

Vaporization and/or Centralization: On the (Self-)Portraits of Manet and Degas

Victor I. Stoichita

Volume 26, numéro 1-2, 1999

Postures et impostures de l'artiste moderne
Myths of the Modern Artist: Exposing the Pose

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1071546ar>
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1071546ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (imprimé)
1918-4778 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Stoichita, V. I. (1999). Vaporization and/or Centralization: On the (Self-)Portraits of Manet and Degas. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 26(1-2), 13–28. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1071546ar>

Résumé de l'article

Admiration réciproque, rivalité, incompatibilité caractérielle font partie du rapport entre Edouard Manet (1832–1883) et Edgar Degas (1834–1917). Puisque les sources écrites sont avares de renseignements à ce propos, il faudra interroger les oeuvres des deux maîtres elles-mêmes pour trouver les raisons de cette incompatibilité. On aura alors la chance de cerner deux positions inconciliables quant à l'art en général et l'art moderne en particulier. Les pages qui suivent se proposent de le faire, en partant de l'analyse des autoportraits des deux peintres et des rares portraits de l'un faits par l'autre. Une attention spéciale est vouée au tableau intitulé *M. et Mme Manet*, réalisé par Degas vers 1865 et découpé par Manet peu après l'avoir reçu comme cadeau de la part de son confrère.

Vaporization and/or Centralization: On the (Self-)Portraits of Manet and Degas

VICTOR I. STOICHITA, UNIVERSITÉ DE FRIBOURG

translated by James Bugslag

Résumé

Admiration réciproque, rivalité, incompatibilité caractérielle font partie du rapport entre Edouard Manet (1832–1883) et Edgar Degas (1834–1917). Puisque les sources écrites sont avares de renseignements à ce propos, il faudra interroger les oeuvres des deux maîtres elles-mêmes pour trouver les raisons de cette incompatibilité. On aura alors la chance de cerner deux positions

inconciliables quant à l'art en général et l'art moderne en particulier. Les pages qui suivent se proposent de le faire, en partant de l'analyse des autoportraits des deux peintres et des rares portraits de l'un faits par l'autre. Une attention spéciale est vouée au tableau intitulé *M. et Mme Manet*, réalisé par Degas vers 1865 et découpé par Manet peu après l'avoir reçu comme cadeau de la part de son confrère.

It is in 1862 that biographers fix the first encounter between Manet and Degas.¹ It took place at the Louvre, where Manet had seen the young Degas tackling Velázquez's *Infante Marguerite* directly on a copper plate.² This encounter – it has already been said³ – holds to the “golden legend” and repeats so many other quasi-mythical encounters between two great artists (Giotto/Cimabue, Perugino/Raphael). Unlike these others, the relation Manet (b. 1832)/Degas (b. 1834) does not conform to master/student stereotypes but was quickly transformed into a complex, even meandering dialogue, of which it is difficult to take full account in a concise manner. Reciprocal admiration, rivalry and temperamental incompatibility all played a part. Beyond all that, one finds above all two irreconcilable positions as to art in general and “modern” art in particular. The written sources are miserly in information in this connection, and it is necessary to consult the works of the two masters themselves to find the reasons for this incompatibility. What follows proposes to do this starting from an analysis of the self-portraits of the two painters and the rare portraits they made of each other.

We have one single independent self-portrait showing Manet at work (1879, fig. 1). Like all self-portraits, Manet's is a paradoxical object. Several layers of a rhetoric of representation are present in it. The first of them concerns the relation of this particular image with the whole of his oeuvre. Manet painted many pictures but only a single true self-portrait “as a painter.” This, nevertheless, stages a primordial situation.

The fact that Manet was not represented here “as he is” but “as he appeared” is revealed to us by the representation itself. Palette in his right hand, brush in his left, what we see is not “Manet” but his reverse image. No source mentions the fact that he had been left-handed, which, moreover, is not very probable, given the sort of training that painters underwent in the nineteenth century. So the left-right inversion present in the *Self-Portrait* must indeed be considered as significant. Michael Fried has recently brought to light the fact that other artists contemporary with Manet made use of it,⁴ and his conclusions

are an excellent point of departure for the considerations that follow. Every self-portrait, as is known, is created with the aid of a mirror. But every self-portrait aspires, by recourse to the mirror, to give the painter's image. Manet, on the contrary, renounces representing “himself” and represents the mirror. The left-right inversion clearly tells us that what we see is the image of an image; it is the “figured” painter.

Wearing morning dress, a hat on his head, Manet is here “the painter of modern life” par excellence.⁵ At the same time, he revives, but modifies, a solution from classic painting, of which *Las Meninas* (1656, fig. 2) by Velázquez – an “extraordinary picture” according to his own opinion⁶ – marks the summit. However, unlike Velázquez, Manet excludes the models and the space of the studio from his representation, which is focused exclusively on his own figure. Palette, brush and gaze are the terms of the encounter from which the painting arose. The scenario of production, which in *Las Meninas* was complex and created from intrications,⁷ in Manet's hands becomes elliptical and, so to speak, “deconstructed.” The task of completing it falls to the spectator and supposes an effort of integration: at the confluence of the gaze with the brush and palette is found the “other side,” reality as a picture in the process of being made.

A last detail succeeds in completing the rhetoric of this self-portrait. This is its unfinished, or more precisely “non-finished,” character. Here might only be seen the result of chance, but I doubt that this was the case. The only non-finished part of the image is the hand that holds the brush. It is represented as a chaos of pictorial matter. It is as if the painter, arriving at the extremity of his operative hand, had succumbed, in the face of the task of self-representation. Considering that it is an act of painting that is represented here, the painting turns on itself like a vortex.

A second self-portrait by Manet dates from the same period (fig. 3). It is at present in a private gallery in Tokyo and is generally considered to be unfinished. Commenting on it in his

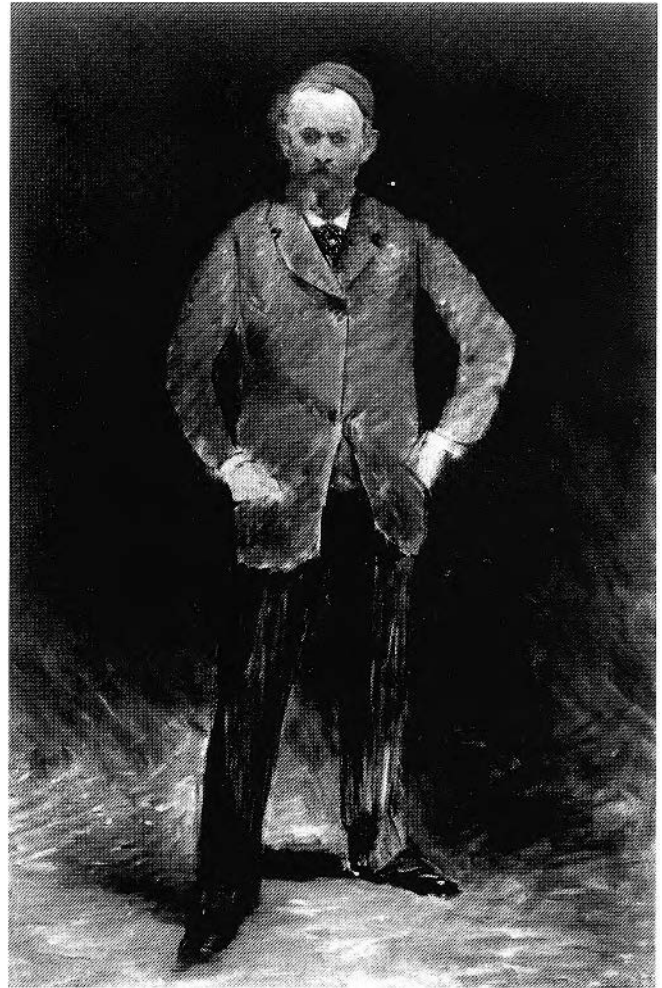
Figure 1. Edouard Manet, *Self-Portrait*, ca. 1879. Oil on canvas, 83 × 67 cm. New York, Private Collection.



Figure 2. Diego da Silva y Velázquez, *Las Meninas*, 1656. Oil on canvas, 318 × 276 cm. Madrid, Prado.



Figure 3. Edouard Manet, *Self-Portrait*, ca. 1878–79. Tokyo, Bridgestone Museum of Art (Photo: Bridgestone Museum of Art, Ishibashi Foundation, Tokyo).



recent monograph, Éric Darragon considers that “the artist is represented full-length as if he had stepped back to judge his painting.”⁸ In the only two independent self-portraits by Manet that we know, the two phases of his profession as a painter (making and critical reflection) are thus represented. If Darragon’s conclusions are correct, that signifies that the fundamental representation of Velázquez would have been subjected. In *Las Meninas*, the painter is represented in a multivalent moment concerning its signification: stepping back and temporary interruption of making were equally present there. With Manet we are dealing with two hypostases of the painter differently focused: on one side, the half-length self-portrait in which the theme of the gaze and that of the making are entangled, on the other, the full-length and, it must be said, less successful version (and, I believe, even abandoned half way through) the real theme of which must have been that of distance.

Figure 4. Edouard Manet, *Jean-Baptiste Faure in the Role of Hamlet*, 1877. Oil on canvas, 196 × 130 cm. Hamburg, Kunsthalle (Photo: Hamburger Kunsthalle).



As is so often the case with Manet, a possible key to reading comes to us from contemporary testimony concerning the original manner of exhibiting his works. It is known that he hung the two self-portraits in his studio on either side of *Faure in the Role of Hamlet* (1877, fig. 4).⁹ No one has tried, to my knowledge, to discern the reasons which led Manet to form this series. Firstly, it appears important to me that the three works would have remained so long in the painter's possession. The fact, moreover, that Manet kept them in his studio allows conjecture of the highly private and self-denotative character of the whole series. The portrait of Faure easily discloses its Spanish antecedents (fig. 5). It is related to a type of actor portrait that Manet could easily have seen during his trip to Spain in 1865. I do not think I am too far wrong in reading a double message in the formation by Manet himself of a series of three works, where two self-portraits frame a Hispanist comedian painting: on the one hand, Hispanicism is announced to us in the whole series, and on the other, the fact that the self-portraits themselves are

Figure 5. Diego da Silva y Velázquez, *Pablo de Valladolid*, 1632. Oil on canvas, 209 × 123 cm. Madrid, Prado.



representations of a representation is emphasized: to be explicit, that they represent *Manet in the role of Manet*.

One of the painter's first biographers has left us an important testimony concerning his working method: "Manet loved to be seen hunched over his easel, turning his head towards the model, then towards the reversed image in the mirror held in his hand."¹⁰ Manet's constant use of a mirror gives rise to thought. Other sources also speak of it. The method is undoubtedly very old, and if there is something truly significant in the passage I have just cited, it is the painter's circulation between the three poles easel/model/mirror and the fact that, during this coming and going, Manet "loved to be seen." We find ourselves here facing a condition of production that be-

Figure 6. Edouard Manet, *Fishing, Saint-Ouen*, 1861–63. Oil on canvas, 76.8 × 123.2 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



comes spectacle and that sets reality, painting, inversion and operator into their fundamental dynamics.

Manet's earliest self-portrait, however, is not a studio self-portrait but forms part of an allegorical painting, the meaning of which is still unclear. This is a painting now known by the title *Fishing, Saint-Ouen* (ca. 1861–63, fig. 6). It is not my intention here to make an exhaustive reading of this painting.¹¹ Suffice it to recall that the painter is represented in the guise of Rubens and Suzanne Leenhof in the guise of Hélène Fourment. The composition was inspired by the Flemish master. Its allegorical meaning remains vague, but the general sense of the canvas is nevertheless clear: Manet represents himself as the Rubens of "modern times." It is significant that this first "endotopic self-projection" of Manet amounts to a self-projection in the history of art. Manet is here a "character," but that character is a(nother) painter.

Owing to its private character, this painting only left Manet's house on a single occasion. This was a one-man show on the Avenue de l'Alma in 1867, an important exhibition, since conceived, like that of Courbet, as a polemical alternative confronting the Exposition Universelle which was taking place at the same time in Paris. Art historical research has so far given too

little importance to the way in which this one-man show of Manet was organized. Thanks to the catalogue which has come down to us,¹² I believe it is possible to advance the hypothesis that the Pont de l'Alma exhibition was an anthology in which chronology played no role but which was structured according to other criteria, very precise in their message.

Number 1 was represented by the *Luncheon on the Grass* of 1863, while number 50 (the last in the catalogue) designated the painting I was just discussing, and which then carried the title *Landscape*. Thus, Manet emphasized the inaugural value of the *Luncheon* and gave *Fishing, Saint-Ouen* the significant place and function of a painting which had to be read as a "signature" for the whole exhibition. Indeed, the latter has as its theme the last seven years (1860–67) of Manet's activity, his passage through the Old Masters in search of modernity.

At the centre of the exhibition, under number 24 in the catalogue, was found another painting-manifesto, on which I would now like to focus: *Music in the Tuileries Gardens* (1862, fig. 7).¹³ This is a large group portrait of the fashionable society of the Second Empire. Contrary to the masked presence of Manet in *Fishing, Saint-Ouen*, *Music in the Tuileries Gardens* has him appear "as himself." He is beside Baudelaire, Fantin-Latour

Figure 7. Edouard Manet, *Music in the Tuileries Gardens*, 1862. Oil on canvas, 76 x 118 cm. London, National Gallery.



Figure 8. Edouard Manet, *Music in the Tuileries Gardens*, detail. London, National Gallery.

and Champfleury or Jacques Offenbach, a representative of the Parisian intelligentsia during the Second Empire. Two elements point to the self-projection being envisaged by Manet as an aporia. The first is the marginal position of the painter. He appears in the left corner of the canvas (that is to say, following the reading sequence codified for centuries, “at the beginning” of the representation) but half cut by the frame (fig. 8). He is thus at one and the same time in the work and outside of the work. He could be absent from it, but he is, however, present. Forming a pendant to the inscription of his figure in the image, on the opposite side of the canvas, is the inscription of his name, his signature (fig. 9). The whole representation unfolds between these “two Manets,” the “figure” and the “name” of the painter-author. Considering the painting again as a part of the Pont de l’Alma exhibition, the marginality of the author and the signature (in the painting) can be seen to be transformed into a centrality of the authorial instance “MANET” at the centre of the exhibition and of the exhibition catalogue. It is necessary to consider the genesis of the painting to realize that the self-portrait as much as the signature are “paratextual” elements, so to speak.¹⁴

Among the studies for the *Music in the Tuileries Gardens*, the most complete is a wash drawing preserved in a private



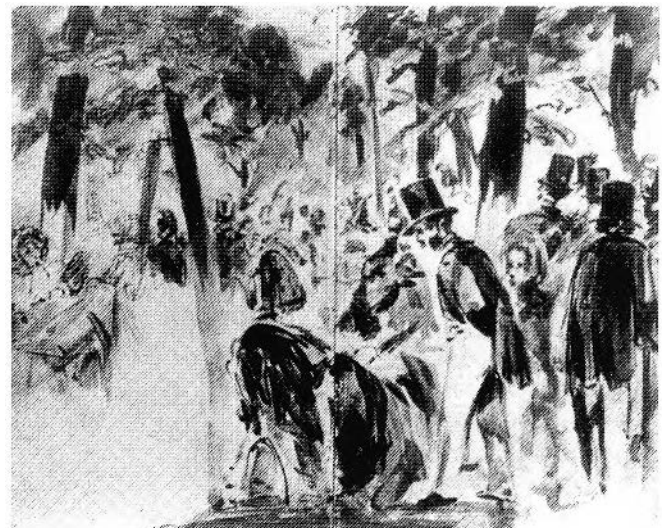
Figure 9. Edouard Manet, *Music in the Tuileries Gardens*, detail. London, National Gallery.



collection (fig. 10). Some figures at the centre of the final composition can be recognized in it. It can also be noticed that the idea of the celebrated curved tree trunk was already present, but it is equally apparent that the two women in the left foreground have not yet found their place on the garden chairs. What appears to me most important in this study is the fact that, while being the most complete, it only represents the central part of the painting to come. What are still lacking are precisely the extreme zones of the future painting where the profile of Manet (at left) and his signature (at right) are found. It undoubtedly must be asked why Manet, who was so accustomed – as is known – to work by paring down his finished works, preferred to work this time by additions. The answer lies – I believe – in the paratextual character of the authorial insertion, as much in the form of the self-portrait as in that of the signature. If the latter is considered attentively (fig. 9), the idea of insertion can there be seen to be rendered in a very clear manner: the name traced thickly in brown is literally *in* the image and not on it. Manet's novelty is fully evident here.

The signature is a mark of the author which is added in a facultative manner to a work once it is finished. In principle, it does not form an integral part of the work: its presence or absence can affect its commercial value, not its intrinsic value. The placing of the signature amounts to a symbolic insertion of the act of production within the product.¹⁵ “What is pure art, following the modern conception?” Baudelaire asked himself in his “Curiosités esthétiques.” And to respond: “It is to create a suggestive magic containing at the same time object and sub-

Figure 10. Edouard Manet, *Study for “Music in the Tuileries Gardens”*, 1862. Wash drawing, 18.5 × 22.2 cm. Private Collection.



ject, the exterior world of the artist and the artist himself.”¹⁶ The integration of the painter's name in the space of the work is certainly only a marginal aspect of that magic. The modality within which Manet approaches the problem of nominal authorial insertion can, however, be considered as being characteristic of his quality as a “painter of modern life.”

Let us now consider the way in which Manet inserts his self-portrait (fig. 8). The staging of the authorial intrusion is

made to a precise plan. The image of the painter is posed so marginally that more than one reproduction of *Music in the Tuileries Gardens* leaves him outside the frame. Attentive observation, indeed, reveals that the presence of the painter in the image seems almost to be an accident. He is at the limit between the world of the image and the exterior space of the image. This marginality is programmatic. It is justified by the double nature of the painter: by his disjunction. Thus, Manet must be imagined once before his picture, painting, and a second time in the image, as a paradoxical object of his painting. The approach is emblematically modern and can indirectly be made clearer with the help of an example. In 1903 Franz Lenbach took a photograph of his family (fig. 11). His approach can easily be reconstructed from the point of view of the representational technique: initially, he calculated the distances and the focussing, then, after releasing the shutter, he quickly passed to the other side of the camera to join his wife and daughters. The result was a picture the photographic origins of which would have been difficult to discover immediately.¹⁷ I do not want, in any manner whatsoever, to suggest here that Manet made use, in this specific case, of a camera.¹⁸ It seems to me, on the other hand,

Figure 11. Franz von Lenbach, *The Lenbach Family*, 1903. Photograph. Munich, Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus (Photo: Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus).



that his manner of inserting himself, without the aid of the mechanical procedure of the camera, in the margin of his picture as an “addition” or almost like an “accident,” is essentially and programmatically modern. The passage of the author from this side of the canvas to its interior is produced by Manet in a far more subtle, more eloquent and, I would add, more

Figure 12. Franz von Lenbach, *The Lenbach Family*, 1903. Oil on canvas, 96.5 × 92.2 cm. Munich, Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus (Photo: Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus).



Figure 13. Edouard Manet, *Waitress serving Bocks*, 1879. Oil on canvas, 77.5 × 65 cm. Paris, Musée d'Orsay (Photo: Paris, Musée d'Orsay).



poetic manner than in the case of a painter/photographer like Lenbach.

It is here that the second aporetic element of the painting intervenes. Unlike *Fishing, Saint-Ouen* (fig. 6) – a still “classical” work, as we have seen – the *Music in the Tuileries Gardens* (fig. 7) is an image which is “open” towards the operative and/or contemplative instance: several figures look toward this side of the painting. An “exotopic Manet,” a productive instance of the representation of which he forms a part, is thus postulated through the representation itself. At this point, it must be asked if the title of this work – *Music in the Tuileries Gardens* – does not contain a significant contradiction. What the title announces (the concert, the spectacle) is not made visible. The public forms the object of the pictorial representation, while the “scene” is conceived as the production space of this representation. Caught in this game of spaces, the painter is an oscillating presence. Baudelaire, himself a figure in this picture-manifesto, must, I believe, be reread, in order to catch the declarative side of the work:

... all artistic phenomena [...] denote in the human being the existence of a permanent duality, the power of being at the same time oneself and the other [...]. The artist is an artist only in the condition of being double and of not ignoring any phenomena of his double nature.¹⁹

Figure 14. Edgar Degas, *At the Café des Ambassadeurs*, 1885. Pastel on etching, 26.5 × 29.5 cm. Paris, Musée d'Orsay (Photo: Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques, fonds du Musée d'Orsay).

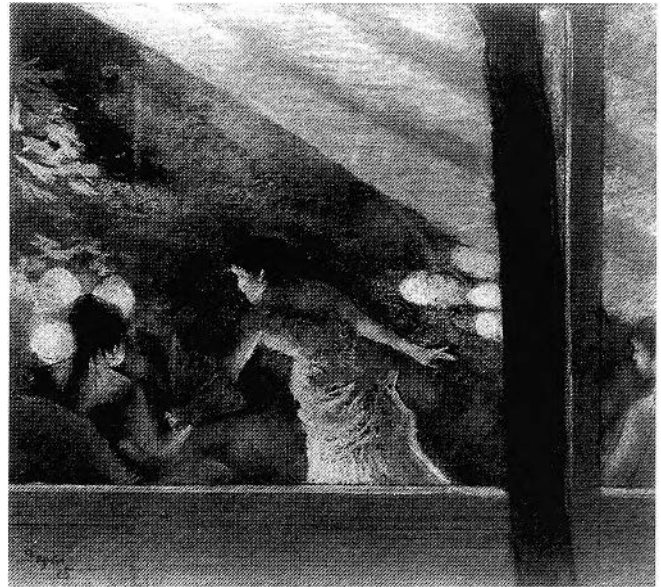
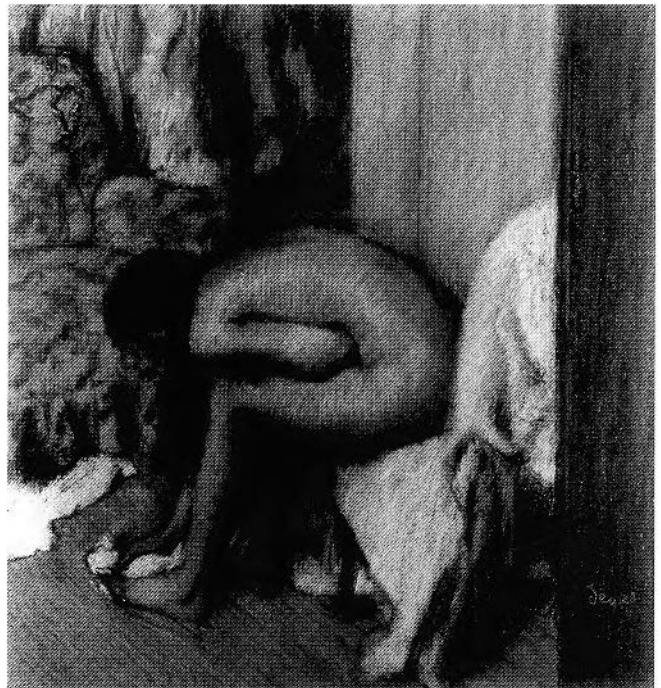


Figure 15. Edgar Degas, *Nude Woman Washing her Foot*, c.1885–86. Pastel on board, 54.3 × 52.4 cm. Paris, Musée d'Orsay (Photo: Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques, fonds du Musée d'Orsay).



I think that Manet can be better understood in the light of this assertion by his friend Baudelaire. The reason for which Manet – the painter of modern life – gave such importance to the delicate zone of the borders of the image is thus grasped. It is just there that the disjunction is produced and that the artist

Figure 16. Edouard Manet, *Woman in a Tub*, 1878–79. Pastel on board, 55 × 45 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins.

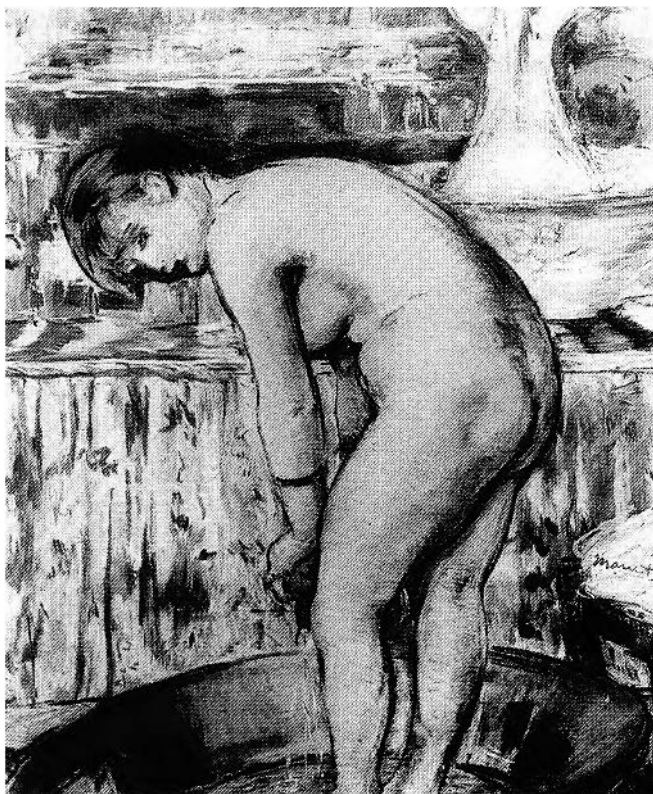


Figure 17. Edgar Degas, *Self-Portrait*, 1854–56. Red chalk on paper, 26 × 20.5 cm. Private Collection.



splits into an endotopic presence and into a productive exotopic instance. I will limit myself here to citing a single case. *Baudelaire's Mistress Reclining*, a picture painted in 1862, was realized in the poet's spirit: it represents Jeanne Duval as an "old infanta" or, one could add, as an "old Menina."²⁰ The remembrance of Velázquez's painting is extremely filtered but nevertheless present: at the left extremity of the painting, the frame and the edges of the canvas before which Manet must be imagined in the process of creating the portrait can be perceived. It is undoubtedly significant that this idea of Velázquez did not appear in the preliminary studies for the painting. In the watercolour in the Kunsthalle in Bremen, this direct reference to the instance of the author is absent.²¹ The representation of the edges of the canvas, as an authorial trace *in* the portrait, was in all likelihood a later idea of Manet. It was added, however, to an element of figurative language that had preoccupied Manet for a long time. The definition of a personal point of view, of a place from which the capturing of the image was effected, was a constant of the "Nouvelle Peinture" of which Manet was the leading exponent.²² Duranty's essay, carrying just this title (1876), made the point on this subject. I cannot repeat or summarize this fundamental text here. His central idea is the following: in the face of the objectivity, the omniscience and the "omnivoyance" of clas-

sic painting, the "new painting" is carried out from a personal and occasional, even accidental point of view.²³

Most often Manet effected his "image taking" in an apparently still traditional manner. This (misleading) traditionalism comes out particularly in the centring to which he subjected his earliest compositions. Only the "Café-Concerts" of the years 1878–79 are constructed according to a very constricted point of view, like a close-up, and the "fragmented" character of these images gives rise to a certain "loss of centre." If there is one characteristic concerning the "image taking" which could be considered as a constant in his work, it is situated at a different level that could be qualified as meta-representational: most of Manet's paintings contain signals that integrate the image in a flux of communication. The most important of these signals is the gaze which, from the space of the painting, is directed toward the space which is found outside of the surface of the image. In all of his great works, from the *Luncheon on the Grass* and the *Olympia* to *Nana* and the *Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, the *Blick aus dem Bilde*, to use the expression of Alfred Neumayer, translatable only with difficulty, is present.²⁴ What is its meaning?

Firstly, as I have just said: the work is considered as an object pertaining to a flux of communication. Before a canvas by Manet, spectators see themselves addressed: it is not only

Figure 18. Edgar Degas, *Self-Portrait*, c.1890–1900. Photograph. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale (Photo: Cliché Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris).



that they look at the painting, but the painting also looks at them. This situation of the reception of the work is only, however, a reflection of the situation of production. The position of the spectator before the finished work is only a repetition of the position of the painter before the work in the act of making it. At the same time that it effects an inscription of the spectator in the space of the work, the *Blick aus dem Bilde* reveals the invisible presence of the creative instance. In this sense, Manet's works are never "finished," since their completion only comes out in the act of reception that reiterates that of their creation. Baudelaire's invocation – "hypocritical reader, my counterpart, my brother"²⁵ – could have been uttered by Manet himself.

This is the point at which the structural differences between Manet and Degas stand out with the greatest force. If with Manet there is nearly always optical contact between one of the figures in the picture and the spectator (even the author), with Degas the authorial instance and even that of the spectator is nearly always thematized as being exotopic. To put it more clearly: the framing, the extremely personal point of view and the optical apparatus of the image result in the authorial instance always remaining "hidden," even if its invisible presence

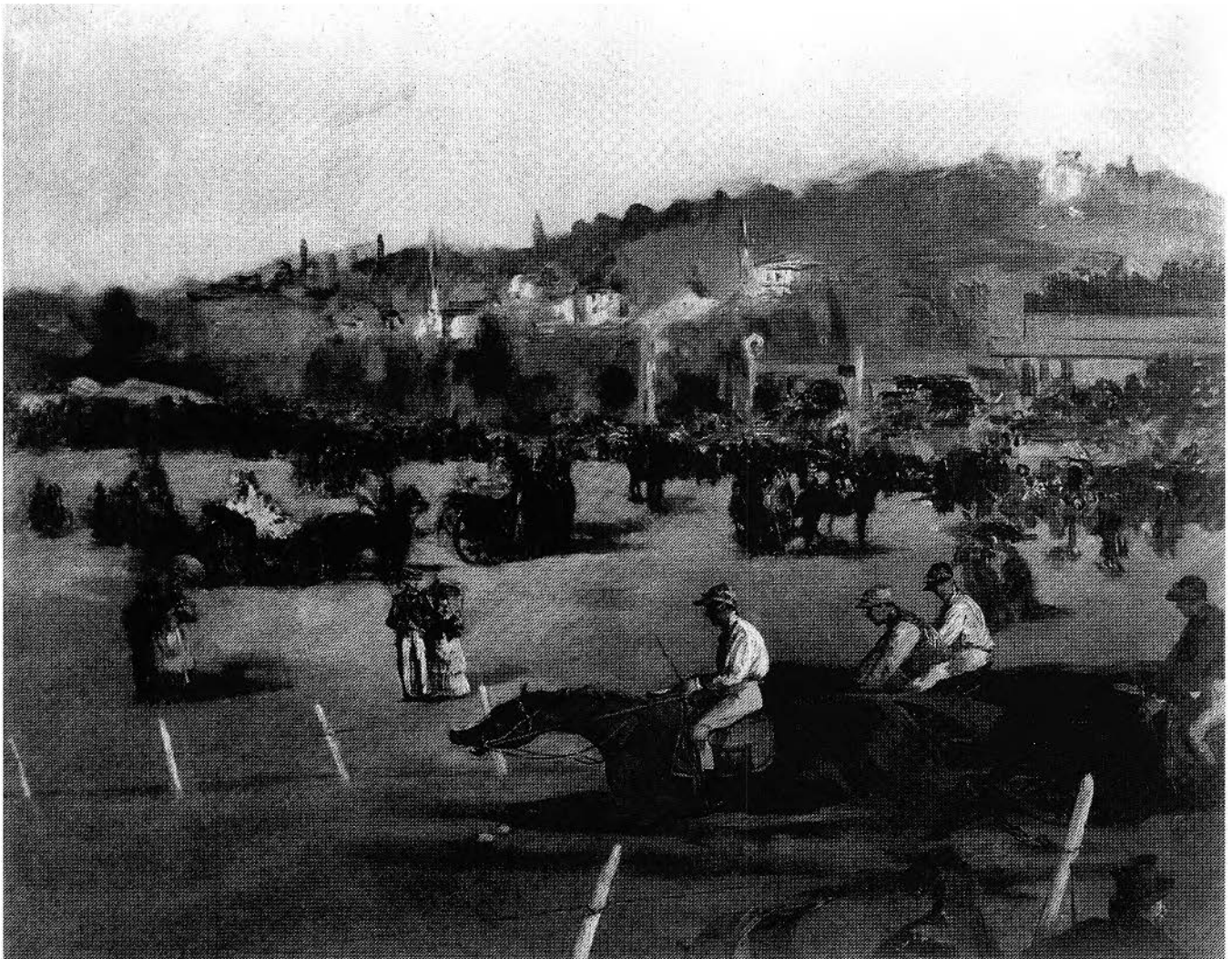
is suggested outside the limits of the image (fig. 15). Degas' position is – and it has been repeated many times – that of the voyeur. He sees without being seen, observes without being observed, paints or draws without implicating himself in the space of his images.²⁶ In this context, there is nothing more significant than the position of the signature: Degas puts his name on the internal borders of his images, on imaginary thresholds or under door frames that double the margins of the image. He always remains "on the threshold" without ever taking the decisive step of integration accomplished by Manet. When the latter, inspired by Degas, takes up the theme of women at their toilet (fig. 16), he brings to it constrained yet highly significant changes. He turns the model's head toward that of the viewer (which Degas would never have done) and affixes his signature at the very heart of the representation.

Degas' choice to remain essentially an exotopic presence explains, I believe, the complete absence of integrated self-portraits for which Manet had such a predilection. A number of important independent self-portraits of Degas are known, for the most part drawings or photographs, but significantly, they date from the extreme periods of the painter's youth and old age (fig. 17, 18). Compared with his artistic *corpus*, these self-portraits are equally "exotopic." They form, metaphorically speaking, the "frame" of Degas' oeuvre, while the centre of his creation excludes direct representation of the authorial instance.²⁷

The considerations I have just sketched find their confirmation in a group of works in which Manet and Degas directly maintained a dialogue with each other. The two artists were accused on many occasions of having "stolen" from each other the subject of horse races (fig. 19, 21). It does not require a great effort, however, to realize that, despite the resemblance of the theme, they approached it in diametrically opposed ways concerning the point of view. If Manet placed his camera in the middle of the track to bring about (strictly speaking, in a way that borders on the improbable) a reportage in which he is himself implicated (fig. 19), Degas for his part (fig. 20) preferred to keep himself hidden or in any case unobserved behind the relaxing jockeys.²⁸ Sometimes, he delegated a well-dressed figure on the race course green to the position of an integrated observer, but he never represented himself in this position.

Manet, however, well understood the significance of this approach. According to Moreau-Nélaton, Manet bears witness in the *Races in the Bois de Boulogne* (1872, fig. 21) of his debt to Degas by representing him in his painting, accompanied by Mary Cassat, at bottom right.²⁹ It appears to me that in addition to a recognition of debt, we have here an ironic picture: Manet created "a race à la Degas," a race, then, observed sideways and from a certain distance. He also took the step that Degas never took himself: he projected him into the image, in the position of a filter-figure,³⁰ as an interior observer. Cut by

Figure 19. Edouard Manet, *Races at Longchamp*, 1867?. Oil on canvas, 43.9 × 84.5 cm. Chicago, The Art Institute.



the frame (an idea typical of Manet), Degas has indeed crossed the threshold of the image, while hesitating between an endotopic position and an extopic attitude.

I believe that Degas, in his turn, well understood Manet's ludic gloss on his own problems of vision and on his relation to the painted image, since in these same years, he completed several versions of a strange portrait (fig. 22).³¹ This is one of the rare times that Degas represents a woman looking out from the image, directly towards the spectator's space, and in addition, he exacerbates this gaze by the formidable binoculars that hide a good part of her face. To my understanding, this work thematizes, perhaps in a slightly ironic way, Manet's gaze. This supposition could appear unwarranted, but it is certainly not. A drawing preserved in the Metropolitan Museum in New York reveals Degas' original conception (fig. 23). We undoubtedly have here a brief note concerning a complex composition on

the racing theme. The figure of the woman with binoculars is found here, but hardly visible, in the farthest background of the composition, while the foreground is occupied by Manet, in a casual attitude. Whereas she undoubtedly watches the horses, the young woman is herself the object of Manet's gaze. In a second version, Degas renounced the portrait of Manet to concentrate on the realization of the woman, who through the staging of the direct gaze, is only a stand-in for Manet's conception of vision.³²

Another portrait of Manet made by Degas also contains elements of a dialogue not exempt of problems between the two painters. The history of this work (fig. 24) is known but remains, once again, open to more detailed interpretations than those attempted previously. Degas is known to have made a present of what was originally a double portrait of Manet and his wife to Manet himself who, unhappy with the way his wife

Figure 20. Edgar Degas, *Race Course, Amateur Jockeys*, 1876/1887. Oil on canvas, 66 × 81 cm. Paris, Musée d'Orsay (Photo: Paris, Musée d'Orsay).



Figure 21. Edouard Manet, *Races in the Bois de Boulogne*, 1872. Oil on canvas, 73 × 92 cm. United States, Collection of Mrs. John Hay Whitney.



Figure 22. Edgar Degas, *Woman Looking through Field Glasses*, ca. 1866. Oil on pink paper, 28 × 22.7 cm. London, British Museum (Photo: © The British Museum).



Figure 23. Edgar Degas, *Manet at the Races with Woman with Field Glasses*, c. 1865. Pencil on paper, 38 × 24.4 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund.



had been represented, unscrupulously cut her from the canvas. Degas, furious, took back his canvas.³³ A contemporary photograph of Degas accompanied by Bartholomé shows us the double portrait in the state in which it was taken back from the Manets (fig. 26), the painting not yet being enlarged with a strip of primed canvas that Degas himself, undoubtedly intending, according to his own formula to “restore” Mme Manet, had affixed a little later. As for Manet, he made good his act of obvious brutality (the elimination of his wife from Degas’ painting) by a painting representing her alone (fig. 25).

If the two canvases are compared (fig. 24, 25), it can be noticed that, despite inherent stylistic differences, Manet’s picture was painted in the same interior: same armchairs covered with white slip-covers, same position of the piano along the wall, same chair on which Mme Manet is seated, same gold lines on the wooden panelling.

What is the meaning of this story? I take risks here in a reading twice removed. Degas’ painting is a profoundly personal staging of the man/woman relationship. Contemplating his wife from the place where he finds himself, Degas confers on Manet the Degasian position of a “non-observed observer.” Manet probably did not relish this staging, even if he remem-

Figure 24. Edgar Degas, *M. and Mme. Edouard Manet*, ca. 1865. Oil on canvas, 65 × 71 cm. Japan, Kitakyushu Municipal Museum of Art.

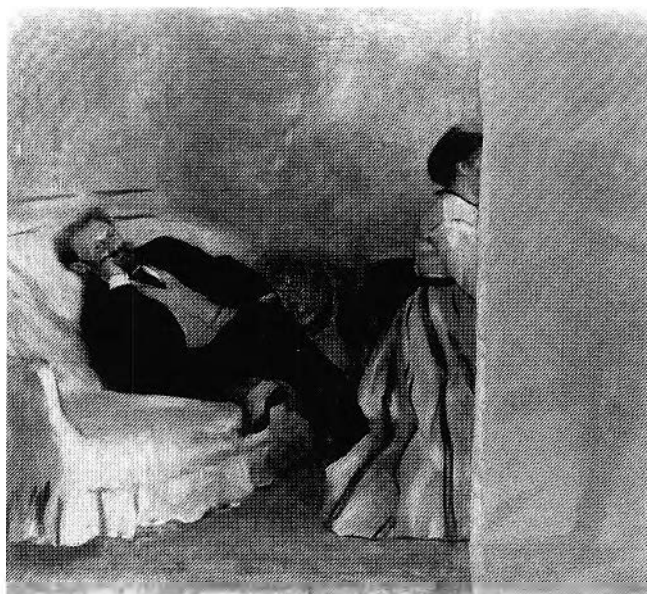


Figure 25. Edouard Manet, *Mme. Manet at the Piano*, 1867–68. Oil on canvas, 38 × 46 cm. Paris, Musée d'Orsay (Photo: Paris, Musée d'Orsay).

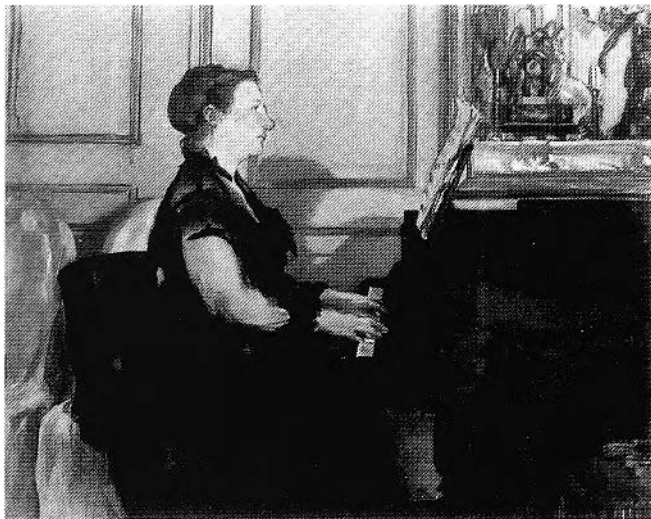


Figure 26. *Degas and Bartholomé*, ca. 1895–1900. Photograph. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale (Photo: Cliché Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris).



bered it several years later in a justly celebrated work – *Nana* – in which he revived the attitude learned from Degas, in a painting that created a real scandal because of its too shocking eroticism. Also to be noticed from Degas' picture (fig. 24), Manet partially cut, by a process which nevertheless formed part of his stylistic repertoire, the observed woman, while in *Nana*, he would leave (partially) outside the frame the man who observes. In his own painting representing Mme Manet at the piano (fig. 25), he obliterated all trace of endotopic contemplation, focusing his model from an exterior point of view.

Degas' subsequent step, his attempt to complete once again the mutilated canvas, remains half finished. He added the missing piece of canvas (fig. 24), but never came to paint it.

Figure 27. Edgar Degas, *Renoir and Mallarmé*, 1895. Silver gelatine print, 17.8 × 12.7 cm. Paris, Bibliothèque Doucet.



Here, however, a detail arises which has passed unnoticed but which deserves the effort of our questioning. The fringe of the added canvas is signed at bottom right. Now, as is known, a work of art is usually signed when it is finished. What is the significance of this signature, affixed in this case to a piece of canvas added but unpainted? I am convinced that through the insertion of his signature, Degas conceived this fringe as an element of fortuitous editing of the image. In short, with the help of the addition and the signature, he restored to Manet's intervention a Degasian character. Through this, he emphasized again his exotopic authorship, his existence on the threshold of the image, but never within it. I am aware of only one example in which Degas played with the idea of the endotopy of the creator. This is in a celebrated photograph representing Mallarmé and Renoir in Berthe Morisor's apartment (ca. 1895, fig. 27), the first description of which came from the pen of Paul Valéry, its first owner:

This photograph was given to me by Degas, whose camera and ghost are seen in the mirror. Mallarmé is standing beside Renoir seated on the divan. Degas inflicted on them a

fifteen-minute exposure in the light of nine oil lamps. [...] In the mirror the shadows of Mme Mallarmé and her daughter can also be seen.³⁴

This photograph has been commented on many times, sometimes in a remarkable way.³⁵ I am not alone in seeing here a sort of manifesto by Degas concerning his typical exclusion from the image of which he is the creator. In the mirror, one sure enough sees the black eye of the camera which hides the face of the person who manipulates it. The nine oil lamps that Valéry mentions have a double effect: it is through their brightness that, on the one hand, the models in the foreground emerge and, on the other, the “observer” is reduced to an “apparition.”

The distance that separates Degas’ manner of self-representation from that of Manet could not be greater. For Manet the mirror is the site of a presentation, for Degas it is the site of a disappearance. The two can, however – it seems to me – only bring confirmation to the premonitory statement of Baudelaire, the prophet of modernity: “... the vaporization and centralization of the Self. It’s all there.”³⁶

Notes

- 1 Adolphe Tarbarant, *Manet et ses oeuvres* (Paris, 1947), 37.
- 2 Etienne Moreau-Nélanton, *Manet raconté par lui-même* (Paris, 1926), I, 36.
- 3 Henry Loyrette in the exhibition catalogue *Degas* (Paris, Ottawa, New York, 1988–89), 140.
- 4 Michael Fried, *Manet’s Modernism, or The Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago and London, 1996), 365–98; I was unable to take into account the interesting topic of Gregory Galligan, “The Self Pictured: Manet, the Mirror, and the Occupation of Realist Painting,” *Art Bulletin*, LXXX (1998), 138–71. I take up again here, in modified form, the analyses offered in Victor I. Stoichita, “Manet raconté par lui-même,” *Annales d’Histoire de l’Art et d’Archéologie (Université Libre de Bruxelles)*, XIII (1991), 79–94. On specular inversion, see now Michel Thévoz, *Le miroir infidèle* (Paris, 1996), 19–54.
- 5 For Manet as a “painter of modern life,” T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton, 1984) should still be consulted. See also Hans Körner, *Edouard Manet. Dandy, Flaneur, Maler* (Munich, 1996).
- 6 See now Caroline Kesser, *Las Meninas von Velázquez. Eine Wirkungs- und Rezeptionsgeschichte* (Berlin, 1994), 91–106.
- 7 Details in Victor I. Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early-Modern Metapainting*, trans. Anne-Marie Glasheen (Cambridge and New York, 1997), pp. 247–56, 266–67.
- 8 Éric Darragon, *Manet* (Paris, 1991), 300.
- 9 E. Bazire, *Manet* (Paris, 1884), 132–33.
- 10 Jacques Emile Blanche, *Manet* (Paris, 1924).
- 11 A good summary is that of Charles S. Moffett, “La Pêche,” in *Manet 1832–1883*, exh. cat. (Paris, 1983), 70–75.
- 12 *Edouard Manet*, exh. cat. (Paris, 1867).
- 13 For more details, N.G. Sandblad, *Manet: Three Studies in Artistic Conception* (Lund, 1954), 17–68, is still worth consulting.
- 14 For the notion of the “paratext,” see Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris, 1987).
- 15 See Victor I. Stoichita, “Manet raconté par lui-même (II): la forme du nom,” *Annales d’Histoire de l’Art et d’Archéologie (Université Libre de Bruxelles)*, XIV (1992), 95–110 (with bibliography).
- 16 Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres (Pléiade)* (Paris, 1956), II, 118. On this subject, W. Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire. Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus* (1955; Frankfurt, 1974), 60ff, should still be consulted.
- 17 See Sonja Mehl, *Franz von Lenbach in der Städtischen Galerie im Lenbachhaus München* (Munich, 1980), 176.
- 18 The fact that Manet sometimes made use of photographs for his paintings is not in doubt. The most striking case is *The Railway* (1874) the first phase of which is known (a photograph touched up with watercolour and gouache) in the Durand-Ruel Coll., Paris; see D. Rouart and D. Wildenstein, *Edouard Manet. Catalogue raisonné*, vol. II (Geneva, 1975), no. 322.
- 19 Baudelaire, *Oeuvres*, II, 119.
- 20 See *Manet 1832–1983*, exh. cat. (Paris, 1983), 96–98.
- 21 D. Rouart and D. Wildenstein, *Edouard Manet. Catalogue raisonné*, vol. II (Geneva, 1975), no. 368.
- 22 See my article cited above in note 4 and Martine Bacherich, *Je regarde Manet* (Paris, 1990).
- 23 Edmond Duranty, *La Nouvelle Peinture – A propos du groupe d’artistes qui expose dans les galeries Durand-Ruel* (Paris, 1876). A modern re-edition can be found in Denys Riout, ed., *Les Écrivains devant l’Impressionnisme* (Paris, 1989), 108–34.
- 24 Alfred Neumayer, *Der Blick aus dem Bilde* (Berlin, 1964).
- 25 Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal*, “To the reader”.
- 26 Recall his well-publicized confession: “It is as if you were looking through a keyhole;” George Moore, *Impressions and Opinions* (London, 1891), 232. On this subject, see Carol Armstrong, “Edgar Degas and the Representation of the Female Body,” in Susan Suleiman, ed., *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1985), 223–42; and Eunice Lipton, *Looking into Degas: Uneasy Images of Women and Modern Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1986), 151–87.
- 27 See Carol Armstrong, *Odd Man Out: Readings of the Work and Reputation of Edgar Degas* (Chicago and London, 1991), 211–43; and Felix Baumann, “Die frühe Selbstbildnisse,” in Felix Baumann and Marianne Karabelnik, eds, *Degas. Die Portraits*, exh. cat. (Zürich and Tübingen, 1994–95), 158–73.
- 28 See Lipton, *Looking into Degas*, 17–71.
- 29 Moreau-Nélanton, *Manet raconté par lui-même*, I, 139.
- 30 On this subject, see W. Kemp, *Der Anteil des Betrachters. Rezeptionsästhetische Studien zur Malerei des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1983).
- 31 For the different versions, see William Wells, “Who was Degas’s Lyda?” *Apollo*, XCV (1972), 129–34; Richard Kendall, “Degas and the Contingency of Vision,” *Burlington Magazine*, CXXX (1988), 180–97; and Lipton, *Looking into Degas*, 66–72.

- 32 In a painting of 1868 in a private collection in London (see Wells, "Who was Degas's Lyda?" fig. 1 and 2, and Lipton, *Looking into Degas*, fig. 38), the cleaning carried out by the National Gallery in London in 1960 brought to light the feminine figure with field glasses accompanied by Manet, who had been covered over, probably by Degas himself.
- 33 See Ambroise Vollard, *En écoutant Cézanne, Degas, Renoir* (Paris, 1938), 125; and Moreau-Nélanton, *Manet par lui-même*, I, 36.
- 34 Paul Valéry, *Degas danse dessin* (Paris, 1934), 49-50.
- 35 Wayne L. Roosa, "Degas' Photographic Portrait of Renoir and Mallarmé: An Interpretation," *Rutgers Art Review*, III (Jan. 1982), 81-96; and Carol Armstrong, "Reflections on the Mirror: Painting, Photography and the Self-Portraits of Degas," *Representations*, XXII (1988), 108-41.
- 36 Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres*, II, 147.