorra (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 11.

[21] Charles Baudelaire, "Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris," *L'art romantique*, in Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes de Baudelaire*, ed. Y.-G. Le Dantec (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), p. 1051: "car ce qui serait vraiment surprenant, c'est que le son ne pût pas suggérer la couleur, que les couleurs ne pussent pas donner l'idée d'une mélodie, et que le son et la couleur fussent impropres à traduire des idées; les choses s'étant toujours exprimées par une analogie réciproque, depuis le jour où Dieu a proféré le monde comme une complexe et indivisible totalité."

[22] See Paul Signac [S.P., pseud.], "Catalogue de l'exposition des XX à Bruxelles," *Art et critique* 2, no. 36 (1 February 1890), pp. 76-78.

[23] Louis de Lutèce, "Les symphonies: Pochades impressionnistes," *Art et Critique* 2, no. 62 (2 August 1890), p. 484: "Du printemps à l'hiver, de l'hiver au printemps; de l'aurore au crépuscule, du crépuscule à l'aurore; à chaque saison de l'année, à chaque heure de jour ou de la nuit, la nature jamais lasse, entonne d'innombrables et divines symphonies de couleurs tantôt gaies, tantôt tristes, tantôt éblouissantes, tantôt sombres, toujours belles! Chacune de ces merveilleuses symphonies a sa couleur dominante prodiguée avec passion, nuancée avec amour...Sa note favorite qui revient, chante, captive, charme, jamais monotone, quoique toujours la même et jouant ou un joyeux allegro, ou un religieux andante, ou un badin scherzo, ou un final sonore."

[24] Ibid.: "L'aube naissante ou la tendre aurore d'une matinée de printemps n'ont-elles pas les jolies délicatesses, les prestes coquetteries d'un scherzo?...Le soleil flamboyant d'un midi estival: les ardentes gaietés, les joyeux éblouissements d'un allegro?...Le crépuscule étoilé d'un soir d'automne: les douceurs infinies, les mélancolies profondes, le calme grandiose d'un andante?...Et les rayons sanglantes d'un couchant d'hiver: les surprises éclatantes, les fureurs ardentes d'un finale?" Lutèce revisited these ideas two years later in another prose-poem entitled "Mélodies," which opened with the following words: "According to the season or the hour, nature is colored with ever harmonious but diverse symphonies, the sublime stanzas of a divine poem" ("Suivant la saison ou l'heure du jour, la nature se colore de symphonies toujours harmonieuses bien que diverses, les strophes sublimes du poème divin"), *Art et critique* 4, no. 95 (26 March 1892), p. 172.

[25] Georges Vanor, *L'art symboliste* (Paris: La Bibliopole Vanier, 1889), p. 42: "La technique nouvelle tend, par l'observation de facultés réactives d'une couleur sur son adjacente, à

composer le tableau comme une partition de taches consécutives et analytiques des tons, qu'ils orchestrent ensuite par une harmonie d'ensemble."

[26] Paul Adam, "Les artistes indépendants," *La revue rose* (May 1887), pp. 140 and 142: "On s'approchait des toiles, on s'efforçait à comprendre l'instrumentation de ces chœurs, gouttes colorantes liant leurs expressions pour la parfaite harmonie de l'ensemble...Dès lors, l'oeuvre se percevra selon ce charme particulier promu par l'audition d'une symphonie musicale où, en même temps que se trace la résultante synthétique des sons, la valeur de chaque élément orchestral se conçoit comme une force unique et vibrante."

[27] Paul Signac [Un camarade impressionniste, pseud.], "Impressionnistes et révolutionnaires," *La révolte* 4 (13-19 June 1891), p. 4: "les purs esthètes, révolutionnaires par tempérament, qui...donnent...un solide coup de pioche au vieil édifice social."

[28] Signac, *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionnisme*, p. 54: "L'art du coloriste tient évidemment par de certains côtés avec mathématiques et à la musique." The words are Delacroix's. Signac, who was an avid reader of Delacroix, probably was familiar also with Delacroix's comments on painting and musicality in his essay "Réalisme et idéalisme," including this: "There is an emotion peculiar to painting, of which nothing in [literature] can give an idea. There is an impression which results from a certain arrangement of colors, lights, shadows, and so forth. It is what one might call the music of the painting. Before you even know what the painting represents,...when you are too far away from it...you are conquered by this magical accord" (cited in English in *Symbolist Art Theories*, p. 3).

[29] Signac, *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionnisme*, p. 57: "La couleur, soumise à des règles sûres, se peut enseigner comme la musique." Blanc's words come from the 2nd edition of his *Grammaire des arts du dessin* (Paris: Renouard, 1870).

[30] Cited in Robert Herbert and Eugenia Herbert, "Artists and Anarchism: Unpublished Letters of Pissarro, Signac, and Others," pt. 1, *Burlington Magazine* 102 (November 1960), p. 479: "Justice en sociologie, harmonie en art: même chose." The quotation comes from an unpublished manuscript in the Signac Archives, Paris.

[31] Paul Signac [Un camarade impressionniste, pseud.], "Impressionnistes et révolutionnaires," p. 4: "Ce serait donc une erreur, dans laquelle sont tombés trop souvent les révolutionnaires les mieux intentionnés, comme Proudhon, que d'exiger systématiquement une tendance socialiste précise dans les oeuvres d'art, car cette tendance se retrouvera beaucoup plus forte et éloquente chez les purs esthètes, révolutionnaires par tempérament, qui...peignent ce qu'ils voient, comme ils le sentaient."

[32] Félix Fénéon, "Le néo-impressionnisme," *L'art moderne* (1 May 1887), reprinted in Fénéon, *Oeuvres plus que complètes*, vol. I, p. 74: "...la réalité objective leur est simple thème à la création d'une réalité supérieure et sublimée où leur personnalité se transfuse" ("...objective reality for them is simply a theme for the creation of a higher and sublimated reality in which their personality is transfused").

[33] For a discussion of Seurat as a Wagnerian painter, see Paul Smith, *Seurat and the Avant-Garde* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 105-55. Smith's analysis of Wagnerian painting, examples of which are Seurat's seascapes as well as his paintings of urban entertainment, has been instrumental to my understanding of Signac's engagement with music. Smith focuses on musicality in Seurat's *La parade*, *Le chahut*, and *Le cirque* rather than on its appearance in his seascapes.

[34] Fénéon, "Signac," p. 179. On Signac as a sailor, see Anne Distel, "Portrait of Paul Signac: Yachtsman, Writer, Indépendant, and Revolutionary," in Marina Ferretti-Bocquillon and others, *Signac, 1863-1935*, exh. cat. (New York and New Haven: The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2001), p. 38.

[35] Smith, *Seurat and the Avant-Garde*, p. 107.

[36] Téodor de Wyzewa, "Notes sur la peinture wagnérienne et le Salon de 1886," *La revue wagnérienne* 2 (May 1886), pp. 101-102: "L'Art, nous dit Wagner, doit créer la vie... Voir, entendre, c'est créer en soi des apparences, donc créer la Vie... Et la Vie que nous avions créée, créée [*sic*] afin de nous donner la joie créatrice, a perdu son caractère premier. Il faut donc la recréer: il faut, au dessus de ce monde des apparences habituelles profanées, bâtir le monde saint d'une meilleure vie: meilleur par ce que nous le pouvons créer volontairement, et savoir que nous le créons. C'est la tâche même de l'art."

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 102: "Mais où l'artiste prendra-t-il les éléments de cette vie supérieure? Il ne les peut prendre nulle part, sinon dans notre vie inférieure, dans ce que nous appelons la Réalité... Ainsi s'explique la nécessité du Réalisme dans l'art: mais non point d'un réalisme transcrivant, sans autre but, les apparences que nous croyons réelles: d'un réalisme artistique, arrachant ces apparences à la fausse réalité intéressée où nous les percevons, pour les

transporter dans la réalité meilleure d'une vie désintéressée. Nous voyons autour de nous des arbres, des maisons, des hommes, et nous les supposons vivans [*sic*]: ils ne sont, ainsi perçus, que des ombres vaines, tapissant le décor mobile de notre vision: ils vivront seulement lorsque l'artiste...leur imposera cette vie supérieure, les recréera devant nous."

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 104: "[une peinture] émotionnelle et musicale, négligeant le soin des objets que ces couleurs et lignes représentent, les prenant, seulement, comme les signes d'émotions, les mariant de façon à produire en nous, par leur libre jeu, une impression totale comparable à celle d'une symphonie."

[39] Signac began to work closely with Henry in the fall of 1888, when he designed a watercolor poster illustrating Henry's *Le cercle chromatique*. The following year, he drew up plates and diagrams for Henry's *Application de nouveaux instruments de précision (cercle chromatique, rapporteur et triple-décimètre esthétique) à l'archéologie* and his *Éducation du sens des formes*. Both projects required more than 600 hours of his labor, according to Cachin, *Signac: Catalogue raisonné de l'oeuvre peint*, p. 357.

[40] Michael Zimmerman meticulously analyzes Henry's theory of expression in *Seurat and the Art Theory of His Time* (Antwerp: Fonds Mercator, 1991), chap. 6.

[41] Charles Henry, "Loi d'évolution de la sensation musicale," *La revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* 11 (July-December 1886), pp. 81-87; *La théorie de Rameau sur la musique* (Paris: Publications de *La vogue*, 1887); *Wronski et l'esthétique musicale* (Paris: Publications de *La vogue*, 1887).

[42] Signac wrote a commemorative essay entitled "Charles Henry" in *Cahiers de l'étoile*, no. 13 (January-February 1930), in which he recalled being maniacally interested in *Le cercle chromatique* in the 1880s (p. 72).

[43] For example, Henry wrote in *La théorie de Rameau sur la musique*, p. 15: "Consonance and dissonance, melody and harmony, the modes are simply particular cases of absolutely general subjective functions: contrast, rhythm, and measure" ("La consonance et le dissonance, la mélodie et l'harmonie, les modes ne sont que des cas particuliers de fonctions subjectives absolument générales: le contraste, le rythme, et la mesure"). Likewise, from *Le cercle chromatique* (Paris: Charles Verdin, 1888), p. 5: "I have chosen the best studied excitations: lights, colors, forms, sounds. I have shown that the phenomena known under the name of optical illusions, consonance, dissonance, modes, and harmony are particular cases of subjective functions common to all nervous reactions—contrast, rhythm, and measure" ("J'ai choisi les excitations les mieux étudiées: lumières, couleurs, formes, sons. J'ai montré que les phénomènes connus sous le nom d'illusions d'optique, consonance, dissonance, modes, harmonie sont des cas particuliers de fonctions subjectives, communes à toutes les réactions nerveuses: le contraste, le rythme, la mesure").

[44] Henry, *Le cercle chromatique*, p. 69: "Il est clair qu'en attribuant à chaque direction une couleur distante sur le cercle chromatique d'un intervalle rythmique variable, on obtiendra simultanément aux rythmes linéaires des mélodies virtuelles et conséquemment des harmonies d'une puissance toute musicale."

[45] Charles Henry, "Introduction à une esthétique scientifique," *La revue contemporaine* 2 (August 1885), p. 442: "Ce que la science peut et doit faire: c'est répandre l'agréable en nous et hors de nous et à ce point de vue sa fonction sociale est immense en ces temps d'oppression et de collisions sourdes. Elle doit épargner à l'artiste des hésitations et des essais inutiles, en assignant la voie dans laquelle il peut trouver des éléments esthétiques toujours plus riches."

[46] The interview was published a second time in October 1891 in *L'art moderne*. It was translated into English by José Arguelles in his *Charles Henry and the Formation of a Psychophysical Aesthetic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), pp. 176-181.

[47] *Ibid.*, 178.

[48] *Ibid.*

[49] *Ibid.*

[50] "The species," he wrote in *Le cercle chromatique*, p. 147, "tends toward dynamogeny, that is to say toward continuity and a unity of action" ("L'espèce tend vers la dynamogénie, c'est-à-dire vers une continuité et une unité d'action").

[51] Antoine de la Rochefoucauld, "Paul Signac," *Le coeur* 1, no. 2 (May 1893), p. 4: "Il sait reculer les limites de la peinture et, véritable hiérophante, il pénètre hardiment dans les contrées plus idéales de la musique. Si ses toiles sont admirables pour les yeux, leurs symphonies n'en charment et n'en émeuvent pas moins, par le miracle des ondes lumineuses transformées en ondes sonores, toutes de grandeur et de majesté."

[52] Alphonse Germain, "Le paysage décoratif," *L'ermitage* 2, no. 11 (November 1891), p. 644: "Le paysage décoratif ne peut pas plus représenter un coin découpé n'importe où qu'une invraisemblable fiction, il ne faut pas davantage qu'il rappelle la scénographie; il doit, de plus souvent possible, correspondre à un état d'âme et synthétiser toujours—par une dominante expressive des lignes et de colorations *affectives* (gaies ou mélancoliques, sévères ou riantes, selon la destination de la pièce)—et synthétiser aussi bien les effets variés des saisons, des mois, des heures de la journée, de l'atmosphère que les aspects multiformes de la nature."

[53] *Ibid.*, p. 641: "O! oublier la laideur des rues devant le paysage idéalisé, lyrique, évocateur d'infini! Vivre l'illusion qu'est la vie dans l'illusion d'une nature gracieuse éternellement!"

[54] Among the neo-impressionists, Seurat, too, painted marines-in-series along the Atlantic coast of France—at Grandcamp in 1885, Honfleur in 1886, Port-en-Bessin in 1888, and Gravelines in 1890—all of which are well-known and well-studied in comparison to Signac's. Critics occasionally read musicality into Seurat's seascapes, which in turn may have inspired Signac to structure *La Mer* around the same. Paul Adam, for one, claimed that Seurat was the first artist to use color in a musical way in his article "Les artistes indépendants" for *La revue rose* (see note 26). His description of the shimmering color in Seurat's seascapes from Honfleur encourages one to think of the vibrancy of music, pp. 142-143: "M. Seurat was the first to apply this pictorial process...Above all he is the prodigious evoker of seas with infinite droves of waves, and calm beaches...*The Shore at Bas-Butin* is like that, so delightfully dusted with its blond sand, over which the sea pours its changing tints of malachite and emerald, and also lapis, while the sky vibrates like a box full of tiny gems" ("Le premier, M. Seurat appliqua ce procédé pictural...Avant tout il est le prodigieux évocateur des mers aux infinis troupeaux de vagues, et des calmes grèves...Ainsi la *Grève du Bas-Butin* si adorablement poudrée de ses sables blonds, où s'épanche une mer aux changeantes teintes de malachite et d'émeraude, de lapis aussi; tandis que le firmament vibre, comme un écrin empli de minuscules gemmes").

[55] Cited in Cachin, *Signac: Catalogue raisonné de l'oeuvre peint*, p. 361: "Les amis...se disent 'éperdus de bonheur' et jouissent de cet été tardif."

[56] Jules Michelet, *La mer* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), p. 328: "la rénovation de nature, l'air, la mer, un jour de repos, ce serait une justice, un bienfait encore pour le genre humain...La Terre vous supplie de vivre; elle vous offre ce qu'elle a de meilleur, la mer, pour vous relever." An 8th edition of *La mer* appeared in 1882.

[57] Henri de Régnier, "L'Eau," *Entretiens politiques et littéraires* 1, no. 4 (1 July 1890), p. 120: "on l'a muée en roulements silencieux de rubis, en pluies d'améthystes, en mélodieuses chutes de saphirs, en fusions d'ors...miroir du ciel, de la pierre et des arbres et des visages qui s'y penchent pour y anticiper une préapparition d'autre vie." Signac knew Régnier personally, for they both were regular participants in 1886 in the writer Robert Caze's Friday evening gatherings (see Cachin, *Signac: Catalogue raisonné de l'oeuvre peint*, p. 350).

[58] He wrote, about an ideal life to come, *ibid.*: "Elle [water] sera au centre des futures villes, logiques et belles."

[59] "Sur la mer et sous les étoiles," *L'art moderne* 6, no. 36 (6 September 1896), p. 281: "La respiration à la surface après la longue, longue nage sous les eaux troublées de la sociale existence."

[60] *Ibid.*, p. 283: "Sur le clavier des flots sonnent maintenant les notes profondes...Orchestration miraculeuse!"

[61] *Ibid.*, p. 282: "Les voiliers que nous dépassons ou qui nous croisent ne semblent plus là que pour l'ornement de la mer polyphonante."

[62] *Ibid.*, pp. 283-284: "Dans mon âme monte la paix salutaire des détachements et des solitudes, et son ennoblissement. Déjà les rides des misères s'effacent, et leurs mauvais plis... Ces grandes impressions servir les justes causes, invigorant en moi le sentiment du devoir, du sacrifice et des solidarités."

[63] Reproduced in color in Ferretti-Bocquillon and others, *Signac, 1863-1935*, p. 98.

[64] Maupassant's synesthetic experience takes place in the second chapter of *La vie errante*. The first chapter, entitled "Lassitude" ("Weariness"), is a set-up for the invigorating and liberating travels that comprise the rest of the text. "Lassitude" refers to the way in which the author feels about Paris during the Universal Exhibition of 1889, which he finds crowded, filthy, and focused too exclusively on utilitarian science and the commercial benefits of industrial production. He writes: "On dirait que les cours de l'esprit humain s'endiguent entre deux murailles qu'on ne franchira plus: l'industrie et la vente," Guy de Maupassant, *La vie errante* in *Oeuvres complètes de Guy de Maupassant*, vol. 28 (Paris: Louis Conard, 1926), p. 7.

[65] *Ibid.*, p. 13: "Et ce minuscule battement [of the ship's clock] troublant seul l'immense repos des éléments, me donne soudain la surprenante sensation des solitudes illimitées, où

les murmures des mondes, étouffés à quelques mètres de leurs surfaces, demeurent imperceptibles dans le silence universel!"

[66] Ibid., pp. 19-20: "Est-ce que je ne venais pas de sentir jusqu'aux moelles ce vers mystérieux: 'Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.' Et non seulement ils se répondent dans la nature, mais ils se répondent en nous et se confondent quelquefois "dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité," ainsi que le dit le poète...Ce phénomène, d'ailleurs, est connu médicalement. On a écrit, cette année même, un grand nombre d'articles en le désignant par ces mots: 'L'audition colorée.'" The "articles" to which Maupassant refers likely include A. de Rochas's "L'audition colorée," published in 1885 in *La nature*; René Ghil's *Traité du verbe* of 1886 (a correlation of the sounds of vowels with certain musical instruments and certain colors); and Suarez de Mendoza's book *L'audition colorée* of 1890. In *La vie errante*, Maupassant also cites Arthur Rimbaud's "La Sonnet des voyelles" of 1871, a poem in which each vowel is paired with a corresponding color.

[67] Cited in Arguelles, *Charles Henry and the Formation of a Psychophysical Aesthetic*, p. 181.

[68] For a discussion of Reclus's poetic approach to geography in the 1870s and 1880s, see Joël Cornuault, *Élisée Reclus, géographe et poète* (Église-Neuve d'Issac: Fédérop, 1995).

[69] Élisée Reclus, *La nouvelle géographie universelle*, vol. 2, *La France* (Paris: Hachette, 1879), pp. 4-5: "La France se distingue encore, entre toutes les contrées de l'Europe, par l'élégance et l'équilibre de ses formes. Ses contours mouvementés s'harmonisent de la manière la plus gracieuse avec la solide majesté de l'ensemble et se développent régulièrement en une série d'ondulations rythmiques." *La nouvelle géographie universelle*, which Reclus considered an encyclopedia of geography, was published in 19 volumes between 1879 and 1894.

[70] Pierre Kropotkin, "Élisée Reclus," *The Geographical Journal* 26, no. 3 (September 1905), p. 340.

[71] In addition to *La nouvelle géographie universelle*, Reclus's most popular geographic writings from this period include *La terre* (1868-9, with subsequent editions in 1870-2, 1874-6, 1877-81, and 1883); its abridgment (Reclus called it an "édition populaire") entitled *Les phénomènes terrestres* (1872-4, with subsequent editions in 1875, 1879, 1882, and 1886); *Histoire d'un ruisseau* (1869, with a second edition published in 1882); and *Histoire d'une montagne* (1880, followed by an edition in 1882).

[72] Élisée Reclus, *La terre: description des phénomènes de la vie du globe*, vol 2, *L'océan—l'atmosphère—la vie*, 4th ed. (Paris: Hachette, 1881), p. 759: "On sent que, sous peine d'amointrissement intellectuel et moral, il faut contrebalancer à tout prix, par la vue des grandes scènes de la Terre, la vulgarité de tant des choses laides et médiocres, où les esprits étroits voient le témoignage de la civilisation moderne." Reclus first expressed this opinion in exactly the same words in 1866 in an article entitled "Du sentiment de la nature dans les sociétés modernes," *La revue des deux mondes* 63 (15 May 1866), p. 380.

[73] Élisée Reclus, "De l'action humaine sur la géographie physique," *La revue des deux mondes* 54 (15 December 1864), p. 763: "L'homme vraiment civilisé, comprenant que son intérêt propre se confond avec l'intérêt de tous et celui de la nature elle-même, agit tout autrement. Il répare les dégâts commis par ses prédécesseurs, aide la terre au lieu de s'acharner brutalement contre elle, travaille à l'embellissement aussi bien qu'à l'amélioration de son domaine. Non seulement il sait, en qualité d'agriculteur et d'industriel, utiliser de plus en plus les produits et les forces du globe; il apprend aussi, comme artiste, à donner aux paysages qui l'entourent plus de charme, de grâce ou de majesté. Devenu 'la conscience de la terre,' l'homme digne de sa mission assume par cela même une part de responsabilité dans l'harmonie et la beauté de la nature environnante."

[74] Seurat wrote those words to Maurice Beaubourg in a letter of August 29, 1890, cited in Robert Herbert and others, *Georges Seurat, 1859-1891*, exh. cat. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991), p. 382. He had dictated them to his biographer Jules Christophe a few months earlier, including at the same time some examples of artistic contrast: light and dark tones, complementary colors, and perpendicular lines. See Jules Christophe, "Seurat," *Les hommes d'aujourd'hui*, no. 368 (March-April 1890).

[75] Signac, "Excerpts from the Unpublished Diary of Paul Signac," pt. 1, p. 171.

[76] Jean Grave, "Autorité et organisation," pt. 3, *Le révolté* 6 (11 May 1884), p. 2: "l'intérêt social et l'intérêt individuel ne peuvent jamais se trouver en antagonisme dans une société bien équilibrée."

[77] As in note 16.

[78] The editor of *Le révolté* changed the journal's name to *La révolte* in September, 1887.

- [79] "La loi de la force et le concert pour l'existence," *Le révolté* 9 (7-13 May 1887), p. 1: "l'harmonie, l'ordre dans l'infinie variété."
- [80] André Veidaux, "Philosophie de l'anarchie," *La plume* 5 (1 May 1893), p. 193: "La société, en un mot, fonctionnera de l'individu aux groupes polymorphes, occasionnels, mobiles, du groupement au faisceau de groupements, homologues et équivalents...Ce sera la variété dans l'unité, car c'est le spectacle publique de l'Harmonie naturelle, c'est la Loi de l'Évolution."
- [81] Reclus, *La terre: description des phénomènes de la vie du globe*, vol. 1, *Les continents*, 4th ed. (Paris: Hachette, 1877), pp. 89-90: "La vie de la planète, comme toutes les autres vies, présent de perpétuels contrastes alternant dans une harmonie perpétuelle...La géographie physique n'est autre chose que l'étude de ces harmonies terrestres."
- [82] Reclus, *La nouvelle géographie universelle*, vol. 2, p. 11: "Toutefois l'ensemble présente une sorte d'harmonie dans les contrastes mêmes; grande est la diversité, mais le tout garde son caractère d'unité géographique."
- [83] *Ibid.*, p. 47: "dans toutes les provinces, les diversités locales sont déjà dominées par la conscience de l'unité supérieure."
- [84] Reclus, *La terre, description des phénomènes de la vie du globe*, vol. 2, p. 760: "Les traits de la planète n'auront point leur complète harmonie si les hommes ne sont d'abord unis en un concert de justice et de paix."
- [85] Élisée Reclus, *Histoire d'un ruisseau*, 2nd ed. (Paris: J. Hetzel, 1882), p. 12: "La terre...est restée la grande éducatrice, et n'a cessé de rappeler les nations à l'harmonie et à la recherche de la liberté."
- [86] *Ibid.*, p. 135: "Dans le lit commun, chaque gouttelette a son cours particulier, bizarre série de courbes verticales, horizontales, obliques, comprises dans les grands méandres du ruisseau."
- [87] *Ibid.*, pp. 136-136: "Les rondeurs convexes et concaves alternant le long des bords: c'est un rythme, une musique pour le regard."
- [88] *Ibid.*, p. 4: "De tout temps la transparence de la source fut le symbole de la pureté morale."
- [89] *Ibid.*, pp. 183-185: "Ah! baguenauder sur le bord de l'eau, quel repos agréable et quel puissant moyen pour ne pas retomber au niveau de la brute!...Toutes ces images gracieuses que nous offrent les chutes, les rides entre-croisées, les broderies d'écume nous reposent promptement des ennuis du métier ou des lassitudes du travail; elles nous relèvent l'esprit...La vue du ruisseau nous restaure et nous renouvelle...nos idées rajeunissent aussi."
- [90] *Ibid.*, pp. 313-317: "Ce grand circuit des eaux n'est-il pas l'image de toute vie?...Aux yeux de l'anatomiste, chacun de nous...n'est autre chose qu'une masse liquide, un fleuve...Aussi bien que l'homme considéré isolément, la société prise dans son ensemble peut être comparée à l'eau qui s'écoule...Les peuples se mêlent aux peuples comme les ruisseaux aux ruisseaux, les rivières aux rivières; tôt au tard, ils ne formeront plus qu'une seule nation, de même que toutes les eaux d'un même bassin finissent par se confondre en un seul fleuve...Les peuples, devenus intelligents, apprendront certainement à s'associer en une fédération libre: l'humanité, jusqu'ici divisée en courants distincts, ne sera plus qu'un même fleuve, et, réunis en un seul flot, nous descendrons ensemble vers la grande mer où toutes les vies vont se perdre et se renouveler."
- [91] Élisée Reclus, *Les phénomènes terrestres*, vol. 2, *Les mers et les météores*, 5th ed. (Paris: Hachette, 1886), p. 5: "Le mouvement naturel de l'eau est de rétablir l'égalité de sa surface dans les parties où s'est produit un trouble accidentel."
- [92] Léon Metchnikoff, *La civilisation et les grands fleuves historiques* (Paris: Hachette, 1889), pp. 152-153: "Tout grand fleuve aboutit à la mer; toute civilisation fluviale à ses débuts, doit, à moins de périr ou de s'absorber dans un courant plus large, se développer naturellement en une civilisation plus vaste, une civilisation communicative, expansive et maritime...La transmissibilité des civilisations, bien grande déjà dès le début de la période méditerranéenne, ne fera que s'accroître quand l'histoire aura quitté les rives des mers intérieures, pour se transporter vers un milieu plus vaste, l'Océan." Metchnikoff likely came up with his theory of historical progress with the help of Reclus, who considered coastal environments ideal for human development because they fostered the creation of a socially unified earth. He believed port cities, in particular, facilitated a flow back and forth of diverse people and ideas, encouraging those who lived in them to understand contrast as the basis for social harmony from a global perspective. As he wrote in *La terre*, vol. 2, pp. 650-651: "At the present time, the regions best-suited for the progress of mankind are the wide plains which look out over the sea...These fertile regions...attract numerous people...and the adjacent ports are those to which commerce is directed, where commodities are exchanged, where men

learn to know men, and ideas mingle with ideas" ("Les régions les mieux disposées actuellement pour les progrès des l'humanité sont donc les grandes plaines continentales qui regardent par dessus la mer...Ces terres fertiles...appellent de nombreuses populations...c'est vers les ports voisins que se dirige le commerce, que les denrées s'échangent, que les hommes apprennent à connaître les hommes, que les idées se mêlent aux idées").

[93] In 1891, Signac was receiving a free copy of every issue of the journal from its founder and editor, Zo d'Axa. This information comes from a letter Fénéon wrote to Signac in August 1891, cited in English in Halperin, *Félix Fénéon, Aesthete and Anarchist in Fin-de-Siècle Paris*, p. 246: "My dear Paul," Fénéon wrote, "You didn't know who was sending you those free copies of *L'endehors*: it was Gallo (is that the spelling?), who used to be a schoolmate of yours and now goes by the name of Zo d'Axa."

[94] Sébastien Faure, "Où nous allons...," *L'endehors* 1, no. 16 (25 August 1891), n.p.: "le fleuve humain...a pour point de départ l'Autorité et, de ci comblant les ravins, de là submergeant les montagnes, mais élargissant sans cesse son lit, il semble destiné à déverser ses eaux torrentielles dans l'Océan de la liberté."

[95] Daniel Saurin, *L'ordre par l'anarchie* (Paris: L'imprimerie de *La révolte*, 1893), p. 69: "Les individus vont à la foule, comme les fleuves vont à la mer; longtemps ils luttent, et, péniblement creusent le passage que les circonstances permettent à leur force; puis ils arrivent au terme, et, dans la paix finale de l'Océan, les fleuves divers se confondent."

[96] *Évolution et révolution* went through six editions, most of them published in Geneva, Switzerland. One, however, was published by the Bureau de *La révolte* in Paris in 1891, while Signac was working on *La Mer*.

[97] Reclus, *Les phénomènes terrestres*, vol. 1, *Les continents*, 5th ed. (Paris: Hachette, 1884), p. 220: "Tout change, tout est mobile dans l'univers, car le mouvement est la condition même de la vie."

[98] Sébastien Faure, *Féodalité ou révolution: Le machinisme et ses conséquences*, 2nd ed. (Paris: *La révolte*, 1891), p. 20: "L'activité n'est-elle pas un besoin inhérent à l'organisme humain? La matière organisée, pensante, mouvante, douée d'électricité, de chaleur, du mouvement, ne peut s'immobiliser sous peine de désagrégation progressive."

[99] Reclus expressed this belief in a chapter of *Histoire d'un ruisseau* devoted to the ever-changing nature of the stream (vs. the more static scenery around it), p. 185: "the view of the stream restores us and renovates us so much better than the scene itself, by its modification from season to season, month to month, day to day. Thanks to landscape which changes around us, our ideas also are rejuvenated" ("la vue du ruisseau nous restaure et nous renouvelle d'autant mieux que la spectacle lui-même se modifie de saison en saison, de mois en mois, de jour en jour. Grâce au paysage qui change autour de nous, nos idées rajeunissent aussi").

[100] Reclus, *La terre: description des phénomènes de la vie du globe*, vol. 1, p. 378: "On a souvent dit qu'un paysage ne peut être vraiment beau quand il lui manque le frémissement d'un lac ou le mouvement des eaux courantes. C'est qu'en effet l'homme, dont l'existence est si courte, et par conséquent si mobile, a l'horreur instinctive de l'immobilité. Pour lui faire sentir la vie de la nature, il faut que le mouvement et le bruit la témoignent à ses sens; ne pouvant apprécier par de longues réflexions la grandeur des mouvements séculaires de la surface terrestre, il lui faut les bonds rapides de l'eau jaillissant de cascade en cascade ou l'ondulation harmonieuse des vagues; il lui faut encore le contraste de stable et de l'instable, du mouvement et de l'immobilité."

[101] A color reproduction of the fourth image in the series, *Saint-Briac. Le Port Hue (opus 212)*, which cannot be reproduced here, is found in Cachin, *Signac: Catalogue raisonné de l'oeuvre peint*, p. 37.

[102] Henry wrote in *Le cercle chromatique*, p. 143: "The most complex psychic phenomena always come down to representations, that is to ramifications of virtual movements" ("Les phénomènes psychiques les plus complexes se réduisent toujours à des représentations, c'est-à-dire à des ramifications de mouvements virtuels").

[103] As in note 50.

[104] In *Le cercle chromatique*, p. 147, Henry underscored his belief in the "tendance individuelle vers la dynamogénie" ("the individual tendency toward dynamogeny"). He then added, p. 148: "l'individualité tend à être collective et que la collectivité tend à être individuelle. La réalisation de cette double fin serait l'ère d'une harmonie absolue" ("individuality tends to be collective and collectivity tends to be individual. The realization of this double end would be the era of absolute harmony").

[105] In *Seurat and the Art Theory of his Time*, p. 275, Zimmerman likewise notes: "Finally, Henry even deduced his image of society from the theory of dynamogeny. The development towards a harmonious, anarchistic or socialist organization of humanity was, according to this, inevitable."

[106] Critics who responded to the series when it was exhibited did not read it from a social, let alone an anarchist, perspective, not even Fénéon whose anarchist sympathies were at least as strong as Signac's. Rather, it was the series' musicality in its own right that interested them.

[107] The details of Signac's avocation as a sailor are discussed in Ferretti-Bocquillon and others, *Signac, 1863-1935*, p. 164.

[108] The most comprehensive anarchist defense of artisanal labor and the mutual aid accompanying it is found in Pierre Kropotkin's *Fields, Factories, and Workshops* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1899).

[109] See Cadoret et al., *Ar vag*, p. 210.

[110] *Ibid.*, p. lxxi.

[111] Michel Gueguen and Louis-Pierre Le Maitre, *Matelots de Concarneau (1800-1914)* (Concarneau: Claude Le Tendre, 1978), p. 243.

[112] Cited in Cornuault, p. 78: "Combien plus grand est l'effet du rythme, quand plusieurs personnes, unies pour une besogne solidaire, ajoutent au bruit mesuré les sons de leurs instruments de travail. Alors, nul parmi les ouvriers ne peut se soustraire à l'effort commun; les muscles se tendent par l'appel même de la cadence; on travaille ensemble."

[113] Fénéon, "Signac," p. 176: "L'essor de chaque couleur est libre et la solidarité de toutes strictes: le tableau s'unifie sous leur houle."

[114] "L'art et la révolution," pt. 1, *L'art moderne* 6, no. 29 (18 July 1886), p. 226: "Un art prend promptement sa place quand, inconsciemment ou non, il entre dans le détroit où roule, énergique et rapide, le courant de ces idées. Il laisse bientôt loin derrière lui les écoles légères, exclusivement amoureuses de la forme, attardées dans les criques qui dentellent les rives, valsant dans les remous qui ne mènent à rien, sautillant sur les petites vagues qui viennent mourir près des bords. Heureux ceux qui sont repris par le flot central et qu'il emporte vers la haute mer...où soit tout l'honneur."

Illustrations



Fig. 1, Paul Signac, *Cap Lombard, Cassis (opus 196)*, 1889. Oil on canvas. The Hague, Gemeentemuseum
[\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 2, Paul Signac, *La baie de Cassis, Cap Canaille (opus 200)*, 1889. Oil on canvas. Private collection
[\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 3, Paul Signac, *Coucher de soleil, Herblay* (opus 206), 1889. Oil on canvas. Glasgow, Art Gallery and Museum. Reproduced Courtesy of Glasgow City Council (Museums). [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 4, Paul Signac, *Scherzo* (opus 218), 1891. Oil on canvas. Private collection [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 5, Paul Signac, *Larghetto* (opus 219), 1891. Oil on canvas. Private collection [\[return to text\]](#)

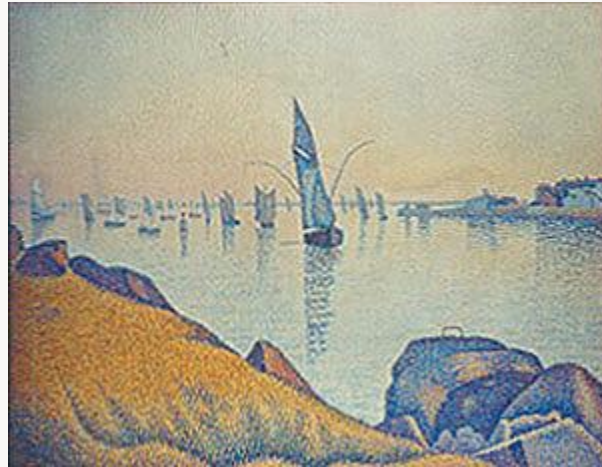


Fig. 6, Paul Signac, *Evening Calm, Concarneau, Opus 220 (Allegro maestoso)* [*Allegro maestoso (opus 220)*], 1891. Oil on canvas. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.208). Photograph © 1997 The Metropolitan Museum of Art [\[return to text\]](#)

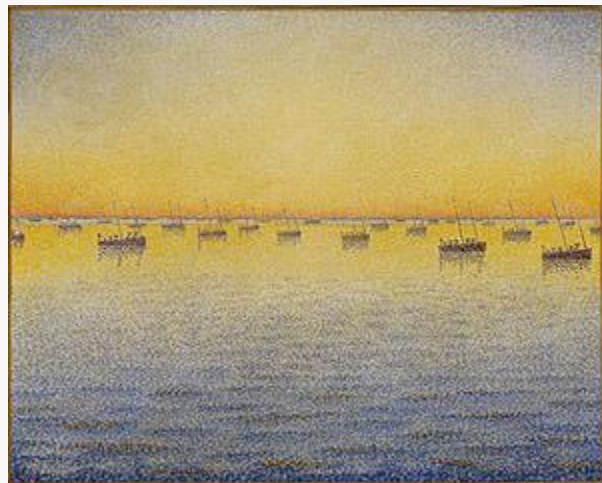


Fig. 7, Paul Signac, *Setting Sun, Sardine Fishing, Adagio, Opus 221 [Adagio (opus 221)]*, 1891. Oil on canvas. New York, The Museum of Modern Art. Digital image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, New York [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 8, Paul Signac, *Presto (finale)* (opus 222), 1891. Oil on canvas. Private collection [\[return to text\]](#)

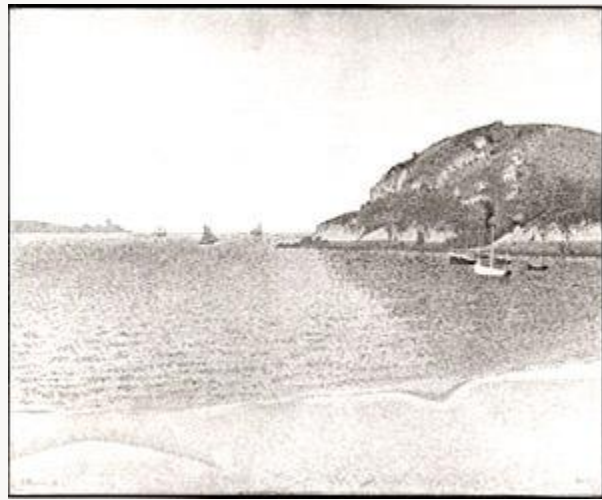


Fig. 9, Paul Signac, *Saint-Cast Harbor* (opus 209), 1890. Oil on canvas. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts. Gift of William A. Coolidge, 1991.584. Photograph © 2004 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston [\[return to text\]](#)

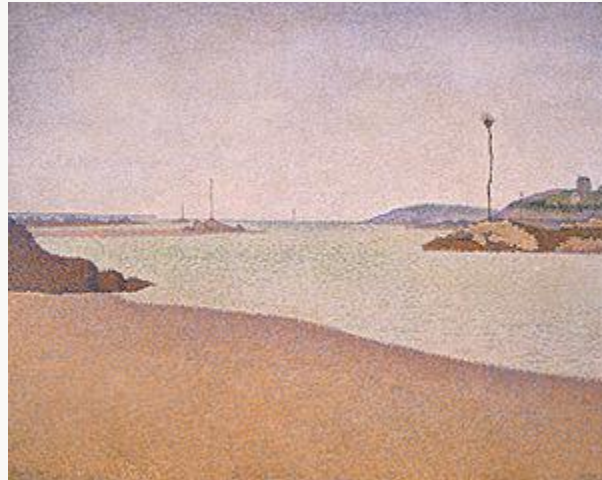


Fig. 10, Paul Signac, *Saint-Briac, les balises (opus 210)*, 1890. Oil on canvas. Switzerland, Private collection
[\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 11, Paul Signac, *Saint-Briac, la Garde Guérin (opus 211)*, 1890. Oil on canvas. Zurich, Rau Foundation
[\[return to text\]](#)