

look in. The spectator is hidden voyeur-like inside the shop. The woman looks at a picture and seems about to comment on it to her husband. Unbeknownst to her, he is fact looking elsewhere, at the proffered buttocks of a half-naked female figure in a painting placed obliquely to the surface/photo/window so the spectator can also see what he sees. Doane argues that it is his gaze which defines the problematic of the photograph and it erases that of the woman. She looks at nothing that has any meaning for the spectator. Spatially central she is negated in the triangulation of looks between the man, the picture of the fetishized woman and the spectator, who is thus enthralled to a masculine viewing position. To get the joke, we must be complicit with his secret discovery of something better to look at. The joke, like all dirty jokes, is at the woman's expense. She is contrasted iconographically to the naked woman. She is denied the picturing of her desire; what she looks at is blank for the spectator. She is denied being the object of desire because she is represented as a woman who actively looks rather than returning and confirming the gaze of the masculine spectator. Doane concludes that the photograph almost uncannily delineates the sexual politics of looking.

I have introduced this example to make somewhat plainer what is at stake in considering the female spectator – the very possibility that texts made by women can produce different positions within this sexual politics of looking. Without that possibility, women are both denied a representation of their desire and pleasure and are constantly erased so that to look at and enjoy the sites of patriarchal culture we women must become nominal transvestites. We must assume a masculine position or masochistically enjoy the sight of woman's humiliation. At the beginning of this essay I raised the question of Berthe Morisot's relation to such modern sights and canonical paintings of the modern as *Olympia* and *A bar at the Folies-Bergère*, both of which figure within the sexual politics of looking – a

politics at the heart of modernist art and modernist art history's version of it. Since the early 1970s, modernism has been critically challenged nowhere more purposely than by feminist cultural practitioners.

In an article titled 'Desiring images/imaging desire', Mary Kelly addresses the feminist dilemma wherein the woman who is an artist sees her experience in terms of the feminine position, that is as object of the look, while she must also account for the feeling she experiences as an artist occupying the masculine position as subject of the look. Different strategies have emerged to negotiate this fundamental contradiction, focusing on ways of either re-picturing or refusing the literal figuration of the woman's body. All these attempts centre on the problem: 'How is a radical, critical and pleasurable positioning of the woman as spectator to be done?' Kelly concludes her particular pathway through this dilemma (which is too specific to enter into at this moment) with a significant comment:

Until now the woman as spectator has been pinned to the surface of the picture, trapped in a path of light that leads her back to the features of a veiled face. It seems important to acknowledge that the masquerade has always been internalized, linked to a particular organization of the drives, represented through a diversity of aims and objects; but without being lured into looking for a psychic truth beneath the veil. To see this picture critically, the viewer should neither be too close nor too far away.<sup>42</sup>

Kelly's comment echoes the terms of proximity and distance which have been central to this essay.\* The sexual politics of

\* In earlier drafts of this chapter I explore the possibilities of co-ordinating the historical perspectives on the spaces of modernity and femininity with those of feminist psychoanalytical writing on femininity (Cixous, Irigaray and

looking function around a regime which divides into binary positions, activity/passivity, looking/being seen, voyeur/exhibitionist, subject/object. In approaching works by Cassatt and Morisot we can ask: Are they complicit with the dominant regime?<sup>43</sup> Do they naturalize femininity in its major premisses? Is femininity confirmed as passivity and masochistic or is there a critical look resulting from a different position from which femininity is appraised, experienced and represented? In these paintings by means of distinctly different treatments of those protocols of painting defined as initiating modernist art – articulation of space, repositioning the viewer, selection of location, facture and brushwork – the private sphere is invested with meanings other than those ideologically produced to secure it as the site of femininity. One of the major means by which femininity is thus reworked is by the rearticulation of traditional space so that it ceases to function primarily as the space of sight for a mastering gaze, but becomes the locus of relationships. The gaze that is fixed on the represented figure is that of equal and like and this is inscribed into the painting by that particular proximity which I suggested characterized the work. There is little extraneous space to distract the viewer from the intersubjective encounter or to reduce the figures to objectified staffage, or to make them the objects of a voyeuristic gaze. The eye is not given its solitary freedom. The women depicted function as subjects of their own looking or their activity, within highly specified locations of which the viewer becomes a part.

The rare photograph of Berthe Morisot at work in her studio serves to represent the exchange of looks between women

Montrelay) between which there was tantalizing coincidence on the issues of the look, the body and the tropes of distance and proximity in the construction and feminine negotiation of sexual difference under a patriarchal system. The use of a statement by Luce Irigaray as introit, and the citation from Mary Kelly, marks the possibility of that reading which could not be undertaken here without massively enlarging this chapter.

which structure these works (Figure 3.26). The majority of women painted by Cassatt or Morisot were intimates of the family circle. But that included women from the bourgeoisie and from the proletariat who worked for the household as servants and nannies. It is significant to note that the realities of class cannot be wished away by some mythic ideal of sisterhood amongst women. The ways in which working-class women were painted by Cassatt, for example, involve the use of class power in that she could ask them to model half-dressed for the scenes of women washing. None the less they were not subject to the voyeuristic gaze of those women washing themselves made by Degas which, as Lipton has argued, can be located in the *maisons-closes* or official brothels of Paris.<sup>44</sup> The maid's simple washing stand allows a space in which women outside



Figure 3.26 Berthe Morisot in her studio

the bourgeoisie can be represented both intimately and as working women without forcing them into the sexualized category of the fallen woman. The body of woman can be pictured as classed but not subject to sexual commodification (Figure 3.27).



Figure 3.27 Mary Cassatt *Woman bathing* (1891)

I hope it will by now be clear that the significance of this argument extends beyond issues about impressionist painting and parity for artists who are women. Modernity is still with us, ever more acutely as our cities become in the exacerbated world of postmodernity, more and more a place of strangers and spectacle, while women are ever more vulnerable to violent assault while out in public and are denied the right to move around our cities safely. The spaces of femininity still regulate women's lives – from running the gauntlet of intrusive looks by men on the streets to surviving deadly sexual assaults. In rape trials, women on the street are assumed to be 'asking for it'. The configuration which shaped the work of Cassatt and Morisot still defines our world. It is relevant then to develop feminist analyses of the founding moments of modernity and modernism, to discern its sexualized structures, to discover past resistances and differences, to examine how women producers developed alternative models for negotiating modernity and the spaces of femininity.

## 3 MODERNITY AND THE SPACES OF FEMININITY

- 1 For substantive evidence see Lea Vergine, *L'Autre moitié de l'avant-garde, 1910–1940*, translated by Mireille Zanuttin (Italian edn 1980), Paris, Des Femmes, 1982.
  - 2 See Nicole Dubreuil-Blondin, 'Modernism and feminism: some paradoxes' in Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (ed.), *Modernism and Modernity*, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983. Also Lillian Robinson and Lisa Vogel, 'Modernism and history', *New Literary History*, 1971–2, iii (1), 177–99.
  - 3 T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*, New York, Knopf, and London, Thames & Hudson, 1984.
  - 4 George Boas, 'Il faut être de son temps', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 1940, 1, 52–65; reprinted in *Wingless Pegasus: A Handbook for Critics*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1950.
  - 5 The itinerary can be fictively reconstructed as follows: a stroll on the *Boulevard des Capucines* (C. Monet, 1873, Kansas City, Nelson Atkins Museum of Art), across the *Pont de l'Europe* (G. Caillebotte, 1876, Geneva, Petit Palais), up to the *Gare St Lazare* (Monet, 1877, Paris, Musée d'Orsay), to catch a suburban train for the twelve-minute ride out to walk along the *Seine at Argenteuil* (Monet, 1875, San Francisco, Museum of Modern Art) or to stroll and swim at the bathing-place on the Seine, *La Grenouillère* (A. Renoir, 1869, Moscow, Pushkin Museum), or to *Dance at Bougival* (A. Renoir, 1883, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts). I was privileged to read early drafts of Tim Clark's book now titled *The Painting of Modern Life* and it was here that this impressionist territory was first lucidly mapped as a field of leisure and pleasure on the metropolitan/suburban axis. Another study to under-
- take this work is Theodore Reff, *Manet and Modern Paris*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1982.
  - 6 Clark, op. cit., 146.
  - 7 *ibid.*, 253.
  - 8 The tendency is the more marked in earlier drafts of material which appears in *The Painting of Modern Life*, e.g. 'Preliminaries to a possible treatment of *Olympia* in 1865', *Screen*, 1980, 21 (1), especially 33–7, and 'Manet's *Bar at the Folies-Bergère*' in Jean Beauroy *et al.* (eds), *The Wolf and the Lamb: Popular Culture in France*, Saratoga, Anma Libri, 1977. See also Clark, op. cit., 250–2, and contrast the radical reading of Manet's paintings which results from acknowledging the specificity of the presumed masculine spectator in Eunice Lipton's 'Manet and radicalised female imagery', *Art Forum*, March, 1975, 13 (7) and also Beatrice Farwell, 'Manet and the nude: a study of the iconography of the Second Empire', University of California, Los Angeles, PhD, 1973, published New York, Garland Press, 1981.
  - 9 Tamar Garb, *Women Impressionists*, Oxford, Phaidon Press, 1987. The other two artists involved were Marie Bracquemond and Eva Gonzales.
  - 10 Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981, 38.
  - 11 I refer for example to Edouard Manet, *Argenteuil Les Canotiers, 1874* (Tournai, Musée des Beaux Arts) and to Edgar Degas, *Mary Cassatt at the Louvre, 1879–80*, etching, third of twenty states (Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago). I am grateful to Nancy Underhill of the University of Queensland for raising this issue with me. See also Clark, op. cit., 165, 239 ff., for further discussion of this issue of flatness and its social meanings.
  - 12 See also Berthe Morisot, *View of Paris from the Trocadéro, 1872* (Santa Barbara, Museum of Art), where two women and a child are placed in a panoramic view of Paris but fenced off in a separate spatial compartment precisely from the urban landscape. Reff, op. cit., 38, reads this division quite (in)differently and finds the figures merely incidental, unwittingly complying with the social segregation upon which the painting's structure comments. It is furthermore interesting to note that both these scenes are painted quite close to the Morisot home in the Rue Franklin.
  - 13 Griselda Pollock, *Mary Cassatt*, London, Jupiter Books, 1980. Contrast G. Caillebotte, *Portraits, 1877* (New York, private collection).
  - 14 See, for instance, M. Merleau-Ponty, 'Cézanne's doubt', in *Sense and*

- Non-Sense*, translated by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus, Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 1961.
- 15 Janet Wolff, 'The invisible flâneuse; women and the literature of modernity', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 1985, 2 (3), 37–48.
  - 16 See George Simmel, 'The metropolis and mental life', in Richard Sennett (ed.), *Classic Essays in the Culture of the City*, New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969.
  - 17 Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977, 126.
  - 18 Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire; Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, London, New Left Books, 1973, chapter II, 'The flâneur', 36.
  - 19 'What was new in the nineteenth century was not the ideal of the woman by the hearth, *la femme au foyer*, in itself, but the unprecedented scale on which it was propagated and diffused.' John MacMillan, *From Housewife to Harlot, French Nineteenth-Century Women*, Brighton, Harvester Press, 1981, 9. For an excellent study of the English case see Catherine Hall, 'The early formation of Victorian domestic ideology', in Sarah Burman (ed.), *Fit Work for Women*, London, St Martin's Press, 1979.
  - 20 Jules Simon, *La Femme au vingtième siècle*, Paris, 1892, 67.
  - 21 A fascinating interpretation of this process is offered in Bonnie G. Smith, *Ladies of the Leisure Class: The Bourgeoisies of Northern France in the Nineteenth Century*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1981. She documents the shift from married women's active involvement in family business and management of financial affairs common in the early nineteenth century to the completed practice of domesticity, which involved total dissociation from family businesses and money, accomplished by the 1870s. See especially chapters 2–3.
  - 22 Shirley Ardener, *Women and Space*, London, Croom Helm, 1981, 11–12.
  - 23 Catherine Hall and Leonore Davidoff, 'The architecture of public and private life: English middle-class society in a provincial town 1780–1850', in Derek Fraser and Anthony Sutcliffe (eds), *In Pursuit of Urban History*, London, Edward Arnold, 1983, 326–46.
  - 24 Jules Simon, op. cit., quoted in MacMillan, op. cit., 37. MacMillan also quotes the novelist Daniel Lesuer, 'Le travail de la femme la déclassée', *L'Evolution Feminine: ses résultats économiques*, 1900, 5. My understanding of the complex ideological relations between public labour and the insinuation of immorality was much enhanced by Kate Stockwell's contributions to seminars on the topic at the University of Leeds, 1984–5.
  - 25 Jules Michelet, *La Femme*, in *Oeuvres complètes* (Vol. XVIII, 1858–60), Paris, Flammarion, 1985, 413. In passing we can note that in a drawing for a print on the theme of omnibus travel Mary Cassatt initially placed a man on the bench beside the woman, child and female companion (c. 1891 Washington, National Gallery of Art). In the print itself this masculine figure is erased.
  - 26 Sennett, op. cit., 23.
  - 27 *The Journals of Marie Bashkirtseff* (1890), introduced by Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, London, Virago Press, 1985, entry for 2 January 1879, 347.
  - 28 Charles Baudelaire, 'The painter of modern life', in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, translated and edited by Jonathan Mayne, Oxford, Phaidon Press, 1964, 9.
  - 29 *ibid.*, 30.
  - 30 The pictures to fit the schema would include the following examples:
    - A. Renoir, *La Loge*, 1874 (London, Courtauld Institute Galleries).
    - E. Manet, *Music in the Tuileries Gardens*, 1862 (London, National Gallery).
    - E. Degas, *Dancers backstage*, c. 1872 (Washington, National Gallery of Art).
    - E. Degas, *The Cardinal family*, c. 1880, a series of monotypes planned as illustrations to Ludovic Halévy's books on the backstage life of the dancers and their 'admirers' from the Jockey Club.
    - E. Degas, *A café in Montmartre*, 1877 (Paris, Musée d'Orsay).
    - E. Manet, *Café, Place du Théâtre Français*, 1881 (Glasgow, City Art Museum).
    - E. Manet, *Nana*, 1877 (Hamburg, Kunsthalle).
    - E. Manet, *Olympia*, 1863 (Paris, Musée du Louvre).
  31. Theresa Ann Gronberg, 'Les Femmes de brasserie', *Art History*, 1984, 7 (3).
  - 32 See Clark, op. cit., 296, note 144. The critic was Jean Ravenal writing in *L'Epoque*, 7 June 1865.
  - 33 See Clark, op. cit., 209.
  - 34 The escapade in 1878 was erased from the bowdlerized version of the journals published in 1890. For discussion of the event see the publication of excised sections in Colette Cosnier, *Marie Bashkirtseff: un portrait sans retouches*, Paris, Pierre Horay, 1985, 164–5. See also Linda Nochlin, 'A thoroughly modern masked ball', *Art in America*, November 1983, 71 (10). In Karl Baedeker, *Guide to Paris*, 1888, the

masked balls are described but it is advised that 'visitors with ladies had better take a box' (p. 34) and of the more mundane *salles de danse* (dance halls) Baedeker comments, 'It need hardly be said that ladies cannot attend these balls.'

- 35 Carl Degler, 'What ought to be and what was; women's sexuality in the nineteenth century', *American Historical Review*, 1974, 79, 1467–91.
- 36 Benjamin, op. cit., 45.
- 37 The exception to these remarks may well be the work of Gustave Caillebotte especially in two paintings exhibited at the third Exposition de Peinture in April 1877: *Portraits in the Country* (Bayeux, Musée Baron Gerard) and *Portraits (In an Interior)* (New York, Alan Hartman Collection). The former represents a group of bourgeois women reading and sewing outside their country house and the latter women indoors at the family residence in the Rue de Miromesnil. They both deal with the spaces and activities of 'ladies' in the bourgeoisie. But I am curious about the fact of their being exhibited in a sequence with *Paris Street, Rainy Day*, and *The Bridge of Europe* which are both outdoor scenes of metropolitan life where classes mix and ambiguity about identities and social positions disturb the viewer's equanimity in complete contrast to the inertia and muffled spaces evoked for the enclosed worlds of drawing-room and terrace of the family estate in the two portrait paintings.
- 38 Pollock, op. cit. (1980).
- 39 For instance François Gérard, *Cupid and Psyche*, 1798 (Paris, Musée du Louvre).
- 40 George Moore, *Sex in Art*, London, Walter Scott, 1890, 228–9.
- 41 Mary Ann Doane, 'Film and the masquerade; theorizing the female spectator', *Screen*, 1982, 23 (3–4), 86.
- 42 Mary Kelly, 'Desiring images/imaging desire', *Wedge*, 1984 (6), 9.
- 43 There are of course significant differences between the works by Mary Cassatt and those by Berthe Morisot which have been underplayed within this text for reasons of deciphering shared positionalities within and against the social relations of femininity. In the light of recent publications of correspondence by the two women and as a result of the appearance in 1987 of a monograph (Adler and Garb, Phaidon) and an exhibition of works by Morisot it will be possible to consider the artists in their specificity and difference. Cassatt articulated her position as artist and woman in political terms of both feminism and socialism, whereas the written evidence suggests Morisot functioning more passively within the haut bourgeois

formation and republican political circles. The significance of these political differences needs to be carefully assessed in relation to the texts they produced as artists.

- 44 For discussion of class and occupation in scenes of women bathing see Eunice Lipton, 'Degas's bathers', *Arts Magazine*, 1980, 54, also published in Eunice Lipton, *Looking into Degas: Uneasy Images of Woman and Modern Life*, University of California Press, 1986. Contrast Gustave Caillebotte, *Woman at a Dressing-Table*, 1873 (New York, private collection), where the sense of intrusion heightens the erotic potential of a voyeuristic observation of a woman in the process of undressing.