Paperwork and Fragmentation in Degas's 'Bureau Pictures'[1]

> "I was or I seemed hard with all the world, by a kind of urge to brutality caused by my doubts and my bad humor. I felt so ill-made, so ill-equipped, so soft, while it seemed to me that my artistic *calculations* were so correct. I sulked against everybody and against myself."[2] (Edgar Degas, *Lettres*, ed. Marcel Guérin (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1997), 26 October 1890, 179) (italics original)

A man sits at a desk covered in a messy pile of loose paper and notebooks (fig. 1). His face is creased, tense, his eyes in shadow and his lips pressed tightly together. He ignores his companion, who leans on the desk, a young woman in a lilac dress trimmed with delicate ruffles. Two decades after he began work on this small canvas, Edgar Degas entitled it *Sulking (Bouderie)*.[3] Yet who is sulking? In eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century

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[1] Members of the 'Word and Image' cluster at St Andrews reviewed an early draft of this piece: Stephanie O'Rourke, Sam Rose, Linda Goddard, and Ilse Sturkenboom. I would also like to extend heartfelt thanks to my collaborator on this special issue, Emily Brink, for her sensitive edits and for her patience and endurance with this entire project. It has been a privilege and a pleasure to work with her.

[2] "J'étais ou je semblais dur avec tout le monde, par une sorte d'entrâinement à la brutalité qui me venait de mon doute et de ma mauvaise humeur. Je me sentais si mal fait, si mal outillé, si mou, pendant qu'il me semblait que mes *calculs* d'art étaient si justes. Je boudais contre tout le monde et contre moi." I thank Henri Zerner for advice on this delicate translation. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

[3] Jean Sutherland Boggs, *Degas* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1988), 146.

France, to sulk (*bouder*), was a state associated with women. Novels and visual images depicted women retiring to their private cabinets (*boudoirs*) to sulk, pout, and write love-letters, the contents of which were held responsible for all the sulking and pouting.[4] In Degas's painting, the young woman in the purple dress holds a rolled-up piece of blue paper in her hand. Tied with a bit of string, the paper is likely a piece of sentimental correspondence, a message from the *boudoir*. Yet the woman does not appear particularly sulky. Her gaze is frank and steady as she meets the viewer's eye. Instead, it is the male figure who seems the most perturbed, as he hunches over what could very well be the source of his chagrin: the papers strewn across his desk, the medium of the business conducted in this back room of a private bank.[5] Degas knew such institutions well; his father had owned one on the Rue de la Victoire. In New Orleans, his uncle ran a cotton factoring business that in effect served as a private bank for cotton planters.[6] In *Sulking*, the man's state, as he sinks into this morass of ledgers, notebooks, and loose papers, is readily legible to most modern viewers: this is a man overwhelmed by paperwork.

By 'paperwork' I mean administrative and bureaucratic tasks, including correspondence and documentation, which take paper as their primary medium. Memos, ledgers, receipts, labels, files, and forms are all examples of paperwork. In the current era, ‘paperwork’ is often conducted electronically, yet the phrase is still used to allude to routine, informational, bureaucratic, and administrative tasks. As a tool of management, communication, and record-keeping, paperwork is generated by public, non-profit, and for-profit enterprises. Paperwork connotes tedium and automatism – the gloomy mien of Degas’s male protagonist in *Sulking* represents an all too familiar attitude to paperwork. No artist refers to their oeuvre, even if its medium is paper, as paperwork. Yet, in a group of paintings that I refer to as his ‘bureau pictures,’ Degas chose to explore this elision between bureaucratic paperwork and artists’ and authors’ creative work on paper. Because of his family’s own particular relationship to business, Degas was particularly sensitive to paperwork as an instrument of commercial and financial enterprise.

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[4] On the boudoir and its associations with sentimental correspondence, see Dena Goodman, *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 26-41. See also Mary Sheriff, *Moved by Love: Inspired Artists and Deviant Women in Eighteenth-Century France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 84-110.

[5] Theodore Reff, *Degas, The Artist's Mind* (London: Thames and Hudson), 118. Reff believes that the ledgers identify this space as a private bank, rather than a betting institution.

[6] Theodore Reff, "The Pictures within Degas's Pictures," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 1 (1968): 144.

In the letter excerpted above, Degas sulks. While the letter does not mention paperwork, it does make a reference to “artistic *calculations*,” by which Degas seems to refer to the business of art and the marketability of his work. His successful sales prove that he has accurately judged – calculated – the desires of the market. While some artists might have rejoiced at the sale of their works, Degas felt morally compromised. His well-documented snobbery and pride regarding his family’s aristocratic past meant that he disliked having to keep shop. So: “I sulked against everybody and against myself.”

Degas’s acute sense of the parallels between artistic and commercial practices, in particular with regard to the emergent market for Impressionist art, have been the subject of several rich scholarly accounts. Notably, Carol Armstrong has argued that Degas wished to ‘privatize’ Realism and the business-place, by introducing activities associated with the private sphere into his representations of the office.[7] Marilyn Brown, in her work on Degas' activities in New Orleans, has stressed Degas' ambivalent attitude towards the monetization of his artistic practice.[8] I want to focus on the relationship between artistic practice and paperwork. In the 'bureau pictures,' Degas points to the way that paper functions as the shared medium of creativity and bureaucracy. Artists begin the creative process by doodling on sheets of paper; office-workers administer the state by writing entries on the pages of ledgers. As a medium of art and administration, paper effects fragmentation, either because paper is highly mobile and therefore likely to travel far from its source, or because paper serves as the vehicle of the administrative processes through which bureaucracy fragments its subjects. Contemporary literature reveals awareness of paper as a medium of fragmentation. In period texts, paper is represented both as enviably unsystematic – scattered, profuse, a *beau désordre* – and as the lynchpin of an efficient bureaucratic system.[9] The former approach, tinged with nostalgia for Romanticism, likens the creative mind to an unorganized collection of papers. In the latter, bureaucratic approach, paper effects the efficient transformation of material presence into mobile inscriptions. In the bureau pictures, Degas wants to show both recto and verso of the sheet, as it were. His sitters hover between two possible approaches to a work surface covered in papers. Either they will sulk, or they will create.

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[7] Carol Armstrong, *Odd Man Out: Readings of the Work and Reputation of Edgar Degas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 24-38.

[8] Marilyn Brown, *Degas and the Business of Art: A Cotton Office in New Orleans* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 1-14.

[9] The primary commentator on French nineteenth-century bureaucracy is Guy Thuillier. See Guy Thuillier, *Bureaucratie et Bureaucrates en France au XIXe siècle* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1980); Guy Thuillier, *La Bureaucratie en France aux xixe et xxe siècles* (Paris: Économica, 1987). The latter contains a trove of useful primary sources, commented upon by Thuillier. Generally, scholars place the origins of the modern French bureaucratic state during the reign of Louis XIV. See John C. Rule and Ben S. Trotter, *A World of Paper: Louis XIV, Colbert de Torcy, and the Rise of the Information State* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014). On the characteristics of Napoléon's much fêted bureaucratic

The Bureau Pictures

The representation of paper in Degas' oeuvre belongs to a category of his work in which portrait and genre-painting mingle.[10] These paintings can be profitably regrouped under the heading, which I suggest, of "bureau pictures," representations of offices and desks, both of which are referred to as *bureau* in French. All of the "bureau pictures" represent workplaces of a sort, whether commercial or creative or both, and all include one or more *bureaux*, surfaces for working, covered with papers. The bureau pictures all feature human

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administration, see Michael Broers, "'Les Enfants du Siècle': An Empire of Young Professionals the Creation of a Bureaucratic, Imperial Ethos in Napoleonic Europe," in Peter Crooks and Timothy H. Parsons, eds. *Empires and Bureaucracy in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 344-63.

[10] Interestingly, most of these paintings have already been grouped together, as featuring 'pictures within pictures.' See Reff, "The Pictures within Degas's Pictures," 125-66. On Degas' portraits, see Marianne Karabelnik, ed. *Degas Portraits* (London: Merrell Holberton, 1994); Jean Sutherland Boggs, *Portraits by Degas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962); Bridget Alsdorf, "La fraternité des individus: Les portraits de groupe de Degas," *La Revue du Musée d'Orsay*, no. 30 (Autumn 2010): 30-43.

figures whose relationship to the bureau is one of the principal subjects of the work. This figure may be a portrait, or not, although it is also worth noting how many of Degas' extant portraits include piles of paper or a sitter holding an album or paper pamphlet.[11] In the bureau pictures, paper materializes the work conducted in the office, whether this work is commercial or artistic. The earliest of the bureau pictures is *Sulking*, likely painted around 1870, although Degas gave it its name much later. The last of the bureau pictures is Degas's painting of Hélène Rouart (1886) in her family's home, standing before a table upon which two piles of paper are arranged. In between, the bureau pictures include *The Portrait of Monsieur Pilet* (1868-9), *Portraits in a Cotton Office* (1872), the *Portrait of Edmond Duranty* (1879), and the two portraits of Diego Martelli (1879). Related works are the early painting, *The Collector of Prints* (1866) and *Portraits in the Stock Exchange* (1878-9).[12] Here, I focus on *Sulking*, *Portraits in a Cotton Office*, and the portraits of Duranty and Martelli, the most explicit examples of Degas' exploration of the multi-valence of paper as a medium of both creative and bureaucratic labor. In this smaller grouping of bureau pictures, what stands out is the complex, conflicted, and varied relationship between human figures and paper.

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[11] In addition, *Madame de Rutté* (owner unknown), *Violinist and Young Woman*, ca. 1872-3 (Private collection), *Jeantaud, Linet and Lainé*, 1871 (Louvre), *Henri De Gas and his Niece Lucy*, ca. 1876 (Art Institute of Chicago), *Pagans and De Gas Père*, 1882 (Private Collection). In addition, in *Miss Cassatt*, ca. 1880-4 (M. André Meyer Collection), Degas shows Mary Cassatt holding three carte-de-visite photographs, which are splayed like a fan.

[12] *The Print Collector* and Manet's related *Portrait of Émile Zola* (1868) evoke the contemporary sense of an explosion of inexpensive images – the culture of "the multiple." Anne Higonnet, "Manet and the Multiple," *Grey Room* no. 48, *Multiplying the Visual: Image and Object in the Nineteenth Century* (Summer 2012): 102-116. As important as these works are, I want to focus on instances in which paper does not bear images.

Degas' *Portraits in a Cotton Office* (1872) includes quite a bit of paper, from receipts to large ledgers, to tiny hand-held notebooks, to newspapers, to discarded correspondence, cards, and bits of coloured paper (fig. 2).[13] The painting represents the office of Degas' uncle, Michel Musson, a wealthy planter and cotton factor in New Orleans.[14] A cotton factor served as a middleman for plantations, advancing cash, administering the planter's accounts, and selling the harvested cotton.[15] Recently emancipated laborers, who now worked for a pittance on Southern plantations, are not included in Degas' composition, which represents only white men, buyers of cotton, clerks, and three members of Degas' immediate family – Michel Musson, and his brothers Achille and René.[16] This painting offers a range of relationships to paper. René Degas, reading a newspaper, uses paper as a medium with which to perform his leisure. He leans back in his chair, a cigarette dangling from his lips. If he is indeed reading reports on the price of cotton futures, as Brown suggests, then he engages in the cerebral activity of speculation, 'calculation.'[17] At least three figures, however, are obliged to demonstrate greater industry in relationship to paper. The cashier Livaudier stands at a raised desk, his forearms resting on a large ledger. His bent, leaning posture is mirrored at the very back of the room in a tiny figure at another standing-desk spread with papers. To the right of this figure is a man in a bowler hat, who holds a small notebook, a *carnet*, in which he writes, perhaps noting his observations about the cotton samples on the table. Degas' uncle, in the foreground, is lost in thought as he handles a sample of cotton, which he has presumably taken from a paper-wrapped packet to his right. Finally, in the foreground, Degas includes the striking detail of a wicker basket filled with discarded paper, a pink, yellow, and blue sheet punctuating otherwise white envelopes and cards. This paper waste may have come from Livaudier's discarding of receipts once he has transferred the contents into his ledger, yet the relationship is not clear.

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[13] On this painting, see Brown, *Degas and the Business of Art*, 15-58. Brown sees the painting primarily as a means for Degas to explore his own and his family's relationship to business. See also Armstrong, *Odd Man Out*, 27-35.

[14] On the complex history of Degas' family and its business in New Orleans, see John Rewald, "Degas and His Family in New Orleans," *Gazette des beaux-arts* 30 (1946): 105-26.

[15] On the cotton factor and his business, see Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Vintage Books, 2014), 219-21. It was common practice for American factors to draw on European bankers for credit, as Musson's company would take loans from Degas' father's bank.

[16] On this conspicuous exclusion, see Brown, *Degas and the Business of Art*, 36-43.

In *Portrait of Edmond Duranty* (1879), the author and critic Duranty (who may have been the model for the male figure in *Sulking*) appears surrounded by a fortress of paper (fig. 3). He is hemmed in on all sides by papery productions, including the large folios and books behind him, as well as the stacks in front of him. By returning to Duranty in order to portray him in a 'creative' workplace, Degas stresses the double-sided nature of the bureau and its gestures. In his own bureau, surrounded by a rainbow of books and papers, Duranty is still hunched, yet he looks up and out, and his expression tends more clearly towards the engaged, the stimulated. Yet it is also possible to see a certain quotient of brooding, the remnants of the affect in *Sulking*. Plagued in his later life by financial concerns – so much so that Degas stepped in after Duranty's death to organize a sale of his effects for the benefit of his impoverished widow – Duranty's creative workplace is also, by necessity, a commercial space, from which text might be exchanged for cash.

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[17] Brown, *Degas and the Business of Art*, 33.

In *Portrait of Diego Martelli* (1879), the Florentine critic, an early supporter of Impressionism, sits next to table, covered in a teal cloth, spread with papers of various sizes and colors (fig. 4). Another version of the portrait, now in Buenos Aires, shows an even messier array of papers on the desk (fig. 5). The disorder of Martelli's papers contrasts notably with the tidier state of Duranty's desk, although Duranty appears to have let the ashes of two pipes spill onto one of his piles of paper. In both versions of the painting, Martelli turns away from his papers and folds his arms. He is lost in thought, although whether these thoughts are sulky or productively pensive is difficult to determine. In this particular composition, Degas juxtaposes the desk spread and overflowing with paper with Martelli's closed posture of arms folded and head sunk. The papers are profuse, expansive, unstable, yet the character of the confusion is colorful, playful, even joyous. Against the centrifugal energy of the papers, Martelli gathers his thoughts to himself.

Generally, the settings of these paintings have been discussed in terms of Degas' desire to heed Duranty's own call, in his article "The New Painting," to closely observe and represent contemporary environments.[18] Indeed, Huysmans lauded Degas for depicting Duranty against "a real setting" rather than against one of "those idiot backgrounds so dear to painters."[19] Degas captured his subjects not in a studio, but in their homes, in their personal corners (*coins*), surrounded by their own things. He picked those objects that would best represent the character of the sitter – books and papers for the writers Duranty and Martelli, cotton samples, newspapers, and ledgers for his brothers and uncle in New Orleans. Yet because of the attention to the sitter's material environment, these portraits veer towards genre scenes, ending with those compositions that are entirely genre scenes, like *Sulking* and *The Print-Collector*.[20] This generic diversity suggests the usefulness of the category that I propose, the "bureau pictures."

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[18] Reff, "The Pictures within Degas's Pictures," 104. Christopher Lloyd, *Edgar Degas: Drawings and Pastels* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2014), 132. For "The New Painting," see the translation in Charles S. Moffett, *The New Painting: Impressionism 1874-1886* (Washington: The National Gallery of Art, 1986), 36-49.

Bureaucrats, businesspeople, and 'creative' workers all have *bureaux*. In the bureau pictures, Degas plays through these confusions, pointing out that a desk in a cotton factor's office might not be so different from the desk of an art critic. Both tend to be piled with paper. The businessman in *Portraits in a Cotton Office*, who writes in a small *carnet*, would have reminded Degas of his own lifelong practice of filling up notebooks, some pocket-sized like this one, with sketches, addresses, and jotted-down musings.[21] The bureau pictures have several significant lineages, which I cannot explore in depth here, but the representation of desk, figure, and papers can be traced from images of scholarly saints (Jerome, Augustine, and Paul), to Northern genre scenes of merchants, tax collectors, and lawyers, to Vanitas and trompe l'oeil images featuring crumpled pieces of paper, moth-eaten books, or boards to which pieces of paper have been pinned. Throughout this history, paper appears both as a medium of creative and of bureaucratic work.

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[19] Huysmans cited in Jean Sutherland Boggs, *Degas* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1988), 310.

[20] As Nochlin points out, many Impressionist portraits tended towards genre scenes as part of an effort to "reconfigure human identity by means of representational innovation." Linda Nochlin, "Impressionist Portraits and the Construction of Modern Identity," in Colin Bailey, *Renoir's Portraits: Impressions of an Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 53-75, here 55.

[21] The major source on the notebooks is Theodore Reff, *The Notebooks of Edgar Degas: A Catalogue of the Thirty-eight notebooks in the Bibliothèque nationale de France and Other Collections*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1976). Also extremely useful are the three

Giddy Paper Fragments

Degas' bureau pictures are too complex to fully interrogate in a single article. Yet the representation of paper in the bureau pictures has a particular bearing on the question of the fragment. In contemporary texts, two tropes cast paper in terms of the fragment or fragmentation. In this section, I circle away from Degas's paintings in order to explore the first of these tropes, which is deeply indebted to Romanticism. Its chief exponent, Théophile Gautier, is one of the generation of authors who bridged the first and second halves of the nineteenth century, and who continued to look with great affection upon this period. During the latter part of his lengthy career, between the late 1840s and his death in 1872, Gautier consistently characterizes the output of Romantic artists and authors as the result of a

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articles by Jean Sutherland Boggs, "Degas Notebooks at the Bibliothèque Nationale I: Group A (1853-1858)," *The Burlington Magazine* 100, no. 662 (May 1958): 163-9, 171; "Degas Notebooks at the Bibliothèque Nationale II: Group B *1858-1861), *The Burlington Magazine* 100, no. 663 (June 1958): 196, 199-203, 205; "Degas Notebooks at the Bibliothèque Nationale III: Group C (1863-1886)," *The Burlington Magazine* 100, no. 664 (July 1958): 240-46.

combinatory project in which copious and diverse bits of paper are gathered together to form a piece-work whole.

In articles on the Romantic lithographers Gavarni (published in 1857) and Tony Johannot (published in 1845), Gautier describes the oeuvres of both artists as *éparpillé* (scattered, dispersed), a descriptor that goes hand in hand with abundance. Johannot, for example, has produced an "immense oeuvre scattered in more than a thousand volumes,"[22] Gavarni an "oeuvre scattered in books, in albums, in series and in detached plates."[23] For Gautier, scattering is desirable. The abundance of images produced by artists like Johannot and Gavarni – "a crowd of charming designs"[24] – is a proper reflection of the spirit of Romanticism, its shifting mutability, its aesthetic adaptation of the "conditions of modern industry."[25] In an article published in 1852, on the occasion of the sale of Victor Hugo's furniture, after Hugo's exile, Gautier meditated on the dispersal of a person's possessions.[26] Forging a rather impossible simile, Gautier likens the sale of furniture and personal effects to "leaves scattered to the wind, here, there, losing the sense that their assembly once lent to them."[27] Hugo's things, once scattered, will begin "elsewhere another existence, *souvenirs abolis*, hieroglyphs forever indecipherable."[28] Fragmented from the whole that once gave them meaning, their hieroglyphic, sphinx-like opacity will furnish material for the creative divagations of authors like Gautier.[29] While it is difficult to imagine one of Hugo's hefty Renaissance side-boards blowing in the wind like a leaf, the insistence upon a papery simile lends the sideboard the mobility necessary to produce this particular kind of fragment, an object separated from its origin.

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[22] Théophile Gautier, *Histoire du Romantisme, suivi de Quarante portraits romantiques*, ed. Adrien Goetz (Paris: Gallimard, 2011), 170-80, here 171: "cette oeuvre immense éparpillée dans plus de mille volumes […]."

[23] Gautier, *Histoire du Romantisme*, 245-55, here 249: "cet oeuvre éparpillé en livres, en albums, en séries et en planches détachés; […]."

[24] Gautier, *Histoire du Romantisme*, 170: "une foule de charmants dessins […]."

[25] Gautier, *Histoire du Romantisme*, 173: "les conditions de l'industrie moderne […]."

[26] Gautier, *Histoire du Romantisme*, 215-21. First published in *La Presse*, 7 June 1852.

The presentation of scattered papers as a sign of creative intelligence is epitomized by Gautier's tribute to Gérard de Nerval in *Histoire du Romantisme*.[30] First published in twelve instalments in the *feuilleton* of *Le Bien Public* in 1872, *Histoire du Romantisme* was collected as a single volume and published, posthumously, in 1874. Inspired, perhaps, by Hugo's return from exile after the fall of the Second Empire, an aging Gautier recalled the highlights of his Romantic youth, from his participation in the pro-Hugo cabal at the premiere of *Hernani* (1830), to his friendship with Nerval. A critic, poet, and author of short fiction, Nerval was a remarkable eccentric; his literary style, which featured temporal confusion, fragmentation, and meta-diegetic interruptions, was well in advance of his time. Like Degas, like the cotton factor in *Portraits in a Cotton Office*, Nerval carried with him a little notebook (*petit cahier*), in which, as Gautier put it, Nerval would write "a thought, a phrase, a word, a reminder, a sign intelligible only to himself."[31] These jottings were, Gautier writes, Nerval's "manner of composing." After Nerval, a manic depressive, killed himself, Gautier kept a green box (*carton vert*) filled with papers that Nerval had "abandoned." The box contains:

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[27] Gautier, *Histoire du Romantisme*, 216: "comme des feuilles éparpillées au vent, deça, delà, perdant le sens que leur donnait leur réunion […]."

[28] Gautier, *Histoire du Romantisme*, 216: "commencer ailleurs une autre existence, souvenirs abolis, hiéroglyphes indéchiffrables désormais."

[29] Raymonde refers to this particular process in Romantic texts, including Gautier's, as textual "reverie." Marcel Raymonde, *Romantisme et Rêverie* (Paris: José Corti, 1978), 96-101.

[30] Gautier, *Histoire du Romantisme*, 112-27. The tribute is two part, the first article entitled simply "Gérard de Nerval," and the second, "Le Carton Vert."

> notes, extracts, drafts, summary information, the beginnings of articles, variations of the same idea turned in a hundred ways, philosophical or moral maxims condensed in Pythagorean golden verse, a form that Gérard loved, lines from a play cut and numbered like bricks waiting for their place in a vaulted arch, all the pieces of this literary architecture disseminated and confused such that no eye, even that of a friend, could recognize the plan, […][32]

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[31] Gautier, *Histoire du Romantisme*, 113: "une pensée, une phrase, un mot, un rappel, un signe intelligible seulement pour lui, […]."

[32] Gautier, *Histoire du Romantisme*, 121: "les notes, les extraits, les brouillons, les renseignements sommaires, les commencement d'articles, les variantes de la même idée retournées de cent façons, les maximes philosophiques ou morales condensées en vers dorés de Pythagore, forme que Gérard affectionnait beaucoup, les répliques de drames taillées et numérotées comme des pierres de taille attendant leur place dans l'arc de voi¨te, tous les morceaux de cette architectonique littéraire disseminée et brouillée sans que nul oeil, même celui de l'ami, puisse en reconnaître le plan, […]."

Gautier also attends to the material character of the papery fragments. The box includes letters smelling of vinegar, which have been cut-up by the censor on their way to Paris from the Levant. "Yellow like the bandages wrapping mummies,"[33] the paper is old and brittle. As he handles it, Gautier takes care not to let it disintegrate at the folds. This is a true mess of papers –Gautier calls it a *tas,* a term for a pile that evokes abundant confusion – without organization, heteroclite, piled into the green box. Yet this mess represents the desired fluidity, mobility, and mutability of Nerval's thought: "how far it all is, carried away by rapid clouds in a profound forgetfulness, and yet how close it is again!"[34] The papers in the box, "a multitude of little squares," "flutter and whirl confusedly," each one presenting an entire worldly philosophy in "microscopic characters mixed with signs and figures as difficult to read as the secret notes of a Raymond Lulle, a Faust or a Herr Trippa."[35] For Gautier, the inability to "recognize the plan" that would join these paper fragments into a sensible whole was exactly what made them valuable.

In dwelling on the papery contents of the *carton vert*, Gautier betrays his debt to Romantic practices of commemoration and collection. One of the most important of these practices is the album, a mania for which spread in early nineteenth-century Paris.[36] Early albums consisted of blank books, the accessories of bourgeois women collecting signatures, inscriptions, and images. Album-makers drew and wrote directly on the pages or had friends or celebrated authors and artists draw and write for them. Loose drawings and prints were pasted onto the pages and flowers pressed between pages. The album aimed to represent a whole, which was the life and character of its possessor, yet it did so by gathering together pieces of paper representing other, absent wholes. The beloved daughter of Victor Hugo, Léopoldine, kept an album, in which drawings by Louis Boulanger, Célestin Nanteuil, and Émile Masson are meticulously pasted in.[37] Léopoldine does not include flowers or ribbons in her album, although her father did press flowers in his own numerous notebooks, which he illustrated with his own drawings and stencils made of cut-up pieces of paper.[38]

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[33] Gautier, *Histoire du Romantisme*, 121: "jaunes comme les bandelettes enveloppent les momies, […]."

[34] Gautier, *Histoire du Romantisme*, 121: "comme tout cela est loin, emporté par rapides nuées dans un oubli profond, et pourtant comme c'est près encore!"

[35] Gautier, *Histoire du Romantisme*, 121: "une multitude de petits carrés de papier," "papillonnent et tourbillonnent confusément," "en caractères microscopiques entremêlés de signes et de chiffres aussi difficiles à lire que les notes secrètes d'un Raymond Lulle, d'un Faust ou d'un Herr Trippa […]."

A related phenomenon, the *chiffonnier sentimental* (literal translation: sentimental rag-heap), assembled three-dimensional souvenirs like jewellery, feathers, shells, bits of fabric, or ceramic shards, which a woman might arrange in a velvet-lined box or pin to the wall of her bedroom.[39] Paper-labels (*étiquettes*) could be used to indicate the name of the object's original owner or the date upon which it was collected. Flaubert, in 1877, published one of the most striking accounts of a *chiffonnier sentimental* in *Un Coeur Simple*, the first of his *Trois Contes*. Set over the course of the Bourbon Restoration, the Bourgeois Monarchy, the Second Republic, and the early years of the Second Empire, the novella's protagonist is a maid living in Normandy, Félicité. In her attic bedroom, Félicité creates an assemblage of objects – half flea market, half reliquary chapel, as Flaubert describes it – including her masters' old clothes, a little fur hat, and inexpensive gifts, like a box covered in seashells, a lithograph of the Comte d'Artois, an Epinal print of the Saint-Esprit, and her dead parrot Loulou, preserved by taxidermy.[40]

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[36] Ségolène Le Men, "Quelques définitions Romantiques de l'Album," *Art et Métiers du Livre* no. 143 (Feruary 1987): 40-7. For literary representations of albums as well as commentary on the different types of albums and their aesthetic import, see Philippe Hamon, *Imageries: littérature et image au XIXe siècle* (Paris: José Corti, 2001), 327-62.

[37] Pierre Georgel, "L'Album de Léopoldine Hugo," *Revue des Sociétés Savantes de Haute-Normandie* 46 (1967): 1-90. Georgel reproduces about 20 pages of Léopoldine's album, as well as all of the inscriptions.

[38] See the catalogue of selected drawings from three of Hugo's albums preserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France: René Journet et Guy Robert, *Victor Hugo: Trois albums (B.N. n.a.f. 13.351, 13.355, 24.807)* (Besançon: Annales Littéraires de l'Université de Besançon, 1963).

The name given to this assemblage, *chiffonnier*, indicates the extent to which the language of fragments and souvenirs was bound up with that of fabric, rags, and by association, paper. In *Portraits in a Cotton Office*, the cotton samples spread atop a wrapping paper upon the central table may allude to contemporary experiments in making paper from cotton rags. European paper had long been made from discarded fabric, preferably linen or hemp rags (*fil de lin, fil de chanvre*).[41] Yet paper-making processes were changing in the nineteenth century, as a shortage of linen and hemp rags and the inferior quality of cotton rags drove paper-makers to seek out a new source of paper pulp.[42] The French resisted the use of wood chips, which required tremendous pressure in order to be ground into a pulp. In lieu of a suitable substitute, rag-pickers (*chiffonniers*) continued to collect fabric rags that would then be made into paper.

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[39] Le Men, "Quelques définitions Romantiques de l'Album," 142. For a contemporary discussion, see *L'Hermite de la Chaussée-d'Antin ou Observations sur les moeurs et les usages parisiens au commencement du XIXe siècle*, 5 vols. (Paris: Pillet, 1813), I.143-54 on the album, I.167-174 on the chiffonnier sentimental.

[40] Gustave Flaubert, *Trois Contes*, ed. Samuel S. de Sacy (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 69-70.

[41] Louis André, *Machines à Papier en France 1789-1860* (Paris: Éditions de l'école des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1996), 301. Louis André, "La Papeterie Française Face à

Album-mania was ruthlessly mocked by contemporary authors, who complained of dinner parties at which a table materialized covered with paper, scissors, and glue.[43] Satirical accounts depicted albums as a particularly feminine vice, the pastime of women who wished to cannibalize the creativity of others. Despite the derision aimed at these 'feminine' practices, male authors used the logic of the album and the *chiffonnier sentimental* as a justification for unconventional, fragmentary literary practices.[44] Both Baudelaire and Manet would cast rag-picking and the rag-picker as emblematic of the piece-meal, illusory character

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la Pâte de Bois (1860-1880)," in Robert Belot, Michel Cotte, and Pierre Lamard, eds. *La Technologie au risque de l'histoire* (Belfort-Montbéliard: Berg, 2011), 183-9.

[42] Louis André, "La Papeterie Française," 183-9.

[43] Le Men, "Quelques définitions Romantiques de l'Album," 43.

[44] This is particularly evident in the oeuvre of those authors that Bénichou has called 'The School of Disenchantment,' a Romantic "middle-generation" that includes Charles Nodier, Théophile Gautier, Gérard de Nerval, and, I would suggest, Champfleury. Paul Bénichou, *L'Ecole du Desenchantement: Sainte-Beuve, Nodier, Musset, Nerval, Gautier* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992). Bénichou sees all of these authors as deeply affected by the perceived failure of the revolution in 1830. They no longer felt able to use literature as visionary prophesy, a mode practiced by the "grande génération" of Romanticism, including Lamartine, Hugo, and de Vigny.

of modern spectacle.[45] Gautier's preferred adjective for describing creative output, *éparpillé*, could be applied just as easily to the scraps of paper and fabric that landed in albums or the *chiffonnier sentimental*. Indeed, Gautier's *carton vert* of Nerval's papers resembles a *chiffonnier sentimental* in important ways: while Gautier has not assembled this box intentionally, it is a collection of paper remnants, the gathering of which evokes an absent person.[46]

Other authors pursued a similar trope. Champfleury would follow Gautier's lead in his own tribute to Nerval, when he claims that Nerval's "adventurous" style of composition gave him (Champfleury) the courage to publish his memoirs of the popular pantomime theater, *Souvenirs des Funambules*:

> So much for method: books that are a little adventurous certainly have their charms; all these little papers, these tales, these pantomimes, that I have lined up one after the

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[45] On rag-picking as a metaphor for modernity, see Alexandra Tranca, "From Pompei to Paris: Ghostly Cityscapes and the Ruins of Modernity in Théophile Gautier and Eugène Atget," *Word &* Image 32, no. 3 (2016): 251-63; Molly Nesbit, *Atget's Seven Albums* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 165-75. On Manet's representation of the ragpicker as a figure for modernity see Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, "Modernity and the Condition of Disguise: Manet's 'Absinthe Drinker,'" *Art Journal* 45, no. 1 (1985): 18-26; Marika Takanishi Knowles, "Affect, Citation, and Rapt Looking in Edouard Manet's *The Old Musician*," *Word & Image* 34, no. 2 (2018): 111-25.

[46] The *carton vert* is also an archive. Indeed, the archive represents a further transformation of the character of paperwork, a transformation to which the bureau pictures likely relate. Yet I do not have the space or time to investigate this relationship here.

> other, I wrote them once with belief, that is my sole justification.[47] (Champfleury, *Souvenirs des Funambules* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1859), 263)

Champfleury re-materializes his text as a collection of "little papers," lined up or strung together – he uses the verb *enfiler*, with its embedded *fil* (string, strand).[48] He reminds the viewer of the material origins of a text as a collection of differently sized, loose pieces of paper, which must be bound (sewn with a *fil*) in order to make a whole. While he does not make the comparison explicit, he likens his book to an album or a *chiffonnier sentimental*, the material joinery of which of has been erased by the process of publication.

This flaunting of order in favor of a patchwork of disparate pieces, 'sewn' and 'un-sewn,'[49] speaks to a mode of production that is free-wheeling, profuse, and rapid. It is also a practice that depends upon pieces of paper as an ontological model; art is mobile and fragmentary like a piece of paper blown on the wind; a work of literature is like a box in which random papers have been mixed together. Despite the ongoing search for a cheaper material with which to make paper pulp, there is no sense in contemporary word and image of any shortage of paper. Paper is a paradigm of plenty, as profuse as the leaves of trees in autumn, and just as likely to become airborne.

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[47] "Tant pis pour la méthode: les livres un peu aventureux ont bien leurs charmes; tous ces petits papiers, ces contes, ces pantomimes, que j'ai enfilés les uns au bout des autres, je les ai écrits avec croyance à leur date, là c'est ma seule justification."

[48] Pappas has also argued that Champfleury's 'Realism' is in fact a quite fragmentary practice. Sara Pappas, "The Lessons of Champfleury," *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 42, nos. 1-2 (Fall-Winter 2013-14): 51-73.

[49] Champfleury, *Souvenirs des Funambules*, ii-iii: "aussi le livre paraîtra-t-il décousu," "je n'aurais pas été fâché de l'intituler: *Contes cousus de fil blanc*."

Baudelaire embraces this aesthetic in “The Painter of Modern Life.” Less remarked upon than this essay’s tributes to cosmetics and fashion are the instances when Baudelaire describes Constantin Guys’ working process. While documenting the Crimean war for Parisian newspapers, Guys produces drawings in abundance: “the sketches pile up, one on top of the other – in their tens, hundreds, thousands.”[50] In a state of sublime drunkenness, Guys produces “a poem composed of such a multitude of sketches (*croquis*),” “accumulated on several hundred scraps of paper whose very stains and smudges tell in their own way of all the turmoil and confusion in the midst of which our artist must have set down his memories of each day.”[51] Only by means of such papery abundance can Guys capture the simmering, ephemeral beauty of modern life. There is no whole to be grasped, only the line of a nipped-in waist, the hem of a trailing gown, a carriage passing by, a child’s swirling hoop. Each one of these bits corresponds to its own scrap of stained, smudged, and torn paper, piles of which constitute Guys’ oeuvre. These stacks of the “thinnest of paper,”[52] which build up around Guys as he works, like shed skins, both bear the images of modernity and form an image of modernity as a pile of scribbled-on papers. Baudelaire cultivates a correspondence between the ephemeral character that he attributes to modernity and the ephemeral nature of Guys’s medium. Painting on canvas lacks both the speed, the mobility, and the expendability of drawing on paper. Guys’s drawings, Baudelaire indicates, should in fact be understood as an

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[50] Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. And ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1964), 18.

[51] Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life,* 20.

[52] Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, 20.

"album," yet the drawings have been "scattered (*disseminé*) in several different places," having been distributed to publishers and engravers.[53] Baudelaire always acknowledged his debt to Gautier, to whom he dedicated *Les Fleurs du Mal*. "The Painter of Modern Life" confirms their shared vocabulary and aesthetic.

Gautier sees the profusion and the mobility of paper as an emblem of creative generation, yet these same features could also be recuperated for bureaucratic purposes. Indeed, there are already intersections in Gautier, Champfleury, and Baudelaire's texts between the mediums and the "gestures" of bureaucracy.[54] Guys' drawings are sent each day to Paris to be lithographed and included in the newspaper; presumably, the drawings would have travelled alongside administrative communications, thus participating in the communicative relay that bound the central administration to the army. Champfleury's allusion to the *fil* evokes the bureaucratic technique of binding paper dossiers together by running bits of string through punched holes (Parisian notarial documents at the Archives Nationales retain this form of binding). Finally, the discovery of Nerval's papers in a *carton vert* would have immediately evoked the bureaucratic realm, where piles of papers, often pinned or tied together into *paperasses*, were stored in green, cardboard boxes. (Such boxes are still used in modern offices – often the green is marbled with black.) In an unpublished satire of the "sweet folly of administrative hysteria," Huysmans has his hero M. Bougran, recently forced into early retirement from a Ministry, reconstruct the office he misses so much.[55] Bougran stocks up on ink, pens, pencils, paper-weights, and white shelves filled with green boxes. Whether intentionally or not, the location of the paper relics of Nerval in a green box points to the ease with which the connotations of paper slipped from creative to bureaucratic realms.

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[53] For the original French, see Charles Baudelaire*, Écrits sur l'art*, ed. Yves Florenne, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 163.

[54] On the "gestes" of bureaucrats in nineteenth-century France, see Thuillier, *Bureaucratie et Bureaucrates en France*, 540-64.

Paper instruments

While looking at and handling Nerval's abandoned papers, Gautier experiences exhilaration and free-wheeling thought. Paper as a mobile fragment engenders an affect of giddy enthusiasm, a never-ending creative riff. Yet paper does not always yield a mood as light as itself. A more muted affect is evident in the second of the two vocabularies used to characterize paper in contemporary literature. Here, paper remains copious, but its profusion is instrumental and ultimately, wasteful. Instead of swirling in the air, paper falls to the ground and is trampled underfoot. Zola's novels provide one of the most pronounced illustrations of this mode.

Pieces of paper feature prominently in Zola's novel about the art world, *L'Oeuvre* (1886), whose protagonist is the doomed painter Claude Lantier. In his artistic practice, Claude produces endless small paper bits, "scribbles on scraps of paper" that he dashes off as he attempts to determine the composition of his unfinished masterpiece.[56] Claude's furious production of *croquis* and *morceaux* is one of the symptoms of his inability to achieve a total composition.[57] Despite his avant-gardism, Claude is obsessed with the model of *grande peinture*. He wants to produce a single, great work, one *Oeuvre* rather than an oeuvre composed of many works. These scribbles satisfy neither him nor his critics.[58] At Claude's funeral, the realist painter Bongrand says of Claude: "I know of him only oil sketches (*ébauches*), scribbles, tossed-off notes, all this baggage of the artist that cannot be shown to the public."[59] Sandoz, Zola's alter-ego, declares: "around him, after him, how his efforts scattered!"[60] For scattered, Sandoz uses the same term used by Gautier, *éparpillé*, except now this scattering is wasteful rather than creative, a sowing without a harvest.

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[55] Huysmans' notes and manuscript for *La retraite de M. Bougran* date to 1887-88. Thuillier, *La Bureaucratie aux XIXe et XXe siècles*, 121-39. The quoted phrase, "la folie douce de l'hystérie administrative," comes from the notebook in which Huysmans considered the subject. The manuscript was recovered and published in 1967: J.-K. Huysmans, *La retraite de Monsieur Bougran*, préface de Maurice Garçon (Paris: J.-J. Pauvert, 1964).

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[56] Émile Zola, *L'Oeuvre*, ed. Henri Mitterand (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), 236: "croquis sur des bouts des papiers."

[57] On Lantier's inability to move from the *morceaux* to the *oeuvre* see David Deutsch, "Art and Imperfection: Zola's *L'Oeuvre*," *American Journal of French Studies* 52, no. 1 (2015): 73-86, here 78-9. Deutsch suggests that Zola thinks that the achievement of a whole is impossible for a true realist: "The most than an artist can hope to do, Zola contends, is to capture accurately fragments of his experiences in small-scale sketches and images, which may nonetheless be woven into larger, less perfect works."

[58] William J. Berg, *The Visual Novel: Emile Zola and the Art of His Time* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 227-8. Berg sees Claude's inability to create a *grand oeuvre* as a symbol of "the fragmentation of his personality as he slips into madness" (227).

[59] Zola, *L'Oeuvre*, 400: "Je ne connais de luis que des ébauches, des croquis, des notes jetées, tout ce bagage de l'artiste qui ne peut aller au public."

Strikingly, bits of paper feature in the novel in another form, as the medium of the election of the Salon Jury. Recruited to serve as a clerk during the election, Claude is given a desk and asked to transfer the results of paper ballots into a ledger so as to tally the official vote. He works fervently, moved by the opportunity to participate in the process. At the end of the count, the room, where the candidates and clerks have dined during the tally, is filthy: "on the floor, bulletins cast during the vote were littered, a thick layer of papers, dirtier still with corks, crumbs of bread, a few broken plates."[61] Here is the pathetic version of the *chiffonnier sentimental*, a collection of discarded, moldering scraps, to which little positive sentiment can be attached. In this case, paper has been used and used up. The purpose of the paper ballots was to make a vote, which was then transferred to a larger piece of paper, after which the smaller piece of paper had no use. It is possible, of course, that the discarded bulletin could have been picked up and pasted into an album, yet Zola emphasizes instead the creation of an un-sentimental rag-heap, scraps that no one would reasonably want.

A similar fate awaits the pieces of paper generated by the workings of the Parisian department store in the eponymous novel, *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1883). The personnel note transactions in a portable booklet of pre-printed receipts. The cashier transfers this information to a register and the salesperson rips out the receipt and impales it on an iron pin.[62] In addition to the movement of the *feuilles* from the vendors' notebooks, paper-labels (*étiquettes*) figure largely in Zola's description of the department store. During a store-wide inventory, in which the sales clerks transfer information from labels to ledgers, Octave Mouret corners his beloved Denise in a workroom that features a miniature printing press for making labels.[63] During one of Mouret's flashy sales events, the white labels of the objects for sale are like "a flight of sparse white flakes, spotting a wintry black ground."[64]

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[60] Zola, *L'Oeuvre*, 403: "Et voyez, autour de lui, après lui, comme les efforts s'éparpillent!"

[61] Zola, *L'Oeuvre*, 311: "sur le parquet, traînaient les bulletins jetés pendant le vote, une couche épaisse de papiers, salis encore des bouchons, des miettes de pain, des quelques assiettes cassées."

This striking image of small pieces of paper sticking wetly to a dark ground could serve as a description of the floor of the Parisian bourse, as Degas painted it in 1878-9 (fig. 6). In addition to showing papers and little notebooks in the hands of the black-suited brokers, Degas also includes discarded squares of paper that have fallen to the floor. The engine of the bourse was fed by tiny pieces of paper, small folded cards upon which client orders were written.[65] Clerks handed the colored cards (*fiches*) onto the trading floor, called the *corbeille* (basket), where the brokers gathered to negotiate sales.[66] The central broker, likely a portrait of Degas' patron Ernest May, consults just such a card, which is handed to him by a disembodied hand. Agreed upon sales were written into little notebooks (*carnets*) and then later transferred into larger ledgers. Of course, Zola does not neglect the bourse, which he depicts in *L'Argent* (1890).[67] In this novel about financial speculation, Zola is attentive to the paper instruments of the market, from the sacks of old promissory notes collected by a team of debt scavengers, to the colorful *fiches* on the floor of the *corbeille* (each of the sixty *Agents de Change* had his own color of *fiche*), to the *carnets* wielded by the brokers.[68] In one of his signature descriptive passages, in which he describes a tableau of modern Parisian life as an assemblage of "patches" (*tâches*), Zola depicts the sight of dark suits at the bourse as relieved by the "large white patch" of the clerks' register, the "little pale notes of the *carnets*, shaken in the air," and a "flowering of color" produced by the "shredded notes" on the floor of the *corbeille*.[69]

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[62] Émile Zola, *Au Bonheur des Dames*, ed. Henri Mitterand (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), 142.

[63] Zola, *Au Bonheur des Dames*, 346-7.

[64] Zola, *Au Bonheur des Dames*, 138: "une volée de rares flocons blancs, mouchetant un sol noir de décembre."

[65] Donald A. Walker, "A Factual account of the functioning of the nineteenth-century Paris Bourse," *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 8, no. 2 (2001): 186-207.

[66] Walker," A Factual account," 198.

Carnets also appear in Zola's description of the activities of the Salon jury. Each jury-member has his own *carnet* in which he has written the favors that he owes to patrons, students, and friends.[70] As the jury proceeds alphabetically through the submissions (arranged in proper bureaucratic order by the guardians), the members rifle through their notebooks. The administration of art is shown to be subject to practices of fragmentary note-taking in the form of scribbles regarding personal favors due.

In the election of the Salon jury, in the department store, and at the bourse, paperwork abets bureaucracy. Bureaucracy is traditionally associated with civic institutions and governance.[71] Yet bureaucracy also refers more generally to a way of processing, recording, and storing information, in which individual cases are broken down so as to fit into pre-formed categories. Thus, in filling out a bureaucratic form (like an application for an identity card) a human being becomes a series of characteristics. Eye-color, height, weight, place of birth, age, each of which is noted in a box created for this purpose on a paper form (now, often, electronic, yet formatted the same way, as a series of lines and boxes). This fragmentation of the individual raises heckles when considered in the abstract, but yet can also be understood as a necessary tool in the service of just and efficient administration. Such practices of information recording and collecting yield and require vast amounts of paper as well as organizational infrastructure and standardized procedures.[72] These kinds of bureaucratic practices, particularly paperwork, also provide the indispensable underlying structure of commercial business transactions, in which information is passed from one agent to another, from the clerk at the edges of the *corbeille* to the broker inside it, then back again to the clerk, who notes the sale in his *carnet* and transfers it to the register at the end of the trading.[73]

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[67] Émile Zola, *L'Argent*, ed. Philippe Hamon and Marie-France Azéma (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1998).

[68] Zola, *L'Argent*, 389.

[69] Zola, *L'Argent*, 397: "la grande tache blanche de leur registre," "les petites notes claires des carnet, agités en l'air," "autour du bassin que les fiches froissées emplissaient maintenant d'une floraison de toutes les couleurs."

[70] Zola, *L'Oeuvre*, 314.

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[71] This is the association made in Max Weber's classic text on bureaucracy, which he based upon the study of the late nineteenth-century Prussian *Beamter* or civil servant. See Max Weber, "Bureaucracy," in Tony Waters and Dagmar Waters, eds. And trans., *Weber's Rationalism and Modern Society: New Translations on Politics, Bureaucracy, and Social Stratification* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 73-127.

[72] Ralph Kingston has described the movement of paper in French bureaucracies in the first half of the nineteenth century. He suggests that this organization was in place well into the late nineteenth century. Ralph Kingston, *Bureaucrats and Bourgeois Society: Office Politics and Individual Credit in France 1789-1848* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 11-30.

Degas visualizes several of these bureaucratic gestures in *Portraits in a Cotton Office*. A bearded figure writes something in his *carnet* as he studies the cotton samples. The cashier Livaudier transfers the information on smaller pieces of paper – perhaps records of sales – into a large ledger, an account book that might be used to track the balance of the firm's capital and to claim sums owed from buyers. Bureaucratic practices that depend upon transferring information from one piece of paper to another can end with the preservation, but more frequently the jettisoning of the intermediary piece of paper. In his description of the floor of the stock market or the Parisian *grand magasin*, Zola pictorializes this waste. In *Portraits in a Cotton Office*, Degas does the same. Livaudier's receipts are discarded into the wicker basket (*corbeille*), a gesture that is perhaps an intentional play on the stock market's central space, the *corbeille* in which the brokers made their transactions and then discarded the color-coded *fiches* on the floor. Yet Degas transforms the sticky, soiled pavement of the bourse into an airy posy, recuperating transactional paperwork for the trope of creative confusion. The waste-paper basket becomes a little pocket of Romantic giddiness, a patchwork album or *chiffonnier sentimental*, which nevertheless cannot fail to recall the green, red, and blue cards littering the floor of the Parisian bourse.

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[73] David Graeber has recently offered a forceful polemic on the way the modern corporation uses the techniques of bureaucracy, as well as the way that the private sector depends upon civic bureaucracy for its legitimacy and structure. David Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* (London: Melville House, 2015), 3-44.

This gesture of transformation is key, because it suggests that artists and authors could counter the instrumentalization of paper by re-casting and recycling it. Zola uses the description of cast-off paper to create visual images that resemble found-paper collages. The image in *Au Bonheur des Dames* of garment labels strewn against a dark ground resembles the pinboard behind the figure in Degas's *The Print-Collector*, upon which cartes-de-visites and colored, patterned papers have been arranged (fig. 7). In *Portraits in a Cotton Office*, Degas enlivens the stale output of administration by wittily transforming discarded colored envelopes into an object of beauty. In the Buenos Aires portrait of Martelli, paper descends into chaos, a papery promiscuity that defies any sense of bureaucratic order. As he handles a tuft of cotton, Uncle Musson is not frantic, yet he could be lost in contemplation like a sculptor with a bit of clay. He could be looking at the cotton to assess its future value; yet he could also be looking at it to see if it will reveal the artwork it wishes to become (like Michelangelo's speaking blocks of marble). Degas represents Musson such that both readings are possible. The figure in the background of *Portraits in a Cotton Office*, writing in his *carnet* as he looks at the cotton is likely making notes about quality, but he could just as well represent the artist, drawing the cotton in preparation for his painting. In *Sulking*, Duranty is a banker whose desk with its crumpled papers could belong to an artist. In his portrait, Duranty is a critic who could also be a banker or an accountant, his papers neatly stacked and organized, one folio per client. Throughout the bureau pictures, paperwork refuses to declare itself as either absolutely creative or absolutely bureaucratic. Degas allows it to be both.

Degas' papers

As his letters suggest, Degas disliked paperwork of a bureaucratic nature. After his father's death, he was often trailed by paperwork related to legacies, estates, and eventually, bankruptcy. In 1886, discussing a property transaction, Degas grumbles. He distrusts lawyers yet does not himself understand the necessary details. As a solution, "I copy and translate loads of acts and contracts, loads of papers, and I will arrive with all these papers in Paris in order to fall into the arms of a Rouart or a friend well-versed on the necessary questions."[74] This load of papers figures both his burden and his helplessness – instead of action, paperwork.

For Degas, preoccupied with the way that business had encroached upon his artistic practice, paperwork materialized the confusion between art and business. In other words, paper was a corrupted medium, constantly threatening to morph from a surface for art into a bill of exchange, a lease, a piece of business correspondence.[75] In the bureaucratic regime, paper was not generative but determining, an instrument for record-keeping, pigeon-holing, and the transfer of information related to financial transactions. [76] Indeed, Degas includes a row of pigeon holes above the desk in *Sulking*, a detail that he took care to study in a preparatory drawing in one of his notebooks. The papers on the desk, now a mess, are to be organized, catalogued, and pigeon-holed.

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[74] Degas, *Lettres*, 17 January 1886, 118: "Je copie et traduis force actes et contrats, force papiers, et j'arriverai avec tous ces papiers pour tomber à Paris dans les bras d'un Rouart ou de tout ami bien ferré sur les questions qu'il me faut."

[75] In other words, paper was instrumentalized by bureaucracy. On bureaucracy's instruments, see the introduction to Peter Becker and William Clark, eds. *Little Tools of Knowledge: Historical Essays on Academic and Bureaucratic Practices* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2001), 1-34.

[76] There has been no paucity of negative accounts of bureaucracy along these lines. For a summary of some of these critiques, as well as a defence of bureaucracy, see Paul du Gay, *In Praise of Bureaucracy: Weber Organization Ethics* (London: Sage Publications, 2000), 1-13.

In this light, Degas' tendency, as a draftsman, to paste additional strips of paper to the original sheet as he drew suggests a clear refusal to adopt to the form designated by the piece of paper.[77] His composition would not fit within the lines. In *Sulking*, Degas also fights back against the cataloguing imperative of paperwork, simply by using energetic strokes of paint to render the mess of papers even messier, and what is more, illegible. A piece of salmon-colored paper, which is meant to be placed under a sheet of white paper, pops forward like an open jaw, advertising itself as nothing other than two great swathes of paint. The papers on the desk, despite being open and laid out, bear no legible text. They are as uncommunicative as the rolled-up piece of blue paper tied with string, which the young woman holds in her hand. While it might be expected that a private epistle like the rolled paper shield its contents, other kinds of paperwork are expected to make themselves available for use. Paperwork is supposed to be legible and impersonal, a diffident vehicle for the transmission of information. In the bureau pictures, however, Degas meddles with these imperatives by substituting painterly excurses for legible text. Degas also subjects the pigeon-holes above the desk to this deconstruction into vivid patches. The green folders placed in the two left-hand slots are capped by squares of red, which could represent labels or colored sheets of paper, while a thick stroke of yellow paint ornaments the lower edge of the right-most folder. The fact that it is impossible to identify what paper instrument is designated by the red squares is precisely the point; painterly abstraction effaces the instrumental character.

A similar process is at work in Duranty's portrait, in which the only legible word in an office packed with books and papers is Degas's own signature, which he has scrawled at the bottom of a pink dossier. On the papers on Duranty's desk, text is signified by streaks of pastel, dashes of varying lengths that do not attempt to approximate the shape of letters. The spines of the books crowding Duranty's shelves are no more than single strokes of brightly-colored gouache. Painterly gesture – a dash for text, a thick stroke for the spine of a book – confidently performs its ability to communicate objects in a language proper to itself.

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[77] Christopher Lloyd, *Edgar Degas: Drawings and Pastels* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2014), 15, 279.

There is another way, however, that the bureau pictures respond to the question of the paper fragment. In the bureau pictures, paper appears within the context of carefully constructed environments. In the portraits of Duranty and Martelli, these environments are constructed both by the sitter, who has chosen his desk, his papers, and his books, and by Degas, who selects the angle at which the sitter will be seen, creating a tight jigsaw of sitter, papers, desk, and wall. Everything in the room bears the imprint of the sitter's taste; everything in the painting bears the impress of Degas. In his writings on art, Zola insisted that "truth" in visual art was wrested from the world by the artist's way of seeing, his temperament. *Coin* was one of Zola's favorite terms for describing the subjects of successful paintings. In one of his most famous formulations, he declared: "a work of art is a corner (*coin*) of creation seen through a temperament."[78] Zola used the word *coin*, corner, to mean something more than the meeting place of two surfaces. Rather, he used it to refer to a "small part or portion" of a place: a "coin de fôret" or a "coin de son atelier."[79] In 1868, complaining about the Salon, he declared: "that which tires, that which irritates, is that one finds nowhere the least little corner of nature […]."[80] The *coin*, in other words, was a small piece of a larger whole; it was small because it represented the extent of physical space that could reasonably be seen through an artist's temperament. Because no artist could mediate the entire world in a single artwork, he produced fragments; because every temperament saw differently, there would be no continuity between visions of the world, only series of little *coins*, no one like another.

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[78] Émile Zola, *Écrits sur l'art*, ed. Jean-Pierre Leduc-Adine (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), 44: "une oeuvre d'art est un coin de la nature vu à travers un tempérament."

[79] Zola, *Écrits sur l'art*, 154.

[80] Zola, *Écrits sur l'art*, 193: "ce qui faitgue, ce qui irrite, c'est qu'on ne trouve pas le moindre petit coin de nature […]."

In the portraits of Duranty and Martelli, the workspace is represented as a *coin*, a densely packed nest, where each object reflects the affective state of the inhabitant. *Portraits in a Cotton Office*, arguably, represents not a single *coin*, but many, fitted together like marquetry. There is the cashier's *coin*, where he writes in his ledger, René's *coin*, created by the wall of the newspaper, or the *coin* the man writing in his little notebook. In these tight spaces, everything is at hand, ready to be touched, held, impressed with the marks of temperament. Paper is subjected to the temperament of the inhabitant of the *coin*, a subjection that mitigates the impersonal, formulaic character of bureaucratic paperwork. The man who writes in his notebook creates his *coin* precisely by turning away from those around him and into his tiny book. Psychic absorption, helped along by paper instruments, creates a personal *coin* in the midst of the public office. Yet this *coin* is also created through Degas' particular way of seeing and composing space, his habit of dramatic cropping, so that Duranty is fit together with his desks and his books, or his habit of tipping up flat surfaces, so that Martelli's table with its papers tilts towards the viewer, so that the wicker basket presents its contents like a cornucopia.

Duranty, in his novella *Le Peintre Louis Martin*, would refer to such *coins* as "true fragments of an interior, significant, expressing well a kind of life in which objects finally maintain the physiognomy assigned to them by the habits and the tastes of the one who inhabits this interior."[81] For Duranty, a true fragment bears the impress of its owner. In this typical bourgeois mechanism, objects become meaningful because of a history of possession. These theories of the fragment are compensatory, indeed possessive. They erect the fragment *against* fragmentation, attempting to restore the English and Germanic concept of the fragment as a perfect little whole, an object that stands-in-for rather than breaking-off-from. In this regard, the bureau pictures begin to put paper in a *coin*, to give paper meaning as a fragment of an interior, marked by a possessor. However, those moments when paper runs riot – the wicker waste basket filled with colored paper, Martelli's desk – are nevertheless essential to Degas's experiment in the bureau pictures, in which a Romantic aesthetic of papery profusion attempts to find a place for itself in the *bureau*. Both fragmentation and the fragment as an incipient unity – a temperamental *coin* – are present in the bureau pictures, yet the movement is towards the latter, as Degas's process of seeing, creating, and translating into paint incorporates paper fragmentation into his personal project.

The bureau pictures represent Degas's engagement with yet another realm of modern work. From the ballet, the laundry, and the brothel, Degas moves to the office, where workers who are not 'manual' laborers encounter the materiality of paper as the medium of their production. In the bureau pictures, Degas alights precisely upon what makes this very old subject – a figure seated at a desk, with papers – into a modern trope. This modernity lies in part in the elision of the artist and the desk-worker, who both bend over surfaces covered with paper. Yet it is not so much the idea of the artist as worker that troubles (Degas accepted this, albeit with irony), but rather the fate of paper as the shared medium of bureaucratic and creative enterprise. Bureaucratic uses of paper tend towards a hierarchical mode of fragmentation, in which some fragments are more valuable than others. What is valued is the fragment of data – the color of the eye, the price of the garment – not the color or the feel of the material fragment – the piece of paper – upon which this information is recorded and transmitted. In the bureau pictures, Degas insists upon the value of paper. He works and re-works paper, transforming what is wasted into a pictorial event. The artist's project becomes recuperative; once again a rag-picker, the artist's 'paperwork' is the work it takes to make old paper into the stuff of art.

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[81] Edmond Duranty, "Le Peintre Louis Martin," in *Le Pays des Arts* (1877; Paris: G. Charpentier, 1881), 313-50.