

Baudelaire's essay maps a representation of Paris as the city of women. It constructs a sexualized journey which can be correlated with impressionist practice. Clark has offered one map of impressionist painting following the trajectories of leisure from city centre by suburban railway to the suburbs. I want to propose another dimension of that map which links impressionist practice to the erotic territories of modernity. I have drawn up a grid using Baudelaire's categories and mapped the works of Manet, Degas and others on to this schema.³⁰

GRID I

LADIES	THEATRE (LOGE)	debutantes; young women of fashionable society	RENOIR	CASSATT
	PARK	matrons, mothers, children, elegant families	MANET	CASSATT MORISOT
FALLEN WOMEN	THEATRE (BACKSTAGE)	DANCERS	DEGAS	
	CAFES	mistresses and kept women	MANET	RENOIR DEGAS
	FOLIES	THE COURTESAN 'protean image of wanton beauty'	MANET	DEGAS GUYS
	BROTHEL	'poor slaves of filthy stews'	MANET	GUYS

From the loge pieces by Renoir (admittedly not women of the highest society) to the *Musique aux Tuileries* of Manet, Monet's

park scenes and others easily cover this terrain where bourgeois men and women take their leisure. But then when we move backstage at the theatre we enter different worlds, still of men and women but differently placed by class. Degas's pictures of the dancers on stage and rehearsing are well known. Perhaps less familiar are his scenes illustrating the backstage at the Opéra where members of the Jockey Club bargain for their evening's entertainment with the little performers (Figure 3.20). Both Degas and Manet represented the women who haunted cafés and as Theresa Ann Gronberg has shown these were working-class women often suspected of touting for custom as clandestine prostitutes.³¹

Thence we can find examples sited in the Folies and cafés-concerts as well as the boudoirs of the courtesan. Even if *Olympia* cannot be situated in a recognizable locality, reference was made in the reviews to the café Paul Niquet's, the haunt of the women who serviced the porters of Les Halles and a sign for the reviewer of total degradation and depravity.³²

WOMEN AND THE PUBLIC MODERN

The artists who were women in this cultural group of necessity occupied this map but partially. They can be located all right but in spaces above a decisive line. *Lydia at the theatre*, 1879 and *Women in a loge*, 1881–2 (Figure 3.21) situate us in the theatre with the young and fashionable but there could hardly be a greater difference between these paintings and the work by Renoir on this theme, *The first outing*, 1876 (London, National Gallery of Art), for example.

The stiff and formal poses of the two young women in the painting by Cassatt were precisely calculated as the drawings for



Figure 3.20 Edgar Degas *Dancers backstage* (c. 1872)



Figure 3.21 Mary Cassatt *Women in a loge* (1891-2)

the work reveal. Their erect posture, one carefully grasping an unwrapped bouquet, the other sheltering behind a large fan, create a telling effect of suppressed excitement and extreme constraint, of unease in this public place, exposed and dressed up, on display. They are set at an oblique angle to the frame so



Figure 3.22 Pierre Auguste Renoir *La loge* (1874)

that they are not contained by its edges, not framed and made a pretty picture for us as in *La loge* (Figure 3.22) by Renoir where the spectacle at which the scene is set and the spectacle the woman herself is made to offer, merge for the unacknowledged but presumed masculine spectator. In Renoir's *The first outing* the choice of a profile opens out the spectator's gaze into the

auditorium and invites her/him to imagine that she/he is sharing in the main figure's excitement while she seems totally unaware of offering such a delightful spectacle. The lack of self-consciousness is, of course, purely contrived so that the viewer can enjoy the sight of the young girl.

The mark of difference between the paintings by Renoir and Cassatt is the refusal in the latter of that complicity in the way the female protagonist is depicted. In a later painting, *At the français*, a sketch, 1877/78 (Figure 3.23), a woman is represented dressed in daytime or mourning black in a box at the theatre. She looks from the spectator into the distance in a direction which cuts across the plane of the picture but as the viewer follows her gaze another look is revealed steadfastly fixed on the woman in the foreground. The picture thus juxtaposes two looks, giving priority to that of the woman who is, remarkably, pictured actively looking. She does not return the viewer's gaze, a convention which confirms the viewer's right to look and appraise. Instead we find that the viewer outside the picture is evoked by being as it were the mirror image of the man looking in the picture.

This is, in a sense, the subject of the painting – the problematic of women out in public being vulnerable to a compromising gaze. The witty pun on the spectator outside the painting being matched by that within should not disguise the serious meaning of the fact that social spaces are policed by men's watching women and the positioning of the spectator outside the painting in relation to the man within it serves to indicate that the spectator participates in that game as well. The fact that the woman is pictured so actively looking, signified above all by the fact that her eyes are masked by opera glasses, prevents her being objectified and she figures as the subject of her own look.

Cassatt and Morisot painted pictures of women in public spaces but these all lie above a certain line on the grid I devised from Baudelaire's text. The other world of women was inaccessible to them while it was freely available to the men of

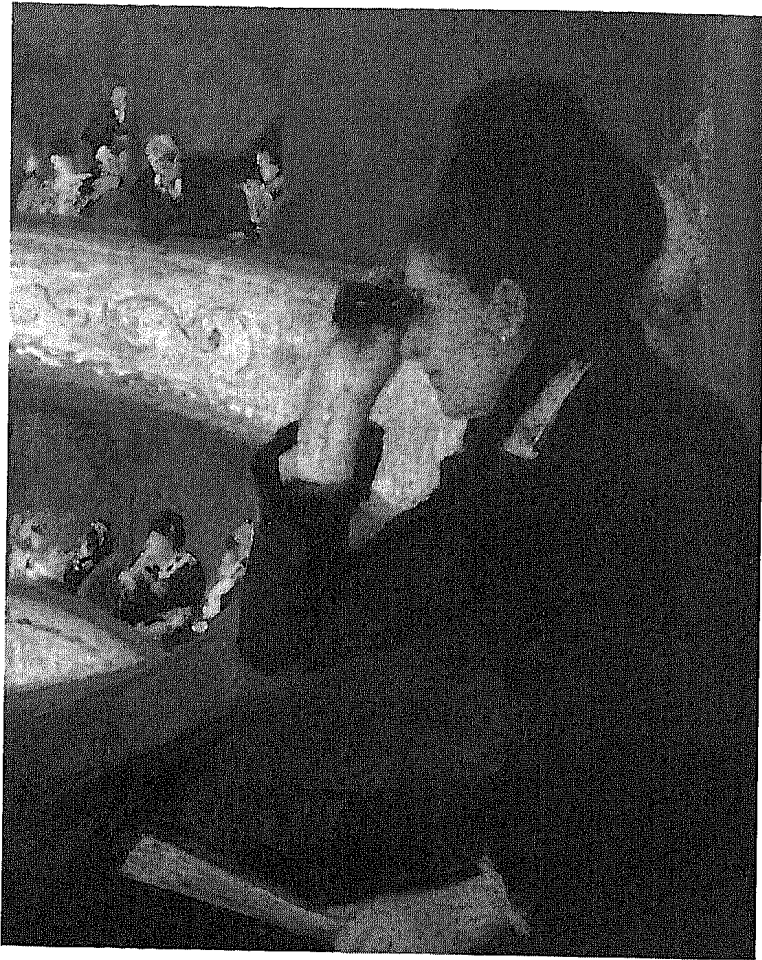


Figure 3.23 Mary Cassatt *At the français*, a sketch (1877–78)

the group and constantly entering representation as the very territory of their engagement with modernity. There is evidence that bourgeois women did go to the cafés-concerts but this is reported as a fact to regret and a symptom of modern decline.³³ As Clark points out, guides for foreigners to Paris such as Murray's clearly wish to prevent such slumming by commenting

that respectable people do not visit such venues. In the journals Marie Bashkirtseff records a visit she and some friends made to a masked ball where behind the disguise daughters of the aristocracy could live dangerously, playing with sexual freedom their classed gender denied them. But given both Bashkirtseff's dubious social position, and her condemnation of the standard morality and regulation of women's sexuality, her escapade merely reconfirms the norm.³⁴

To enter such spaces as the masked ball or the café-concert constituted a serious threat to a bourgeois woman's reputation and therefore her femininity. The guarded respectability of the lady could be soiled by mere visual contact for seeing was bound up with knowing. This other world of encounter between bourgeois men and women of another class was a no-go area for bourgeois women. It is the place where female sexuality or rather female bodies are bought and sold, where woman becomes both an exchangeable commodity and a seller of flesh, entering the economic domain through her direct exchanges with men. Here the division of the public and private mapped as a separation of the masculine and feminine is ruptured by money, the ruler of the public domain, and precisely what is banished from the home.

Femininity in its class-specific forms is maintained by the polarity virgin/whore which is mystifying representation of the economic exchanges in the patriarchal kinship system. In bourgeois ideologies of femininity the fact of the money and property relations which legally and economically constitute bourgeois marriage is conjured out of sight by the mystification of a one-off purchase of the rights to a body and its products as an effect of love to be sustained by duty and devotion.

Femininity should be understood therefore not as a condition of women but as the ideological form of the regulation of female sexuality within a familial, heterosexual domesticity which is

ultimately organized by the law. The spaces of femininity – ideologically, pictorially – hardly articulate female sexualities. That is not to accept nineteenth-century notions of women's asexuality but to stress the difference between what was actually lived or how it was experienced and what was officially spoken or represented as female sexuality.³⁵

In the ideological and social spaces of femininity, female sexuality could not be directly registered. This has a crucial effect with regard to the use artists who were women could make of the positionality represented by the gaze of the flâneur – and therefore with regard to modernity. The gaze of the flâneur articulates and produces a masculine sexuality which in the modern sexual economy enjoys the freedom to look, appraise and possess, is deed or in fantasy. Walter Benjamin draws special attention to a poem by Baudelaire, 'A une passante' ('To a passer-by'). The poem is written from the point of view of a man who sees in the crowd a beautiful widow; he falls in love as she vanishes from sight. Benjamin's comment is apt: 'One may say that the poem deals with the function of the crowd not in the life of a citizen but in the life of an erotic person.'³⁶

It is not the public realm simply equated with the masculine which defines the flâneur/artist but access to a sexual realm which is marked by those interstitial spaces, the spaces of ambiguity, defined as such not only by the relatively unfixed or fantasizable class boundaries Clark makes so much of but because of cross-class sexual exchange. Women could enter and represent selected locations in the public sphere – those of entertainment and display. But a line demarcates not the end of the public/private divide but the frontier of the spaces of femininity. Below this line lies the realm of the sexualized and commodified bodies of women, where nature is ended, where class, capital and masculine power invade and interlock. It is a line that marks off a class boundary but it reveals where new

class formations of the bourgeois world restructured gender relations not only between men and women but between women of different classes.*

MEN AND WOMEN IN THE PRIVATE SPHERE

I have redrawn the Baudelairean map to include those spaces which are absent – the domestic sphere, the drawing-room, veranda or balcony, the garden of the summer villa and the bedroom (Grid II). This listing produces a markedly different balance between the artists who are women and men from that on the first grid. Cassatt and Morisot occupy these new spaces to a much greater degree while their colleagues are less apparent, but importantly, not totally absent.

By way of example, we could cite Renoir's portrait of *Madame Charpentier and her children*, 1878 (New York, Metropolitan

* I may have overstated the case that bourgeois women's sexuality could not be articulated within these spaces. In the light of recent feminist study of the psychosexual psychology of motherhood, it would be possible to read mother-child paintings by women in a far more complex way as a site for the articulation of female sexualities. Moreover in paintings by Morisot, for instance of her adolescent daughter, we may discern the inscription of yet another moment at which female sexuality is referred to by circling around the emergence from latency into an adult sexuality prior to its strict regulation within marital domestic forms. More generally it would be wise to pay heed to the writings of historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg on the importance of female friendships. She stresses that from our post-Freudian vantage point it is very difficult to read the intimacies of nineteenth-century women, to understand the valencies of the terms of endearment, often very physical, to comprehend the forms of sexuality and love as they were lived, experienced and represented. A great deal more research needs to be done before any statements can be made without the danger of feminists merely rehearsing and confirming the official discourse of masculine ideologues on female sexualities. (C. Smith-Rosenberg 'Hearing women's words: a feminist reconstruction of history', in her book *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*, New York, Knopf, 1985.)

GRID II

LADIES		MANET CAILLEBOTTE	MORISOT CASSATT	BEDROOM	
		RENOIR CAILLEBOTTE	MORISOT CASSATT	DRAWING ROOM	
		BAZILLE CAILLEBOTTE	CASSATT MORISOT	VERANDA	
		MONET	CASSATT MORISOT	GARDEN	
	THEATRE (LOGE)	debutantes	RENOIR	CASSATT	THEATRE
	PARK	elegant families	MANET	CASSATT MORISOT	PARK
FALLEN WOMEN	THEATRE (BACKSTAGE)	dancers	DEGAS		
	CAFES	mistresses and kept women	MANET RENOIR DEGAS		
	FOLIES	THE COURTESAN 'protean image of wan- ton beauty'	MANET DEGAS GUYS		
	BROTHELS	'poor slaves of filthy stews'	MANET GUYS		

Museum) or Bazille's *Family reunion*, 1867 (Paris, Musée d'Orsay) or the painting of Camille in several poses and different dresses painted by Claude Monet in 1867, *Woman in the garden* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay).

These paintings share the territory of the feminine but they are painted from a totally different perspective. Renoir entered Madame Charpentier's drawing-room on commission; Bazille celebrated a particular, almost formal occasion and Monet's painting was devised as an exercise in open-air painting.³⁷ The majority of works by Morisot and Cassatt deal with these domestic spaces: for instance *The mother and sister of the artist*, 1869–70 (Figure 3.5) and *Young girl at window*, 1883 (Figure 3.7). These are painted with a sureness of knowledge of the daily routine and rituals which not only constituted the spaces of femininity but collectively trace the construction of femininity across the stages of women's lives. As I have argued previously, Cassatt's oeuvre may be seen to delineate femininity as it is induced, acquired and ritualized from youth through motherhood to old age.³⁸ Morisot used her daughter's life to produce works remarkable for their concern with female subjectivity especially at critical turning-points of the feminine. For instance, her painting *Psyché* shows an adolescent woman before a mirror, which in France is named a 'Psyché' (Figure 3.24). The classical, mythological figure Psyche was a young mortal with whom Venus's son Cupid fell in love and it was the topic of several paintings in the neo-classical and romantic period as a topos for awakening sexuality.³⁹

Morisot's painting offers the spectator a view into the bedroom of a bourgeois woman and as such is not without voyeuristic potential but at the same time, the pictured woman is not offered for sight so much as caught contemplating herself in a mirror in a way which separates the woman as subject of a contemplative and thoughtful look from woman as object – a contrast may make this clearer; compare it with Manet's painting of a half-dressed woman looking in a mirror in such a way that



Figure 3.24 Berthe Morisot *Psyché* (1876)

her ample back is offered to the spectator as merely a body in a working room, *Before the mirror*, 1876–7 (New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum).

But I must stress that I am in no way suggesting that Cassatt and Morisot are offering us a truth about the spaces of femininity. I am not suggesting that their intimacy with the domestic

space enabled them to escape their historical formation as sexed and classed subjects, that they could see it objectively and transcribe it with some kind of personal authenticity. To argue that would presuppose some notion of gendered authorship, that the phenomena I am concerned to define and explicate are a result of the fact that the authors/artists are women. That would merely tie the women back into some transhistorical notion of the biologically determined gender characteristics, what Rozsika Parker and I labelled in *Old Mistresses* as the feminine stereotype.

None the less the painters of this cultural group were positioned differently with regard to social mobility and the type of looking permitted them according to their being men or women. Instead of considering the paintings as documents of this condition, reflecting or expressing it, I would stress that the practice of painting is itself a site for the inscription of sexual difference. Social positionality in terms of both class and gender determine – that is, set the pressure and prescribe the limits of – the work produced. But we are here considering a continuing process. The social, sexual and psychic construction of femininity is constantly produced, regulated, renegotiated. This productivity is involved as much in the practice of making art. In manufacturing a painting, engaging a model, sitting in a room with someone, using a score of known techniques, modifying them, surprising oneself with novel and unexpected effects both technical and in terms of meanings, which result from the way the model is positioned, the size of the room, the nature of the contract, the experience of the scene being painted and so forth – all these actual procedures which make up part of the social practice of making a painting, function as the modes by which the social and psychic positionality of Cassatt and Morisot not only structured their pictures, but reciprocally affected the painters themselves as they found, through the making of images, their world represented back to them.

It is here that the critique of authorship is relevant – the

critique of the notion of a fully coherent author subject previous to the act of creation, producing a work of art which then becomes merely a mirror or, at best, a vehicle for communicating a fully formed intention and a consciously grasped experience. What I am proposing is that on the one hand we consider the social formation of the producer within class and gender relations, but also recognize the working process or practice as the site of a crucial social interaction between producer and materials. These are themselves economically and culturally determined be they technical – the legacy of conventions, traditions and procedures – or those social and ideological connotations of subject. The product is an inscription of those transactions and produces positions for its viewers.

I am not suggesting that the meaning is therefore locked into the work and prescribed. The death of the author has involved the emphasis on the reader/viewer as the active producer of meaning for texts. But this carries with it an excessive danger of total relativism; any reader can make any meanings. There is a limit, an historical and ideological limit which is secured by accepting the death of the mythic figure of the creator/author but not the negation of the historical producer working within conditions which determine the productivity of the work while never confining its actual or potential field of meanings. This issue becomes acutely relevant for the study of cultural producers who are women. Typically within art history they are denied the status of author/creator (see Barr's chart, Figure 3.1). Their creative personality is never canonized or celebrated. Moreover they have been the prey of ideological readings where without regard to history and difference, art historians and critics have confidently proclaimed the meanings of the work by women, meanings which always reduce back to merely stating that these are works by women. Thus Mary Cassatt has been most often indulged as a painter of typical feminine subjects, the mother and child, while the following enthusiastic review by the Irish

painter and critic George Moore speaks volumes about his problem with praising an artist who genuinely impressed him but was a woman:

Madame Lebrun painted well, but she invented nothing, she failed to make her own of any special manner of seeing and rendering things; she failed to create a style. Only one woman did this, and that woman is Madame Morisot, and her pictures are the only pictures painted by a woman that could not be destroyed without creating a blank, a hiatus in the history of art. True that hiatus would be slight – insignificant if you will – but the insignificant is sometimes dear to us; and though nightingales, thrushes and skylarks were to sing in King's Bench Walk, I should miss the individual chirp of the pretty sparrow. Madame Morisot's note is perhaps as insignificant as a sparrow's, but it is an unique and individual note. She has created a style, and has done so by investing her art with all her femininity; her art is no dull parody of ours; it is all womanhood – sweet and gracious, tender and wistful womanhood.⁴⁰

Thus it becomes especially necessary to develop means by which we can represent women as cultural producers within specific historical formations, while at the same time dealing with the centrality of the issue of femininity in structuring their lives and work. Yet femininity must not be presented as the founding cause of their work. This involves moving away from stressing the social construction of femininity as taking part in privileged social practices such as the family prior to the making of art which then becomes a merely passive mirroring of that social role or psychic condition. By stressing the working process – both as manufacture and signification – as the site of the inscription of sexual difference I am wanting to emphasize the active part of cultural practices in producing the social relations

and regulations of femininity. They can also conceivably be a place for some qualification or disruption of them. The notion springs women from the trap of circularity. Socially shaped within the feminine, their art is made to confirm femininity as an inescapable condition understood perpetually from the ideological patriarchal definition of it. There is no doubt that femininity is an oppressive condition yet women live it to different purposes and feminist analyses are currently concerned to explore not only its limits but the concrete ways women negotiate and refashion that position to alter its meanings.

How sexual difference is inscribed will be determined by the specificity of the practice and the processes of representation. In this essay I have explored two axes on which these issues can be considered – that of space and that of the look. I have argued that the social process defined by the term modernity was experienced spatially in terms of access to the spectacular city which was open to a class and gender-specific gaze. (This hovers between the still public figure of the flâneur and the modern condition of voyeur.) In addition, I have pointed to a coincidence between the spaces of modernity and the spaces of masculinity as they intersect in the territory of cross-class sexual exchange. Modifying therefore the simple conceit of a bourgeois world divided by public and private, masculine and feminine, the argument seeks to locate the production of the bourgeois definition of woman defined by the polarity of bourgeois lady and proletarian prostitute/working woman. The spaces of femininity are not only limited in relation to those defining modernity but because of the sexualized map across which woman is separated, the spaces of femininity are defined by a different organization of the look.

Difference, however, does not of necessity involve restriction or lack. That would be to reinscribe the patriarchal construction of woman. The features in the paintings by Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot of proximity, intimacy and divided spaces posit a

different kind of viewing relation at the point of both production and consumption.

The difference they articulate is bound to the production of femininity as both difference and as specificity. They suggest the particularity of the female spectator – that which is completely negated in the selective tradition we are offered as history.

WOMEN AND THE GAZE

In an article entitled 'Film and the masquerade: theorizing the female spectator', Mary Ann Doane uses a photograph by Robert Doisneau titled *An oblique look*, 1948 to introduce her discussion of the negation of the female gaze (Figure 3.25) in both visual representations and on the streets.⁴¹ In the photograph a petit bourgeois couple stand in front of an art dealer's window and



Figure 3.25 Robert Doisneau *An oblique look* (1948)