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A Woman's Place:

Gender and Class in Manet's Paris

By

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A thesis submitted to

the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of Art History

McGill University

August 1991

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

ISBN 0-315-74724-2

Canada

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ABSTRACT

Edouard Manet's paintings of working-class women reflect the dramatic social changes which occurred in Paris during the late nineteenth century. This thesis examines Manet's paintings which represent some of the sites of femininity within modern Paris: the home and garden, the prostitute's bedroom, and the new public sphere of the boulevards and cafés. With references to contemporary writings and social histories, the result of this study is a more profound understanding of how Modernism affected women's lives and the way in which they were represented in art.

RÉSUMÉ

Les portraits de femmes d'Edouard Manet reflètent les changements sociaux spectaculaires qui se sont produits à Paris durant le dix-neuvième siècle. Cette thèse examine les tableaux de Manet qui représentent les champs de féminínité dans un Paris moderne: Le foyer et le jardin, la maison close et le nouveau domaine public des boulevards et des cafés.

En référence aux écrits de l'époque et des histoires sociales, le résultat de cette étude nous mènent à mieux comprendre comment le modernisme a affecté la vie des femmes et aussi la manière dont elles étaient représentées dans l'art.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my adviser, Dr. Detlef Stiebeling for his generous support throughout the writing of my thesis. I would also like to thank members of McGill University's Department of Art History, Dr. George Galavaris, Director of Graduate studies, Dr. Rigas Bertos, and Dr. Thomas Glen, Chairperson, for their help and guidance.

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INTRODUCTION

Manet's images of working-class women emerge from the Realist interest in the depiction of class types. This thesis looks at the interrelationship between the rapidly changing social position of working-class women in Paris during the second half of the nineteenth century and the changes in how they were being represented. Without an analysis of how women were being represented, by whom, and for whom, the understanding of these paintings will remain incomplete.

Art history as a practice has never produced a satisfactory explanation for Manet's paintings of women. *L'art pour l'art,* which was the new aesthetic principle of the 1880's, emphasized formal and stylistic concerns over content. The bourgeoisie had begun to dismantle the socially critical aspects of the arts, including Realist painting, so that they might pursue their private affairs under the protection of a strong government.[1] During this period, cultural histories began to appear which sought to modernize the past and make it seem natural and evolutionary. Like Darwin's theory of evolution, the history of art emerged to validate the authority of the bourgeoisie by implying their natural organic rise to power. Benjamin writes that "art begins to doubt its own function and resorts to novelty to satisfy bourgeois false consciousness."[2] It would appear that art was to lose its ability to represent the social order, including the status of women, and become a purely aesthetic practice.

Benjamin's theory differs dramatically from the conventional histories of modern art, in which art is perceived as an autonomous *reflection* of society

which turns to painting as process because of a dearth of worthy subjects. Rosen writes:

> If contemporary life was to be represented either in its banality, ugliness and mediocrity undistorted, unromanticized, then the aesthetic interest had to be shifted from the objects represented to the means of representation.[3]

Thus, between the self-censoring tendencies of the bourgeoisie and the subsequent emphasis on style over content in the histories of art, subject matter was devalued. Art historians developed elaborate formalistic approaches to explain Manet's images of working-class women, judging the content to be unworthy of critical evaluation. This is not difficult to understand given the suppression of meaning inherent in the works themselves. Manet's painting is always subtle, and frequently the meaning is obscured by fragmented compositional strategies and psychological complexities. Art historians have not only ignored the subject matter in these works, they have objectified these women by imposing sexual fantasies upon them. Pierre Courthion's summary description of Manet's representations of women, "I seem to see a veritable procession of delectable women" is redeemable only in the use of the word *seem* which, dependent on appearances and sensations, suggests the subjectivity of what is being said, that subject being male.[4]

Realism is the art historical paradigm which defines Manet's work. Realism emerged in art as a response to major shifts in mid-nineteenth century science. Nochlin writes: "The work of the realists is impartial, impassive, and objective

with a rejection of *a priori* metaphysical or epistemological prejudice... the description of how, not why, things happen."[5] The material world replaced the supernatural realm of thought with a belief based on facts. Nietzsche's dictum "God is Dead" parallels the painter's shift from the abstract principles of history and religion, to the encoding of lived experience. Nochlin asserts that

> The theological and metaphysical stages of civilization would be transcended when knowledge was obtained by observation aimed not at the discovery of first causes but simply of the relation between phenomena.[6]

Thus the observation of reality and the interrelation of its processes became central to both the sciences and the visual arts.

But how can Realist art maintain meaning if it is only a reflection of reality? Roman Jacobson suggests metonymy "as the fundamental imagery of Realist Art."[7] The stone in Courbet's *The Stonebreakers*, 1849, becomes the symbol of the oppressed worker's burden. For Courbet, an overriding order of things exists which dictates the choice and nature of his subjects and arranges them according to narrative strategies. It is only with Zola in literature and Manet in painting that an attempt is made to describe without this framework. Zola and Manet, as deterministic naturalists, take inventory of the world around them.

Manet stated that he painted only what he could see, and although he did religious works, he thus associated himself with the naturalists. However, artistic intent is rarely an accurate assessment of signification. It is only one of

many factors which produce meaning. Panofsky recognized this fact and even invented the term "iconology" to describe meaning in a work of art which exists beyond artistic intentions

> [Iconologists] deal with the work of art as a symptom of "something else" which expresses itself in a countless variety of other symptoms...the discovery and interpretation of these "symbolical" values (which are often unknown to the artist himself, and may even emphatically differ from what he consciously intended to express) is the object of what we may call "iconology as opposed to iconography" [which] implies a purely descriptive, often even statistical, method of production...[in contrast] iconology is an iconography turned interpretive... a method of interpretation which arises from synthesis rather than [scattered] analysis[3]

A classic example of an artist's intent being contrary to the meaning of a work of literature is found in the fiction of Balzac, whose sympathies were with the aristocracy but whose texts are significant as studies of the then emerging power of the bourgeoisie. Despite Manet's professed objectivity, his paintings are encoded with the attitudes and systems of representation of the period. They combine the way in which society represents itself, how Manet represents it, and how it is represented to the viewer. This *representing to* the viewer is evident in the handling of paint or style in his work. Loose and *ebouche*–like, it is suggestive of casual conversation. It is an acknowledgement of the viewer's participation in the creation of meaning – a margin of signification which emphasizes the fluidity of symbolic structures, which in turn are reflective of the rapid changes in the economy of the Third Republic.

Manet's choice of working-class women is an example of the exploration of the everyday world as a means of describing truth. There is a conscious effort to suppress his own attitudes and those of art production of the period in general. In this sense he is like Flaubert, who wanted: "to write the mediocre beautifully."[9] Given the systemization of power by the bourgeoisie and the emergence of mass consciousness, it is not surprising that the Realists would turn to the everyday for their subjects. A general systemization of production made the everyday the site of important changes in class relationships and representations. Even art production, according to Marx, was losing its privileged status:

> All the so-called higher forms of labour – intellectual, artistic, etc. – have been transformed into commodities (by bourgeoisie capitalism) and have thus lost their former sacredness.[10]

This commodification of art production would suggest that new systems of representation would be required which would inscribe the reification of social relations between the social classes, men and women, and art and its audience. This demand was fulfilled with the emergence of the avant-garde and modernism.

Saint Simon, in the early part of the nineteenth century, had attracted artists to his socialist ideas and gave the word Avant-garde to cultural production.[11] His pupil, August Comte, who invented the word sociology, would coin the

term social sciences in the 1830's. Modernism was changing the arts and sciences. Simon wrote:

> It is we artists, who will serve you as avant-garde: the power of the arts is in fact most immediate and most rapid: when we wish to spread new ideas among men, we inscribe them on marble or on canvas; ...and if our role appears nil or at least very secondary, what is lacking to the arts is that which is essential to their energy and to their success, namely, a common drive and a general idea.[12]

The idea that is important here is the concept that art could not only reflect society, but could reconstruct it. Modernism demanded new codes of representation to reflect the rapid changes brought about by imperialist expansion and industrial growth. Socialists were looking towards changing and shaping society with art. Even Baudelaire who would later advocate *L'art pour l'art* wrote in 1852: "Art was henceforth inseparable from morals and utility."[13] However, while the socialists envisioned an enlightened Realism, the bourgeoisie was busy changing the structures of the French economy, and with it, the map of Paris. In chapter three, the redevelopment of Paris by Baron Von Haussmann will be analyzed not merely as a changing of the backdrop in front of which modernism was played out, but as a major cause for a social and economic shift. For the working-class, it changed their lives irrevocably. Clark writes: "Haussmann's modernity had been built by evicting the working-class of Paris from the centre of the city."[14]

Some of those spaces of modernity are visible in Manet's images of working-class women: the bars, cafes, railways, streets, and the boudoirs. During this period, labour was emerging as a major focus of the division of time. Capitalism was colonizing everyday life so that people's time and place and code of behaviour changed frequently during the day. This development is particularly relevant to the changing role of women in society for two reasons. First, women were emerging from the private to the public realm more and more frequently. And secondly, women as the objects of male artists' representations, were subjected to a greater degree of personification than men. As signs for wealth, virtue, desire, and fantasy, women, as symbols, were vulnerable to being recoded.

Manet's *View of the Universal Exposition of Paris*, 1867, (Fig.4), shows members of all classes. Indeed, the central exposition was called "the History of Work."[15] Nochlin suggests

> Of all the themes of contemporary life, none was felt to be so much the very epitome of modern experience, or was treated with such concreteness and urgency by mid-century artists... as the theme of labour... the revolution of 1848 had raised the issue of labour as a major issue for the first time.[16]

In realist painting, it was the peasant who was a popular subject. Nochlin believes it was because he was disappearing. Perhaps it had more to do with the fact that he did not threaten the bourgeoisie social order as did the Parisian

mob. The peasants were actually conservative and hard working. Nochlin describes *The Stonebreakers* as "The very epitome of gratuitous meaningless labour, the bottom of the manual heap."[17] If they were the bottom of the social order, women workers, working at a fraction of men's wages, were somewhere off the chart. Nochlin omits women from her discussion of labour in general.

References to labour are not uncommon in the histories of the period. Since the 1820's, the *dangerous classes* of the urban and industrial Paris initiated fear, fascination and even hostility among the bourgeoisie. Oppression was the general response. The elegant facade of the *belle epoque* was supported by the drudgery of the labouring masses. Machines which could operate twenty–four hours a day and required constant and repetitive manipulation required a worker of limited individualism. Shifts, breaks, holidays, meal times, alcohol consumption and countless nuances of existence had to be regimented to the requirements of mass industrialization. The position of labour within the economic system was changing.

Foucault suggests that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, wealth was no longer based on the exchange values of objects. Rather, in a discussion of Adam Smith (1723–1790), he asserts that labour emerges as a major concept in economics. Its value is realized as the root of all wealth. Foucault writes

> Wealth no longer establishes the internal order of its equivalence by a comparison of the objects to be exchanged, or by an appraisal of the power peculiar to each... it is broken down according to the units of labour that have in reality produced it. Wealth is always a

> functionary representative element; but, in the end, what it represents is no longer the object of desire; it is labour[18]

The implications of this realization were remarkable for the bourgeoisie. If industrialization could somehow amplify the productivity of labour with machines, and the division of labour (assembly line production), the potential for the creation of wealth became enormous.

So entrenched was the concept of labour as a given condition of humanity that it was connected to the evolutionary theories of human development to create the concept of progress. Even Marx stands within the frame of this paradigm, believing labour to be the natural condition of man. Jean Baudrillard claims that Marx saw man as alienated by his labour because he sells it for its use value. Baudrillard asserts that labour in itself is alienating:

> Marxism suggests the cunning of capital. It convinces men that they are alienated by the sale of their labour power. Thus censoring the much more radical hypothesis that they might be alienated as labour power, as the inalienable power of creating value by their labour.[19]

Baudrillard's decoding of the sign *labour* as a system of signification imposed on existence, rather than as a given biological characteristic of the species, affords a deconstruction of Realist art history which has accepted labour as a given in the social equation. This is especially true for women's work, which has been traditionally perceived as biologically determined. Indeed, both bourgeois artists and bourgeois art historians have viewed the emergence of labour on the scene as the object of liberal sympathies towards the oppressed,

ignoring the fetishistic glamorization of labour to mirror bourgeois values such as heroism, nobility and honesty. Nochlin typifies this when she declares

> Yet at the same time that the Realists were creating a visual compendium of social injustices, they were also finding ways for declaring the heroism, dignity and probity of manual labour.[20]

Similarly, Jules Breton, a popular painter of peasant life of the mid-nineteenth century wrote

> We studied the streets and the fields more deeply; we associated ourselves with the passions and feelings of the humble and art was to do them the honour formerly reserved exclusively for the gods and for the mighty.[21]

Nochlin claims that with Manet, the vision of labour is neutralized – that it in some ways is less emotional, a heroism of the pathetic. His contemporary realism: "had nothing to do with capturing the bitterness of lower-class existence nor yet with a specific and systematic depiction of the haute monde..."[22] While this may be true in terms of artists' intentionality, the lack of idealization or sensationalization in his portrayal of the working-class is derived from factors beyond his control. Codes of behaviour and representation were subject to state controlled censorship, and to the rigorous manipulation of the workers. Moreover, the emergence of the urban proletariat, which frightened the bourgeoisie as an unknown, had been systematically classified, coded and reproduced in the *physiognomies* of the period. Walter Benjamin writes:

> From the itinerant street vendor of the boulevards to the dandy in the foyer of the opera-house, there was not a figure of Paris life that was not sketched by a physiologue.[23]

In 1841, seventy-six new physiologies were published in France.[24] With the censorship laws of September 1836, the reign of Louis Philippe was a period of stereotypes, generalizations and limited analysis in the press. The *feuilleton* or daily tabloid newspaper filled with belletristic novelties was becoming popular. The endless stream of images and text which poured off the presses in Manet's Paris created an ordered representation of bourgeois authority. Edouard Fuchs, in a study of European people, wrote

> Reaction, then was the principle which explains the colossal parade of bourgeois life which... began in France... everything passed in review... work, and play... the family, the home, children, school, society, and theatre, types, professions.[25]

If the spectacle of everyday life was to be encoded and represented by the bourgeoisie in the *feulletons*, physiognomies, anthologies and paintings of the period it is because the discourse of modernism is constructed on the idea of a mass culture. Despite Manet's intentions as an artist, his Realist tendencies and acute perceptiveness would construct images which revealed working women, not as symbols or types, but as individual subjects caught in the fluctuating spaces of modern Paris.

NOTES

1. Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London) 106.

2. Benjamin, *Baudelaire,* 172.

3. Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner, *Romanticism and Realism, The Mythology of Nineteenth Century Art* (Markham: Penguin Books, 1984) 149–150.

4. Pierre Courthion, *Edouard Manet* (New York: Abrams) 10.

5. Linda Nochlin, *Realism and Tradition in Art 1848–1900* (New Jersey: Prentice–Hall, 1966) 45.

6. Nochlin 43.

7. Nochlin, 182.

8. E. Panofsky, Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History (Garden City: Doubleday, 1955) 28, 31– 32.

9. Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondence* (Paris, 1933) September 12, 1853.

10. Donald Egbert, *Social Radicalism and the Arts: A Cultural History from the French Revolution to 1968* (New York: Knopf, 1970) 90.

10. Egbert, 118.

12. Saint–Simon, *Opinions Littéraire*, 345–347, as quoted in Egbert, 120.

13. Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complete de Charles Baudelaire; L'Art Romantique* (Paris: 1925) 184–185.

14. T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life* (Princeton: Princeton UP) 23.

15. Patricia Mainardi, "The Political Origins of Modernism" *Art Journal* (vol.44, Spring 1985) 147.

16. Nochlin, 111–112.

17. Nochlin, 119.

18. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Random House, 1970) 223.

19. Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, Trans. Mark Poster (St Louis: Telos Press, 1975) 31.

20. Nochlin, 127.

21. Nochlin, 113.

22. Nochlin, 159.

23. Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 35.

24. Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 36.

25. Edouard Fuchs, *Die Karikatur der Europäischen Völker* (Munich: 1921, vol. 1) 362.

CHAPTER ONE

Le Chemin de Fer

> No more motherhood! No law of the blood. I say: no more motherhood. Once a woman has been freed from men who pay her the price of her body... she will owe her existence... only to her body... she will owe her existence... only to her own creativity. To this end she must devote herself to a work and fulfill a function.... So you will have to decide to take a newborn child from the breast of its natural mother and place it in the hands of a social mother, a nurse employed by the state. In this way, the child will be raised better.... Only then and not earlier will men, women and children be freed from the law of blood, the law of mankind's self-exploitation.[1]

> What is man's vocation? It is to be a good citizen. And woman's? To be a good wife and mother. One is in some way called the outside world, the other is retained for the interior.[2]

Le Chemin de Fer (Fig. 1) was painted by Manet in 1873 and was subsequently exhibited in the Salon of 1874. Since its first exhibition, it has been interpreted by art historians as an example of a realistic depiction of the leisure time of the Parisian bourgeoisie. The subject matter has been traditionally seen as an innocuous vehicle for exploring painterly techniques. Art historians, who have generally reflected white, male, middle-class values, have consistently ignored anything but the surface of paintings of women in domestic spaces. For example, John Richardson suggests that *Le Chemin de Fer* reveals the "agreeable aspects of the gaiety of Paris in the Third Republic."[3] Such an assertion is perplexing given the lack of communication between the two figures, the claustrophobic cage-like space and the sooty view.

While art historical approaches to *Le Chemin de Fer* do vary, they are consistent in their reticence toward the subject matter. This is evident in how a basic error in the interpretation of the painting has been allowed to go unchallenged for over one hundred years. For it has been traditionally assumed that this painting depicted a young mother with her child and not, as I will try to prove, a child care worker or nanny with her charge.[4] Phillipe Burty writes, in *La Republique Française* of June 9, 1874, that what was interesting in this painting was:

> The blue twill frock of the young mother. Above all we recognize M. Manet's desire to strike the right note without the help of any artifice of style or pose and his application of painting out of doors.[5]

Other critics of the period were as willing to privilege style over content. Castagnary wrote in *Siecle* of June 19, 1874:

> So powerful in its light, so distinguished in colour and a lost profile so gracefully indicated, a dress of blue cloth so broadly modelled that I ignore the unfinished state of the face and hands.[6]

If it was at the hand of favourable art critics that *Le Chemin de Fer* was committed to an art historical tradition of complicitous misinformation, it is perhaps in the negative reaction of the period that one finds the most revealing clues to its meaning. Indeed, Castagnary's blatant dismissals of subject matter cannot be attributed to oversight. Rather, Manet's *Le Chemin de Fer* depicts

disconcerting and problematic signification when it comes to issues of gender and class which he and other critics chose not to address.

Durvergier de Hausanne wrote in the Revue des Deux Mondes:

> Is Manet's Railway a double portrait or a single subject picture?... We lack information to solve this problem; we hesitate all the more concerning the young girl which at least might be a portrait seen from the rear. Manet has introduced so many innovations that nothing he does should astonish us. It is apparent that in spite of his revolutionary intentions Manet is an essentially bourgeois painter... Doubtless he belongs to a school which failing to recognize beauty and unable to feel it, has made a new idea of triviality and platitude. But his is the painting of shop–fronts and... tavern signs.[7]

This quote reveals the difficulty that the Parisian public was having with this work. The introduction of class terms, calling Manet both bourgeois and a painter of tavern signs, suggests that the difficulty was not entirely a question of impressionistic techniques. Indeed, in more vulgar criticism, problems with the subject matter resulted in more hostile attacks on the woman and child depicted. In the *Journal Amusant* of June 13, 1874, *Le Chemin de Fer* was described as "two mad women, attacked by incurable Monomanetic ["Manetmania"] watch the passing train through bars of their padded cell."[8] While *Charivari*, (*Amedie de Noe*), in the text of his caricature of the painting called it "the lady with the trained seal. These unfortunate creatures, finding themselves painted in this fashion wanted to flee! But the artist, foreseeing this, put up a grating which cut off all retreat."[9] It is in this derogatory and sarcastic description that one

senses the true nature of the problems the public, accustomed to academic painting, faced with these works, and why the "better" critics dealt mainly with technique. In calling her a "madwoman", one senses the fear generated by the questions of gender and class which, I believe, are evident in the painting. The allusion to a "padded cell" is an unsympathetic, yet perhaps, accurate description of how Manet paints the oppressive, enclosed sites of femininity in late nineteenth-century Paris.

In this chapter, I shall discuss how the sphere of home and garden constitutes one of the spaces of femininity in the late nineteenth century. I shall explore how this space was constructed in relation to the emerging modern, industrial society with its dramatic changes in gender and class relations. Moreover, I shall attempt to situate the relationship of childcare worker and bourgeois child as revelatory of the interaction between the bourgeoisie and the working-class in general.

We do know a thing or two about this woman and child, and the space they occupy. The woman who modelled for the painting was Victorine Meurent. She had posed for Manet for over a decade at this time.[10] However, her career as a model probably goes back to at least 1852 or 1853 when she was seventeen and had posed nude for a series of photographs.[11] This would make her approximately forty when Manet painted *Le Chemin de Fer*. The length and nature of her career would suggest that she was a member of the working-class, or as Beatrice Farwell euphemistically puts it "the class of women to

which she belonged."[12] Thus, if Manet was trying to represent a young bourgeois mother and child, as some have suggested, he chose an unusual model in the fortyish, street-wise Victorine.

The mother-daughter theory is even more unconvincing in light of other paintings of the period of the same subject by Manet and others.

Berthe Morisot's *The Balcony*, 1872, (Fig.2) is strikingly similar to *Le Chemin de Fer*. As in *Le Chemin*, a woman and young girl are situated in a confined space upon an incline along which runs an iron fence. However, where in *Le Chemin de Fer*, the woman and child look in separate directions without communication, in *The Balcony*, they look out together at the same thing. They stand closely together, unified visually by the parasol the woman carries. The woman is confident in her gaze over the city. With her elbows casually supported on the fence, she is in control of what she sees. The young girl shares her point of view. Her actions are in unison with those of the woman. The view is clear and while an enormous block limits access out of the frame on the right, the balcony continues completely unobstructed out of the frame on the left. They are close friends of Morisot, Yves Gobillard and her daughter Paule Gobillard. Two members of the bourgeoisie who have the power to direct their gaze over what they see clearly, to move out of the frame. There is no discord or dichotomy in the relationship to one another. They share privileges and values. This is unlike Morisot's *View of Paris from the Trocadero*, (Fig. 3), of the same year where the same mother and daughter are

positioned above a broader panorama with Morisot's sister Edma Pontillon. In this work painted from the same place as Manet's *View of the Universal Exhibition of 1867*, (Fig. 4), the figures seem lost in the large space. Their relationship and control over what they see is less defined and the intimacy of shared emotions and values seen in *The Balcony* is replaced by an uneasy relationship to the site separated visually from Paris by an expanse of lawn. Their lack of authority as women is revealed. Morisot did not paint the view unmediated by foreground protagonists as Manet did in *The View of The International Exhibition.* The women are like question marks and the fence is like the edge of the page. Their relationship to Paris as women is separate and unresolved by their lack of power.

If in *The Balcony*, mother and child choose to look out together from their aloof though limited position, a more introspective view of maternal relations is evident in Manet's *The Monet Family in their Garden in Argenteuil* of 1874 (Fig. 5). Here in the less structured rural setting, mother and son are melded into one figure. Without overt emotional display their shared bonds of family and class are unquestionable. When compared to Renoir's version of the same scene painted side-by-side, *Madame Monet and her Son in their Garden at Argenteuil*, (Fig. 6), Monet's intense coordination of the gaze of the mother and child and his articulate massing of the two figures are evident. In the Renoir, the boy's hand is visibly defined; Mme. Monet's back forms a separate contour-line from his and she looks out to the side. Manet's painting tells us so much

more about these people. One would suspect he would do the same in *Le Chemin de Fer*.

One might argue that perhaps *Le Chemin de Fer* represents a different class of mother-daughter painting, a sort of other-side-of-the-tracks version of Morisot's *The Balcony*. We have already established Victorine Meurant's working-class status; and the tracks are there. A good example of a working-class mother and child is Honore Daumier's *The Laundress* (Fig.7). Here a laundress, bent with lifting, mounts an exterior staircase helping a young child who carries a paddle. They do not look up or out over the view but at the ground. Overworked and fatigued, they have neither the leisure nor the power to command the view. Their exit from pictorial space and the railing which divided Morisot's bourgeois women from society at large only leads them down the stairs. Their life is a consistent grind of climbing endless stairs, endless work and insurmountable barriers.

Nevertheless, there is one similarity between *The Balcony* and *The Laundress* in that both the mother and the daughter share space, touch and have the same point of view. In other words, they share the conditioning of their class and gender. Indeed, it is this sharing of intimate space, gestures and emotions that is conspicuously absent from *Le Chemin de Fer*.

If there is little to suggest a maternal relationship between the two figures in *La Gare St-Lazare*, it is not because Manet was unwilling or unable to convey familial social interaction as is proven by his portrait of *Mme. Manet and her*

Son. In *Le Linge*, 1875, (Fig.8), a woman hanging laundry engages a young child in her labour. Painted in the same garden as *Le Chemin de Fer*, one immediately senses a far greater feeling of intimacy than is evident in *Le Chemin de Fer*. It would, however, be as presumptuous to assume that this is a scene of a mother and child as it had been to do in *Le Chemin de Fer*. The models were Alice Lecouve and the son of Hirsch's concierge. What they share is not family but class. In *Le Chemin de Fer*, it is Hirsch's daughter who confidently looks out over Paris in a stiffly pretty dress. So strong is the suggested maternal relationship between woman and child in *Le Linge* that even Mallarme assumed it:

> Here a young woman dressed in blue washes some linen several pieces of which are already drying; a child coming out from the flowers looks at its mother – that is all the subject.[13]

Having pointed out the differences and distances between the two figures in *Le Chemin de Fer*, I would like to reconstruct their relationship: to each other, to the space they occupy and finally to the space beyond the fence, modern Paris.

Between the figures, the older working-class woman and the young bourgeois girl, the most obvious relationship is that of child-care worker or nanny and her charge. Child care, an invisible occupation before feminism, hardly fits under the rubric of labour in the traditional definitions of Realism.

The nanny in her static, dull occupation, confronts us, blocking the view which the bourgeois art public shares with the little girl. If the nanny asserts her presence through her gaze towards the viewer, she, at the same time, suppresses her presence by adopting a bourgeois identity. This was typical of the changing role of working-class women of the period. The book, the hat, the dress and the fan all suggest a unity of bourgeois representation. However, individually, the iconography of these accoutrements suggest the fluctuation in class and gender roles of the period.

By the mid-1860's, Paris had an *Ecole Professionelles de Jeunes Filles.* Using private bourgeois money, these training schools taught working-class girls arithmetic, hygiene, design confection and sewing; all of which were particularly useful to the growing service industries of modern Paris. There was also a heavy ideological training of the young women. One of the "dames patronesses" claimed:

> Labour, the great benefactor of the world... The new Prometheuses, it makes light, condenses steam and transports thoughts by controlled electricity from one end of the world to the other... Father of all virtue, it inspires personal dignity and respect for the dignity of others.[14]

By educating the working-class, the bourgeoisie not only created literate workers but, perhaps more importantly, well behaved ones. A literate public could be educated to accept the social order. While inter-class conflict

dominated the headlines of the 1870's, one finds the establishment of the first night schools for adults as well as the creation of public lending libraries.[15]

At the same time that education was changing the minds of working-class women, the emerging fashion system was changing the way they dressed. More and more it was becoming difficult to differentiate between the classes solely on the basis of dress. This was due to the mass production of ready-made clothes and the anonymity of urban Parisian life where fleeting impressions sustained only a superficial analysis of social standing.[16] Indeed, working women were conscious of not appearing working-class, as the following remark of a late nineteenth-century servant to a British photographer suggests:

> There are so few that care for pictures in their working dress – they all want to be as smart as can be...(they) are as fine as anybody, dressed up.[17]

In France Leray-Beaulieu, in his work *Le Travail des Femmes au XIXe Siecle* writes of counter-help in fashionable stores:

> Indeed one shudders at the thought that most of the young girls, who dress and speak like great ladies, do not earn more than 2 franc 50 a day... this class... includes more than 10 to 12,000 women.[18]

In *Le Chemin de Fer*, Manet suggests both the success and failure of this woman's attempt at fine dressing. In contrast to the stiff, prim dress of the girl, her coat is soft and faded, the buttons large and plain. Her hair is wild and her hat sits awkwardly on her head. Even her hands and face protrude, thick and

fleshy, uncontained by her clothes. This awkward balance of self and self-image, of making do, is evident when one compares her with Manet's portrait of bourgeois women. *In the Garden*, 1870, (Fig. 9), depicts a subject not unlike *Le Chemin de Fer*. The woman here, however, relaxes comfortably in a muslin dress. Her hair is styled and her body unified by the voluminous dress. Her hands and face are integrated and restrained within the contours of her person. There is nothing awkward here, she is as confident and self-assured in her class as in her clothes.

There are countless other examples of this phenomenon. In Manet's *Berthe Morisot au chapeau noir et violettes*, 1872, (Fig.10), her hat is unified with the form of her head with an effortless elegance, unlike the hat of the woman in *Le Chemin de Fer*. If Manet has used clothing to indicate this nursemaid's vague and fluctuating position in the social order, he has also depicted the ambiguity in the relationship between the two figures and the space they occupy. The strained, alienated position of the figures is strikingly different from the other examples of nanny-child relationships in paintings of the period.

In Pierre Zandomeneghi's *Square d'Auvers, Paris*, 1880 (Fig. 11), a scene of Parisian life unfolds within a city square. A breezy genre scene is punctuated by children and their nannies exercising and taking air. It is a scene that reaffirms the bourgeois ideal of the good life so associated with Impressionist paintings. T.J. Clark mentions the "nursemaid helping a baby piss on the parterre"[19] without, unfortunately, elaborating on the social implications of this

observation. Clark has unwittingly accepted this degrading form of labour as somehow picturesque. In Clark's view, and that of the painter and assumed public, it is natural to view nurses as physically appended to the children in their charge. This is no social critique of the endless, daily drudgery, the low pay and the alienation of living in someone else's home. While a social critique is not explicit in *Le Chemin de Fer*, it is implicit in the lack of a cohesive relationship between the two figures. If one compares it with *Ready for the Party*, 1866 (Fig. 12), one finds striking differences in the position and intercourse between the figures. In *Ready for the Party*, a nursemaid helps a little girl to dress. Wearing a dress similar to that of the child in *Le Chemin de Fer*, the girl is primped and doted upon by a subservient nurse. The social distance between them is symbolized by the girl's position on a staircase above the nurse. The stooping maid, two steps below, is depicted as a willing participant in her own degradation.

The theme of Nanny and child, beyond its obvious social implications, could have suggested other symbolic meanings for Manet. His cryptic and often incomprehensible use of iconography derived from history and painting is well documented.[20] However, it is in the poem *Herodias* by Mallarme, Manet's close friend, that one finds the most revealing description of a nurse and child (annex 1). I believe that this description relates strongly to *Le Chemin de Fer*.[21]

Manet and Mallarme became friends in the early 1870's. Mallarme wrote in defense of Manet in a review of *The Salon of 1874*, when the poet was still

relatively unknown. His famous *The Impressionists and Edward Manet* was written in 1876, the same year that Manet painted his portrait. His poem *Herodias* was substantially written between 1864 and 1867, however, it was never finished and he worked on it up until his death in 1898.[22] Undoubtedly, the subject of *Herodias*, that of the young girl (future bride of Herod and mother of Salome) in a dialogue on age, sex, and destiny with her nurse would have been discussed by Manet and Mallarme.[23]

Herodias resembles *Le Chemin de Fer* not only in describing details of the two figures – Herodias speaks of "the blond torrent of my immaculate hair" but also in their relationship to each other. Indeed, throughout *Herodias*, Mallarme situates the female subject consciously in a confining space, looking out. She tells her nurse to "get back" and speaks of her "solitary body":

> By what lure
> Drawn, and what morn forgotten of the prophets
> Pours, on the dying distances, its sad festivity,
> I know not? You have seen me, wintry nurse,
> Down in the heavy prison of iron and stone.
> ... I stop, dreaming of exile and unleaf.

The resemblance to Manet's oddly positioned pair is striking. The young girl, imprisoned in a space enclosed by iron and stone, contemplating her destiny looks out to another space, in modern Paris. The Nurse in Herodias "dare[s] no longer look" and begs forgiveness "From my mind grown pale as an old book."

Imprisoned in the garden, a continuation of the domestic space of femininity, these women are cut off from the real action of the modern world. The weary and sexually knowing Victorine Meurant no longer questions her destiny, she has lived it. Susan Hirsh, of another class and generation, was not so sure. In those rapidly changing times, her position was less clear. Nevertheless, her caged position suggests the limits of her power and it is only in her position as a female subject that she can project meaning onto modern Paris. This is why Manet has left out the subject of the painting as suggested by the title. The train as a symbol of Modernism is conspicuously absent from the painting. Its existence is evidenced only by the ephemeral steam and, most importantly, by the mediation of the female subject who engages the train as object. The perceived male viewer must acquire meaning through the emptied female signifier. The inability to objectify the train as a symbol of Modernity coincides with the male viewer's inability to objectify the position of women as contained domesticated beings, rendering expected and accepted significations of both *female* and *modern* impotent.

The train which is both absent and present in *Le Chemin de Fer* was a major political issue in France during the 1870's. It is no coincidence that Manet chose it to cut off both physically and metaphorically his female subjects from Paris. The old bourgeoisie, who made their money in banking, ran the six national railroads. As power shifted to the new bourgeoisie of small businessmen who relied on the railway to move their goods from the provinces

to Paris, the centre of production, the old financial bourgeoisie were perceived as stifling expansion of the national market. It would be five years after Manet painted *Le Chemin de Fer* that The Freycinet Plan would complete and consolidate the French national railway and, consequently, the national market.[24] This plan had begun in 1872, the year before Manet had begun *Le Chemin de Fer*, when Clément Laurier, Gambetta's *Chef de cabinet* in 1870, introduced a measure requiring the state to re-purchase the railroads which were controlled by the banking cartels. He argued that this would provide French citizens and business with a right to freedom of movement and markets. This bill never reached the National Assembly.[25]

Thus *Le Chemin de Fer* can be read allegorically. The young girl, representing the future, is denied the promise of freedom and prosperity that a national railway would bring. The absence of the train suggests the failure of the dream to be materialized, while the green (sour?) grapes suggest goals aimed for but not attained. The railroad is an open ended sign from the unfinished project of Modernism.

The Railroad was only one element in the modernization of Paris. Nevertheless, in its brutal dissection of the city, its use of modern technologies and materials, and in its speed and ability to link distant places, it symbolized all that was potent in progress. In *Le Chemin de Fer*, Manet has chosen women to symbolize the unrealized and unknown future modernism would bring to Paris. The young girl, like Mallarme's Herodias, looks to her future vaguely

discernable, not yet formulated, in the fleeting nebulous steam. The older, wiser Victorine Meurant engages the viewer knowingly, aware of both her and the viewer's irrevocable social position, something that is even more permanent than the railway itself. In using women as the signs of male–generated meaning, and as objects of the male subject's gaze, Manet does not depart from the traditions of representation in western culture. One could in no way suggest otherwise. However, in his self proclaimed status as a Realist, he inadvertently reveals the subjective nature of these women and their relationships to Paris, Modernism, and each other. Manet, in creating an allegory of Modernism has, like an archaeologist, exposed the spaces of femininity and the fluctuations of class in Paris of the 1870's.

Le Chemin de Fer belongs to a genre of impressionist paintings which situate woman in the home or garden, the parameters of space usually associated with women as the site of their control and more importantly, their domination by men. Societies generate their own culturally determined spaces based on class, gender and race.[26] The garden, as the defining space between the city and the country, the interior and the exterior, the private and the public, was the choice of the impressionists for hiding the complexities and dichotomies of class and gender, rather than revealing them. In Claude Monet's *Camille au jardin, avec Jean et sa bonne*, 1873, (Fig. 13), the spaces of femininity look very different from what we see in *Le Chemin de Fer*. Painted by Monet at Argenteuil, T.J. Clark describes how

> The painter would make his own landscape there, in a place he could fill with intimate things, hoops, hats, coffee, children, wives, maids.[27]

This fiction constructed by the male painter for the male viewers eliminates evidence of modernism or class conflict from the picture. In reality, it was not far away.

The alley behind the garden is evident in the harshest light of winter in Monet's *Boulevard Saint-Denis, Argenteuil*, 1875, (Fig. 14). Indeed, as in *Le Chemin de Fer*, Monet's Garden was next to the train station, and the people in this shabby little back way are probably off to catch the train. We are very far from Mme. Monet's sun-filled garden and Monet has done his best to keep her separate from the outside world and to pad her cell with landscape.

Not so in *Le Chemin de Fer*. The bars of this cell are all too evident. Manet has minimized the distracting prettiness of the garden and juxtaposed the spaces of femininity with the spaces of masculinity (power and modernity) by including the train yard. The garden-as-enclosure is boldly revealed as having no exit. It's a no choice situation.

No choice for whom specifically? The nurse in Monet's *Camille au jardin* lacks even a passing consideration, much less choices. Cropped by the edge of the canvas, she is just part of the landscape, part of the "watery, vegetable, uterine stillness."[28] In *Le Chemin de Fer*, on the other hand, Victorine Meurant is clearly aware of her segregation within the spaces of class and gender alloted

to her. She reads in order to escape them. More significantly, she regards the (male) views questioningly, as if to say, "I am here but I am aware of your space as the viewer." She does not watch the spectacle of the passing train or the scheming day dreaming of someone else's child; she is focused on the real action in any painting: that of the subject–viewer. Manet submitted *Le Chemin de Fer* to the Salon of 1873. Its significance lies in how it synthesized the spaces of modernity with the train, the spaces of femininity with the garden, and the space of the salon by addressing the male bourgeois viewer. For who better to attract the attention of that audience than a nanny or maid? Only a prostitute perhaps. Working–class women formed a continuously available source of sexual fantasy for the bourgeois male. Any image of working–class woman from this period

> integrates the prostitute with that chain of resigned female bodies, originating in the lower class and bound to the instinctive physical needs of upper–class males.... To this series of submissive bodies belongs the nurse who lavishes her intimate care on the newborn; the nursery maid who toilet trains the child; the double–faced servant, both Martha and Mary Magdalen, whose body serves as an object of obsession in the master's house...[29]

Victorine Meurant knew this only too well. As a model for Manet some ten years earlier, she had played not the nanny, but the prostitute. We move now from the garden to the bedroom, that most intimate of the sites of femininity in

the 19th century, and to a painting whose realism of class and gender would affront and engage the salon audience as few paintings had before.

NOTES

1. Claire Démar, *Ma Loi d'avenir* (Paris, 1834) 58ff.
   Démar was a Saint-Simonian socialist whose radical feminists ideas are surprising for the period, some 30 years before Manet's *Le Chemin de Fer.*

2. Jules Simon, *La Femme au vingtième siècle,* (Paris, 1892), 67.

3. John Richardson, *Manet* (London: Phaidon, 1967) 27.

4. Rand, Harry, *Manet's Contemplation at the Gare St-Lazare* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1987) 22.
   This is the first reference to these two figures as a nanny and child: "the two figures are not a mother and daughter, as sometimes thought. The idea seems to have started with Philippe Burty."

5. Pierre Courthion, *Edouard Manet* (New York: Abrams, 1962) 114.

6. Jules-Antoine Castagnary, *Siècle* (Paris, June 10). See George Heard Hamilton, *Manet and His Critics* (New Haven: Yale UP) 179.

7. Hamilton, 179.

8. Stop, *Journal Amusant* (Paris: June 13, 1874). See Hamilton, 178.

9. Cham, *Charivari* (Paris: May 15, 1874). See Hamilton, 179.

10. Rand, 22.

11. Beatrice Farwell, *Manet and the Nude: A study in Iconography in the Second Empire* diss., UCLA, 1973 (New York: Garland Press, 1981) 161-162.

12. Farwell, 161-162.

13. Penny Florence, *Mallarmé, Manet and Redon* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) 14.

14. Sanford Elwitt, *The Making of the Third Republic: Class and Politics in France, 1868–1884* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP) 295.

15. Elwitt, *The Making of the Third Republic,* 201.

16. Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (London: Virago Press, 1985) 156.

17. Liz Stanley ed., *The Diaries of Hannah Cullwick Victorian Maidservant* (London: Virago, 1984) 231.

18. Joanna Richarson, *La vie parisienne 1852–1870* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1971) 94.

19. Clark, The Painter of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers (Princeton: Princeton UP) 76.

20. See: Michael Fried, "Manet's Sources" *Artforum* (March, 1969).

21. Though both Rand and Florence refer to *Herodias*, neither relates it specifically to *Le Chemin de Fer.*

22. Florence, 129.

23. Hérodias or Hérodiade (7 B.C. – 39 A.D.) was a Jewish princess who scandalized the Jews with her incestuous relationship with Herod. By manipulating her daughter Salome, she obtained the head of John the Baptist, with whom she was apparently in love.

24. Elwitt, *Making of the Third Republic*, 15.

25. Elwitt, *Making of the Third Republic*, 26.

26. Shirley Ardener, *Women and Space* (London: Croom Helm, 1981) 11–12.

27. Clark, *Painting*, 194–195.

28. Clark, *Painting*, 195.

29. Alain Corbin, "Commercial Sexuality in Nineteenth Century France: a System of Images and Regulations" *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteen Century.* Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laquer, eds. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1987) 213.

CHAPTER 2

Olympia

> This *Olympia*, a sort of female gorilla, a grotesque in India rubber outlined in black, apes on a bed in a state of complete nudity, the horizontal attitude of Titian's Venus: the right arm rests on the body in the same fashion, except for the hand, which is flexed in a sort of shameless contraction.
>
> Amédée Cantaloube[1]

> Women then stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning.
>
> Laura Mulvey[2]

Amédée Cantaloube's unflattering, even hostile description is typical of the criticism received by *Olympia* (Fig. 15). Indeed, of the seventy or so reviews which were published in the year after its exhibition in the Salon of 1865, most are hostile not so much towards the painting as towards the female subject depicted. Clearly, it was not because she was nude. Several highly eroticized nudes were displayed during the Salons of the 1860's. Alexandre Cabanel's *La Naissance de Vénus*, 1863, (Fig. 16) and other similar works were perhaps more acceptable because of their classical subjects and smooth academic surfaces. However, *Olympia* is a classical Greek name – the name of the mother of Alexander the Great, a woman of great power who ruled while he was on campaigns. And, as I shall attempt to prove in this chapter, it was not so much the painting style as the subject that evoked the most vicious attacks. There is something about this woman which disturbed Parisian society deeper than any

vulgar image of prostitution could. Manet had captured, perhaps inadvertedly, something crucial to Modernism: the changing of power relations based on class and gender. *Olympia* embodied the emerging working-class and the emerging figure of woman as subject rather than object. These changes of power relations are most evident where gender, class and commodity exchange intersect: in prostitution.

In analyzing Manet's *Olympia*, art historians have generally ignored the subject and emphasized the innovations in painting technique. George Heard Hamilton offers a good example of the denial approach towards Manet's subject matter

> *Olympia* is a puny model, stretched out on a sheet, and the Negro woman and cat are there. That is all. There is no need to explain them; it is impossible to explain them, except as elements which occur in the work primarily for pictorial necessity which is inextricably part of the painter's vision.[3]

As this limited discourse was exhausted, art historians began dealing with Manet's subject matter in terms of his use of paintings from the European tradition as compositional sources for his own work. These arguments reinforced his position in the tradition while maintaining the code of silence concerning his use of contemporary subjects. In the case of *Olympia*, the source most frequently cited is that of Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, 1538. While the source is unquestionable (Manet had copied it earlier) and the similarities

obvious, it is the differences which are revealing. Both are paintings about prostitution but where the *Venus of Urbino* is an object of male desire whose gaze and hand lead the male viewer into the body as a site of his pleasure, *Olympia* confronts him, penetrates the viewer's space, and asserts her presence as a subject being.

In this chapter, I would like to examine the issues surrounding prostitution in Paris in the 1860's and how it revealed the changing nature of class and gender relations in the era of high capitalism.

The represention and conceptualization of the body, and particularly the female body, underwent enormous transformations in the 19th century.[4] The emergence of modern demographics, sociology and medicine prioritized and subsequently regulated the body in ways previously unimaginable. Contrary to the popular view that the body and sexuality were repressed in the discourses of the nineteenth century, they were in fact never more central to the systems of power and representation. Indeed, sexual exchange and the body formed a complex and intricate system of exchanges based on class and gender. Foucault writes

> At issue is not a movement bent on pushing rude sex back into some obscure and inaccessible region, but on the contrary, a process that spreads it over the surface of things and bodies, arouses it, draws it out and bids it to speak, implants it in reality and enjoins it to tell the truth: an entire glittering sexual array, reflected in a myriad of discourses, the obstination of powers, and the interplay of knowledge and pleasure.[5]

This spreading of sexuality over *bodies* which *implants it in reality* is what I believe is significant in *Olympia*. Of course, the sexualization of the body is not new. The nude in art is a familiar subject.

Prior to the nineteenth century, the nude was usually related to some Christian or classical mythological narrative. It could symbolize something, as images of woman usually do, such as innocence or virtue, guilt or vice. The rising importance of Venus in the eighteenth century afforded closer associations between *beauty*, sexuality and the female body.[6] It is in Ingres' *Grande Odalisque*, 1814, that the narrative elements are reduced to a lingering exoticism while the sexual signification is amplified by her rather distorted anatomy. While many nudes, including Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, had been painted more for their erotic appeal than for their classical subjects, these were usually private commissions, painted for an individual patron and not for a public space such as the Salon. Thus, they form a discourse outside of the main systems of representation. Indeed, it is really only with the nineteenth century when these private images were displayed in Museums that the erotic nude emerges in the public sphere with Ingres, Goya and Manet.

As Anne Coffin Hanson suggests, Ingres' status as a leading academician in concert with his highly finished painted surface, protected him from the criticism to which Manet would be subjected for *Olympia*, but there is more to it than that. Ingres' Odalesque is coy and demure. She lets the implied male

viewer look at her without confrontation. Moreover, her distorted body and exotic surroundings de-contextualize her out of any reality into a realm of pure male fantasy. *Olympia*, on the other hand, confronts the viewer with a sardonic glare. Her body is extremely realistic, to the point where the critics called it dirty and putrid. By confronting the male viewer engaged in his fantasies with a real thinking person who returns his gaze, Manet has deconstructed the codes of representing the female nude. In *Olympia*, we see the meeting of the ideal body derived from the classical Venus in general and Titian's *Venus de Urbino* in particular, with the nineteenth century body as a site of sexuality as symbolized by the prostitute. In choosing to depict a prostitute as a nude, Manet has entered into the discourses of sexuality with all their complexities of power, commodity exchange and gender relationship.

Modern Paris gave rise to whole new systems of prostitution. Increasing urban populations were accompanied by the colonization of woman as cheap plentiful labour. Leroy-Beaulieu stated revealingly that it was difficult to understand how laundresses, who earned two francs a day "earned enough to exist."[7] The corollory to this contemplation is they must have resorted to prostitution.

This association of poverty with prostitution, a realist tendency, is evident in how Manet depicts *Olympia* not as a classical nude but as a living woman of the streets. Thus the social definitions of class and gender transected in this painting.

Foucault suggests that sexuality was an ideological invention of the bourgeoisie.[8] Culture, which can be defined as those social practices which aim to produce signification, or to make sense of the world, produces images which either legitimize power or deconstruct power's systems of control. Manet's *Olympia* is of the latter sort in that it reveals the systems of exchange hidden in the act of prostitution as revealed by the gaze.

T.J. Clark argues that it is the interaction between a working–class *Olympia* and the middle–class art audience which characterizes a fracturing of traditional modes of representation.[9] Indeed, it is both her class and her gender which define her role as prostitute. Femininity itself, in its class specific forms, is maintained by the polarity between the virgin and the whore "which is a mystifying representation of the economic exchange in the patriarchal kinship system."[10] Clark's assertion of a strictly class–based reading of *Olympia* is further weakened by the fact that class systems in modern Paris were rapidly shifting, leaving a strictly visual rendering of class ambiguous. Gender, on the contrary, had very specific systems of representation which remain evident despite the changing position of woman in the society. Clark's equation of the Haussmanization of Paris and the use of the Prostitute as a symbol for Modernism is lacking, in that it relies on artists' intentionality and disinterestedness. He suggests that the prostitute symbolized pleasure, and yet the pleasure involved in seeing implies a lack or a repression. One could look but not touch. Thus Clark codifies woman as a sign to generate male meanings

and desires. Moreover, he doesn't acknowledge the erotic motivations in the painting of *Olympia*. Finally, Clark ignores the prostitute as labour and commodity in one. She both works and sells, which more accurately decodes her relevance to late capitalism than her symbolic value for male viewers. It would be advantageous to begin filling in the gaps of Clark's arguments concerning *Olympia* by looking at how prostitution was constructed in mid-nineteenth century France.

It was only in the nineteenth century that prostitution became viewed as a threat to public health in need of control.[11] Parent-Duchâtelet, one of the leading hygienists of the day was an expert on both sewage and prostitution, which reveals how these women were considered at the time. Based on his work, what had started out in Paris in 1802 as a procedure to check prostitutes for sexually transmitted diseases soon became a system of arbitrary police control. Jill Harsin writes "Instead of the orderly procedures envisioned by the creators of the system, the police des moeurs gave rise to a system of repression directed not only against prostitutes but against women of the working-class in general."[12]

The legality of prostitution was vague. If a woman was a registered prostitute, she could be imprisoned without trial. Slowly, this and other tools of oppression were applied to other working-class women. Moreover, a woman who was not registered (who had not admitted to being a prostitute) could be registered against her will by the police. By the time that Manet painted

Olympia, thousands of women were being arrested in Paris every year. The female body, or more specifically, the working-class female body, had become not only the sight of commodity exchange and labour, but one which was strictly regulated and controlled through inspections and arrests.

The line between prostitute and working-class woman was thus vaguely defined. All working-class women were both economically powerless and, as women, legally invisible. These factors could lead women into prostitution while making all working-class women suspect.[13] Under the Napoleonic Code of 1804, women were legally non-existent. All their possessions and money belonged to their husbands or fathers. Indeed, the civil code included women in the category of unfit persons along with ex-convicts and the insane. A woman could be jailed for adultery while a man could only be fined.[14] Denied basic human rights, the Paris police could do exactly as they liked with prostitutes and working-class women in general.

Women were frequently rounded up off the street to fill daily quotas for arrests. The system of regulation and policing involved the creation of the *maison de tolerance* which facilitated both the procuring of the prostitute by the client and the regulation of prostitution by the police. These houses could not be near a school or church and had to be equipped with shutters or glazed windows.[15] Indeed, in *Olympia*, we sense a closed space. This was not the space of femininity defined by the interior as home and garden, but rather the interior of the *boudoir* were women were enclosed for sexual pleasure. Because

this contrasted sharply with the image of woman as virtuous wife and mother, it was necessary to keep this space controlled and hidden. Between these polarities of the isolated woman working in the home and the sexual collective of the brothel (both in the service of men), women had no legitimate function. Jules Michelet wrote: "How many irritations for the single woman! She can hardly ever go out in the evening: she would be taken for a prostitute."[16] *Olympia*'s enclosed boudoir, offering no exit, suggests the nature of her immobility. She floats on the bed. Here is a space where class and gender meet in critical ways; it is a site of sexual exchange.

This site of sexual exchange goes beyond the room itself. It is *Olympia*'s body which functions as a work place. Parent-Duchâtelet in his *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris* of 1836, applied objective statistical methods which included defining likely prostitutes by the colour of their eyes, hair and eyebrows.[17] Women were seen to be physically pre-disposed to prostitution, thus victimized by their own bodies. This may explain why *Olympia* drew so much attention to the rendering of the body, described by many as putrid and dirty. The notion that the prostitute's body was a site of pleasure was always counter-balanced, in the male subject's mind, by the idea that it was also the site of concealed disease. P.A. Didiot suggested in his work on venereal diseases that prostitutes were not victims of these diseases but active transmitters to the innocent public.[18] The prostitute was thus vulnerable to diseases which invaded her body, ultimately taking it over. Her body as a site

of work eventually robbed her of life itself. The fear generated by this hidden reality probably accounted for the hostility of the critics and public towards *Olympia* to a large extent. Her body symbolized both lust and death, and Manet's realistic depiction brought both of these to the surface. Again, working-class women in general suffered from these overtones and were generally perceived as being lustful and potentially diseased.

It has been suggested that the black maid in *Olympia*, represents a primitivism associated with virulant sexuality. Pollock writes

> Thus a painting of a woman having chosen a sexual partner outside of marriage will be read as a fallen woman, a disordering force in the social fabric... an animalized and coarsened creature closer to the physicality of the working-class population and to the sexual promiscuity of "primitive peoples".[19]

Thus the equating of the black maid in *Olympia* with promiscuity has been addressed specifically by Sander L. Gilman, who suggests that the emergence in France of the Hottentot in the early 1860's sought to prove the hightened sexuality of black women by constructing proof from physical differences.[20] Characterized as having small waists and enormous buttocks, Gilman suggests that the fashion for corsets and bussles was an attempt to imitate the sexualized stereotype of black women.

The use of black characters as a compliment to an image of a nude white woman has traditionally been seen as providing an exoticism of foreign places. In Bazille's *La toilette*, 1870, a black women (with large buttocks) removes a

shoe from a nude white women's foot (Fig. 17). It is the distance and difference of an elusive sexualized object which defines primitivism as a white, western male persuit.

While it is tempting to ascribe a great deal of significance to the black maid as a symbol of *Olympia's* shockingly overt sexuality, Manet's rather gentle treatment of this typical compositional device suggests nothing more than colonial exoticism. What the black maid does provide is a counterpoint to the gaze of the implied male viewer, who remains outside of the frame. She gazes at *Olympia*, and *Olympia* gazes out to the viewer. In this regard, *Olympia* challenges the conventions of male/female interaction in what Freud called the "libido for looking", in which men cultivate the desire to see, while women, because of their role in society, invert this concept onto themselves and want to be looked at.[21] Moreover, *Olympia* not only returns the gaze of the male viewer, she also obstructs his fantasies through the placement of her hand and the fragments of clothing she wears. She is both exposed and hidden, passively available and yet modest. The duplicity of her attributes as both available and restricted is best seen in her long flowing hair which Manet has painted in such a way that it appears and then disappears into the the shadows. Her bracelet and necklace both serve to fragment her body into sexualized parts, while her hand both draws attention to, and hides, her genitalia. Freud writes

> In women, the inclination to passive exhibitionism is almost invariably buried under the imposing reactive function for sexual modesty, but not without a loophole being left for it in relation to clothes[22]

Manet's interest in the play of the male gaze and the construction of female sexuality is a recurrent theme in his work. In 1877, fourteen years after *Olympia*, he painted *Nana, (Fig. 18).* Less shocking than *Olympia*, it retains the confrontation of the viewer by a sexualized female subject. Manet has even included the male viewer who appears peripherally to the left. The male viewer, as an essential component in the construction of female sexuality, appears in Cézanne's *A Modern Olympia*, 1872–73, (Fig. 19), in which a black servant theatrically unrobes *Olympia* before an attentive bearded man.

Olympia's shock value does not emerge from her nudity or from, as Clark states, her working–class origins. Rather, it is her self awareness as a sexualized object of male desire which is disconcerting. Her clear regard for her male audience and ambiguous nudity which sexualizes through fragmentation and the fetishization of hair and shoes, suggests the alarming dichotomy between the emerging conciousness of women as fully evolved subject–beings and their continuing position as objects of male sexual fantasy. The attention given to the bed, which spans the entire width of the painting, as the site of this construction of femininity, implies the inescapability of her position. *Olympia* does not float on a cloud, or a wave, or a shell. With no exit, it is the claustrophobia of her objectification which is disconcerting.

NOTES

1. Amédée Cantaloube, *Le Grand Journal* (Paris: 1865). As quoted by Clark, *Painting*, 94.

2. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16:3 (Autumn, 1975) 7.

3. George Heard Hamilton, *Manet and His Critics*, 75.

4. Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laquerir (eds.) *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteeth Century* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1978).

5. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York, 1978) 72.

6. Anne Coffin Hanson, *Manet and the Modern Tradition* (New Haven: Yale UP) 90–102.

7. Joanna Richardson, *La vie parisienne 1852–1870* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1971) 94.

8. Foucault, 3–13.

9. Clark, *Painting*, 146.

10. Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Femminism and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988) 78.

11. Jill Harsin, *Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth–Century Paris* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985) XV.

12. Harsin, *Policing*, XVI.

13. Harsin, *Policing,* VIII.

14. Harsin, *Policing,* VIII.

15. Harsin, *Policing,* VIII.

16. Jules Michelet, *Oeuvres completes, vol. XVIII, 1858–60* (Paris: Flammarion, 1985) 413.

17. Harsin, *Policing*, 102.

18. Harsin, *Policing*, 248.

19. Pollock, *Vision*, 10.

20. Sander L. Gilman, "The Hottentot and the Prostitute: Race, Gender, and Difference in Manet and Zola," Liberal Arts College Public lecture, Concordia University, Montreal, 26 January 1989.

21. Sigmund Freud, *"Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol. 14 (London: 1953–74) 126–130.

22. Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconcious, The Sandard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol. 8 (London: 1953–74) 98.

CHAPTER THREE

A Bar at the Folies–Bergère

> Woman is by our civilization consecrated to night, unless she escape from it sometimes to those open air afternoons by the seaside or in an arbour, affectionated by moderns. Yet I think the artist would be in the wrong to present her among the artificial glories of candle-light or gas, as at that time the only object of art would be the woman herself, set off by the immediate atmosphere, theatrical and active even beautiful, but utterly inartistic.

Stephané Mallarmé. "The Impressionists and Edouard Manet."[1]

> The spaces of modernity are where class and gender interface in critical ways, in that they are the spaces of sexual exchange. The significant spaces of modernity are neither simply those of masculinity, nor are they those of femininity...they are...the marginal or interstitial spaces where the fields of the masculine and feminine intersect and structure sexuality within a classed order.

Griselda Pollock. *Vision & Difference: Femininity, Femminism and the Histories of Art.* [2]

By the early 1880's, when Manet painted *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (Fig. 20), the spaces of femininity within modern Paris had changed dramatically. Woman, as homemaker/caregiver or woman as sex-object/prostitute within the private enclosed spaces of the interior, was becoming enlarged to include woman as a public figure who walked the boulevards and went to work. However, her previous roles were subsumed into her new identity. Traces of the homemaker and sex-object were carried over into public life. Most women's work outside of the home was somehow related to homemaking skills such as sowing, cleaning or serving. And the erotic attributes assigned to these degrading jobs reveal how women were commodified both by their physical

labour and by their objectification as signs of male sexual fantasy. If, as the quote of Mallarmé above suggests, the representation of woman (as the object of male fantasy) is tied artistically to nature, as part of a male domain rather than as a subject, then Manet's formalized and intentional representation of women in the highly artificial urban setting of the Folies-Bergère may account for the perplexing disjunction of composition which characterizes this painting. Indeed the disparity between the reticent barmaid and her reflection suggests the ambiguity of her social position and her alienation (for reasons of sex and class) from the bourgeois man she serves. Mallarmé goes as far as to say that woman seen in (urban) gaslight, is the woman herself, "set off by the immediate atmosphere, theatrical and active..." not only suggesting the harsh realities of the spaces of modernism, but also the duality of feminine representation. For if *la vie moderne* made her look like herself, what did she appear as, and for whom, the rest of the time?

Beyond these burdens of representation and hard work, working-class women were also being colonized as a new consumer market. Mass production and public sanitation were making it possible for her to mimic the sophisticated appearance of the bourgeoisie with whom she now shared the grand boulevards. Paris had undergone massive urban renewal under the direction of Baron Von Haussmann, which had cleared out the slums of the medieval city, and in the process, had displaced the closed urban environment of the working-class. In its place, Haussmann installed the bright stage-like boulevards. These new

spaces were filled with newly regimented hourly wage earners, keeping punctual schedules, and the more leisurely bourgeois consumers. Time and space were dramatically altered as the relationships between femininity and masculinity, of working-class and bourgeoisie fluctuated in the period of high capitalism.

The changing role of working-class women began with their emergence from the home. Their changing class awareness and the new phenomena of mixed class popular night-life, based on crowd and spectacle, and its corollary – the alienated female subject in the modern city, constitutes the basis of my analysis of Manet's *Bar at the Folies- Bergere*.

Art Historians have, as with most Impressionist painting, ignored or denied a social or political reading of café or bar scenes. The smartly dressed women, the bottles and fruit, the glittering spectacle of the crowd have all but obliterated the behind-the-scenes reality of hard work and low pay for the women who worked there. As Nochlin writes "The impressionists views of bars, balls, laundresses, boulevards, café-concerts, theatres and cityscapes were remarkably free of any sort of social or political *parti-pris*"[3]. That the true nature of these women's lives is sublimated beneath a veneer of bourgeois respectability is not due to an idealization on Manet's part. It was implicit in the nature of the cafe concerts as sites of spectacle and fantasy. It was part of a barmaid's job to look both sexually attractive and morally respectable, or in other words, both good

and bad. The barmaid–as–representation was like the dioramas and painted theatre sets of the period: a confection of male fantasy and desire.

Thus it is understandable that Anne Coffin Hanson would write that

> The depiction of *la vie moderne* can certainly be considered realism in the sense that it records the sights and peoples of 19th–century Paris, but in practice the term meant only a certain kind of imagery which showed its fashionable and progressive side.[4]

Yet, however much we may indulge ourselves in the fashionable allure of these images, one cannot ignore the rather disconcerting anomalies of composition and the fractured allusionism with which Manet so intentionally deconstructs their representation. Indeed, Hanson goes to great lengths to avoid such troubling matters, claiming that Manet's avant–gardism was not social or political, but rather, the expansion of artistic means to embrace a new optimistic poetry dedicated to "the spirit of modern life"[5]. This seems to conflict with the evidence in the paintings themselves, for there is little optimism in the face of the barmaid in the *Bar at the Folies–Bergère*.

Novelene Ross goes so far as to objectify the barmaid as "a symbol of the unique sophistication and *élan* vital to nineteenth–century Paris"[6], and then further reduces her and her reflection to being an "opportunity to study the animate gestures of two pretty females and the varied sensations of still–life arrangement in an atmosphere of shimmering light."[7]

Clearly, Nochlin, Hanson, and Ross have been taken in by the very illusionism and theatricality of Parisian night life. But given Manet's

disconcerting use of a mirror to fracture the compositional space, and the distracted, even sad face of the barmaid, one can assume that Manet, rather than participating in this fantasy of pleasure, was attempting to reveal it for what it really was.

As mentioned above, one of the greatest influences on the changing social position of women in nineteenth century Paris was the enormous urban renewal project begun by Baron Von Haussmann, who had been appointed Prefect of the Seine in 1853. What is now referred to the "Haussmannization of Paris" involved everything from the restorations of Notre Dame (completed in 1863) to the demolition of whole neighbourhoods and their subsequently rebuilding as the grand boulevards which characterize Paris to this day. Medieval Paris was gone, and with it, whole social systems. In seventeen years Haussmann had remade Paris and had displaced 350,000 people. He spent 2.5 billion francs and, at the height of the construction, one in five Parisian workers was employed in the building

trades.[8]

Haussmann was thus responsible for the rapid expansion of the suburbs as places for the working–class to live and work. In 1850, L. Maric was cited in a publication on the decentralization of the Paris markets as saying that

> As a result of the transformation of the old Paris, the opening up of new streets, the widening of narrow ones, the high price of land, the extension of commerce and industry, with the old slums giving way each day to apartment houses, stores, and workshops the poor and working–class population finds itself...forced out to the extremities of Paris; which means the centre is destined to be inhabited in future only by the well–to–do.[9]

Despite the move to the suburbs, many working-class women remained within Paris to work in the reconstruction or in the service industries created by the new consumer-oriented shops and cafés. However, having lost their closed artisan-based neighbourhoods they were now more visible to the gaze of the bourgeoisie. Concerning this, the Goncourts wrote

> The Paris of the way of life of 1830 to 1848 is passing away. Its passing is not material but moral. Social life is going through a great evolution, which is beginning. I see women, children households, families in this café [the Eldorado]. The interior is passing away. Life turns back to become public.[10]

The interior world, that site of femininity familiar to us in both *Le chemin de Fer* and *Olympia*, was opening up as the spectacle of the boulevards with their café concerts, department store windows, gas lights and pedestrian traffic revealed the working-class woman to the collective gaze of the bourgeoisie. For the first time she was written about and painted, not as a symbol, but as a subject.

Indeed Gervaise, a character in Zola's *L'Assommoir*, refers to the Haussmannization as a metaphor for her own alienation

> Her anger came precisely from the fact that the quartier was being embellished just as she herself was on the road to ruin...It was an immense crossroads with its arms stretching out to the horizon along endless thoroughfares, swarming with people, drowned in a chaos of ruins and new construction...Gervaise felt alone and abandoned... and to think that in all this flood of people, where there must be so many who were well off, there wasn't a single

> christian soul to understand her and slip her a ten-sou piece![11]

Women like Gervaise and the barmaid in Manet's Bar at the Folies-Bergere, had much to fear and to resent in the new Paris. The adoption of bourgeois values fragmented both consuming and producing capacities, leaving the working-class poor in a rich town. The subsequent recoding of working-class consciousness left a certain blankness, which is evident in the face of Manet's barmaid. Clark suggests that "here above all was uncertainty--a pantomime of false rich and false poor, in which anyone could pretend to be anything if he or she had money for clothes".[12]

If the working-class woman was forced to emerge into the gaslight of Paris, she herself was uncomfortable with her new position. Two factors helped her to obscure her ambiguous position; one was the crowd, the simple fact that she was one of many anonymous class types discretely moving along the vast boulevards. The other was a revolution in fashion that made ready-wear clothing in the style of bourgeois dress available, if expensive. Dressed up, she could pass for middle-class if she was only glimpsed at in a crowd.

The crowd of modern Paris was not strictly defined along class lines. Nevertheless, despite isolated private interests, a crowd does suggest a social cohesion. This social cohesion does not resemble the previous institutions, such as the church or family, which brought people together. The modern urban crowd manifests in its behaviour many of the attributes of mass production. In

describing mass production, Marx writes how the worker modifies his behaviour to coordinate his own "movements to the uniform and unceasing motion of automation".[13] The modern worker was pressured to conform in behaviour, dress and even facial expression.

The ominous overtones of the evening crowds in the streets, looking for spectacle and distraction are suggested by Victor Hugo who wrote

> In that hideous dream, night arrived together with the crowd, and both grew ever thicker; indeed in those regions which no book can fathom, the more numerous were the people, the deeper was the darkness.[14]

Engels wrote, to much the same effect

> The very turmoil of the streets has something repulsive, something against which human nature rebels. The hundreds of thousands of all classes and ranks crowding past each other, are they not all human beings with the same qualities and power and with the same interest in being happy...and still they crowd by one another as though they had nothing in common... and their only agreement a tacit one...the brutal indifference, the unfeeling isolation of each in his private interest[15]

The crowd in *Manet's Bar at the Folies-Bergère* is portrayed with equal cynicism as that expressed by Hugo or Engels. Despite the portrait sketches of Gaston Latouche, Méry Laurent and Jeanne de Marsy, all of whom were familiar to Manet and Parisian society at the time, the overall sense is one of conformity, anonymity and darkness. Indeed, the portraits only emphasize the truly alienating nature of the crowd as a mass.

The barmaid's relationship to the crowd is complex. She is both part of it and separate from it. Manet has made this ambiguity apparent by using a mirror to place her both in the crowd but within a separate space behind the bar. This division suggests the more rigid demarcation of leisure time, represented by the crowd, and work time as represented by the barmaid. Moreover, her separateness suggests the incongruity of her position as a working-class woman dressed up to imitate the bourgeoisie only to be placed in a position of service.

Clothes had taken on a new significance in modern Paris. Mass production and department store marketing strategies meant that more and more women were buying ready made dresses in the latest styles. The urban middle-class wanted to avoid appearing overdressed and, at the same time, wanted to suggest discreetly their social position to their peers. This led to subtle styles which subverted their own anonymity with clues of class and wealth.

The problem of what to wear for a woman who worked with the public was difficult. Clothes were still very expensive and represented a major investment among the poor. Moreover, a barmaid, such as the one at the Folies-Bergère, was expected to look attractive, respectable and economically secure. Positioned somewhere between female factory workers and white collar clerks, she was expected to work physically serving drinks while looking appealing for her male customers in a restricting dress. The contradictions of class and clothes

which suggest the ambiguous social position of woman in modern Paris is evident in the remarks of F. Béraud, who wrote:

> It does not take much acuteness to recognize that a girl who at eight o'clock may be sumptuously dressed in an elegant costume is the same who appears as a shop girl at nine o'clock and as a peasant girl at ten.[16]

If *Bar at the Folies-Bergère* is a painting of social realism, it is one in which the typical clichés of constructed bourgeoisie stereotypes of working-class life have been ignored, and the complicated fluctuations in class structure have been emphasized. If we compare Manet's *The Plum*, 1877-78, (Fig. 21), with Degas' *Absinthe*, 1876, (Fig. 22), it is apparent how differently the two artists perceived working-class women. In Degas' work we sense immediately the dejected misery of this poor woman's life. Reff describes her as a well-dressed prostitute, and despite the rigidity of this term, we have no doubt that her life has been difficult.[17] Degas, looking down from above, encapsulates all the fatalism of victimhood. There is no female subject left here looking lost in thought, as in Manet's *The Plum*, or out towards the viewer, as in *the Bar at the Folies-Bergère*. The women in Degas' *Absinthe* is objectified to conform with Degas' static bourgeois stereotypes of a woman of the street with little considerations for her as a person or her changing position within the social order. This judgemental and paternalistic view of the fringes of society was shared by many of Manet's contemporaries. Huysmans wrote of similar women as "sitting dejectedly on benches, wearing their elbows out on marble-topped

tables with their heads in their hands".[38] This will to sublimate these woman into the pre-existing roles of prostitute or woman of vice may reflect how Parisian society were having difficulty in recognizing that many of the modern female roles which were played out in the public sphere, were no longer as easily recognized or circumscribed as they had once been. The incongruity of young working women going about alone, dressed in ready wear dresses from department stores which resembled those of the middle-class could only be explained through her own immorality. The fact that many working women found it necessary to resort to prostitution in order to sustain themselves only reinforced these stereotypes.

In Manet's scenes of bars and cafés, we sense the alienation of these women not only as an internalized function of their poverty but also in their relationships and interactions with other individuals. In *At the Café*, 1878, (Fig. 23), we find to the left of the canvas a woman's head in profile, who is totally removed from the couple next to her. Her angular face and cropped hair resemble a renaissance portrait. Cut off by the bar and truncated by the window sill at the neck, she occupies a two-dimensional plane totally removed from the social interaction of the café.

This painting was originally part of a larger work which most likely included *A Waitress Serving Beer*, 1877, (Fig. 24). Together they would have formed a rather fractured composition with each person looking out in a different direction. A gentleman with his top hat, a worker in his smock and

clay pipe, the physically close, but mentally distant couple and the women in profile. No doubt Manet cut the painting in two because of this compositional disparity, as he had done with the bullfight painting which included *The Dead Toreador*, 1864. By cutting up these elaborate compositions, Manet demonstrated that in order to paint the disparate realities of *la vie moderne*, new concepts of space, composition and *mise en scene* would be required. New solutions to new problems had to be found in order to go beyond the parameters of traditional modes of representation. It would take him until the end of his career to come up with *Bar at the Folies-Bergère* as a compositional solution which could not be cut in two.

Manet was able to organize the fluctuating systems of representation present in modern Paris into an eloquent yet fractured *Bar at the Folies Bergère* by referring to Watteau's painting of *Gilles*, 1721 (Fig. 25). Watteau had also worked in a period of great social change. The emergent bourgeois of the late 18th century refuted an aristocratic hierarchy of rank and birth, creating a universal democracy centered on the ideological figure of man. *Gilles*, the clown represents this new consciousness, a man of the people who has a soul and is able to think. Separated from the other players by a physical and psychological space, his singular authority as a human being is emphasized. He faces us, without the mask of his trade, to proclaim the new space of the common man.

Similarly, in *Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, Manet has presented us with the barmaid as a symbol of the new role of women, and of the working-class in general, in the development of the urban industrialized society.

The degree to which Watteau was an influence on Manet has only been dealt with discursively in the literature[19]. There is no mention of Manet's use of *Gilles* as a direct source for *The Bar at The Folies-Bergère*. Reff does associate *Gilles* with the boy in white in Manet's *The Old Musician*, 1862 (Fig. 26).[20] In 1881, the same year that Manet painted *The Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, he completed a portrait of a young boy, *Henry Bernstein*,(Fig. 27). The Bernstein portrait resembles both *Gilles* and Manet's own boy in white from the *Old Musician* painted almost twenty years earlier. This suggests that Manet used *Gilles* as a source over a long period of time and that Watteau's tribute to the common man was significant in Manet's work as a recurring theme.

Manet, like Watteau, has combined contemporary psychological dispositions within a historical context. *Gilles* has the same complacency as the barmaid in *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*. There is similar passiveness, a stationary distant and yet open face. Like an actress on the stage of modern Parisian night life she reflects and distracts her audience (the crowd) just as Gilles had done.

Moreover, there are strong compositional elements which relate the two paintings. There is the obvious point of comparison: the ruff lace collar, the

buttons down the front of his smock and her dress, the placement of the arms, the shadow of their noses, his straw hat which has become her flaxen hair. Most importantly, there is the similarity between the fractured space between the main figure and the surrounding environment and the frontal but slightly distracted gaze of both *Gilles* and the barmaid.

The discrepancy between the space behind the bar and its reflection in the mirror has puzzled viewers of *Bar at the Folies-Bergère* since its first exhibition at the Salon of 1882. Mirrors have traditionally symbolized vanity and the complexities of human psychology. There is a long tradition of mirrors in 18th century art, going back to Velazquez and Ingres. Manet had earlier painted a woman in front of a mirror in *Devant le Psyche*[21]. We find this, for example, in a photograph of a courtesan of the Second Empire, where, gazing obliquely into her mirror, she reveals both her beauty and her vice (Fig. 28). However, Manet's barmaid doesn't look at herself in the mirror. Instead, the mirror reveals her back, the crowded bar, and in the upper right, a gentleman in a top hat. Manet was not the first to use these large mirrors which decorated the cafés and bars of modern Paris to create interesting compositional arrangements. Gustave Caillebotte in his *In a Café*, (Fig.29), had painted a single figure before a mirror with the other café patrons apparently on the spectator's side of the picture plane.[22] But where Caillebotte has represented the space in an organized logical fashion, corresponding approximately to reality, Manet has intentionally altered the space so that the barmaid's reflection doesn't

correspond to her position in front of the mirror, while the gentleman who approaches seems totally unrelated to the spatial realities of the bar. In this regard as well, *Bar at the Folies-Bergère* resembles Watteau's *Gilles*. Although there is no mirror in the latter, the placement of a single figure facing the picture plane with a discordant relationship to a background of active figures is enough to suggest that Manet used *Gilles* as a source when one considered the other similarities of facial expression and details of dress.

Clearly Manet wanted to draw parallels between his barmaid and the 18th century clown, but on what grounds? Michael Levey suggests that the 18th century was a period in which art began to represent the realities of ordinary people and ceased to be decoration for the aristocracy.[23] Like Beaumarchais' *Figaro,* Watteau's *Gilles* was part of a new interest in the psychology of the average man as an individual. Levey writes

> Gilles seems too dignified for the clown's white floppy tunic and abbreviated trousers. The moon shaped hat encircles a vividly painted but solemn face, its lack of animation the more marked when compared with the boisterous lively faces behind, there is a complete separation between the group and the individual; they are active while he is idle, having fun while he gazes out directly at the spectator.[24]

Watteau has imbued Gilles with the dignity and individuality which characterized the emergence of the common man as a subject in the 18th century. This new social awareness, which would eventually culminate in the French revolution, was updated by Manet in the figure of the barmaid to

express the new social position of working women as subjects in their own right, rather then mere objects of male desire. Manet's barmaid is equally aloof, contemplative and dignified as Gilles, despite her questionable social standing and surroundings. Like Gilles, she has entered into the consciousness of her times, not as a clown or ornament, but as a human being.

NOTES

1. Stéphane Mallarmé, "The Impressionists and Edouard Manet". Penny Florence, *Mallarmé, Manet and Redon* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP) 14.

2. Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1988) 70.

3. Linda Nochlin, *Realism* (New Jersey: Prentice–Hall, 1966) 157.

4. Anne Coffin Hanson, *Manet and the Modern Tradition* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1977) viii.

5. Hanson, *Manet*, viii.

6. Novelene Ross, *Manet's Bar at the Folies–Bergères and the Myths of Popular Illustration* (Anne Arbour: UMI Research Press, 1982) 2.

7. Ross, 3.

8. T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984) 37.

9. L. Marie, *De La decentralisation des Halles* (Paris, 1850) qtd. in P. Lavedon, *Histoire de l'urbanisme à Paris* (Paris, 1975) 403.

10. Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Journal des Goncourts: Mémoires de la vie littéraire.* (Paris, 1912) 18 novembre, 1860.

11. Emile Zola, *L'Assommoir* (Paris: Garnier–Flammarion, 1969) 387, 413–414.

12. Clark, *Painting*, 47.

13. Karl Marx, *Das Kapital* ed. Karl Korsch (Berlin, 1932) 404.

14. Victor Hugo, *Oeuvres completes, Poesie II: Les Orientales, Les Feuilles d'automne* (Paris, 1880) 365 ff.

15. Fredrich Engels *The condition of the Working-class in England* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973, 1844) 64.

16. F. Béraud, *Les filles publiques de Paris et la police que les régit* (Paris-Leipzig, 1839) vol. 1, 55ff.

17. Theodore Reff, *Manet and Modern Paris: One Hundred Paintings, Drawings, Prints and Photographs by Manet and his Contemporaries*, (Washington, 1982) 76.

18. Reff, *Manet and Modern Paris*, 76.

19. Michael Fried, "Manet's Sources", *Artforum*, VIII (March, 1969) 21-82.

20. Reff, *Manet and Modern Paris, 90.*

21. I owe much of this discussion of mirrors to information provided by Detlef Stiebeling of the McGill University department of Art History.

22. Robert Rosenblum, "Gustave Caillebotte: the 1970s and the 1870s" *Artforum*, vol. XV (March 1977,) 46-52.

    The relevant passage reads:

    Was *In a Cafe* really dated 1880, one year before Manet began to think about the visual and psychological paradoxes of the *Bar at the folies-Bergère,* in which a lone figure also stands before a bar-room mirror that, seemingly synonymous with the plane of the picture, reflects other figures on the spectator's side of the painting? (page 47).

23. Michael Levey, *Rococo to Revolution: Major Trends in Eighteenth-century Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1966) 10.

24. Levey, 76-77.

CONCLUSION

In Manet's *Le Chemin de Fer, Olympia,* and *a Bar at the Folies-Bergère,* the changes in the social position of women which resulted from Modernism are revealed to be external to the women themselves. Trains pass them by, cities are destroyed and rebuilt, and they are displayed in the glare of electric lights. None of this is their doing: modernism is enacted upon them. The sites of femininity in modern Paris, whether in the home, the brothel, or the bar, are characterized by a lack of space or an exit. Unlike the Realists who had objectified the working-class by encoding their images with cliches and stereotypes, Manet's realism created disconcerting images of working women, which portray the fluctuations in the social position of individual human subjects.

The new social organization of work into structured units of time contributed to the static alienated quality of these images. Lukacs refers to this as "The contemplative stance" which conforms to a closed system of control over time and space.[1] The objectification of labour is "now made into the permanent ineluctable reality of their daily life" in which "the personality can do no more than look on helplessly while its own existence is reduced to an isolated particle and fed into an alien system.".[2]

Indeed work is the distraction that allows the male viewer to indulge his libidinal fantasies unchallenged by the female subject who is rendered absent by her banal labour. Thus, the alienation of these women is not only a result of the objectification of their labour, they are also objectified by their social

position as women and by the gaze of the male viewer. This is evident in the way in which these women look absently toward the viewer, asserting their subjective being while fully aware of their role as objects of the viewer's regard. This silent, steady return of the gaze is unique to Manet's images of working-class women, and is a major reason that these paintings are both compelling and confusing. Baudelaire describes such a gaze, suggesting that "in eyes that look at us with mirror-like blankness the remoteness remains complete."[3]

These paintings also demonstrate how the division of public and private spaces was disintegrating in the late nineteenth century. With the invention of public transportation, and the expansion of the public sphere of the streets and cafés, a prioritization of visual communication over verbal communication emerged. Photography was developed precisely at this period and demonstrates this obsession with encoding the public and the private visually. Roland Barthes writes

> The age of photography corresponds precisely to the eruption of the private into the public, or rather to the creation of a new social value, which is private publicity: the private is consumed, as such, publicly.[4]

It is this *private publicity* which situates Manet's images of working-class women within the social processes of modernism. Without the luxury of choice, they are frozen in perpetuity by class and gender and the systems of representation, to be always publicly available to the gaze of those who have more power. Manet's uncanny realism sympathetically portrays the struggles of these women as individuals caught in a system beyond their control.

NOTES

1. Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*, Trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press) 89.

2. Lukacs, 90.

3. Walter Benjamin. *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism,* Trans. Harry Zohn (London: 1973) 149–150.

4. Roland Barthes, *La Chambre Claire: note sur la photographie* (Paris: Gallimard–Seuil, 1980) 153.

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ANNEX 1

Herodias

by

Stéphane Mallarmé

SCENE

Nurse – Herodias

N. Alive! Or is it the shadow of a princess I see?
For my lips your fingers and their rings, and cease
To walk in an age ignored.

H. Get back.
The blonde torrent of my immaculate hair
Bathing my solitary body, freezes it
With horror, and my hairs with light entwined
Are deathless. Woman, a kiss would kill me
If beauty were not death.
By what lure
Drawn, and what morn forgotten of the prophets
Pours, on the dying distances, its sad festivity,
I know not? You have seen me, wintry nurse,
Down into the heavy prison of iron and stone
Wherein my aged lions tawny centuries drag
Enter and walk, fated and hands unscathed,
Amid the desert perfume of those ancient kings:
But yet more did you see what were my fears?
I stop, dreaming of exile and unleaf,
As by a basic where jetting water invites,
The pale lilies within me, whilst entranced
At following with their eyes the languid spoils
Falling down through my reverie in silence,
The lions averting my robe's indolence
Look at my feet which would make calm the sea.
Calm, you, the shudders of your senile flesh
Come, and my tresses imitating the ways
Too wild which make you dread a lion's mane,
Help me, since thus you dare no longer look,
To comb me nonchalantly in the glass.

N. If not gay myrrh in bottles shut,
Of some essence ravished from roses' age
Will you not child, the virtue essay
Funereal?

H. Leave there the perfumes! Do you not know
I hate them, nurse, and would you have me feel
Their exaltation drown my languishing head?

I want my hairs, which are not flowers
To spread forgetfulness of human ills,
But gold, for ever virgin of aromatics,
In their cruel lights and matt palenesses
To observe the sterile coldness of metal,
Having reflected you, jewels of my natal walls,
Armour, vases since my lone childhood.

N. Forgive! age had effaced, queen, what you forbade
From my mind grown pale as an old book, or
black...

H. Enough, hold up this mirror.
Oh mirror!
A cold water frozen with ennui in your frame,
How often, for how long, unvisited
Of dreams, and seeking my remembrances which are
Like leaves beneath your ice's profoundness
I to myself appeared a far-off shade.
But ah! Some evenings in your severe fount
I of my sparse dreams have known the nudity.
Nurse, am I beautiful?

N. A star, in truth.
But this tress falls...

H. Stop in your crime
Which chills my blood towards its source, and check
That famously impious gesture: ah! tell me
What sure demon throws on you this sinister spell,
This kiss, these offered scents, and, shall I say it?
My heart, this hand still more sacrilegious,
For I think you would have touched me, make a day
That will not finish without ill on the tower...
Oh day, Herodias with dread looks upon!

N. Strange times, indeed, from which heaven protect!
you!
You wander, solitary shade, and a new fierceness,
And look within, precocious with dread:
But always adorable like an immortal,
O my child, and beautiful, terribly, and such
That...

H. But were you not going to touch me?

N. ... I should love
To be for whom Destiny guards your secrets.

H. Oh! Silence!

N. Will he ever come?

H. Pure stars,
Hear not!

N. How, if not amid obscure
Alarms, to dream more implacable still
And as a suppliant the god whom the treasure
Of your grace awaits! For whom, devoured
By anxiety keep you the splendour ignored
And the vain mystery of your being?

H. For myself.

N. Sad flower which grows alone and has no other joy
Than its own image seen in water listlessly.

H. Go, keep your pity as your irony.

N. Only explain: Oh! no, naive child,
It must grow less one day, this triumphant disdain.

H. But who would touch me, of the lions untouched?
Besides, I want naught human, and if sculptured
You see me with eyes lost in Paradise
'Tis when I bring to mind your milk once drunk.

N. Ah! Lamentable victim offered to its fate!

H. Yes, it's for me, for me that I flower, deserted!
You know it, gardens of amethyst, hid
Endlessly in cunning abysses and dazzled,
Ignored gold, keeping your antique light
Under the sombre sleep of a primaeval soil,
You sones whence my eyes like pure jewels
Borrow their melodious brightness, and you

Metals which give my youthful tresses
A fatal splendour and their massive sway!
For you, woman, born in an evil age
As for the mischief of sibylline caves,
Who talk of a mortal! who declare, from the calyx
Of my robes, aromatic of fierce delights,
There should issue the white shudder of my nudity,
Prophesy too that if the warm blue of summer,
Towards which natively woman unveils,
Sees me in my pudour a shivering star,
I die!

I love virginity's horror, and I would
Live in the terror that my locks inspire
So, at evening, drawn back in my couch, a reptile
Inviolate, to feel in my purposeless flesh
The cold scintillations of your pale light
You, who die to yourself, you, who burn with chastity,
White night of ice-clots and cruel snow!

And your lonely sister, oh my sister eternal
My dream will mount you-wards: such already
Rare limpidity of a heart which dreamed it,
I think myself alone in my monotonous country
And, around me, all lives in the idolatry
Of a mirror, reflecting in its sleeping calm
Herodias of the clear diamond look...
Oh! supreme joy, yes, I know it, I am alone.

N. Madam, are you to die thus?

H. No, my poor grandam,
Be calm, and withdrawing, pardon this hard heart,
But first, if you will, close the shutters, the azure
Seraphic smiles in the profound panes,
And I detest, I, the beautiful azure!

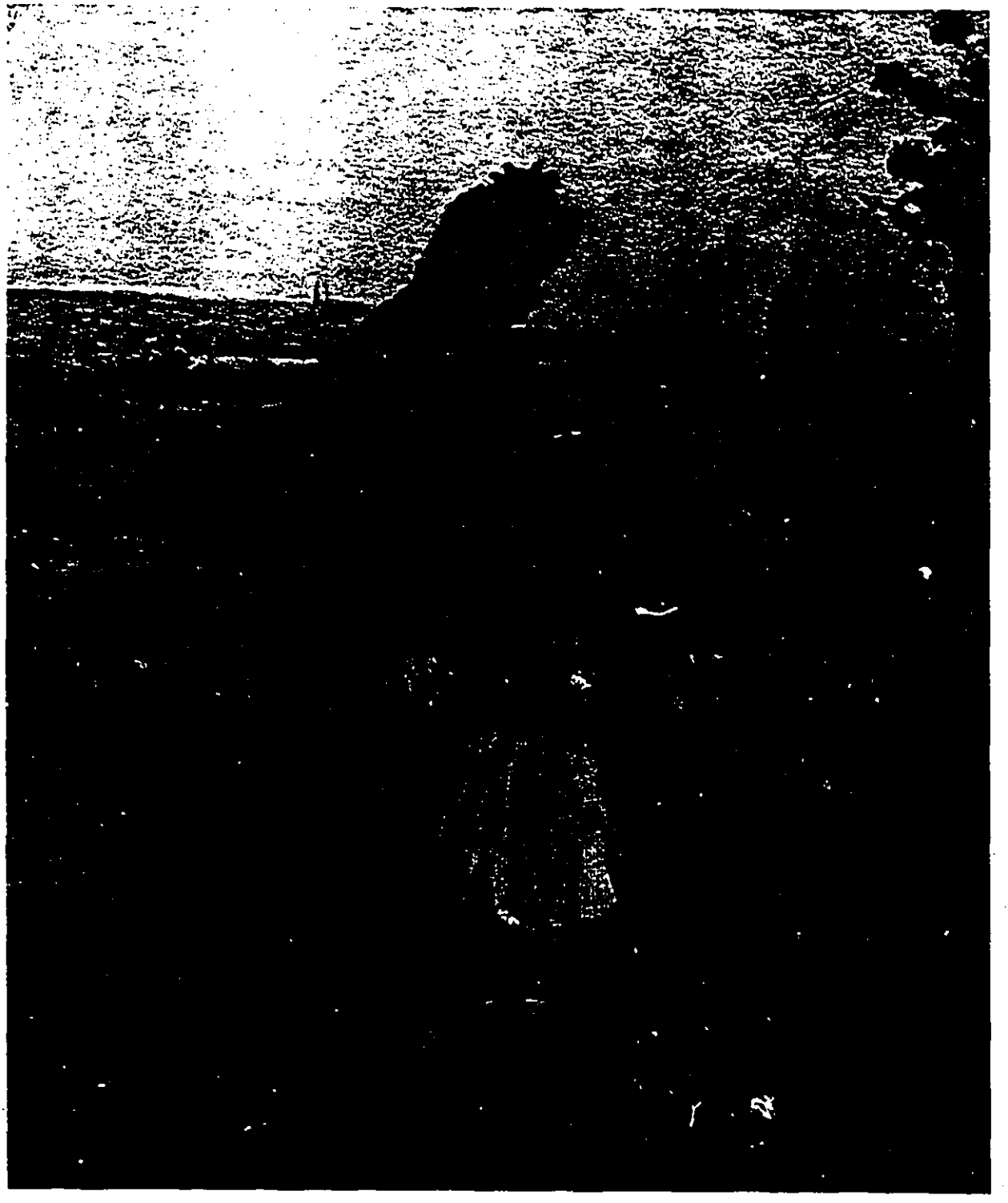
Waves
Rock gently and, yonder, know you not a land
Where the sinister sky has the hated looks
Of Venus who, the eve long, burns in the leafage;
I'll thither.
Light, too, it's childish
You'll say, those torches where wax with subtle fire

Weeps mid the vain gold some strange tear
And...

N. And now?

H. Adieu.
You lie, naked flower
Of my lips!
I await a thing unknown
Or perhaps, ignoring the mystery and your cries,
You utter the ultimate, bruised, sobs
Of a childhood feeling amid its reveries
Separate each from each its cold polished stones.

ILLUSTRATIONS



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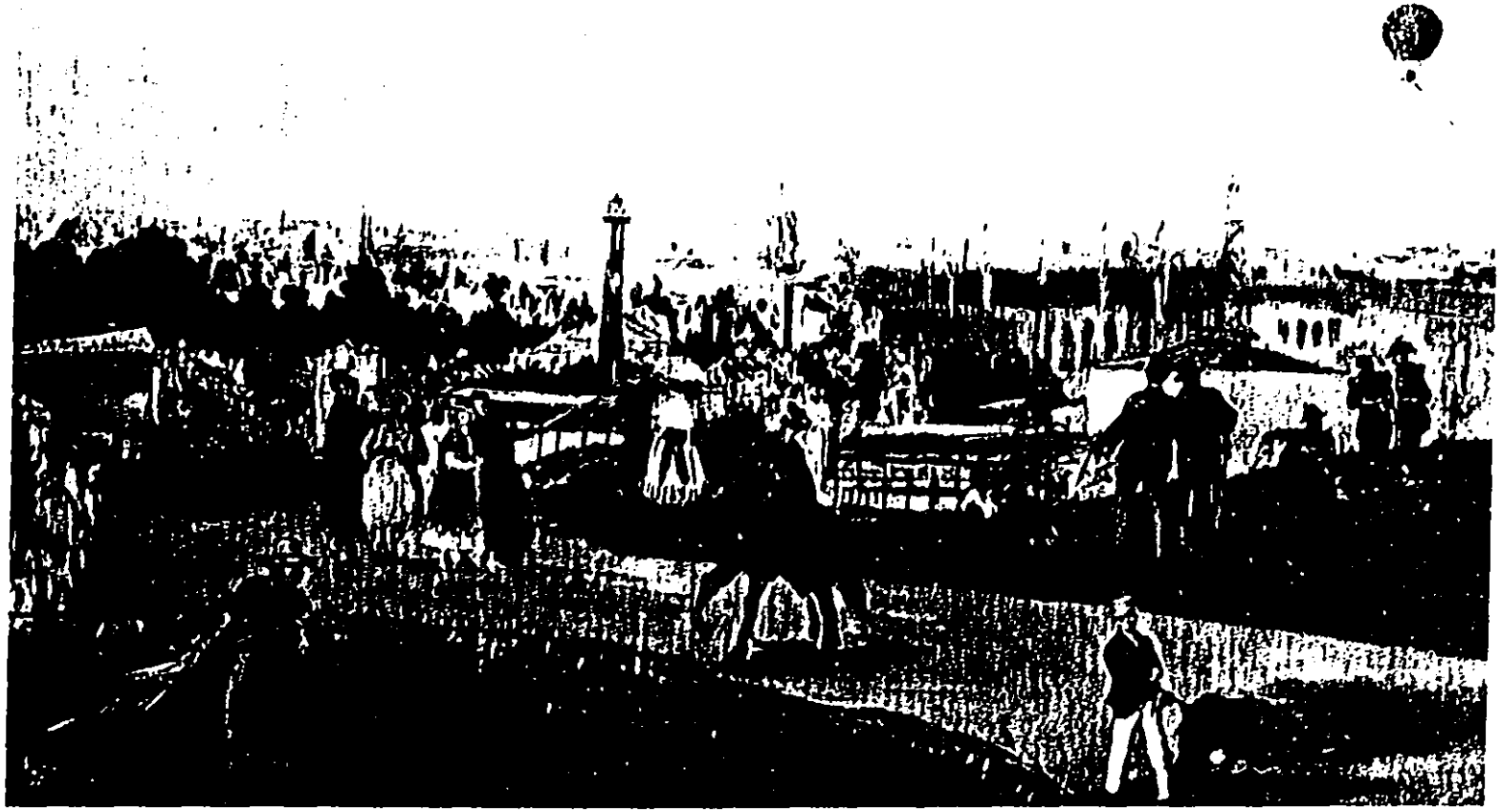

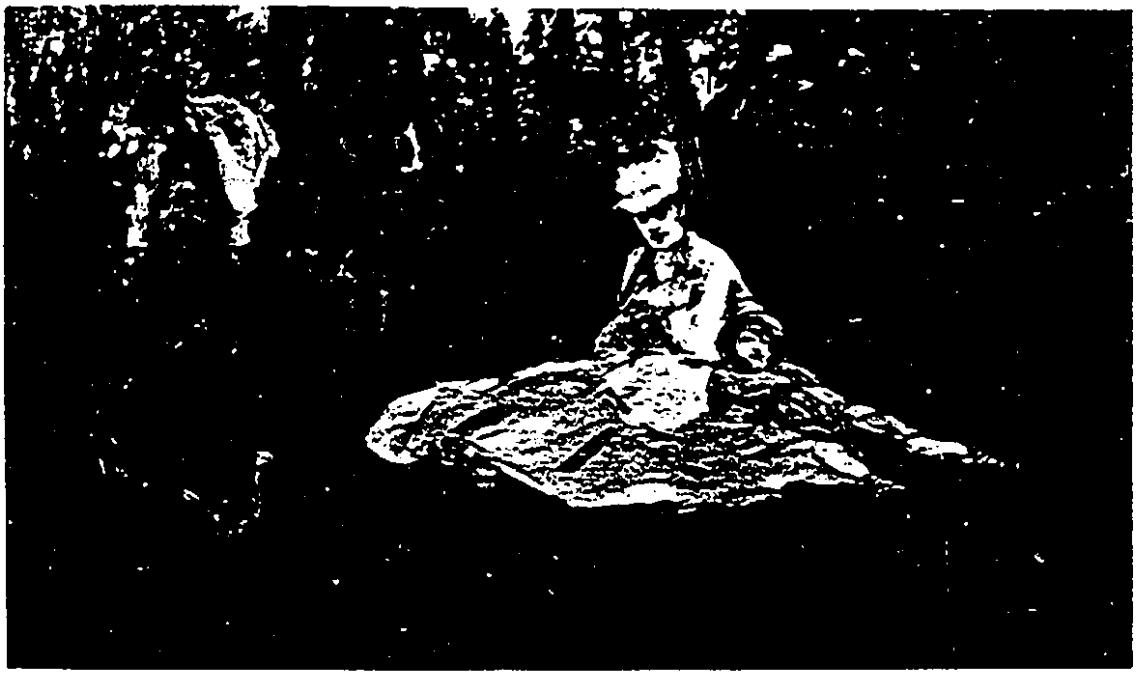

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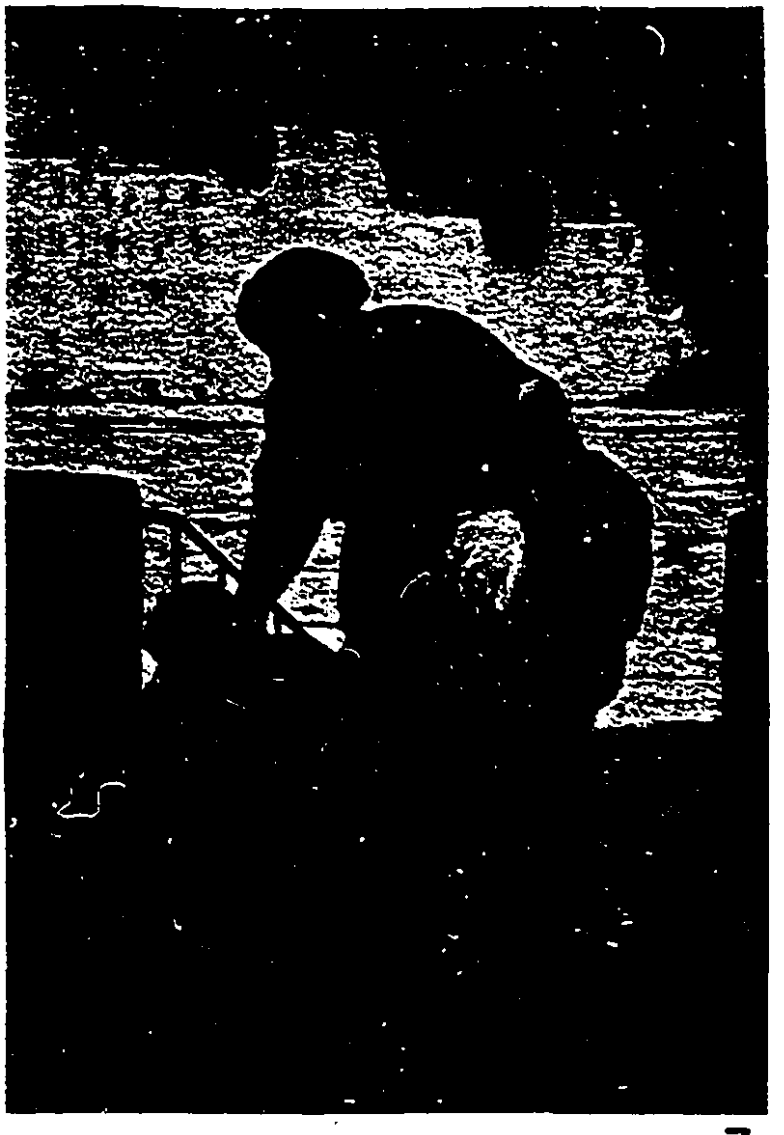

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