In this encounter between one of the twentieth century's greatest philosophical minds and an artist fundamental to our understanding of the development of modern art, Michel Foucault explores Edouard Manet's importance in the overthrow of traditional values in painting. Originally delivered as a lecture in Tunis in 1971, here translated into English for the first time, the text takes the form of a commentary on thirteen of Manet's paintings. For Foucault, the connection between visual art and power is clear. Far from being an insular and bourgeois pursuit, he saw painting as a place where power's insidious workings were disclosed and therefore to be challenged. At the same time, this work is part of the larger history of representation that informs all Foucault's major works, a stage in the development of his concern for *le regard* or the gaze; a major feature of twentieth-century French phenomenology.

With a newly commissioned introduction by leading French critic Nicolas Bourriaud and a note on the translation by Matthew Barr, this is a major contribution to the fields of both modern philosophy and art history.

Manet and the Object of Painting

Manet and the Object of Painting

BY MICHEL FOUCAULT

Translated from French
by Matthew Barr

With an introduction
by Nicolas Bourriaud

Tate Publishing

First published in English 2009 by order of the Tate Trustees
by Tate Publishing, a division of Tate Enterprises Ltd,
Millbank, London SW1P 4RG
www.tate.org.uk/publishing

First published in paperback 2011

A catalogue record for this book is available from
the British Library
ISBN 978 1 85437 996 2

Distributed in the United States and Canada by
ABRAMS, New York
Library of Congress Control Number: 2011926192

Designed by Chalk
www.chalkdesign.co.uk

Colour reproduction by DL Interactive Ltd, London
Printed and bound in China by C&C Offset Printing Co., Ltd

Front cover: Edouard Manet, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* 1881–2 (detail of fig.13)

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This book is supported by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as part of the Burgess programme run by the Cultural Department of the French Embassy in London.
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BY NICOLAS BOURRIAUD

MICHEL FOUCAULT: MANET AND THE BIRTH OF THE VIEWER

While Michel Foucault was in Tunis delivering his conference on Manet in 1971, he was given the post of Professor at the Collège de France, Paris, the pinnacle of the university's hierarchy, three months before founding the Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons (G.I.P.). Paradoxically, this academic distinction inaugurated the most militant period in the French philosopher's life, bringing him into line with the theoretical activist of yesterday, Jean-Paul Sartre, and the Maoists of the newspaper *La Cause du Peuple*. Moreover, this short return to Tunis was not anodyne for Foucault. It was effectively in Tunisia, where he had arrived in September 1966 to take up a chair as Professor of Philosophy, that he encountered political activism for the first time, finding himself at the centre of a series of resistance demonstrations against the authoritarian regime of President Bourguiba. Even if he was, by force of circumstances, outside France during the events of May 1968, it was during these three Tunisian years that he discovered the world of the militant which would occupy such an important place in his life over the following years. At the same time, the expatriated philosopher deepened his interest in art, notably when he drew up a course on the

evolution of painting from the Renaissance to Manet. This project constituted a recurring and lasting obsession for him: shortly after his departure from Paris, Foucault had signed a contract with a Parisian editor for a book which he had established as 'Le Noir et la surface' ('The Black and the Surface') – a work which he would never write. Much later, shortly before his death, he wrote a final text on this subject, published in the newspaper *Le Monde* under the flaubertian pseudonym of 'Julien L'hopital'.

Meanwhile, the philosopher's main activity in Tunisia would be the writing of *L'archéologie du savoir* (*The Archaeology of Knowledge*), in which he redefined his work as that of a 'genealogist', and where he tried a strategic rapprochement with a group of French historians in deciding to disengage himself from the structuralism which had up until then formed the melting pot of his thought, and which he now perceived as a limit and an embarrassing reference. From the publication of this book in 1969, which constituted a sort of general methodology, it is possible to speak of a 'genealogical turning point' in Foucault: 'The genealogist,' he wrote, 'is a diagnostician who examines the relations between power, knowledge and the body in modern society.'[1] It is well known that, contrary to the traditional historian, Foucault did not attach himself to institutions (the clinic, the prison...) nor to ideologies (sexuality, the law...), but to specific relations between knowledge and power which, in any given epoch, produce these institutions as much as statements: it is the notion of 'discourse' which, from *L'archéologie du savoir*

[1] In Hubert Dreyfus & Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: un parcours philosophique*, Paris 1984, p.157.

onwards, came to substitute in his thought the concepts of 'episteme' and of 'structure' which took their theoretical armature from the earlier works.

Already, with *Histoire de la folie* (*History of Madness*), Foucault had resisted the urge to write a book on psychiatry. Psychiatry speaks of madness, he says, but madness does not speak, it characterises itself precisely by its 'absence of oeuvres', by its apparent silence. 'I did not want to write the history of this language,' he wrote, 'but the archaeology of silence.'[2] He concerned himself therefore less with this or that social object than with what happened between and to them – because 'power is a relationship, it is not a thing.'[3] Apart from aligning himself with the minor, individuals and with repressed groups, it is this passion for modelling – philosophical operations which make apparent, precisely, the space which exists between social and discursive groups – which doubtless represents the most tangible common ground between Foucault and the great French philosophers of this generation: Gilles Deleuze redefined the world in terms of flows and gaps between mechanisms; Jean-François Lyotard described it in the form of a system of connections and of 'differentials' between various conduits of energy; and Jacques Derrida explored the interval between the oral and the written, the sign and the trace. Always the space between things, rather than things in terms of singular objects, the event rather than the monument. For this generation, thought is before everything else the creator of a geometry – such is the nature of their debt to structuralism. Deleuze

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[2] Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, Paris 1972, p.11. Published in English as Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa, Abingdon 2006.

[3] Foucault cited by François Dosse, *Histoire du structuralisme*, vol.2, Paris 1992, p.315. Published in English as François Dosse, *History of Structuralism: The Sign Sets, 1967–Present*, trans. Deborah Glassman, Minneapolis 1998.

summarizes the Foucaldian method as follows: 'Not taking a position, but following and disentangling lines',[4] that is to say studying historical phenomena, everything but the present, before finally extracting the visibilities and the utterances. In the wake of Nietzsche, the other major influence, these philosophers shared a postulate which existed not at the origin, nor in the sense of an *a priori*, but from heterogeneous plateaux which acted as interpretation. Foucault's thought thereby affirms itself like genealogical work, exploring the multiple strata of human discourse as it distributes itself in the most diverse spaces and objects, and of which the 'depth' is never to be found.

In this way one could say that beyond a certain predilection for art (he often repeated that art was the only type of study which he took real pleasure in writing about), Foucault seized the subject in the same way as all the others that he could have tackled: in a transversal manner. The trigger for his reflection is always the position and function of this or that artistic event within a given historic grouping. Such is the bedrock of his passion for Manet, but also of what he felt for René Magritte or Paul Klee, who became objects of long critical texts, not to mention the magisterial description of Diego Velàzquez's *Las Meninas* c.1656 that opens *Les mots et les choses* (*The Order of Things*) – which, as we will see, is not without rapport with Manet.

The interest Foucault sustained for the painter of *Luncheon on the Grass* (*Déjeuner sur l'herbe*) 1863 came first of all from the fact that Manet proved himself a founder of discursivity,

[4] Gilles Deleuze, *Pourparlers*, Paris 1990, p.119.

that he instituted a 'discursive field', in the same way as the works of Darwin, Buffon, Marx or Freud. The famous conference on 'The Death of the Author', announced in 1969, applied at the same time a radical distinction between the proper noun and that which Foucault called the 'author function', a system which stamps discourses and in so doing distributes rules among them, in a given society, in the space of knowledge. Thus Michel Foucault did not approach Manet as though he were an individual whose life it was a matter of studying like a collection of anecdotes – to such an extent that he did not even mention his first name, Edouard, throughout his conference: instead, he seemed to describe an intensity, an electric field, an event named Manet which unfolds in pictorial language, reminding his audience that he is in no sense a specialist in history of art. ('What does it matter who speaks?' runs the formula of Samuel Beckett). More generally, Foucault is less interested by what the image says than by what it produces – the behaviour that it generates, and what it leaves barely seen among the social machinery in which it distributes bodies, spaces and utterances. Representation? It forms an integral part of processes of social differentiation, of exclusion, assimilation and control. Foucault tries hard to articulate the implicit and invisible strategies that confine painting, to render visible what it shows, but equally what it conceals.

With Manet, Foucault finds himself confronted with one of these figures of rupture, of historical break, who forms the point of departure of all these works: with regard to

the history of madness, penal incarceration or sexuality, Foucault begins by locating the tipping points in the field of knowledge; by identifying, with the clinical precision which characterises it, these moments where discourse splits up into a 'before' and an 'after'. What is the event which inaugurates modern painting? For Foucault it is clearly Manet. Why? Because he explodes the discourse on which western painting is founded, a knowledge which he makes appear suddenly, 'at the very interior of what was represented in the picture, these properties, these qualities or these material limitations of the canvas which painting, which the pictorial tradition, had up until then made it its mission in some way to sidestep and to mask.'[5] If Foucault's aim consists of illuminating the unthought-of in institutions and practices, that of Manet lies in the reinvention of painting starting from its materiality, which has been carefully concealed by the ideological device put in place since the quattrocento, based on monocular perspective and the illusion of the *veduta*. The space of the canvas, the lighting, the position of the viewer: the three levers by which Manet makes classical painting fly off its hinges.

This rupture would not have been possible without the equivalent transformation, in a radical manner, of the pact which links the painted image to the reality that inspires it. It is the status of the referent which explodes with Manet, as is the case in the same era in the novels of Gustave Flaubert, another lasting fascination for Foucault. 'Flaubert is to the library what Manet is to the museum,' he affirms. 'They write, they paint in an

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[5] See p.30 of this book.

essential rapport with what makes them paint, with what makes them write – or rather with what in painting and in writing remains fundamentally open. Their art builds itself there, where the archive is formed.'[6] In other words, Manet's painting refers to painting and imitates nothing but itself. The introduction of the theme of the archive, a concept which plays a crucial role in the foucaldian method, sounds here like an identification mark: this infinite 'murmur' – almost Borgesian – by which he identifies the painter, is equally that which he evolves himself, and his manner of describing this 'oeuvre which extends itself into the space of existing [pictures]' recalls the subject which constitutes his own writings: the space of discourse. In this, Foucault clearly places himself alongside Stéphane Mallarmé, who thought that the world was made to culminate in a book; with Paul Valéry, for whom the history of literature could have been seen to be written without a single proper noun being pronounced; or even with André Malraux, whose theses on the 'Imaginary Museum' had so deeply marked the intellectual life of his times, by affirming the autonomy and the transcendence of the history of art.

The first audacity of Manet, according to Foucault, consisted of making a witness out of the viewer by showing him that the figures direct their gaze toward a blind spot, outside of the canvas. Analysing the celebrated *The Balcony* (*Le Balcon*) 1868–9, he insists on the fact that the three figures are looking at something that the viewer cannot see. 'We, we see nothing...' With *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (*Un bar*

[6] Michel Foucault, 'Sans titre', postface to Flaubert in *Dits et écrits*, vol.1, Paris 2001, p.321.

aux Folies-Bergère] 1881–2, Foucault refines and extends his reasoning: the mirror's reflection is unfaithful; there is distortion between what is represented in the mirror and what should be shown there. The painter is at once here and there, his point of view is at once descending and ascending; as for us, we can neither place ourselves nor determine where the painter is placed. With *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, the viewer has no assigned position – nowhere in reality could a gaze perceive this disposition of figures and their reflection, convincing though it is at first glance, which depicts a waitress at a bar in front of her customer. With Manet, painting brutally ceases to be a normative space which assigns to the author and viewer their respective places in the service of a general idea and freezes their status, and becomes a space in relation to which the viewer must place himself, reminded of his mobility and his ontological disinclination before a flat object, deprived of depth, which the light strikes in full shot – especially that which illuminates *Olympia* 1863. Thus, what vouches for Manet's painting is the definite birth of an individual exiled from his certainties regarding his place in the world, and plunged violently into a universe where the mirror, the pictorial surface and physical reality see themselves from now on divided to form three distinct realities. Manet thus invents the 'picture-object', the picture as pure materiality, a simple coloured surface which comes to clarify a light whose unreality is such that the viewer is commanded to position himself as an autonomous subject, lacking the possible means by which to identify himself or to project himself into the artwork he

confronts. Through this device, Manet invents the figure of the modern viewer, questioned by a pictorial object which renders him conscious of his presence and of his position within a much larger system. The path he inaugurates will lead to the famous formula of Marcel Duchamp: 'It is the viewers who make the pictures.'

In the text – written partly in Tunisia – of a conference given to the Circle of Architectural Studies in Paris in March 1967, Foucault developed the notion of 'heterotopia', in which we can, in light of the Tunis conference, perceive the painting he must have studied, and which had obvious value in the echo it produced with Manet's paintings.[7] Heterotopia, which represents, Foucault writes, a constant among all human groups, can be defined as an 'anti-location'. It consists of an ensemble of 'places outside of all places, even though they are at the same time effectively localizable'. He thus imagines describing and establishing the typology of these other spaces, even evoking a possible 'heteropology' which would be the 'challenge at once mythical and real of the space in which we live'.[8] Contrary to utopia, which maintains an analogical rapport with the reality it surrounds, this heterotopian place is one of separation. The list Foucault makes only gathers together the dissimilar spaces of the cemetery, the brothel, the sailing ship on the ocean, the psychiatric clinic, the festival, the honeymoon, sacred places... In a strange coincidence, these spaces (those of sexuality, of madness and of the sacred) correspond to those studied by another great commentator on Manet, Georges Bataille, inventor of 'heterology', defined as the

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[7] Michel Foucault, 'Des Espaces Autres', conference given to the Circle of Architectural Studies, 14 March 1967 in *Dits et écrits*, vol.2, Paris 2001, p.1571.
[8] Ibid, p.1575.

science of the radically other, of waste, of scrap material or the immaterial, of the shapeless... One could go as far as to say that the painter of *Olympia* constitutes the invisible stitch between these two major twentieth-century thinkers, for whom the theoretical preconceptions are numerous. Since the adjective 'shapeless' is, according to Bataille, 'a term which serves to declassify, demanding generally that every object has its form', it is one which devotes itself to the study of that which escapes form, one could say, to the *order of discourse*.[9] It would seem, however, that Foucault was largely helping himself to Bataille's *Manet* in order to prop up his own intuitions.[10] Thus this 'sinking of the subject' perceptible in Manet's pictorial practice, finds equal support in *A Bar at the Folies-Bergères*, described as a 'bewitching of the light which reflects the game onto a mirror of vast dimensions', a mirror before which the real crowd 'is but a reflection in its magical light'.[11] The crucial role of light, silence, figures reduced to the level of things, divergence of gazes, the strangulation of discourse: Bataille signposted the ground shared by Foucault. This does not hide, however, the author's debt to *La littérature et le mal* (*Literature and Evil*): in 1963, Foucault had contributed to the homage paid to Bataille by the review *Critique*, with a long text on the experience of transgression, in which he insists on the Bataillean figure of the 'disgusted eye'.[12] Four years later, in response to a question about his 'spiritual masters', he spoke of his 'passion' for Bataille, and of the plain 'interest' that he fuelled for Georges Dumézil or Claude Lévi-Strauss, so that one might believe Bataille was even more decisive in his philosophical training.[13] Is it

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[9] Georges Bataille, *Le dictionnaire critique*, Orléans 1993, p.33. *L'ordre du discours (The Order of Discourse)* is the title of Foucault's 1971 publication, which sets out his influential theories of discourse.

[10] Georges Bataille, *Manet*, Geneva 1983. The text was first published in 1955.

[11] Ibid, p.88.

[12] Michel Foucault, 'Préface à la transgression', in *Dits et écrits*, vol.1, Paris 2001, p.261.

not possible that one even detects in Foucault, in numerous places, some echoes of Bataille's style of thought? Bataille writes: 'The whole of *Olympia* distinguishes itself as the evil of a crime or as a spectacle of death... Everything in it is sliding towards an indifference to beauty.'[14] Or again: 'The bourgeoisie could not at first admit that the world had reduced itself to what it was and that only a single, wordless man remained.'[15] In the last pages of *Les mots et les choses* (*The Order of Things*), one can read these lines: the figure of man, recently appearing, had 'the effect of a change in the fundamental arrangements of knowledge. [...] If these arrangements were to disappear just as they had appeared, [...] one could certainly bet that man would disappear, like a face in the sand at the edge of the sea.'[16]

A specific object linking Manet, Bataille and Foucault is none other than the mirror, 'place without place', which the latter situates, very significantly, between utopia and heterotopia, and defines as a composite of both: 'It is from the mirror that I find myself absent from the place where I am,' he writes, 'as long as I see myself there.'[17] Such is the discrete yet decisive role of painting in the theoretical work of Foucault: absolute heterotopia, a one-way mirror in which the mastery of man is effaced in his real life, it constitutes a sufficiently deep rupture in western discourse to have inflected the theoretical elaboration of Michel Foucault on space and time, serving as a grid for our modes of thinking and behaviour. This rupture produces a long silence; it is from this silence that the archaeologist is made.

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[13] Michel Foucault, 'Qui êtes-vous, professeur Foucault', in *Dits et écrits*, vol.1, Paris 2001, p.642.

[14] Bataille, Orléans 1993, p.69.

[15] Ibid, p.72.

[16] Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses*, Paris 1990, p.398. Published in English as Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, Abingdon 2001.

[17] *Dits et écrits*, vol.2, Paris 2001, p.1575.

Translator's Introduction

BY MATTHEW [illegible]RR

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

This lecture on thirteen paintings by Edouard Manet does not present the kinds of complex theoretical issues which confront a translator of Foucault's major works, such as *The Order of Things* or *Discipline and Punish*, works deeply rooted in a French phenomenological tradition and the specialized rhetoric of a very elitist education. The opening of the lecture was not the only time that Foucault emphasised his lack of training as an art historian and the argument here rests firmly on a formal analysis. This being so, great care has to be taken to render the precision of the ekphrasis, the observations of detail and the thing often overlooked. It should be obvious that this is a transcription of a recording of a lecture and this in itself presents some stylistic oddities which cannot readily be removed without producing a wholesale rewrite of the text. Spoken sentences tend to be longer than those of a text intended for publication and I have frequently followed the French transcription in using semi-colons in order to try to clarify long passages. One curious habit is the repetition of nouns. Here again, it is tempting to remove them, but that would be to impose a personal style and mask what must have been a very idiosyncratic and forceful lecturing style.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty of this text for the translator (and the reader) is to try to imagine exactly what Foucault is referring to when he points out details of the works under discussion. Where this seems unambiguous, I have supplied the information in square brackets. Sometimes, however, it is not possible to be certain and in these cases I have left readers to decide for themselves. It is only by chance that this lecture alone survives as a recording from a series on Manet delivered variously at Milan, New York State, Tokyo, Florence and Tunis between 1967 and 1971 and so caution must be exercised in building arguments about Foucault's broader thought from what must remain an intriguing fragment.

Manet and the Object of Painting

BY MICHEL FOUCAULT

MANET AND THE OBJECT OF PAINTING

I would like to begin right away by excusing myself because I am a little tired. It seems that what I have done, during the two years that I have been here, is to spread myself so thinly that I no longer have a spare minute when I am back in Tunis; the day is spent in conversations, discussions, questions, objections, answers and such like, and so I've arrived here late in the day almost exhausted.[1] Anyhow, I would ask you to forgive my lapses, my mistakes, perhaps even the limpness of my exposition.

I would also like to excuse myself for talking about Manet because, of course, I am not a Manet specialist; nor am I a painting specialist, so it is as a layman that I would speak to you about Manet. What I would like to convey to you broadly is this: I have no intention whatsoever of speaking to you in general about Manet; I will be presenting to you, I believe, no more than about ten or twelve canvases by this painter which I would like, if not to analyse, at least to explicate in certain areas. I will not be speaking in general about Manet, not even about the aspects which are most important or least known in Manet's painting.

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[1] Foucault gave these lectures on Tuesday evenings.

Manet always appears in the history of art, in the history of nineteenth-century painting, as someone, of course, who modified the techniques and the modes of pictorial representation, in such a way that he made possible this movement of Impressionism which occupied the forefront of the history of art scene during almost all of the second half of the nineteenth century. It is true that Manet is really in effect the precursor of Impressionism, it is really he who made Impressionism possible; but it is not this aspect of Manet with which I am concerned. It seems to me that Manet in effect did something else, that perhaps what he did was something even more than simply making Impressionism possible. It seems to me that, beyond even Impressionism, what Manet made possible was all the painting *after* Impressionism, is all the painting of the twentieth century, is all the painting from which, in fact, contemporary art developed. This deep rupture or this rupture in depth which Manet brought about, is without doubt something slightly more difficult to situate than the set of modifications which made Impressionism possible.[2]

Those things which in Manet's painting made Impressionism possible, as you will be aware, are relatively well known: new techniques of colour, the use of colours if not pure then at least relatively pure, the use of certain forms of lighting and luminosity which had not been fully recognised in earlier painting, etc. On the other hand, the modifications which made possible, beyond Impressionism, in a way over Impressionism, the painting

[2] The concept of *rupture* in art and artistic practice was an important one for Foucault and a number of his contemporaries, especially in Philippe Sollers's arts journal *Tel Quel*, to which Foucault himself contributed. See, for example, Marcelin Pleynet, 'Les Problèmes de l'Avant-Garde,' *Tel Quel*, Spring 1966, p. 81.

which was to come afterwards, these modifications are, I believe, more difficult to recognise and to situate. I believe that these modifications can even be summarised and characterised with one word: Manet in effect is one who for the first time, it seems to me, in western art, at least since the Renaissance, at least since the quattrocento, allows himself to use and in a way to play with, at the very interior of his paintings, even at the interior of what they represent, the material *properties* of the space on which he paints.

This is more clearly what I want to say: since the fifteenth century, since the *quattrocento*, it was a tradition in western painting to try to make the viewer forget, to try to mask and sidestep the fact that painting was put down or inscribed on a certain fragment of space which could be a wall, in the case of fresco, or a panel of wood, or again a canvas or eventually even a piece of paper; to make the viewer forget, therefore, that the painting rests on this more or less rectangular surface and in two dimensions, and substitutes for this material space on which the painting rests a represented space which denies, in a sense, the space on which it is painted; and it is in this way that painting, since the quattrocento, has tried to represent three dimensions even while it rests on a plan of two dimensions. It is painting which not only represents the three dimensions, but privileges, in every possible way, great oblique lines and spirals in order to mask and negate the fact that the painting was still inscribed inside a square or a rectangle of straight lines cut at right angles.

Painting has tried equally to represent an interior lighting in the canvas or even a lighting exterior to the canvas, coming from the back or from the right or left, in a manner which denies and sidesteps the fact that the painting rests on a rectangular surface, really lit by a real light source, which evidently varies however with the picture's placement and with the daylight. It must also deny that the picture was a piece of space in front of which the viewer could be displaced, around which the viewer could turn, so that consequently he can grasp an angle or eventually grasp the two sides and that is why painting, since the quattrocento, has fixed a certain ideal place, from which and only from which, one can and must see the picture;[3] so that, if you like, this materiality of the picture, this level, rectangular surface, really lit by a particular light outside of itself, all of this was masked and sidestepped by what was represented in the picture itself; and the picture had represented a deep space lit by a lateral sun that one was seeing like a spectacle from an ideal place.

There, if you like, is the game of sidestepping, of hiding, of illusion or elision which painting had practised since the quattrocento. What Manet did (it is in any case one of the important aspects, I believe, of the changes contributed by Manet to western painting) was to make reappear, in a way, at the very interior of what was represented in the picture, these properties, these qualities or these material limitations of the canvas which painting, which the pictorial tradition, had up until then made it its mission in some way to sidestep and to mask.

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[3] I have translated 'saisir' into 'grasp' here, the French verb also containing the double sense of a physical hold and an understanding. This notion of 'fixing' the viewer's position and the interest in works that appear to question this tradition recalls Foucault's well-known analysis of Velàzquez's *Las Meninas* at the beginning of *The Order of Things* (1966).

The rectangular surface, the large vertical and horizontal axes, the real lighting of the canvas, the possibility for the viewer of looking in one way or another, all of this is present in Manet's pictures, and given back, restored in Manet's pictures. And Manet reinvents (or perhaps he invents) the picture-object, the picture as materiality, the picture as something coloured which clarifies an external light and in front of which, or about which, the viewer revolves. This invention of the picture-object, this reinsertion of the materiality of the canvas in that which is represented, this I believe is at the heart of the great change wrought by Manet to painting and it is in this sense that one could say that Manet really turned upside-down, beyond what could have foreshadowed Impressionism, all that was fundamental in western painting since the quattrocento.

So it is this which I would now like to show you by way of the facts, that is to say in the pictures themselves, and I will take a series of pictures, a dozen canvases which I will try to analyse a little with you; and if you wish, for the convenience of the exhibition, I will arrange them under three rubrics: firstly, the manner in which Manet treated the very space of the canvas, how he played with the material properties of the canvas, the superficiality, the height, the width, how he played with the spatial properties of the canvas in what he represented on this canvas. That will be the first group of pictures that I will study; next, in a second group, I will try to show you how Manet treated the problem of lighting, how in these pictures he used not a represented light which lit the interior of the picture, but

how he used real external light. Thirdly, how he also played with the place of the viewer in relation to the picture; and for this third point, I will not study a group of pictures, but a single one which, moreover, no doubt typifies Manet's oeuvre, which is, moreover, one of the last and one of the most disruptive Manets, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*.

I. THE SPACE OF THE CANVAS

So, if you will, the first group of problems and the first group of canvases: how is it that Manet represented space? At this point we are going to move to the slides, so we must turn out the lights.

Music in the Tuileries (1862)

Here you have one of the first canvases painted by Manet, a canvas still very classical; you know that Manet had an entirely classical training: he worked in the conformist studios of the period, relatively conformist, he worked with [Thomas] Couture and he mastered and possessed the whole of the great pictorial tradition; and in this canvas – it dates from 1861–62 – one can say that Manet still uses all the traditions that he had learned in the studios where he studied.[4]

Already a number of things must simply be signalled: you see the privilege that Manet accords to the great vertical lines which are represented by the trees. And you see that Manet's canvas organises itself according to, at the back, two large axes: a horizontal axis which is signalled by the last line of the figures' heads and then the large vertical

[4]Thomas Couture (1815–79), history and genre painter, tutor to Manet for six years.

Music in the Tuileries

1862
Oil on canvas
76.2 x 118.1 cm
National Gallery, London. Lane Bequest, 1917

axes, which are indicated here with, as though to repeat them or rather as if to emphasise them, this small triangle of light from which all the light which illuminates the front of the scene spills out. The viewer or the painter sees this scene very superficially from an aerial viewpoint, in the same way that one can see a little of what happens behind, but one does not see it very well – there is not much depth, the figures in front are in a way masking almost completely what happens behind, from which derives this effect of a frieze. The figures form a sort of flat frieze here, and the verticality extends this frieze effect with a relatively shortened depth.

The Masked Ball at the Opera (1873–4)

So now, ten years later, Manet comes to paint a picture which is in a sense the same and which is like another version of this same picture, that is 'An Evening at the Opera', sorry, *The Ball at the Opera*. In a sense, it is the same picture you see: the same types of figure, men in outfits with top hats, some feminine figures with light dresses, but you see that, already, the whole spatial balance is modified. The space has been filled, closed from behind; the depth which I was telling you was not very marked in the preceding picture but which existed nonetheless, this depth, it is now closed, it is closed by a thick wall; and as though to signal clearly that there is a wall and that there is nothing to see behind. You note these two vertical pillars and this enormous vertical bar here which frames the picture, which in a way doubles inside the picture the vertical and the horizontal of the canvas. This large

rectangle of the canvas, you find it repeated inside and it closes the depth of the picture, preventing, consequently, the effect of depth.

Not only is the effect of depth effaced, but the distance between the edge of the picture and the back is relatively short such that all the figures find themselves projected forward; far from there being depth, you have on the contrary a sort of phenomenon of relief; the advancing figures and the black of the costumes, equally of the dresses, the black absolutely blocks all that the clear colours could have done, in a way, to in fact open the space. The space is closed at the back by the wall and at the front by these dresses and costumes. You do not really have space *per se*, you have only something like packages of space, packages of volumes and surfaces which are projected forwards, towards the viewer's eyes.

The only real opening or rather the only opening which is represented in the picture is this very curious opening which is here, right at the top of the picture, and which does not open onto a true depth, which does not open onto something like the sky or the light. Remember, in the previous picture, you had a small triangle of light, a small triangle which opened onto the sky and from where the light spilled out; here, by a sort of irony, the light opens onto nothing but what? Well, you see the feet and the trousers and the rest, that is, the whole group of figures beginning to repeat; as though the picture restarted here [at the level of the balcony], as though it were the same scene and this

2 The Masked Ball at the Opera

1873–4
Oil on canvas
59.1 x 72.5 cm
National Gallery of Art, Washington.
Gift of Horace Havemeyer in memory
of his mother, Louisine W. Havemeyer

one indefinitely: the effect, consequently, of a tapestry, of a wall, the effect of painted paper that you see extending itself all along, with the irony of two little feet which swing here and which indicate the fantasy character of this space which is not the real space of perception, which is not the real space of the opening, but which is the play of these surfaces and these colours spilled and repeated indefinitely from top to bottom of the canvas.

The spatial properties of this rectangle of canvas are thus represented, manifested, exalted by what is represented in the canvas itself, and you see how Manet, by relating to the previous canvas, which treated basically almost the same subject, has entirely closed up the space, but how this time it is the material properties of the canvas which are represented in the picture itself.[5]

The Execution of Maximilien (1868)

Do you want to move to the next picture, which is *The Execution of Maximilien*? A picture which dates from 1867, evidently, and where you find once again, as you can see, most of the characteristics which I have just signalled with regard to *The Ball at the Opera*; this is an earlier picture, but you already have here the same procedures, that is to say a violently marked and compressed closing of space by the presence of a large wall, a large wall which is no more than the repetition of the canvas itself; whereby, as you can see, all the figures are placed on a narrow band of earth, so that you have something like a staircase, the effect of a staircase, which is to say, horizontal-vertical and, again,

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[5] Foucault had been interested in this phenomenon for some time, having remarked in *The Order of Things* upon Velàzquez's inclusion of an easel in *Las Meninas* and made the same observation in 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe', his essay on Magritte first published in the journal *Les Cahiers du chemin* in 1968.

something like a vertical, a horizontal which opens up with the small figures [on the wall] who are watching the scene. You see, however, that one has here almost the same effect as a moment ago in the scene in *The Ball at the Opera*, where you had a wall which was closed and a scene which began again there; and so you have here, hanging on behind the wall, again a small scene which repeats the picture.

Now, if I show you this picture, it is not simply because it gives once again, or it gives in advance these elements that one must find again later in *The Ball at the Opera*, it is for another reason: you see that all the figures are therefore placed on the same narrow little rectangle, on which they have placed their feet – a sort of staircase behind which you have a large vertical. They are all drawn close on this small space, they are all very near to one another, so near that, as you see, the rifle barrels are touching their chests. I should have mentioned, however, that these horizontals and the vertical position of the soldiers amounts, once again, to nothing more than multiplying and repeating inside the picture the large horizontal and vertical axes of the canvas. In any case the soldiers here touch at the tip of their rifles the figures that are there. There is no distance between the firing squad and their victims. Now, if you look, you can see that these figures here [the victims] are smaller than [the executioners] there, even though normally they must be of the same size, as long as they are very exactly on the same plane and they are arranged one according to the other with very little space to arrange themselves; that is to say, Manet makes use of this strongly archaic

3 The Execution of Maximilian

1868
Oil on canvas
252 x 302 cm
Kunsthalle Mannheim

technique which consists of making the figures diminish without dividing them out across the plane (which is the technique of painting before the quattrocento). He uses this technique to signify or symbolise a distance which is not actually represented.

In his picture, in the space which he gives himself, in this tiny rectangle where he places all the figures, it is very evident that Manet could not represent distance. Distance cannot be given to perception; one does not see distance. On the other hand, the diminution of figures indicates a sort of purely intellectual and non-perceptive recognition that there must be a distance between the victims and the firing squad; and this imperceptible distance, this distance which is not given to the gaze, is simply signalled by this sign which is the diminution of figures. Beginning, as you can see, to evolve in the very interior of this small rectangle that Manet gives himself and where he places his figures are some of the fundamental principles of pictorial perception in the West.

Pictorial perception must be like the repetition, the redoubling, the reproduction of the perception of everyday life. What had to be represented was a quasi-real space where distance could be read, appreciated, deciphered in the way that we ourselves see a landscape. There, we enter a pictorial space where distance does not offer itself to be seen, where depth is no longer an object of perception and where spatial positioning and the distancing of figures are simply given by signs which have no sense or function

except inside the picture; that is, by the relationship, in some ways arbitrary, in any case, purely symbolic, between the size of the figures here [the victims] and the size of the figures there [the executioners].

The Port of Bordeaux (1871)

Would you now like to move to the next picture which plays with another property of the canvas? In those which I've just shown you, *The Ball at the Opera* or *The Execution of Maximilien*, what Manet was using, what he was playing with in his representation, was above all the fact that the canvas was vertical, that it was a surface in two dimensions, that it had no depth; and in a way Manet was trying to represent this absence of depth by diminishing as far as possible the very thickness of the scene which he represents. Here, in this picture, which dates from the year 1872 if I remember correctly, what is in play, as you see, is essentially the horizontal and vertical axes.[6] These horizontal and vertical axes are really repetitions inside the canvas of the horizontal and vertical axes which frame the canvas and which form the very frame of the picture. But, as you see, it is equally the reproduction of a sort, in the very grain of the painting, of all the horizontal and vertical fibres which constitute the canvas itself, the canvas in which it has material.

It is as though the weave of the canvas was in the process of starting to appear and show its internal geometry, and you see this interlacing of threads which is like a sketch represented on the canvas itself. If, however, you isolate

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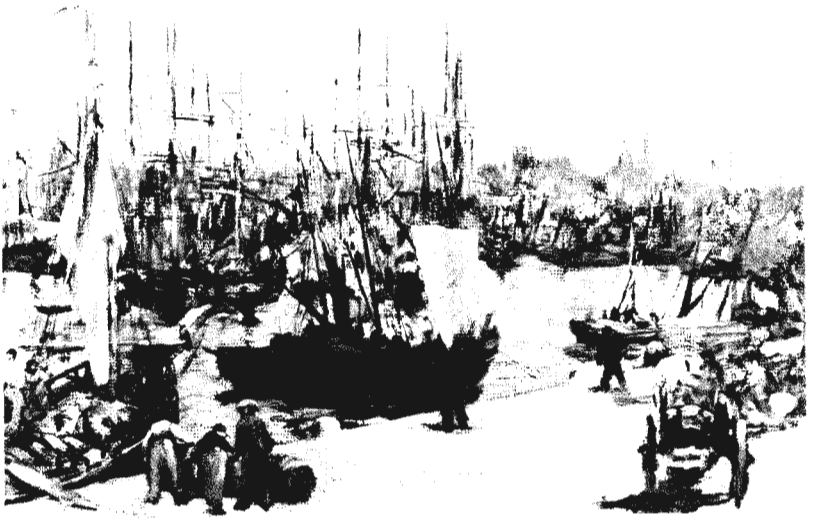
[6] It is likely that he does *not* remember correctly – this work is now generally accepted to date from 1870–1.



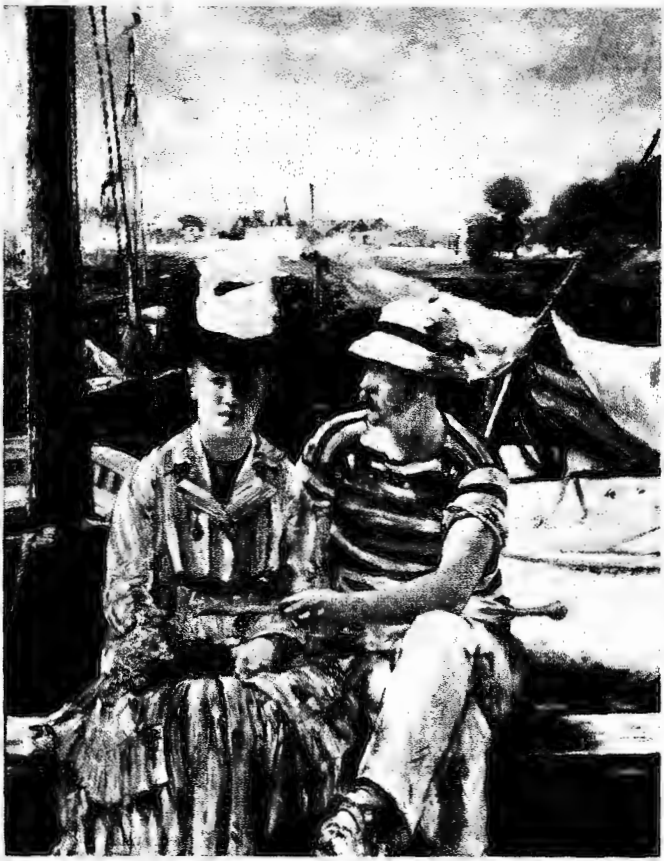
4 The Port of Bordeaux

1871
Oil on canvas
66 x 99.5 cm
Private collection, Switzerland

this part, this quarter [the top left], this sixth perhaps, of the canvas, you see that you have a game of almost exclusively horizontals and verticals, which are cut like right angles, and those among you who are in the spirit of Mondrian's picture of a tree, or rather the series of variations that Mondrian made on trees, you know, during the years 1910–14, there you see the very birth of abstract painting. Mondrian treated his tree, his famous tree out of which, at the same time as Kandinsky, he discovered abstract painting, a little like Manet treated the boats in *Port of Bordeaux*. From his tree, he finally extracted a certain play of lines which match up to the right angles and which form a sort of framework, a draughtboard, a framework of straight horizontal and vertical lines. And so, in the same way, in this tangle of boats, in all the activity of this port, Manet has come to extract this, this game of verticals and horizontals which are the geometrical representation of the very geometry of the canvas in which it has material. This game of the weave of the canvas you will see again shortly in a manner at once amusing and for this period absolutely scandalous, in the next picture which is called *Argenteuil*.

Argenteuil (1874)

Would you like to move to the next canvas? You see the vertical axis of the mast, which repeats the edge of the picture, this horizontal here which repeats this other one; and the two large axes which are therefore represented inside the canvas, but you see what it is that is represented, it is precisely the weave, the weave which comes from



5 **Argenteuil**

1874
Oil on canvas
149 x 115 cm
Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Tournai, Belgique

6 *In the Greenhouse*

1879
Oil on canvas
115 x 150 cm
Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

the vertical and horizontal lines; and the character, at once popular, unpolished, and the figures, and what is represented in this canvas, no more than a game for Manet, a game which consists of representing in a canvas the very properties of a weave and the interlacing and the matching up of the vertical and the horizontal.

In the Greenhouse (1879)

Would you like to move on to the next canvas, which is called *In the Greenhouse* and which is all the same one of the most important of Manet's canvases for understanding the manner of his play [it seems that Foucault had a problem at this point in finding his reproduction – the recording is broken here, indicating that a few seconds were lost], ... the vertical, the horizontal and this interlacing of the very lines of the picture. You see how space, the depth of the picture is restrained. Immediately behind the figures you have this tapestry of green plants which no gaze could pierce and which unrolls absolutely like a background canvas, absolutely like a wall of paper which could have been there; no depth, no lighting pierces this space, this forest of leaves and stems which peoples the greenhouse where the scene occurs.

The figure of the woman here is entirely projected forwards, the legs themselves are not seen in the picture, they extend beyond it; the woman's knees extend in a way out of the picture from which she is projected forwards for there is no depth and the figure behind is toppling over entirely towards us with this enormous face that

you can see, which is shown somehow very close to us, almost too close to be seen, while he has tipped forwards and is arranged in such a short space – the closure therefore of space and of course the game of verticals and horizontals, the whole picture barred by this stage, the back of this seat, the line of the seat which finds itself repeated firstly here, a second time there, a fourth time here, a line which is found doubled in white this time by the woman's umbrella; and now for the verticals, all of this grid here, with simply this small, very short diagonal to indicate depth. The whole picture is structured around and starts from these verticals and horizontals.

And if you now add that the folds of the woman's robe take the form of vertical folds here [below the waistband], but that you have all this fan-shaped movement of the woman's dress here [across the seat], which means that the first folds are towards the horizontal like these four fundamental lines, but that, in turning, the dress ends by almost achieving the vertical, you see that this play of folds which goes from the umbrella to the woman's knees reproduces by turning the movement which runs from the horizontal to the vertical; and it is this movement that is reproduced here. Now add that you have a hand which hangs [the woman's left hand] and a hand going the other way [the man's left hand] and you have at the centre of the picture, on a clear ground, reproducing the axes of the picture, the same vertical and horizontal lines that you find in dark lines constituting the very armature of the seat and the interior architecture of the picture. And

here, therefore, you have the whole game which consists of deleting, erasing and compressing space in terms of depth, and on the contrary intensifying the lines of verticality and horizontality.

So that is what I wanted to say to you concerning the play of depth, of vertical and horizontal in Manet, but there is still another way for Manet to play with the material properties of the canvas; because the canvas is really, in effect, a surface, a surface which has a horizontal and a vertical, but it is moreover a surface of two faces, a *verso* and a recto, which in a manner still more vicious and malicious, if you like, Manet will set in play.

The Waitress (1879)

And here is how: if you move to the next picture, which is *The Waitress*, one has a curious example. In effect, what does this picture consist of and what does it represent? Really, in a sense, it does not represent anything in so far as it offers nothing to see. In effect, you have in total here and for a total, in this picture, this figure of the waitress which you see very close to the painter, very close to the viewer, very close to us, who has a face turned suddenly turned towards us as though a spectacle has suddenly presented itself in front of her and attracted her gaze. You see that she is not looking at what she is doing, which is putting down her beer glass, but her eye has been attracted by something that we do not see, that we do not know, which is there, in front of the canvas. Otherwise, the canvas is composed of one, two, or at the most three other figures; in any case one or

two which we almost do not see since between them we see hardly anything but the receding profile and after that we see nothing except the hat. Rather, whoever they are looking at, they are themselves looking [back] at them in exactly the opposite direction. What do they see? Well, we know nothing about it, we know nothing since the picture is cut in such a way that the spectacle which is there, and by which these gazes are attracted, this spectacle is also hidden from us.

Consider now, if you will, a painting of the classical type – it doesn't matter which. It happens to be very traditional in painting that a picture represents people in the process of looking at something. For example, if you take Masaccio's *The Tribute Money* [c.1425], you see that the figures are in a circle and are looking at something. That something is a dialogue or rather an exchange of a coin between Saint Peter and the ferryman. There is therefore a spectacle, but this spectacle that the figures in the picture are watching, we know it, we see it, it is given in the picture.

Here though [in *The Waitress*], we have two figures who look but, firstly, these two figures do not look at the same thing and, secondly, the picture does not tell us what these figures are looking at. It is a picture where nothing is represented except two gazes, two gazes in two opposite directions, two gazes in the two opposite directions of the picture, *recto verso*, and neither of the two spectacles which are actually followed with so much attention by the two figures, neither of these two spectacles is given

7 The Waitress

1879
Oil on canvas
77.5 x 65 cm
Musée d'Orsay, Paris

8 Saint-Lazare Station

1872–3
Oil on canvas
93.3 x 111.5 cm
National Gallery of Art, Washington.
Gift of Horace Havemeyer in memory
of his mother, Louisine W. Havemeyer

to us; and to underline this, you have the curious irony of this little part of a hand that you see [on the left] and this small part of a dress. The effect is that, in an earlier version of this picture, Manet has represented what was seen by these figures; what is represented is a cabaret singer from a café concert in progress there [on the left], taking place, a singer or the suggestion of a dance step [a version which can be found in London]; and afterwards this version, this second version which I am showing you now.[7] And so Manet, in this second version, has cut the spectacle in such a way that it is as though there is nothing to see, that the picture should consist of these gazes turned towards the invisible, showing nothing but the invisible and doing nothing but indicate by the direction of these opposing gazes something which is necessarily invisible since it is in front of the canvas and what is seen here is on the contrary behind the canvas. From one part of the canvas to another, you have two spectacles which are seen by the two figures but at its root the canvas, instead of showing what is to be seen, hides and conceals it. The surface with its two faces, *recto verso*, is not a place where a visibility manifests itself; it is the place which assures, on the contrary, the invisibility of what is seen by the figures that are in the foreground of the canvas.

Saint-Lazare Station (1872–3)

This is clear in this picture [*The Waitress*], clearer still in the one you are going to see now which is called *Saint Lazare Station*. Here, you have a new version of the same trick; of course you see always a new version of the same verticals

[7] Daniel Defert has clarified this, suggesting that there are not exactly two versions, but that Foucault means *Corner of a Café Concert* c.1878–80. This canvas was cut in half by Manet during its execution and the left-hand portion is now in the Oskar Reinhart Collection in Winterthur, Switzerland.

and the same horizontals that we have found before: these verticals and these horizontals which define a certain plan in the picture, in a sense the plan of the canvas, and so you have two figures as we had a moment ago in *The Waitress*, two figures who summon us, head-to-tail, one looking in our direction, the other looking in the same direction as us. One turns her face towards us, the other on the contrary turns her back to us. What the woman is watching – and you see that she watches it with a great sort of intensity – is a spectacle that we cannot see since it is in front of the canvas; and as for what the little girl is looking at, well, we cannot see it since Manet has deployed here the smoke of a train which is just passing, in such a way that we, we have nothing to see. And to have seen what they see, we would have had either to get over the shoulder of the little girl or to have walked around the picture in order to see over the woman's shoulder.

You see how Manet plays with this material property of the canvas which means that it is a plane, a plane which has a *recto* and a *verso*; and, up until now, no other painter amused himself by using the *recto* and the *verso*. Here, he uses it not only in the way that he paints the front and back of the canvas, but in a sense by forcing the viewer to have the desire to turn the canvas around, to change position in order finally to see what one senses must be seen, but all the same is not given in the picture. And it is this game of invisibility assured by the surface of the canvas which Manet sets in play inside the picture in a manner that, as you see, one could say is all the same

vicious, malicious and cruel, since it is the first time that painting has presented itself as something invisible that we watch. The gazes are there to indicate to us that there is something to see, something that is by definition, and by the very nature of the canvas, necessarily invisible.

9 The Fifer

1866
Oil on canvas
161 x 97 cm
Musée d'Orsay, Paris

II. LIGHTING

Would you like to move on to the next canvas, which brings us to the second series of problems I would like to speak to you about? These are the problems of illumination and lighting.

The Fifer (1866)

You know this picture, *The Fifer*, which dates from 1864 or 5, a picture which, at that time, had some scandalous repercussions.[8] You know that Manet – and this is no more than the sum of what I have been saying up until now – entirely removed the background of the picture. You see that there is no space at all behind the fifer; not only is there no space behind the fifer, but the fifer in a way is placed nowhere. You see the space where he places his feet, this stage, this floor, is indicated by almost nothing; this tiny shadow, this very light grey mark here, which marks the difference between the bottom of the wall and the space on which he places his feet. The staircase, which we have seen in the preceding pictures, is even removed here. There is nothing to serve as a

[8] The date of *Le Fifre* is actually 1866.

place where he positions his feet except this very light shadow. It's definitely a shadow, it's definitely nothing at all, it's definitely the void on which he places his feet.

But what I would like to say most about *The Fifer* is not this, but the manner in which is it illuminated. Ordinarily, in traditional painting, as you know very well, the light source is always situated somewhere. There is, either from the very inside of the canvas, or from outside, a luminous source which is directly represented or simply indicated by rays of light: an open window indicates that the light comes from the right for example, or from above, from the left, from below, etc., and outside of the real light which strikes the canvas, the picture always represents, in addition, a certain light source which sweeps the canvas and provokes upon the figures there all the falling shadows which form the modelling, the relief, the hollows, etc. It is that whole systematisation of light which was invented at the beginning of the quattrocento and to which, as you know, Caravaggio, to whom a particular homage must be paid here, gave regularity and perfect systematization.

Here, on the contrary, you see that there is absolutely no light coming from above or from below, or from outside the canvas; or rather all the light comes from outside of the canvas, but strikes it absolutely at the perpendicular. You see that the face presents absolutely no modelling, simply two little hollows either side of the nose to indicate the eyebrows and the hollows of the eyes. You notice, however, that the shadow, practically the only shadow

which is presented in this picture, is this tiny little shadow here under the hand of the fifer and which indicates that in effect the lighting comes from absolutely opposite since it is behind the fifer, in the hollow of the hand, that the only shadow of the picture is drawn, with this one [under his left foot] which assures stability, as you see, this tiny little shadow, which is the indication of the rhythm that the fifer prints on his music in tapping his foot: as you see, he lightly raises his foot which gives, from this shadow [under the left foot] to this one [in the right hand], the large diagonal which is reproduced clearly here by the fifer's flute case. So we have an entirely perpendicular lighting, a lighting which is the real lighting of the canvas if the canvas in its materiality was to be exposed to an open window, in front of an open window.

Traditionally, it was common in painting to represent in the picture a window by which a fictive light swept the figures and gave them their relief. Here, we must admit a canvas, a rectangle, a surface which is itself placed in front of a window, a window which illuminates it in absolutely full shot. Manet evidently did not fulfil this radical technique of suppression of an interior light and its replacement by real exterior and frontal light the moment he put it into play; and in one of his most celebrated pictures, the first of his great pictures, you are going to see that he used two lighting techniques concurrently.

Luncheon on the Grass (1863)

Would you like to move to the next picture? It is the famous *Luncheon on the Grass*. I will not attempt to analyse this *Luncheon on the Grass* it in its entirety – there is evidently a great deal to say on this subject. I want to speak simply about lighting. In fact, in this picture, you have two systems of lighting which are juxtaposed and which are juxtaposed in depth. You see in effect that in the second part of the picture, if one allows that this line here, of the grass, splits the picture in two, you have a lighting which is a traditional lighting with a light source coming from above, from the left, which sweeps the scene, which illuminates this large meadow from the bottom, which strikes the back of the woman, which models her face, in one part plunged in shadow; and this lighting comes to an end here on two clear bushes (this can't be very clearly seen because the reproduction is not very good), two clear and slightly dazzling bushes, which are in a way the meeting points of this lateral and triangular lighting here and here. You have, therefore, a triangular lighting which sweeps the woman's body and models her face: traditional lighting, classical lighting which leaves the relief and which is constituted by an interior light.

Now, if you take the figures in front, what characterises them is the fact that they are lit by a completely different light which has nothing to do with the preceding one which comes to an end on these two bushes. You have a lighting which is frontal and perpendicular, which strikes, as you see, the woman and this entirely nude body, which strikes

10 Luncheon on the Grass

1863
Oil on canvas
208 x 264.5 cm
Musée d'Orsay, Paris

it from directly opposite: you see that there is absolutely no relief, no modelling. The woman's body is a sort of enamel as in Japanese painting. The lighting comes only brutally and from opposite. It is this lighting which strikes equally the face of the man, which strikes equally this profile [of the male figure on the right] absolutely flatly, without relief, without modelling, and the two dark bodies, the two dark jackets of these two men, are the culminating and end points of this frontal lighting, just as the two bushes here were the dazzling and culminating points of the interior lighting: an exterior lighting blocked by the bodies of two men and an interior lighting repeated by the two bushes.

These two systems of representation, or rather these two systems of manifesting light inside a picture, are juxtaposed here in this very canvas, are in a juxtaposition which gives this picture its slightly discordant character, its internal heterogeneity; an internal heterogeneity which Manet tried in a way to reduce or perhaps rather to underline – I don't know – by this hand which is here, this clear hand which is in the middle of the picture [that of the male figure on the right]. Remember, however, the two hands that I showed you a moment ago *In the Greenhouse*, and which were the reproduction by the fingers of the very axes of the picture; so here you have this hand with its two fingers, one finger which points in this direction; or this direction, which is precisely the direction of the interior light, of this light which comes from above and from elsewhere. And on the contrary the finger is bent, bent towards the outside, on the axis of the picture, and it indicates the origin of the

light which strikes here, in such a way that you have in this hand-play the fundamental axes of the picture and the principle – at once of linking and of heterogeneity – of this *Luncheon on the Grass*.

Olympia (1863)

Would you now like to come to this, on which I will be brief? I will not say much to you about this picture, simply because I am not capable and it is too difficult; I would like simply to speak to you on the subject of lighting; or, if you like, I'm going to speak to you about the point of view which can be taken concerning the rapport between the scandal that this canvas provoked and a certain number of its purely pictorial characteristics and, I believe, essentially, the light.

This *Olympia*, as you know, caused a scandal when it was exhibited at the 1865 Salon; it caused a scandal that one is obliged to leave aside. There were the bourgeois types who, visiting the Salon, wanted to put their umbrellas through it, so indecent did they find it. But the representation of feminine nudity in western painting is a tradition which revives in the sixteenth century and one has seen many others before *Olympia* caused a scandal. What is scandalous, then, about this painting, which did something which could not be tolerated?

Art historians say, and evidently they are quite right, that the moral scandal was no more than a clumsy way of formulating something that was an aesthetic scandal: one

11 **Olympia**

1863
Oil on canvas
130.5 x 190 cm
Musée d'Orsay, Paris

does not tolerate this aesthetic, this use of tone, this great, Japanese style painting, which is ugly and which is meant to be ugly. All of this is absolutely true. I ask myself if there is not, in a slightly more precise way, another reason for the scandal which is linked precisely to the lighting?

In effect – unfortunately I've forgotten to bring it – this canvas must be compared to one which serves up to a point as a model and a foil; you know that this Venus, finally this *Olympia* of Manet, is the double, the reproduction, always spoken of as a variation on the theme of nude Venuses, reclining Venuses and in particular the Venus of Titian [*Venus of Urbino* 1538]. In Titian's *Venus*, you have a woman, a nude woman who is slightly reclining in this position. Around her there are curtains, a source of light from above, to the left, which softly lights up the woman, which illuminates, if I remember, the face, in any case certainly the breast and the leg, and which is there like a gilded space which caresses her body and which is in one way the principle of the body's visibility. If the body of Titian's *Venus* is visible, if she gives herself to our gaze, it is because there is this space, this luminous, discrete, lateral and golden source which surprises her, which surprises her in some ways among her and among us. Here is this nude woman, dreaming of nothing, looking at nothing, and there is this light which, indiscreetly, strikes or caresses her, and us viewers who surprise the game between this light and this nudity.

Or here, you see that if Manet's *Olympia* is visible it is because a light strikes her. This light is certainly not a soft and discreet lateral light, it is a very violent light which strikes her here, full shot. A light which comes from in front, a light which comes from the space found in front of the canvas, which is to say that the light, the luminous source indicated, which is assumed by the very lighting of the woman, this luminous source, where is it, if not here, precisely where we are? That is to say, there are not three elements – nudity, lighting and we who surprise the game of nudity and lighting, there is [rather] nudity and us, we who are in the very place of lighting; in other words, it is our gaze which, in opening itself upon the nudity of *Olympia*, illuminates her. It is we who render it visible; our gaze upon the *Olympia* is a lantern, it is that which carries the light; we are responsible for the visibility and for the nudity of *Olympia*. She is nude only for us since it is we who render her nude and we do so because, in looking at her, we illuminate her, since the whole of our gaze and the lighting add up to one and the same thing. Look at a picture and the lighting, it is no more than one and the same thing in a canvas like this one and that is why we are – every viewer finds this – necessarily implicated in this nudity and we are to a certain extent responsible. You see how an aesthetic transformation can, in a case such as this, provoke a moral scandal.

The Balcony (1868–9)

So that is what I wanted to say to you about this game of lighting in Manet, and now, what I have said about space and lighting I would like to synthesise briefly in a picture which will be the penultimate one that I'm going to speak about: *The Balcony*.

Would you like to move on to the next canvas? Here, in this canvas, I believe we have the combination of everything I have been saying up until now. Unfortunately, again here, the reproduction is very poor. You have to imagine a slightly larger picture; the photographer has, in a very stupid manner, cropped the picture. There you have the green shutters, a green much brighter however than we see here, and the shutters, the *persiennes* to be precise, with very numerous horizontal lines which frame the picture.[9] You have, therefore, as you see, a picture which is structured very manifestly by vertical and horizontal lines. The window itself very precisely doubles the canvas and reproduces its verticals and horizontals. The balcony which is in front of the window, or rather the ironwork which is in front of the window, reproduces once more the verticals and horizontals, the diagonals serving only to support and to highlight these large axes. If you add to all that these shutters that you do not see [in Foucault's poor reproduction], you see that the whole picture is framed by these verticals and horizontals. Far from wishing to make the viewer forget the rectangle on which he paints, he does nothing but reproduce it, insist on it, double it and multiply it in the very interior of his picture.

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[9] '*Persiennes*' are shutters with moveable slats.

What is more, you see that the whole picture is in black and white with this one colour that is not black and white, as though it were the fundamental colour, the green. It is the very inversion of the quattrocento formula, where the large architectural elements must be plunged into shade, merely represented in the dark, with figures who themselves carry the colours, these great blue, red and green dresses, etc., as you see in the figures from paintings in that epoch; therefore, the architectural elements are light and dark, black and white, and the figures are traditionally coloured. Here, you have the exact opposite. The figures are in black and white and the architectural elements, instead of being swallowed up in the semi-darkness, are on the contrary exalted and accentuated in a way by the garish green of the canvas. So much for the vertical and the horizontal.

With regard to the depth, there again Manet's game here is particularly vicious and cruel because the picture opens well, through a window, onto a depth; but you see that this depth is eluded here just as completely as a moment ago in *La Gare Saint-Lazare* [*Saint-Lazare Station*] where the landscape was eluded by the smoke from the train. Here you have a window which opens onto something which is entirely obscure, entirely black. One distinguishes with difficulty a very vague reflection of a metallic object, a sort of teapot there with a little boy carrying it, but it's barely visible. And all of this great hollow space, this great empty space which must normally open onto a depth, why is it rendered invisible to us and why does it render us invisible? Well, very simply because all of the light is exterior to the picture.

12 The Balcony

1868–9
Oil on canvas
170 x 124.5 cm
Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Rather than penetrating into the picture, the light is outside, and it is outside precisely because the viewer is on a balcony; we must assume that the midday sun strikes the balcony head on, strikes these figures here, on the point of eating away the shadows; and you notice these large white layers of the dresses in which absolutely no shadow is drawn, just a few sparkling reflections; consequently no shadow, and so every shadow is behind, because, by the effect of back-lighting of course, one cannot see what there is in the room; and instead of having a light-dark picture, instead of having a picture where light and shadow mix together, you have a curious picture in which all the light is on one side, all the shadow on the other, all the light is from in front of the picture and all the shadow is from the other side of the picture, as if the very verticality of the canvas separates a world of shadow, which is behind, and a world of light, which is in front.

And at the limit of this shadow which is behind and of this light which is in front, you have these three figures who are in a sense suspended, who rest almost on nothing; the best proof that they rest on nothing is this: look at this little foot of Berthe Morisot's sister here [the figure on the right], this little foot which swings like so, as though it had nothing on which to rest. It is like in Giotto's *Saint Francis Giving His Mantle to a Poor Man*, the figures do not really stand on anything. The three figures are suspended between the darkness and the light, between the interior and the exterior, between the room and the daylight. They are there: two whites, one black, like three musical notes,

they are suspended at the limit of light and darkness; notice something of a Raising-of-Lazarus aspect to this picture, at the limit of light and darkness, of life and death. And Magritte, the Surrealist painter, as you know, made a variation on this picture where he represented the same elements, but instead of the figures, he represented three coffins.[10] It is really this limit of life and death, of light and darkness, which is here manifested by these three figures; these three figures of whom one could say, moreover, that they too look towards something, that they look with intensity towards something which we do not see.

And here again, invisibility is almost signalled by the fact that the three figures look in three different directions, all three absorbed by an intense spectacle which, evidently, we cannot know, one because it is in front of the canvas, the other because it is to the right of the canvas, the third because it is to the left of the canvas. And in any case, we, we see nothing, we see only the gazes, not a place but a gesture and always the gestures of hands, folding hands, unfolding hands, hands actually unfolded; gloves put on, gloves about to be put on and hands without gloves, and it is this same turning gesture which is at root the gesture which makes the three figures. It is simply this circle of hands which unifies here again, as before in *In The Greenhouse* and as earlier in *Luncheon on the Grass*, these divergent elements of a picture which is nothing other than the brilliance of invisibility itself.

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[10] René Magritte, *Le Balcon de Manet* 1950, Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Ghent, Belgium.

13 **A Bar at the Folies-Bergère**

1881–2
Oil on canvas
96 x 130 cm
The Samuel Courtauld Trust,
The Courtauld Gallery, London

III. THE PLACE OF THE VIEWER

A Bar at the Folies-Bergère (1881–2)

And now, if you wish to move to the final painting, it is on this that I will finish. This brings us to the third element about which I would like to speak to you, no longer space, no longer light, but the very place of the viewer. It is the last of Manet's great paintings, it is the *Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, which can be found in London.[11] It is a picture whose strangeness, evidently, I do not need to point out to you. But the strangeness is not really strange since it is a picture whose elements are really very well known: the presence of a central figure of whom one makes the portrait in a sense for her alone, and then behind this figure, a mirror which reflects to us the very image of this figure. It's something very classic in painting, for example, the *Portrait of Countess d'Haussonville* by Ingres is exactly on this model: you have a woman, behind the woman a mirror and in the mirror you see the woman's back.

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[11] *Un bar aux Folies-Bergère* 1881–2, The Courtauld Gallery, London.

Meanwhile, Manet's picture, engaging with this tradition or this pictorial habit, is at the same time radically different and one can very quickly point out the differences. The principle, as you see, is that the mirror occupies practically all of the background of the picture. The edge of the mirror is this gold band here [running behind the figure's wrists], so that Manet closes the space with a sort of plane surface, as though with a wall. And it's the same technique as in *The Execution of Maximilien* or *The Ball at the Opera*: behind the figures, immediately behind them, rises a wall, but in a very vicious way Manet has, on this wall, and by the fact that it was a mirror, represented what there is in front of the canvas, in such a way that one does not see, so that there is not really any depth. It is the double negation of depth since not only does one not see what is behind the woman, because she is immediately in front of the mirror, but one does not see behind the woman what there is in front of her. That is the first thing one should say about the picture.

Equally, you see that the lighting is one which is entirely frontal and which strikes the woman in full shot here. Again, Manet has simply in a way repeated the malice and the cunning in representing the frontal light inside the painting, by the reproduction of these two lamps; but this reproduction is evidently the mirrored reproduction, therefore, the light sources pay themselves the luxury of being represented in the picture while in reality they come from nowhere but outside the picture, in the space in front. So here you have the reproduction and the representation

of light sources at the same time as the lighting which actually strikes the woman from outside. But these are doubtless no more than relatively singular and partial aspects of the picture. Much more important no doubt is the manner in which the figures, the elements rather, are represented in the mirror. In principle, all of this is a mirror, therefore everything that must be found in front of the mirror is reproduced inside the mirror; one must find the same elements here and there. In fact, if you were to try to count and find the same bottles here and there, you would not manage it, because in fact there is a distortion between what is represented in the mirror and what must be reflected in it. But evidently the great distortion is in the reflection of the woman here, since you are obliged to see the reflection of the figure here [on the right of the picture]. You do not need to have lots of optical ideas to realise this – one senses it in the unease one feels in looking at this picture – that in order to see the reflection of a woman who would be placed here, to see it there [on the right], the viewer and the painter must find themselves, if you like, slightly over here where I place my stick, that is to say, very much sideways. And at this moment, the woman placed here could really have her reflection, finally one would see her reflection here, towards the extreme right. For the woman's reflection to be shifted towards the right, the viewer or the painter themselves must also shift towards the right. Do you agree? It is very evident that the painter cannot be shifted towards the right because he does not see the girl in profile but from opposite. To be able to paint the woman's body in this position, he must be exactly

opposite; but in order to paint the woman's reflection here on the extreme right, he must be there. The painter therefore occupies – and the viewer is therefore invited to occupy after him – successively or rather simultaneously two incompatible places: one here and the other there.

Meanwhile there is a solution which would allow things to be fixed: there is one instance in which one could find oneself in front of the woman, absolutely face-to-face with her, and then see her reflection here. The condition is that the mirror was oblique and receding, that is, in the bottom left over there and disappearing in the distance. This would be possible, of course, one could envisage it, but since you see there, the edge of the mirror parallel to the marble plane which is at the edge of the picture here, you cannot admit that the mirror runs diagonally down there and consequently one has to admit two places for the painter.

But something else must be added. You see here the reflection of a figure which is about to speak to the woman. It must therefore be assumed that in this place which must be occupied by the painter is someone whose reflection is here [in the upper-right corner]. Or, if there is someone in front of the woman speaking to her, and speaking to her as closely as we see here, there would necessarily have been on the woman's face, on her white throat, and equally on the marble, something like a shadow. There is nothing: the lighting comes full shot, striking without any obstacle or cover whatsoever the whole of the woman's body and the marble; so for what has been reflected here

[i.e. the male figure in the upper right corner], there must have been someone and yet in order to have the lighting like this [on the woman's face and the marble surface], there must have been nobody. Therefore, along with the centre and right inconsistency you have the present or absent inconsistency.

You tell me again that this is perhaps not fundamental, that this place at once empty and occupied is perhaps the place of the painter; and when Manet has in this way left empty the space in front of the woman and then represented here someone who looks at her, is it not his own gaze which he has given the reflection here and of which he has indicated the absence there? The presence and absence of the painter, his proximity towards his model, his absence, her distance, finally all of this would be symbolised by that [empty space]. To which I respond, not at all, not at all because, as you see here, the face of this figure which one may suppose is the painter (even though it does not look like him), this face looks at the waitress from above, he has a plunging view onto her and consequently onto the bar, and if it really were the gaze of the painter represented here or reflected here, he would have to, if he were currently speaking to the woman here, see her not as we see her, at the same height, he would have to see her from a plunging view and we would therefore see the bar from a totally different perspective. You see how in reality the viewer and the painter are at the same height as the waitress, perhaps even a little below her, hence the very small distance that there is between the edge of the marble and the edge of

the mirror. The distance is very compressed because there is an ascending view and not at all this plunging view which is indicated here.

You have, therefore, three systems of incompatibility: the painter must be here and he must be there; he must have someone here and he must have no-one there; there is a descending gaze and there is an ascending gaze. This triple impossibility, whereby we know where we must place ourselves to see the spectacle as we see it, this exclusion, if you will, of every stable and defined place where we locate the viewer, is evidently one of the fundamental properties of this picture and explains at once the enchantment and the malaise that one feels in looking at it. While all classical painting, by its system of lines, of perspective, of vanishing point, etc., had assigned to the viewer and to the painter a certain precise place, fixed, constant, from where the spectacle was seen, so that in looking at a picture one very clearly saw from where it was seen, if it was from above or from below, from an angle or from opposite. Here, on the contrary, in a picture like this one, or in any case in this one, it is not possible to know where the painter has placed himself in order to paint the picture as he has done it, and where we must place ourselves in order to see a spectacle such as this. And you see that with this last technique, Manet plays with the picture's property of being not in the least a normative space whereby the representation fixes us or fixes the viewer to a point, a unique point from which to look. The picture appears like a space in front of which and by rapport with which one can move around: the viewer

mobile before the picture, real light striking head on, verticals and horizontals perpetually doubled, suppression of depth. So you see the canvas in which there is something real, material, in some ways physical, is about to appear and to play with all its properties in representation.

Manet certainly did not invent non-representative painting because everything in Manet is representative, but he made a representational play of the fundamental material elements of the canvas. He was therefore inventing, if you like, the 'picture-object', the 'painting-object', and this no doubt was the fundamental condition so that finally one day we can get rid of representation itself and allow space to play with its pure and simple properties, its material properties.

Michel Foucault (1926–1984) was a French historian and philosopher. He is the author of many books, including *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, *The History of Sexuality* and *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*.

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