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## **Opposing the ugly: the reception of Manet and the struggle against the primitive**

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# MUSEUMS, COLLECTIONS AND SOCIETY

YEARBOOK 2021

Holly O'Farrell and Pieter ter Keurs (eds)



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Pieter ter Keurs

# Opposing the Ugly

## The Reception of Manet and the Struggle against the Primitive

Pieter ter Keurs

... Olympia, *monstre d'amour banal que complimente une négresse. Olympia choque, dégage une horreur sacrée, s'impose et triomphe. Elle est scandale, idole; puissance et présence publique d'un misérable arcane de la Société. ... Vestale bestiale voué au nu absolu, elle donne à rêver à tout ce qui se cache et se conserve de barbarie primitive et d'animalité rituelle dans les coutumes et les travaux de la prostitution des grandes villes.*<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

The work of Édouard Manet (1832-1883) has been severely criticized – particularly during his lifetime – , but in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is seen, by many, as strikingly revolutionary. Manet used classical themes in contemporary scenes and thereby commented on Parisian society of the mid-nineteenth century in a way that was not altogether accepted by the ruling *bourgeois* class, with its artistic tastes and preferences for classical myths and legendary stories of French history. Manet, however, commented on his own times, which was a historical period with enormous changes, socio-economic (the rise of the working class), technical (photography, telegraph, railways), infrastructural (the construction of the *Grands Boulevards*, a new network of railways and railway stations (*gares*)) and political (from the Second Empire, through a war with Prussia and the *Commune*, to the Republic). All these

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1 Paul Valéry, *Manet: 1832-1883* (Paris: Musée de l'Orangerie, 1932), x.

changes, no doubt, left its traces on the people who made and looked at art. The uneasiness and discomfort of the period had a great influence on how Manet's works were received, but also on how Manet himself conceived them.

In a short text, it is impossible to outline the complex mid-nineteenth century French art scene, with its Salon exhibitions and its alternative ways of commenting on modern reality. Plenty of literature is available on this period and the changes that took place within the world of painting and beyond.<sup>2</sup> Here, however, I will try to indicate a specific line of research on this important shift in the history of European art, particularly on how the changes are related to the idea that European art is shaped in contact with, and in conflict with influences from outside. These outside influences I will call 'the primitive'. I use this term not in the evolutionist sense of a development from primitive to civilized, but as something that is seen (by the receiver) as strange, chaotic and potentially dangerous. My hypothesis will be that Manet's art takes form in alliance with the primitive and that the reception of Manet's work was in fact a fight against the primitive, led by the dominant *bourgeois* elite whose fear for disorder and loss resulted in emotional, fierce verbal and physical battles against the paintings of Édouard Manet and everything else he stood for.<sup>3</sup> It was a fight against a *barbarie primitive* (Paul Valéry, cited above), against a *petrifying primitive chaos* (Van Eck 2015: 11).<sup>4</sup>

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2 For good analyses I refer foremost to the publications of Timothy J. Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the Second French Republic 1848-1851* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973a); Timothy J. Clark, *The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France 1848-1851* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973b). Timothy J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999 (1984)); Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism or, the Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

See also Bourdieu's lectures at the *Collège de France*, published as Pierre Bourdieu, *Manet: Une révolution symbolique. Cours au collège de France (1998-2000) suivis d'un manuscrit inachevé de Pierre et Marie-Claire Bourdieu* (Paris: Édition Seuil, 2013).

3 It is striking to see that Émile Zola felt obliged to defend his friend Manet by sketching his good character and the fact that he came from a serious, *bourgeois* background. Emile Zola, *M. Manet* (originally published in *L'Événement*, 27 avril 1866), in *Zola Journaliste: Articles et chroniques*, ed. Adeline Wrona (Paris: Édition Flammarion, 2011a), 111.

Zola stressed repeatedly that Manet was a sympathetic, civilized and modest man. He wrote extensively about the social background of the painter as well as on how sympathetic Manet was. (Édouard Manet. "Étude biographique et critique" (originally published in *La Revue du XIX siècle*, 1 janvier 1867) in Édouard Manet (New York: Parkstone Press, 2011b), 7-76 (most recent reprint, with 47 illustrations). 'Édouard Manet est de taille moyenne, plutôt petite que grande. Les cheveux et la barbe sont d'un châtain pâle; les yeux, étroits et profonds, ont vivacité et une flame juveniles; la bouche est caractéristique, mince, mobile, un peu moqueuse dans le coin. Le visage entier, d'une irrégularité fine et intelligente, annonce la souplesse et l'audace, le mépris de la sottise et de la banalité. Et si du visage nous descendons à la personne, nous trouvons dans Édouard Manet un homme d'une amabilité et d'une politesse exquises, d'allures distinguées et d'apparence sympathique' (Zola, "Édouard Manet," 14).

4 Caroline van Eck, "Works of Art that Refuse to Behave: Agency, Excess and Material Presence in Canova and Manet," *New Literary History* 46, no. 3 (2015).



Figure 4.1: *Victorine Meurent*, Édouard Manet, 42.9 x 43.8 cm, ca. 1861-62. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

As a point of departure the portrait of Victorine Meurent in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston serves well. Manet painted it circa 1862, shortly after he had met Victorine, so it was one of the first paintings he made with her as a model (Cachin 1983: 105). In some of his well-known masterpieces (*Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, *Olympia* and *Chemin de fer*) Victorine Meurent would figure as the main model, so there is some justification in seeing her as a key figure, with a strong presence and agency, in Manet's work and as an important target for the severe critical comments that came their way.

Victorine's Boston portrait is strikingly disarming, although her gaze is not altogether neutral. She looks openly at the viewer, but still shows some reserve towards the outside world. Manet's depiction of a gaze outside the painting, towards the viewer, would become a strong characteristic of his most famous works. In this early painting, however, he was already experimenting with the model's possibilities to attract the viewer. This early portrait of Victorine Meurent already shows the potential of a common, unexceptional pose and gaze as potentially dangerous. This model comes very close to the viewer and she herself experiments with the relationship model – viewer, although not yet in a dangerous way. She is commonly, and properly, dressed and she does not form a threat. However, this may be a too simplistic view on this seemingly simple portrait.

The Boston portrait was acquired by the Museum of Fine Art in 1946, from the private collector Richard C. Paine who donated it to the museum in commemoration of his father, Robert T. Paine. The painting can be traced back until the end of the

nineteenth century when it was part of the collection of Sir William Burrell in Glasgow. Nothing is known about who owned the painting between its production and Burrell's ownership, which gave rise to the hypothesis that Manet may have given it to Victorine just after painting it.<sup>5</sup> The dimensions of the painting are small, so it may indeed never have been meant for the Salon. We also should not forget that it was painted shortly after Manet met Meurent, so the process of building up a relationship between painter and model may still have been going on.

The portrait of Victorine may, however, not be so neutral as it seems. Susan Sidlauskas (2012) has extensively analysed the model's gaze and the painting's materiality<sup>6</sup> and she compared it with more than life-size photographs of Thomas Ruff. Such comparison does have its disadvantages – the sizes of the portraits are for instance very different, *Victorine Meurent* being 42.9 x 43.8 cm and Ruff's portraits 210 x 165 cm – but it does offer an interesting study of gazes and composition. Without repeating Sidlauskas in detail, it is easy to acknowledge that Manet's painting as well as Ruff's photographs are prototypes of normality as well as intrusions at the same time. There is a potential threat in both artistic expressions. Sidlauskas (2012: 34), in my view correctly, observed: 'With, and through, Meurent, Manet constructed the breathtaking illusion of the proximity of another's subjectivity, which, upon closer inspection, refuses to yield any of its facets.'

Although at first sight very open, there is an element of mystery in Victorine's portrait: something that refuses to be known (or tamed?) and can thus, potentially, be dangerous. On the formal and more technical aspects of the painting Sidlauskas commented: 'it refuses to cohere structurally' (Ibid, 35). The portrait is made of strong oppositions of colourful parts, without a demanding background, but despite this technically 'tearing apart the human face', the image of the model 'produces an acutely engaging human *presence*, one which seems so modern, so familiar, possessing as it does traces of scepticism, faint humor, and a knowing gravity' (Ibid, 32).

Victorine's gaze is open and uncomfortably mysterious at the same time. To the viewer this feels like an intrusion.<sup>7</sup> It is inviting, but reserved. I will take this

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5 See Françoise Cachin, Charles S. Moffett, avec la participation de M. Melot, *Manet: 1832-1883* (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1983), 105. And Sidlauskas, who stated: 'After years of invisibility, the painting surfaced abruptly around 1900 in a private collection in Scotland. Perhaps until then its circulation had been limited to only the artist and his subject' (2012: 36).

Susan Sidlauskas, "The Spectacle of the Face: Manet's Portrait of Victorine Meurent" in *Perspectives on Manet*, ed., Therese Dolan (Burlington, Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 36.

6 '... the sheer bravado of its materiality. In certain passages the paint itself seems to be clamouring for the beholder's attention with an urgency that is at odds with the psychological restraint of the subject'(Sidlauskas, "The Spectacle of the Face," 36).

7 See also Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism or, the Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996). Fried identifies 'facingness' and 'strikingness' as key concepts for understanding Manet's work.

potentially uncomfortable intrusive aspect of Manet's early portrait of Victorine Meurent as a point of departure for this article.

## Theoretical framework

Only few art historians paid serious attention to 'the primitive' or 'the barbarian'. One of them was Aby Warburg, whom I will refer to later, another was Ernst Gombrich in his *The Preference for the Primitive* (2002). A third name to mention is William Rubin with his influential *Primitivism in 20th Century Art* (1984).

Gombrich treated the primitive as an earlier stage in the development of styles. In his view, the primitive and the archaic are similar. He analysed archaic Greek sculpture as an expression of a more primitive style of sculpture. Archaic statues (a great collection can be seen in the Acropolis Museum in Athens) were considered to be early stages in the development towards classical Greek styles. And such a view is indeed also reflected in the name 'archaic'. Gombrich cited several sources, from classical Greek and Roman times to the 18th century, in which this view was expressed and taken for granted. Cicero, for example, wrote: 'No art ever comes to perfection the moment it is invented' (Gombrich 2002: 23). In fact, in much of European art history we can (and here I again refer to Gombrich) distinguish a cyclic approach. Histories of art styles are often described in terms of an archaic period, the rise of a new style, a classical period and a period of decline. The limits of such an approach become clear when Gombrich tried to justify why he did not include a chapter on the Middle Ages in his book. Focusing on the religious character of Medieval art, and implicitly to its static characteristics, he wondered 'whether a preference for the primitive is likely to have manifested itself in this atmosphere. The idea of the primitive, as we have seen, implies the possibility of technical progress, ...' (Ibid: 40). So, was there no primitivism in the Middle Ages? Or no progress? Perhaps, when one sees the primitive the way Gombrich did, there was no primitivism in that period of European history, but there are of course other approaches.

The possibility of technical progress (which includes a 'greater mastery of matter'), so the promise of an even 'greater period' to come, was an important part of the appreciation or rejection of the primitive up until the end of the 18th century. But then, things radically changed. First of all, the discovery of alternative cultures and material cultures fundamentally challenged the idea of an ultimately superior European civilization<sup>8</sup> and, secondly, around 1800 the increasing appreciation for the local – as an alternative way of living – challenged the idea of the 'civilized' as *the* standard. This was of course part and parcel of the rise of Romanticism. One of

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8 The travels of James Cook, for example, resulted in an increasing influx of foreign objects in Europe. Again, after Napoleon's conquest of Egypt in 1798 new types of objects reached Europe. How were these to be judged? They clearly came from another 'highly developed' civilization and could not be easily dismissed as lower, technically worse or archaic.

the expressions of this alternative (for enlightenment rationalism) movement was a renewed interest in the Middle Ages, or as often said, the Gothic.

Another major shift in attention for the primitive appeared at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, when artists such as Picasso, incorporated the primitive in mainstream European art. Here again we clearly see the limits of Gombrich' approach. The 'primitive' examples for these Western artists, mainly masks and statues from Africa and Oceania, were of course not representations of earlier phases in the history of an art style. They were not archaic forms. On the contrary, they were often contemporary to their nineteenth century European counterparts. They were seen as earlier, but they were not. For Gombrich, however, the idea of the primitive remains closely linked to the idea of progress (Ibid: 235).

Starting from the second half of the nineteenth century, the evolutionist frame of reference became so strong that people did not think of other possible explanations for the rough, unfinished, 'uncivilized' outlook of the primitive objects than to see them as earlier stages in the development of art.<sup>9</sup> The re-evaluation of primitive objects as art objects, in the beginning of the twentieth century, was foremost an interest in the formal aspects of the pieces. Gombrich also acknowledged this prevailing interest in form and not in content. The meaning of things did not attract the attention of artists such as Picasso, but there certainly was an appreciation for the roughness and the uncivilized of the objects. The incorporation of the primitive in European art forms was to a large extent a revolt against the nineteenth century values of academic art, values such as realism (with mythical and historical themes) and mastery of certain accepted techniques.

Interestingly enough, Gombrich also paid attention to the primitive as an expression of the infantile and as an expression of the insane (Ibid: 264-265). Furthermore there was the idea of modern art as a form of degeneration (Ibid: 263). Gombrich, however, appears to change position at the end of his book. He cited Franz Boas' *Primitive Art*, 1927, and affirmed that there is in fact 'no ascending scale' in artistic expressions (Ibid, 269). However, he does not seem to be convinced, since he arrived at an astonishing (because contrary to Boas' views) conclusion (Ibid: 297):

... where we find [great art] we confront a wealth and mastery of resources which transcends ordinary human comprehension. Even so, the preference for the primitive is an understandable reaction, for the increase of artistic resources also increases the risk of failure. Base line art is safer and all the more lovable

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9 For a good summary of evolutionist studies of art, see: A. A. Gerbrands, *Art as an Element of Culture, especially in Negro-Africa* (Leiden: National Museum of Ethnology, 1957); Also: Wilfried Van Damme, *Beauty in Context. Towards an Anthropological Approach to Aesthetics* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

for that. Yet it is human to want to transcend such limitations and to improve the language of art, the instruments of expression, towards ever more subtle articulation.

I disagree with this point of view, because it is fundamentally wrong to see primitivism as 'base line art', as 'safer' and as a reaction to 'a wealth and mastery of resources'. 'Primitive' forms are not at all safer. On the contrary, they are often seen as strange, aggressive and threatening.

I also think Gombrich' views do not help us to comprehend what actually happened in certain artistic revolutions. Manet's strength does not lie in his 'subtle articulation' (although he certainly was subtle), but more in his ability to make strong statements supported by a powerful technique. The same can be said about Picasso's handling of the primitive in *Guernica*. Picasso was not subtle here. On the contrary, he was explicitly overdoing it, to assure that the message would be heard. Both Manet's and Picasso's works are powerful, harsh and at times even aggressive.

William Rubin's *Primitivism in 20th Century Art* (1984) treated the primitive as something that comes from 'primitive' societies.<sup>10</sup> He traced the use of the word primitive.<sup>11</sup> and noted that the *Larousse illustré* of 1897 saw the primitive as 'imitation', while referring to 14th and 15th century Italian and Flemish painting. Rubin, in my view correctly, dismissed this definition as too narrow. In the Webster Dictionary of 1934 'primitivism' is a 'belief in the superiority of primitive life', a 'return to nature'. Here, we see the echo of Rousseau's 'noble savage'. From 1906-1907 onwards (when Picasso, Matisse, Derain and De Vlaminck discovered the arts of Africa and Oceania) 'primitive art' is practically synonymous with 'tribal art' (so, art that comes from tribal areas). Rubin, however, did not stop at this point. After briefly discussing the psychological effects of primitive art, Rubin observed (Ibid: 38) that: 'There are, of course, many tribal works which ... deal with ferocity, horror, or fright, and express a certain violence ...'. This is a crucial sentence opening up a wide range of questions, views and interpretations that can be very fruitful for further research. For one thing, it is well-known that early twentieth century *avant garde* artists did not have a lot of knowledge about the cultural background of the tribal objects they valued so much. Why then did they single out these violent, aggressive aspects of the objects

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10 See also, for example, Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989) In general, the anthropology of art is based on the assumption that primitive art comes from primitive places. Certainly in the 1960s to the 1980s anthropologists interested in art (eg. Biebuyck, Forge, Gerbrands) did not look at European art. Of course there are exceptions, such as the Belgium anthropologist Jacques Maquet, *The Aesthetic Experience: An Anthropologist Looks at the Visual Arts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986).

11 Rubin, W. "Modernist Primitivism: An Introduction," in "*Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*," ed., William S. Rubin (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, Vol. I, 2., 1984).

in their expressionist masterpieces such as *Guernica*? No meaning was documented when the objects came from Africa and from Oceania, but somehow the shape, the form, of the thing, the material expression of the mask evoked an 'European' interpretation that is, in a way, not far from the interpretations given in the original cultural contexts. In the cultures of origin, the masks and other objects often also had the purpose of being frightening and aggressive, to ward off evil spirits in order to protect life, fertility or even the dead.

So, we can see the primitive as dangerous, repulsive, uncivilized and at the same time as fertile, attractive and stimulating. In this model the primitive is not confined to a certain stage in development and not confined to a certain 'backward' region of human culture. We can see the primitive as something that intricately belongs to humanity as a way of coping with the unknown, dangerous, 'outside', the uncivilized. It tries to cope with that part of reality that is not (yet) controlled by culture. How all this relates to the work of Édouard Manet will be discussed in the paragraphs below.

## The reception of Manet's paintings

Before going into detail about the reception of Manet's work in terms of the civilized and the barbarian or the primitive, I would like to mention Pierre Bourdieu's remarks about Manet's barbarism. Bourdieu wrote about Manet in the 1990s, in his *Règles de l'art* (1992) and in *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993). For him the painter Édouard Manet, but also the author Gustave Flaubert, were good illustrations to be used in his theory on cultural practices based on the concepts of 'habitus' and 'social field'. Both Manet and Flaubert were examples of *bourgeois* artists who succeeded to implant a new symbolic language, partly due to their financial independence. This new language was closely linked with realism, but not altogether limited to it. Bourdieu, however, was not only *interested* in Manet, he was *fascinated* by him. In 1999 and 2000 Bourdieu gave lectures about Manet at the *Collège de France* and these lectures were published (in 2013) posthumously. Bourdieu spoke of 'l'indécence esthétique ... est redoublée par l'indécence éthique' in the work of Manet and that this leads to a 'force historique de ce barbarisme' (Bourdieu 2013: 72) and 'c'est un barbarisme du point de vue des canons académiques, de la perspective, ...' (Ibid, 119). In fact, this barbarism or primitivism<sup>12</sup> was immediately identified by Manet's contemporary critics. The influential art critic Ernest Chesneau (1833-1890) wrote in 1864, one year after the *Salon des Refusés*, 'il [Manet] a le goût corrompu par l'amour du bizarre ... Cette naïveté n'est point déplaisante, à condition toutefois qu'elle ne durera pas'

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12 Barbarism and primitivism are here seen as two words for the same phenomenon. The Robert Dictionary 'de la langue française' mentions *arrière*, *primitif*, *sauvage* as synonyms for *barbare*.

(Chesneau 1864: 189).<sup>13</sup> (He has the corrupted taste for the bizarre ... This naivety is not unpleasant, as long as it does not last.) Chesneau (1864: 189) also observed that ‘Manet, avec une perception parfois très juste certains rapports de tons, ne sait point de tout dessiner (Manet, with a perception that sometimes shows the correct nuances, does not know how to draw). From this severe criticism, from an important art critic of the period, we can deduct that Manet was either an amateur, drawing in a primitive (Gombrich’s perception of the primitive) style, or that Manet drew in a style that was not accepted by the dominant academic taste. Bourdieu would follow the second line of thought and Chesneau’s remarks should probably be seen in that context.<sup>14</sup> However, Chesneau’s words on ‘le goût corrompu par l’amour du bizarre’ also suggests yet another possibility. Like many of his contemporaries, Ernest Chesneau was somewhat fascinated by what Manet was doing,<sup>15</sup> but it was at the same time ‘bizarre’, incomprehensible and strikingly different from what academic taste prescribed. This was not mythical, this was uncomfortably close to reality, this was not beautiful, this was ugly. In fact, this was not civilized, this was primitive.

There is another issue that should be noticed in the framework of Chesneau’s critical remarks about Manet. He also wrote (Ibid: 190): ‘Il est à peine croyable que M. Manet ait emprunté à Raphaël une des ses compositions. Cela n’est, hélas! que trop vrai cependant. Que l’on compare *Déjeuner sur l’herbe* à certain groupe de *Jugement de Paris*’ (We can hardly believe that Mr. Manet has used one of Raphaël’s compositions. This is, unfortunately, very true. We just have to compare *Déjeuner sur l’herbe* with a certain group in *Judgement of Paris*). Of course Chesneau was correct in saying that Manet used a classical source (the myth of the *Judgement of Paris* as it was painted by Raphaël, see fig. 4.2) as inspiration for *Déjeuner sur l’herbe*. And Chesneau was not the only one to see it. In the Parisian cultural scene of the 1860s prints with classical themes were well-known, since they were to educate people in their knowledge of the past and they were supposed to communicate certain moral aspects of life. It was regular practice for painters to take subjects from ancient pasts as inspiration. In that sense, Manet was no exception. The problem was that he painted his characters in

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13 Many important citations from mid-nineteenth century art critics have been translated by G.H. Hamilton in his book *Manet and his Critics* (George Heard Hamilton, *Manet and his Critics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 1969 (1954)). In this article I regularly use Hamilton’s translations. In case it concerns texts that have not been used by Hamilton I use the original French texts followed by my own translations.

14 Chesneau also wrote critically on the fact that Manet has ‘pris le pinceau avant de connaître le maniement du crayon’ (taken up the paint brush before knowing how to handle the pencil). Implicitly this means that Chesneau blamed Manet not to have followed the accepted academic trajectory for becoming a good painter. Ernest Chesneau, *L’Art et les artistes modernes en France et en Angleterre*. Paris: Didier, 1864, 189.

15 On other occasions Chesneau judged Manet more positively. In 1863 he wrote: “... a certain amount of youthful daring is not distasteful to me ... In my eyes he [Manet] has one great virtue: he is not commonplace and he does not stick in the rut which leads to easy rewards and cheap success ...” (Hamilton, *Manet and his Critics*, 39).



Figure 4.2: Marcantonio Raimondi (1480 -1534) was a famous engraver during the Italian Renaissance. His interpretation of Raphael's *Judgement of Paris* was widely known in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The three 'forest spirits' on the right inspired Manet for his *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*.

a contemporary situation, thereby combining ancient themes with sensitive ethical and moral issues in Parisian life of the 1860s.

Here we should look at what Aby Warburg wrote, many years later, about Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*. It is a short unfinished text (printed in Wuttke 1989: 257-272), only a few pages, but it is, as far as I know, the only text Warburg wrote about nineteenth century painting. It is hard to agree with Warburg's introductory remark: 'With no other modern painting it will be more difficult to establish a relationship with tradition as with Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*', since the relationship of this painting with tradition is in fact very clear. In short, and I follow Warburg himself (and Chesneau) in this: Manet's famous painting is mainly inspired by a print of Marc Antonio Raimondi, made between 1510 and 1524, of the *Judgement of Paris*; a popular classical theme that was often depicted by painters, sculptors and printmakers. However, in making *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* Manet did not take the central theme, the *Judgement* itself (when Paris chooses Aphrodite as the most beautiful woman), as leading motif, but a side scene in which three people (interpreted by Warburg as river gods) casually witness the main scene. They are not even looking at it, they are casual bystanders.

Manet was very well acquainted with classical history and the way it was depicted in art. Prints as the one of Raimondi were circulating in Paris, and were easily accessible through the print room of the Louvre. In fact, when *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* was shown for the first time, in a private gallery in 1863, the reference to Raimondi and Raphaël must have been quite clear for the educated public, as well as the reference to Michelangelo's famous painting on the ceiling of the Sistine's chapel in the Vatican (the hand pointing towards the female model). As mentioned above, Ernest Chesneau immediately recognized Manet's sources. Manet's strong relationship with tradition within the art of painting was quickly seen and is often repeated since then. The point was, of course, that he did not use regular, accepted, techniques to depict this classical scene. Since he wanted to fuse 'the classical' with 'the modern' he experimented with new ways of painting, new ways of depicting, to fully incorporate the main art tradition into contemporary life, or contemporary life into the main classical tradition of art production. Warburg did not mention Chesneau's text of 1864. If he had, he would have found confirmation of his firm argument that Manet actually linked up with classical themes, although in a radically different manner than before. This was exactly one of the major problems for contemporary critics. Manet gave importance to the scene with the 'heathen' and 'wild' river gods, he did not concentrate (and did not even show them) on Paris, or the three 'classically' beautiful women. Manet must have done this deliberately, since it was not the only time he did it. In *Olympia*, painted shortly after *Déjeuner*, he did the same thing. While painting a goddess, *Olympia*, as a modern nude, conspicuously looking at the viewer,<sup>16</sup> he also painted a black servant bringing in flowers, in the same composition, and a black cat standing on *Olympia*'s bed. Contemporary critics were shocked about the black cat (see fig. 4.3). Were they shocked by what they saw was a classical theme, Venus teased (or seduced, or threatened?) by a *satyr*, in a form they did not expect? Here, classical mythology was transformed into something common (the men in *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* wear contemporary clothes) and nearby, and forest spirits and satyrs were part and parcel of it. Warburg clearly saw this and Manet shocked his contemporaries with it.

The Parisian art critics were not always negative about Manet. In 1861 Manet sent a painting of his parents to the Salon,<sup>17</sup> and one of a Spanish *Guitar Player*.<sup>18</sup> About the *Guitar Player* Théophile Gautier wrote:

*Caramba!* Here is a *Guitarero* who hasn't stepped out of a comic opera, and who would cut a poor figure in a romantic lithograph. But Velasquez would have given him a friendly wink, and Goya would have asked him for a light for his

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16 This was already a shocking experience for the contemporary public.

17 The annual or bi-annual state-controlled exhibition of paintings.

18 Spanish themes were very popular at the time. Manet saw Velásquez as one of his great examples. He also travelled to Madrid to see the original paintings.

*papelito*. How heartily he sings as he plucks away at his guitar! We can almost hear him. ... there is a great deal of talent in this life-sized figure, broadly painted in true color and with a bold brush.<sup>19</sup>

Although other critics were less positive (notably Hector de Callias and Léon Lagrange), the early Manet still had the advantage of being a promise for the future. He was seen as a painter who could be placed in the tradition of realism as it was formulated and practiced by Courbet. This radically changed with the reception of *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863) and *Olympia* (1865). Some characteristic comments, all to be found in Hamilton's useful study *Manet and his Critics* (1969):

Maxime Du Camp: There is something cruel about this exhibition [the *Salon des Refusés* of 1863]; people laugh as they do at a farce. As a matter of fact, it is a continual parody, a parody of drawing, of color, of composition. These, then, are the impatient painters, those who complain, who rail at men's injustice, at their hard lot, who appeal to posterity! No more brilliant sanction could be given to the decisions of the jury, and it can be thanked for having tried to spare us the sight of such lamentable things.<sup>20</sup>

One of these 'lamentable' things was *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*.

Jules Castagnary: There has been a lot of excitement about this young man. Let us be serious. The Bath [*Le Bain* was the earlier name of *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, PtK], the Mayo, the Espada are good sketches, I will grant you. ... But then what? Is it drawing? Is it painting? ...<sup>21</sup>

Théophile Thoré: The misfortune is that they [the young painters of the *Salon des Refusés*] have scarcely any imagination and that they despise charm. ... Therefore they excite the uncontrolled laughter of gentlemen well educated on sane principles...<sup>22</sup>

The *Bath* is very daring. ... The nude hasn't good figure, unfortunately, and one can't think of anything uglier than the man stretched out next to her, who hasn't even thought of taking off, out of doors, his horrid padded cap. ...

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19 Cited in Hamilton, *Manet and his Critics*, 25.

20 Hamilton *Manet and his Critics*, 43.

21 *Ibid.*, 47.

22 *Ibid.*, 49.

I can't imagine what made an artist of intelligence and refinement select such an absurd composition, which elegant and charming characters might perhaps have justified. ...<sup>23</sup>

The critics were very tough on Manet about his two contributions to the Salon of 1864 (*Incident in the Bull Ring* and *Dead Christ with Angels*). They severely attacked him on the composition and the technique (his brush stroke),<sup>24</sup> the figures were dirty and scrubby, and Manet now had too much imagination (Hector de Callias: 'this is how he abuses it'<sup>25</sup>). While 1861 still gave some recognition, particularly for the portrait of his parents and the *Guitar Player*, 1863 and 1864 definitely established Manet as an incomprehensible painter, with a bold brush stroke which was mostly heavily criticized. This was the situation when his *Olympia* was accepted for the Salon of 1865. Until this time Manet could still be seen, by the critics as an angry young man who did not yet know what he was doing. Although he had clearly used classical sources for his *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, which was seen as shocking in combination with the contemporary clothes of the men, the 'strange' techniques and perspectives used in for example the *Bull Ring* could still be seen as unprofessional and amateurish, but at the same time harmless. However, the potential danger of *Déjeuner* came back even stronger with *Olympia*. It was again a respectable theme, but the way it was executed was, apparently, shocking. After having discussed the 'clumsy design' of the *Dead Christ*, Hamilton described it well:

In *Olympia* tradition and modern life collided with even greater violence, for here Manet was reworking one of the most familiar as well as one of the most conventionally idealized themes of European painting. In her nudity and recumbent pose *Olympia* proclaimed for those who knew anything at all of the past that her ancestresses were the Venetian Venuses of the High Renaissance, in particular Titian's *Venus of Urbino*.<sup>26</sup>

And referring to the nude, who was recognizable as the same girl as in *Déjeuner*: '... this was the same model, still nude. More than anything else it was this portrait character which shocked the public, for *Olympia* was obviously naked rather than conventionally nude.'<sup>27</sup>

In 1866 Émile Zola wrote his first article in defence of Manet. He ironically summarized the main criticism around the painting: 'J'ai revu également l'*Olympia*, qui a le défaut grave de ressembler à beaucoup de demoiselles que vous connaissez.

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23 Ibid., 50.

24 Ibid., 51-65.

25 Ibid., 53.

26 Ibid., 67.

27 Ibid.

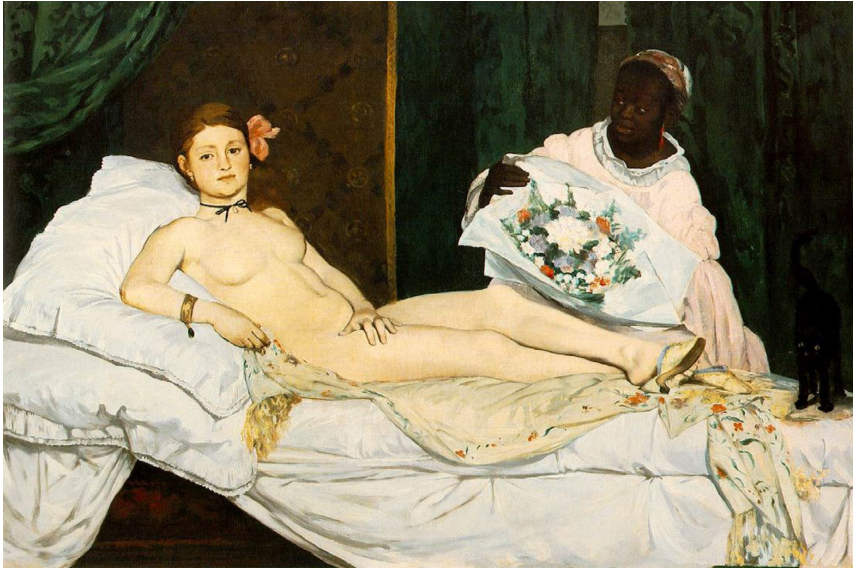


Figure 4.3: Edouard Manet : Olympia, 1863 (RF 644), Musée d'Orsay, Paris, offert à l'Etat par souscription publique sur l'initiative de Claude Monet

... Il y a là aussi un chat qui a bien amusé le public.<sup>28</sup> (I have again seen Olympia, who has the great default to look like many of the girls whom you know. ... There is also a cat that has amused the public well.)

There were two issues that apparently effected the public to a large extent, a contemporary girl – conspicuously looking at the viewer – as *Olympia* and a black cat. Beth Archer Brombert, in her excellent biography of Manet (1996, and only recently translated in French), made an interesting remark about Manet's portraits of women. She observed that some critics blamed Manet for uglifying (*enlaidie*) his models.<sup>29</sup> That is exactly what we see in the critics of *Olympia*.

Théophile Gautier (père):

With some repugnance I come to the peculiar paintings by Manet. It is awkward to discuss them, but one cannot pass by them in silence, ... In many persons' opinion it would be enough to pass by and laugh; that is a mistake. Manet is not of no account; ... his influence extends further than you think. Manet has the distinction of being a danger [underlined by PtK].

28 Zola, M. Manet, 113

29 Beth Archer Brombert, Édouard Manet: Rebel in a Frock Coat. Boston, Mass (Little, Brown and Company, 1996), 118.

[About Olympia] The color of the flesh is dirty, the modelling non-existent. The shadows are indicated by more or less large smears of blacking. What's to be said for the Negress ... , or for the black cat ... We would still forgive the ugliness, were it only truthful, carefully studied, heightened by some splendid effect of color. The least beautiful woman has bones, muscles, skin, and some sort of color.<sup>30</sup>

The public said, according to Antonin Proust : '... il [Manet] se moquait du public en lui présentant l'*Olympia*.'<sup>31</sup> ('... he [Manet] mocked the public by presenting them *Olympia*.)'<sup>32</sup>

More constructive comments came from a lesser known critic, Gonzague Privat. He reviewed the Salon only once and saw the talents of Manet, Whistler, Puvis de Chavannes and Morisot. Although in general sympathetic about Manet, he did criticize him on his technique. If Olympia would have been 'well-drawn ... more skilfully modelled, you would have a charming picture, because it has in it the great seed: life, ... ' (Hamilton 1969: 77). Privat as well was looking for charm and beauty. He may differ from others with his positive remarks on the painters that would later become important persons in the history of painting, but he is still traditional in his focus on aesthetics. He saw, however, the *living presence* of Olympia (the great seed: life), but adds that life is there, 'because it has been conceived and painted by a sincere man'. He did not see it in Olympia herself, but in the person who painted her (Zola's influence?). In the next paragraph I will discuss 'life' in *Olympia* in more detail.

### **Manet, the 'outside', the model and 'living presence'**

In *Déjeuner* and *Olympia* Manet clearly referred to Parisian life of the 1860s, not as opposed to the accepted mythical themes, but as part of an attempt to incorporate contemporary life in the classical tradition or to make the classical more alive in the present. Content and technique both strengthened Manet's attempts to deal with the contemporary and the classical at the same time. For this he used well-known mythical themes (Venus as a beautiful Goddess), the primitive (the ugly, threatening to become part of mainstream art) and a technique of rough brushstrokes or crude surfaces of colour, to stress the 'ugliness' of the visible and the whiteness of the nudes of *Déjeuner* and of *Olympia*. Here, we also observe that the critics often saw the contemporary as ugly and classical mythical figures should not be depicted as ugly contemporaries. Indeed, Paris of the 1860s was a city in transition. At the expense of Medieval streets and buildings, the city was completely restructured. The

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30 Cited by Hamilton, *Manet and his Critics*, 74-75)

31 Antonin Proust, *Édouard Manet: souvenirs*. Paris: L'Échoppe, 1996(1897), 32.

32 Antonin Proust (1832-1905), not related to the author Marcel Proust, was Manet's lifelong friend. They went to school together and both visited the atelier of the painter Thomas Couture. Proust published his *Édouard Manet Souvenirs* in 1897. Here, I have used the more recent reprint of 1996.

*Grands Boulevards* were made, partly for hygienic, partly for political reasons. In a well-structured city with broad lanes, it is easier and faster to move around military and police forces. As a result Paris was, for a long time, under construction, with a lot of noise, dust and dirt.<sup>33</sup> The ugliness of modernity is regularly mentioned in contemporary dairies or letters (eg. the diaries of the Goncourt brothers). It was a threat to classical ideas about beauty and ideal forms.

In this context of the spatial, socio-economic and political changes of the 1860s, we can come to a better understanding of individual reactions on Manet's paintings, or in anthropological terms: reactions of the Parisian subject of the 1860s to the work of Manet, the object, and vice versa.<sup>34</sup> People 'mistook the object for the subject'.<sup>35</sup> It was, however, not only the ugliness of contemporary life that was disturbing. It was also the threat of ugliness appearing in contemporary art as an intrusion, because the 'outside' dangers came too close to 'inside' cultured (*bourgeois*) life. Particularly *Olympia* came too close, since – despite her so-called ugliness – she seduced.

Hamilton claimed that Gautier, although very critical on Manet, unintentionally came close to what Manet was actually doing.<sup>36</sup> 'Olympia is a puny model, stretched out on a sheet, and the Negro woman and cat are there. That is all'. It is, however, not as simple as that. There is much more. There is also something that can be described as *living presence* and the agents for Manet's intrusions were, of course, his models.<sup>37</sup> They, in concordance with Manet, made the images 'alive' (see Privat's remarks, mentioned above).

Bourdieu mentioned that Manet irritated his models by asking them to take natural poses.<sup>38</sup> They had learned to take on classical positions, but Manet asked them to divert from these idealized (com)positions. The fact that both the girls in

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33 Proust described a walk through Paris with his friend Manet, who was fascinated by everything he saw. They walked to the Boulevard Malesherbes, witnessing the demolitions. Proust, *Édouard Manet: souvenirs*, 27, 28.

34 In anthropology a considerable amount of literature exists on the relationship between the object and the subject. Since the end of the 1980s this theme became a dominant issue in anthropological discourse. It goes, however, too far beyond the scope of this article to discuss this in great length. For summaries see Fred Myers, ed., *The Empire of Things: Regimes of value and material culture* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2001); Pieter ter Keurs, *Condensed Reality: A Study of Material Culture* (Leiden: CNWS Publications, 2006); Eleana Yalouri, "'Matter Matters Matter': Developments in Material Culture Studies since the 1980s," in *Social Matter(s): Anthropological Approaches to Materiality*, eds., Tryfon Bampilis and Pieter ter Keurs (Zürich/Münster: Lit Verlag, 2014), 9-41.

35 Hamilton, *Manet and his Critics*, 80.

36 *Ibid.*, 75.

37 Van Eck, *Art, Agency and Living Presence*, 52-55.

38 '... Manet énervait beaucoup les modèles parce qu'il leur demandait de prendre des poses naturelles, alors que les modèles transportaient d'un atelier à l'autre les poses académiques qu'ils avaient apprises' (Bourdieu, *Manet: Une révolution symbolique*, 118).

*Déjeuner* and *Olympia* were openly looking at the viewers, shocked the public. Two of Manet's most important female models were Victorine Meurent (1844-1927) and Berthe Morisot (1841-1895). Both were not seen as 'classical beauties', and the critics often referred to that, but somehow Manet was fascinated by them. It was with these two women that he made most of his well-known masterpieces. Here, I will concentrate on Victorine Meurent, since she played an important role in the impact of Manet's work in the 1860s. She modelled for both *Déjeuner* as well as *Olympia*. Manet probably met her for the first time in 1861 or the beginning of 1862. There are several stories on where and how they met, but we actually do not know the details of their first encounter. Cachin cited two stories from two different sources (Duret and Tabarant), which are actually not contradictory.<sup>39</sup> According to Antonin Proust, Manet and Meurent knew each other already in 1861, but Proust wrote his memory of Manet much later and is not always accurate.<sup>40</sup> We do know that she modelled in the studio of Thomas Couture (1815-1879) (Cachin 1983: 105), a painter who had been a teacher of Manet, and that later she was also a model for Alfred Stevens (1823-1906).<sup>41</sup> For Manet's painting *A Game of Croquet*,<sup>42</sup> dated in 1873, both Alfred Stevens and Victorine Meurent modelled. Victorine's name first occurred in Couture's payment accounts on December 15, 1861.<sup>43</sup>

The life history of Victorine Meurent is a fascinating, as well as tragic, story of inclusion and exclusion. Only recently researchers started to unfold details of her life, but much is still unclear.<sup>44</sup> In earlier literature, Victorine Meurent was often described in the following terms: 'Her agitated love life – perhaps not altogether unblemished by venality – eventually took her to America. After her return, around 1873, she again posed for Manet. In time, her contact with the artist aroused artistic ambitions in her and she took up painting [and exhibited several times at the Salon, PtK]. But Manet's talent had not communicated itself to her. She fell into poverty,

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39 Cachin, *Manet: 1832-1883*, 104

40 Antonin Proust recalled that Manet talked about Victorine in 1861. During one their walks they saw a woman coming out of a 'cabaret louche'. Manet decidedly asked her to pose for him. The woman laughed. Manet said to his friend: '... si elle ne veut pas j'ai Victorine.' ('... if she doesn't want to, I have Victorine.') Proust added: 'Victorine était son modèle de prédilection' (Victorine was his preferred model). Antonin Proust, Édouard Manet, 28.

41 A successful Belgium painter, who lived and worked in Paris and was a friend of Manet.

42 This painting is now in the Städel Museum in Frankfurt am Main. It was exhibited in the recent exhibition M.A. Stevens et.al, *Manet: Portraying Life* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2012), 154-155, 199.

43 Margaret Mary Ambrust Seibert, *A Biography of Victorine-Louise Meurent and her Role in the Art of Édouard Manet* (PhD dissertation Ohio State University, 1986), 51.

44 Ambrust-Siebert, *A Biography of Victorine-Louise Meurent*; Eunice Lipton, *Alias Olympia: A Woman's Search for Manet's Notorious Model and her Own Desire* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992).



Figure 4.4: Victorine Meurent (1844-1927). Photograph from Manet's personal photo album (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, 4-Na-115).

drank more and more, and finally the lovely model of so many illustrious pictures, ... disappeared from the records of history'.<sup>45</sup>

So, her 'exploits' were described in very negative terms. It is exactly in these terms that she was judged by her contemporary *bourgeois* viewers. She was ugly and dirty (read: not a Greek goddess) and had all the qualifications of being a prostitute. Even T.J. Clark, in his excellent *Painting of Modern Life*, took it for granted that Victorine was a prostitute, or at least that the image of Victorine intended to depict a prostitute, and doesn't say anything else about her.<sup>46</sup>

Victorine Louise Meurent was 17 years young when she started to work for Manet and soon after he made several portraits of her. She was born in 1844 in what is now the 11th Arrondissement of Paris (in the rue de la Folie-Méricourt, now rue Popincourt). Armbrust-Siebert wrote: 'It was a quarter of laborers burdened with

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45 Pierre Schneider, *The World of Manet: 1832-1883* (New York, Time-Life Books Inc., 1973). 136; Cachin, gave a similar account of Meurent's life (Cachin, *Manet: 1832-1883*, 105). She also cited A. Tabarant (1932) who wrote 'La fin douloureuse à celle qui fut l'Olympia' (The painful end of the one who was Olympia).

46 Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*.

numerous children, living on insufficient wages, who had no resources to protect them from unemployment or illness'.<sup>47</sup> Her father was Jean-Louis Meurent, her mother Louise-Thérèse Meurent, and in the papers for Victorine's *baptême* (one day after she was born) it is said that her father was a *ciseleur*.<sup>48</sup> That does not mean a lot, since in the mid-nineteenth century *ciseleur* was used for a variety of professions. There was also no association of *ciseleurs*, with an administration, so it is hard to trace Victorine's father in more detail. What is clear, however, is that she came from a working-class family and that there were major changes going on in her everyday life. It is estimated that by 1848 most artisans in Paris worked as wage earners and only 9% of the workers were independent with their small scale, home based industries.<sup>49</sup> This was a major change compared to 20 years before, when a majority of the artisans was still independent. Victorine's family might have suffered a great decline in standard of living in these years.<sup>50</sup>

After the revolution of 1848, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte became *Président de la République* and two years later consolidated his position by becoming Emperor Napoleon III. His reign, which lasted until 1870 became known as the Second Empire and was characterised by major changes as well as a very strict police control. Everything was state controlled and the secret services were flourishing. One field of politics, however, was relatively liberal. That was the politics of sex (see Clark, 1984, and Armbrust-Siebert, 1986). Prostitution was legalized and even outside the zones of legalized activity the sexual industry was left relatively untouched by police control. This may have been related to the fact that many *bourgeois* civil servants were using the services of *courtisans*. It was quite normal for high placed officials to have a mistress, although it is of course difficult to give exact numbers. So, there certainly existed a politics (in a Bourdieuan sense) of sex that offered opportunities for poor girls or young women to achieve a certain standard of living.

Modelling for artists was part of that arena. Although modelling clearly had sexual connotations and may often have resulted in a sexual relationship between the artist and the model, this of course did not always occur.<sup>51</sup> There is no proof that Manet had a sexual relationship with Victorine, although some authors suggest it. Modelling was, however, not seen as something proper to do for upper or middle class girls. Upper class girls were never in an artist's studio without the presence

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47 Armbrust-Siebert, *A Biography of Victorine-Louise Meurent*, 45.

48 *Ibid.*, 46.

49 *Ibid.*

50 In 1846 and 1847 failed harvests also led to high prices of food and consequently a lot of poverty (see also Zamoyski, *Phantom Terror: The Threat of Revolution and the Repression of Liberty 1789-1848* (London: William Collins, 2014), 478-498). Hobsbawm speaks of '... the remarkable acceleration of change since 1830, ...' Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: 1789-1848*. London: Little, Brown Book Group, 2010 (1962)), 366.

51 Brombert wrote: 'Victorine came from a world in which women rarely got to marry the men who made them pregnant.' Brombert, *Édouard Manet*, 115.

of a chaperone. Berthe Morisot who, contrary to Victorine Meurent, came from a *bourgeois* family, was always accompanied by her mother or her sister when she went to Manet's studio.

We know that Victorine modelled for Couture, Manet and later for the Belgian painter Alfred Stevens. It probably provided her with a modest income. She is, however, not mentioned as one of the well-known Parisian courtesans of the time.<sup>52</sup> She could of course have been a courtesan and not well-known. Most likely she had to live from hand to hand trying to earn a living wherever she could. Armbrust-Siebert (1989: 53, 61) noted that both Couture and Manet mentioned a number of addresses for Victorine Meurent or Louise Meuran, probably the same person, which shows that she must have been flexible in moving to places where opportunities were available or where lower rents made life easier. We know that she was a painter herself and that she wanted to make a career out of it<sup>53</sup> and that Manet stimulated her. Manet also wanted to share the money he earned with his own paintings with her (Brombert 1996: 115). Unfortunately, he never sold a lot. Both *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* and *Olympia* remained in Manet's studio until his death.

Victorine Meurent worked again for Édouard Manet in 1872-73, after a period of absence. Again, the result was a masterpiece: *Chemin de fer* also known as *Gare St. Lazare*, and again the critics did not appreciate the painting. They recognized the model and this time they were furious about her posing as a mother or a nanny in an, at first sight, innocent scene of regular daily life. However, this is not the place to analyse *Chemin de fer* in more detail.

Little is known about Victorine's life after the 1870s,<sup>54</sup> we know that she was somewhat of a celebrity among painters at the end of the century. Toulouse-Lautrec visited her regularly 'laden with gifts' and mentioned that she was 'more famous than the *Président de la République*'.<sup>55</sup> He may have overdone it a bit. She certainly did not die young, as an alcoholic, as was often suggested. She lived until 1927 (so she died at the age of 83) having a relatively comfortable life in one of the *banlieux* of Paris. A striking detail: she exhibited as a painter several times at the Salon, the place where Manet had so often been refused. Her only surviving painting is kept in the Museum of Colombes, close to Paris.

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52 See Armbrust-Siebert's excellent account of Victorine's social background (44-63).

53 An *Autoportrait* of Victorine Meurent was accepted by the Salon jury in 1876, a jury that refused Manet. Cachin, *Manet: 1832-1883*, 105.

54 Lipton tried to reconstruct Victorine's life in *Alias Olympia. A Woman's Search for Manet's Notorious Model and Her Own Desire*. Unfortunately this is a rather unbalanced book. It is more about Lipton than about Meurent. Lipton's unclear, unstructured and imbalanced use of sources does not help to clarify Meurent's life history. Lipton, E., *Alias Olympia*. Armbrust-Siebert is much more helpful, although incomplete.

55 Cited in Bernard Denvir, *Toulouse-Lautrec* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 163.

Manet was not a person who talked or wrote openly about himself and his feelings, so we will probably never know what exactly attracted him to Victorine Meurent. Manet's 'Boston' portrait of Victorine (1862), discussed in the introduction of this article, is perhaps the most personal of all the paintings he made of her. His fascination for his favourite model, however, became dangerous when he used her for large paintings meant for the Salon exhibitions, because now her image was used in Classical themes and an attempt was made to incorporate the regular and the modern into the canon of mainstream art. To valorise a girl who was not depicted as a classical beauty, who was clearly of a common background, who was seducing the beholder and who at the same time pretended to be Venus: that was a scandal indeed. This dangerous outside (because not *bourgeois*) influence had to be neutralized, had to be tamed.

### **Practices of the judgement of taste**

Victorine Meurent and the way she was painted by Édouard Manet enhanced the fear of the *bourgeois* to be overwhelmed by the 'other', the dirty, the strange outside. To them a girl from the working class, born in Rue Popincourt was not acceptable as a serious theme in the art of painting. It was not part of their world. Even if realism was, by now, not a novelty, the sheer brutality of Manet's paintings and the seductive character of Victorine's image shocked the upper and upper middle classes. Bourdieu (1992, 1993, 2013) analysed the socio-cultural struggle between academic (Salon) taste and alternative ways of creating art. Here, there is no need to repeat all his observations, but I do want to pay attention to the actual practices around the judgement of Manet's paintings. The written voices, the critics, is one thing, but the public, the viewers, is another. How did they react? And what does this tell us about the appreciation for the strange and the primitive in mid-nineteenth century Paris?

The Salon certainly was an event in Paris, a ritual practice attracting thousands of visitors. The opening was an emotional affair – for visitors, critics, civil servants, politicians, the jury, etc. – and for artists it meant inclusion in or exclusion from the field of art production and consumption, which meant a sizable income or poverty. It would be interesting to study in more detail the social background of the Salon public in the 1860s. We can be certain that it was not only the *haute bourgeoisie* that visited the Salons. The middle classes and well-trained craftsmen were probably well represented among the visitors of this annual or bi-annual event. Apart from the powerful elite, there must have been a great interest in cultural events among the less powerful who anyhow often aspired to a rise in social status. Both groups, although different in status and prestige, had the same interests: guarding the existing social order.

Manet's *Olympia* was accepted by the Jury of the Salon, so that was a hopeful beginning. We don't know why the jury accepted Manet's painting, but it could very

well be that they didn't see the potential 'danger' of the painting.<sup>56</sup> They must have seen a 'classical' scene that was already well-known in art history. *Olympia* may indeed at first have been seen as less openly challenging than *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*. However, the jury had under-estimated Édouard Manet's and Victorine Meurent's powers to seduce.<sup>57</sup>

The reaction was at times violent, not only in words but also physically. Ross King described the feverish atmosphere in a chapter called 'The Apostle of Ugliness'.<sup>58</sup> Particularly on Sundays, when admission was free, there was an atmosphere of hysteria and fear. 'Some spectators collapsed in "epidemics of laughter" while others, mainly women, turned their heads from the picture in fright. "Nothing can convey the visitors' initial astonishment," wrote the correspondent for *L'Époque*, "then the anger or fear".<sup>59</sup> After some time Chennevières, the powerful organiser of the Salon, was obliged to place guards in front of the painting to protect it from maltreatment by the visitors. Even that did not help. Finally, the painting was replaced, to a position close to the ceiling, safe from the furious crowds.<sup>60</sup>

So, why did (at least part of) the public react so emotional, violent and full of anger towards this work and the man who painted it? Émile Zola gave ignorance as the main reason.<sup>61</sup> The public (*la foule*, the masses) just did not know what they saw and therefore did not understand what Manet was doing. However, Zola also said something else. He also wrote extensively about the fact that the public laughed when seeing Manet's paintings. Particularly when Manet exhibited outside the Salon, which he did several times, reactions of the public can maybe better be characterised with the word 'disbelief' instead of 'hostile'. Some of the critics were clearly hostile, but the public may have seen Manet's work more as incomprehensible than as

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56 Tainturier (1865: 6) ironically wrote: '... cette femme verte et jaune de M. Manet, que le jury semble avoir laissé entrer pour tenir compagnie au Proudhon de M. Courbet et mettre le public en belle humeur.' (... that green and yellow lady of Mr. Manet, which was probably accepted by the jury to keep Proudhon of Courbet [a portrait of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, 1809-1865, exhibited at the Salon of 1865, PtK] company and to bring the public in a good mood.)

57 Another option is that the jury deliberately left space for change and experiments. In some years the jury was clearly less conservative than in other years. We should also keep in mind that in 1865 the scandal and the uproar resulting from the large amount of refusals in 1863 was still very recent.

58 Ross King, *The Judgement of Paris: The Revolutionary decade that Gave the World Impressionism* (London: Pimlico, 2006), 151-158.

59 Ibid: 152.

60 Proust wrote: 'Si la toile de l'*Olympia* ne fut pas lacérée et crevée, ce fut grâce aux précautions prises par l'administration du Salon de 1865' ['The fact that *Olympia* was not cut into pieces or destroyed was thanks to the precautions the organisation of the Salon took']. Proust, Édouard Manet: souvenirs, 32.

61 'le dimanche est le jour de la vraie foule. Le jour des ignorants, de ceux dont l'éducation artistique est encore entièrement à faire'. Zola, *Édouard Manet*, 138.

hostile.<sup>62</sup> And what do people do when they don't understand things? Or when they don't know how to react? They ignore things, or they laugh at it, to neutralize it. Particularly the laughter (often reported, eg. by Astruc) is of interest to my argument. Anne McCauley wrote in her article 'Sex and the Salon' (1998): '... Manet's painting (*Déjeuner*) showed nude women next to dressed men in a situation that was certainly foreign to respectable *bourgeois* behaviour, ... [in a way that inspired] laughter perhaps but not moral offense. The laughter may have hidden a certain anxiety about the meaning of the picture and its ambiguous sexuality, but the act of laughing repressed or sublimated sexual tension and made it unthreatening (one cannot presumably laugh at a nude woman and feel sexual desire for her at the same time)'.<sup>63</sup> It may not have been only 'sexual tension' that was repressed, it may also have been fear for the challenges the 'outside other' offered. To paraphrase Mc Cauley: One cannot laugh at Olympia and at the same time fear her. Laughter neutralizes fear.<sup>64</sup>

Here, the viewer became part of the work of art – attracted to the painting by Victorine's gaze – and had to, as an individual, be active in interpreting and placing the work in relation with her/himself. There was no longer an ideological point of reference.<sup>65</sup> The *bourgeois* viewer suddenly had to do it all himself. His or her privileged position was no longer taken for granted. Individual viewers must have felt deeply uncomfortable and did their best to keep the objects *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* and *Olympia* at a safe distance from the subject. And amidst all this violence and laughter, Manet himself, shocked by the reactions he evoked, wrote to his friend Charles Baudelaire in Brussels: 'I wish you were here. Insults pour down on me like hail' (Hamilton 1969: 34).<sup>66</sup>

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62 McCauley has shown that critics loyal to the Second Empire were usually hostile to artists who were seen as opponents of the Empire, which Manet definitely was. Anne McCauley, "Sex and the Salon: Defining Art and Immorality in 1863" in *Manet's Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*, ed., P.H. Tucker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 38-74.

63 *Ibid.*, 49

64 Van Eck, correctly, in my view, observes that 'what needs to be investigated are the psychological mechanisms of the viewer'. Van Eck, *Art, Agency and Living Presence*, 23.

65 See also Nicolas Bourriaud, "Michel Foucault: Manet and the Birth of the Viewer" in *Manet and the Object of Painting*, Michel Foucault (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), 16.

66 Édouard Manet and Charles Baudelaire were good friends and there seems to be a direct relationship with Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal* from 1857 and Manet's work of the early 1860s. As we have seen, *Olympia* was described as ugly by contemporary critics, but she was not someone they could disregard. She was attracting the viewer. One of Baudelaire's poems begins with: '*Les yeux fixes sur moi, comme un tigre dompté*'. [The eyes fixed on me, like a tamed tiger].

To cite Hamilton once more: 'Olympia herself can be thought of as symbolizing more than one aspect of the woman, alternatively beloved and loathed, who passes through the poems of the *Fleurs du mal*. Her imperturbable expression, which more than one critic might have confessed was what disturbed him as much as her nakedness, ...' Hamilton, *Manet and his Critics*, 79

## Fear and appreciation for 'the outside': The primitive revisited

The problematic object-subject relationship I have touched upon above has been a central issue in anthropology for about three decades now. At the end of the 1980s the oscillating dynamics between objects and subjects were placed in the centre of attention by Daniel Miller (1987) and Marilyn Strathern (1988), among others.<sup>67</sup> The shaping of the subject, in relation to the object, became an important focus for much fieldwork, particularly in New Guinea and Oceania, and in the 1990s the first ethnographies appeared in which the flexible and constructive role of the object-subject relationship was illustrated and clarified with ethnographic data.<sup>68</sup> Marilyn Strathern (1988, 1999) and Roy Wagner (1991), in particular developed the idea of partible personhood. Wagner had, already in 1975, written: '... all things that have a cultural significance, are "invested" with life ...' they partake of the self, and also create it.<sup>69</sup> Miller used *sublation* and *externalization* as terms to describe the attraction and rejection between objects and subjects. A person's self is shaped in relationship with the outside world of objects. Some objects are easily accepted and help a person to shape his or her own personality, but other objects are less easily accepted. Some objects are even completely rejected, sometimes because these are just not interesting enough to be used and sometimes for reasons of safety. The stronger objects are 'invested with life', the more difficult it is to ignore them. Manet's revolutionary paintings were both familiar as well as strange. Therefore, they were not easy to reject, but also not easy to accept as part of one's self. People in mid-nineteenth century Paris may well have looked for security in a rapidly changing world, but Manet did not offer them an easy way out of the uncertain situation. Many must have thought that he made the crisis even worse. They were not willing to accept modern depictions of 'classical' themes entering their lives, because it meant accepting the lower classes, the ugliness of modern life, giving up the certainties that were still there. However, they could not completely ignore Manet's work. With his

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67 Miller, D., *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987; Marilyn Strathern, *Gender of the Gift. Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988).

68 Some examples are Debhora Battaglia, "Projecting personhood in Melanesia. The dialectics of artefact symbolism on Sabar Island," *Man* (n.s.) 18 (1983), 280-304; Retaining reality: some practical problems with objects as property. *Man* 29 (1990), 631-644.

Maureen MacKenzie, *Androgynous Objects: String bags and gender in central New Guinea* (Cur: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1991), Webb Keane, "The Spoken House: Text, Act, and Object in Eastern Indonesia," *American Ethnologist* 22, (1995), 102-124; "Calvin in the Tropics. Objects and Subjects at the Religious frontier," in *Border Fetishism: Material Objects in unstable Spaces*, Patricia Spyer, ed., (New York and London: Routledge), 13-34.

69 Roy Wagner, *The Invention of Culture*. Revised and Expanded Edition. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981 (1975)), 77.

powerful technique Manet produced images that were indeed ‘invested with life’. Thus, they could not be ignored.

To illustrate the power of Manet’s Boston portrait of Victorine Meurent, Sidlauskas observes: ‘So vivid is the force concentrated in this small canvas that it seems poised to lift off the wall where it hangs, an insistently demanding counterpoint to the lower-keyed paintings by Alfred Stevens, Alfred Sisley, and Claude Monet that are its immediate neighbors’.<sup>70</sup>

The unknown that comes from another place, from outside, is often seen as dangerous and evokes bodily reactions of horror and fear. The unknown coming too close to the known is often seen as ugly and as a ‘living presence’ of an unsettling danger. This evokes violence or laughter. Both reactions were documented as reactions on Manet’s paintings.

When Chesneau and Warburg (mentioned above) identified Manet’s ‘distortions’ of ‘classical’ paintings (Rafaël as depicted by Raimondi’s prints) and ‘primitive’ elements, such as river gods, in *Déjeuner sur l’herbe*, they identified not an unimportant detail. What they saw was crucial to the paintings of Édouard Manet in the 1860s and the way these works would influence the history of painting. In identifying the primitive as a danger as well as an incentive for change Chesneau and Warburg have described a phenomenon that may even be crucial in understanding more and other, beyond the 1860s, developments in the history of art. It may be that fertile change in art is often, if not always, the result of contact with influences from outside. And it often concerns potentially dangerous influences, that have to be neutralized or re-interpreted before becoming fertile.

In anthropology, the ritual context of disarming the dangers from outside is well documented. In many societies the dangerous aspects of the ‘outside’ are ritually neutralized and put to use in a positive way, since the outside can also be fruitful and can stimulate new initiatives and new ways of expression. The unknown from outside is double-faced: it is dangerous and ugly, but at the same time stimulating and fruitful. Anthropological literature is full of references to ritual practices directed towards controlling the outside, although the disarming effects of the performances are not always explicitly mentioned. In general, one can speak of goods or hunter’s preys that are brought into the village, but still have the potential of being very dangerous.<sup>71</sup> Particularly game that has been killed is threatening to society and has to be ‘cooled off’. The hunter’s prey is seen as male, potentially dangerous and hot,

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70 Sidlauskas, “The Spectacle of the Face,” 35. ‘... immediate neighbors’ in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

71 See, among others, C. Barraud and J.D.M. Platenkamp, “Rituals and socio-cosmic order in eastern Indonesian societies,” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* I, 145; II, 146 (1989/1990), 4, 1; Maurice Bloch, *Prey into hunter. The politics of religious experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Pieter ter Keurs, “Eakalea. A ritual feast on Enggano Island, viewed from a regional perspective,” *Indonesia and the Malay World* 30 (2002), 238-252.

while the female world of the village is safe and cool. For new fertility you need both elements of life (male and female, with all the connotations related to these categories) and you need to fuse them without provoking the dangerous elements to become active. Therefore, the hunter's prey has to be 'cooled off' by the women. To be made useful, the dangerous elements from outside have to be, at least partly, neutralized. The ritual acts performed to obtain the desired result differ for each culture, and it goes far beyond the scope of this article to search for universal schemes to neutralize the 'dangerous outside'. However, in some culture areas the procedures are strikingly similar. In Northeast New Guinea, on the Moluccan Islands and on Enggano Island, southwest of Sumatra,<sup>72</sup> ritually adorned women receive the goods from outside (often rare, valuable goods from far-away), particularly the hunter's preys, with dances forming a circle with still one part of the circle left open. By means of these dances the women are "cooling off" the dangerous goods. On Enggano Island the relationship with new life is made clear during the ritual by placing young coconuts in front of people's houses. Young coconuts are symbols of new life.<sup>73</sup>

The procedures and performances mentioned above are based on a fundamental and universal distinction between civilized and barbarian, the known and the unknown, the inside and the outside. Every culture makes these distinctions and people usually feel good with the known (and call that: the civilized) and distrust the unknown (the barbarian or the primitive). Cultures shape their own feeling of identity in relationship to neighbouring cultures that are notably different. This is an important role of the outside: to shape the inside.

The oppositions involved in the distinction between inside and outside seem, at first sight, to be criteria for divisions, for creating clear boundaries. One can think of: Rough – Fine; Frightening – Comforting; Animal – Human; Outside – Inside; Forest – Village or Nature – Culture. Apart from being dividing principles, however, these oppositions also illustrate dependencies. Bridging gaps between opposing elements is the main aim of ritual acts. Ritual practices aim at creating situations that can be handled in a specific cultural context. The materiality of the primitive, rough, unfinished (deliberately) – around which the ritual practices are concentrated –, expresses what William Rubin called 'ferocity, horror, or fright, and a certain violence'.<sup>74</sup> However, this fear has to be turned into something useful, even fertile.

At the same time, the primitive also functions at times as a counter-movement. It did so in Gombrich's sense, as an antidote to 'too much civilization', as a means to return to the roots. We observe that phenomenon with the appreciation for Archiac

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72 I mention these three cultures since I happen to be more familiar with these than with others (apart from my own European background), because of fieldwork I did in 1983/84 (Papua New Guinea), 1990-1994 (several short trips to the Moluccan Islands) and 1994 (Enggano Island). It is, however, easy to find other examples as well.

73 See Ter Keurs, "Eakalea. A ritual feast".

74 Rubin, "Primitivism" in 20th Century Art, 38.

Greek statues (one of the examples used by Gombrich), but also with the revolt against Academic art in the second half of the nineteenth century, in which Manet played a key role. The Salon was the ritual context in which Manet's paintings were received (if accepted) and where the critics and the public often failed, or refused, to make them part of their (sub)culture. Symbolically (as Bourdieu proposed, 2013), but also physically there was no place for Manet. The works of Édouard Manet had to be neutralized, since he was so obviously trying to combine the classical with the intrusive primitive. The way he treated non-classical elements was indeed seen as an intrusion. The river gods moved from a marginal position in Rafaël and Raimondi to a central position in Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, but also the contemporary clothes of the men in *Déjeuner*, the black cat (a reference to a *satyr*?) in *Olympia*, as well as the model's open, challenging gaze in both paintings, were too strange, or should we say too confronting, to the mid-nineteenth century viewers who were afraid to be drawn into something they feared.

Manet wanted to renew classical art with new elements from outside: elements that were, however, seen as ugly and dangerous by the dominant bourgeois class. The ritual dances in the Salon exhibitions did not incorporate Manet in the safe zone of the inside. On the contrary, his work had to be expelled, which led to emotional scenes. However, in the end the critics and the public did not succeed. In retrospect, we can say that academic art (*art pompier*)<sup>75</sup> did not succeed to ward off the evil of Manet's works. Instead, Manet's paintings forced their way in and fertilized mainstream European art. The same can be said about the potentially dangerous hunter's prey on Enggano Island, southwest of Sumatra. During fertility rituals it is brought in and cooled off. Only then it can help to create new life.

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75 See Bourdieu, *Manet: Une révolution symbolique*, 17, 166.

