3
Modernity and the spaces of femininity

Investment in the look is not as privileged in women as in men. More than other senses, the eye objectifies and masters. It sets at a distance, and maintains a distance. In our culture the predominance of the look over smell, taste, touch and hearing has brought about an impoverishment of bodily relations. The moment the look dominates, the body loses its materiality.

(Luce Irigaray (1978). Interview in M.- F. Hans and G. Lapouge (eds) *Les Femmes, la pornographie et l'érotisme,* Paris, p. 50)

INTRODUCTION

The schema which decorated the cover of Alfred H. Barr's catalogue for the exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1936 is paradigmatic of the way modern art has been mapped by modernist art history (Figure 3.1). Artistic practices from the late nineteenth century are placed on a chronological flow chart where movement follows movement connected by one-way arrows which indicate influence and reaction. Over each movement a named artist presides. All those canonized as the initiators of modern art are men. Is this because there were no women involved in early modern movements? No.[1] Is it because those who were, were without significance in determining the shape and character of modern art? No. Or is it rather because what modernist art history celebrates is a selective tradition which normalizes, as the *only* modernism, a particular and gendered set of practices? I would argue for this explanation. As a result any attempt to deal with artists in the early history of modernism who are women necessitates a deconstruction of the masculinist myths of modernism.[2]

3.1 Cover design for exhibition catalogue: *Cubism and Abstract Art* (1936) New York Museum of Modern Art

These are, however, widespread and structure the discourse of many counter-modernists, for instance in the social history of art. The recent publication *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers,* by T. J. Clark,[3] offers a searching account of the social relations between the emergence of new protocols and criteria for painting – modernism – and the myths of modernity shaped in and by the new city of Paris remade by capitalism during the Second Empire. Going beyond the commonplaces about a desire to be contemporary in art, 'il faut être de son temps',[4] Clark puzzles at what structured the

3.2 Gustave Caillebotte, *Paris, a rainy day* (1877)

notions of modernity which became the territory for Manet and his followers. He thus indexes the impressionist painting practices to a complex set of negotiations of the ambiguous and baffling class formations and class identities which emerged in Parisian society. Modernity is presented as far more then a sense of being 'up to date' – modernity is a matter of representations and major myths – of a new Paris for recreation, leisure and pleasure, of nature to be enjoyed at weekends in suburbia, of the prostitute taking over and of fluidity of class in the popular spaces of entertainment. The key markers in this mythic territory are leisure, consumption, the spectacle and money. And we can reconstruct from Clark a map of impressionist territory which stretches from the new boulevards via Gare St Lazare out on the suburban train to La Grenouillère, Bougival or Argenteuil. In these sites, the artists lived, worked and pictured themselves[5] (Figure 3.2). But in two of the four chapters of Clark's book, he deals with the problematic of sexuality in bourgeois Paris and the canonical paintings are *Olympia* (1863, Paris, Musée du Louvre) and *A bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1881–2, London, Courtauld Institute of Art) (Figure 3.3).

It is a mighty but flawed argument on many levels but here I wish to

3.3 Edouard Manet, *A bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1881–2)

attend to its peculiar closures on the issue of sexuality. For Clark the founding fact is class. Olympia's nakedness inscribes her class and thus debunks the mythic classlessness of sex epitomized in the image of the courtesan.[6] The fashionably blasé barmaid at the Folies evades a fixed identity as either bourgeois or proletarian but none the less participates in the play around class that constituted the myth and appeal of the popular.[7]

Although Clark nods in the direction of feminism by acknowledging that these paintings imply a masculine viewer/consumer, the manner in which this is done ensures the normalcy of that position leaving it below the threshold of historical investigation and theoretical analysis.[8] To recognize the gender specific conditions of these paintings' existence one need only imagine a female spectator and a female producer of the works. How can a woman relate to the viewing positions proposed by either of these paintings? Can a woman be offered, in order to be denied, imaginary possession of Olympia or the barmaid? Would a woman of Manet's class have a familiarity with either of these spaces and its exchanges which could be evoked so that the painting's modernist job of negation and disruption could be effective? Could Berthe

Morisot have gone to such a location to canvass the subject? Would it enter her head as a site of modernity as she experienced it? Could she as a woman experience modernity as Clark defines it at all?*

For it is a striking fact that many of the canonical works held up as the founding monuments of modern art treat precisely with this area, sexuality, and this form of it, commercial exchange. I am thinking of innumerable brothel scenes through to Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon* or that other form, the artist's couch. The encounters pictured and imagined are those between men who have the freedom to take their pleasures in many urban spaces and women from a class subject to them who have to work in those spaces often selling their bodies to clients, or to artists. Undoubtedly these exchanges are structured by relations of class but these are thoroughly captured within gender and its power relations. Neither can be separated or ordered in a hierarchy. They are historical simultaneities and mutually inflecting.

So we must enquire why the territory of modernism so often is a way of dealing with masculine sexuality and its sign, the bodies of women – why the nude, the brothel, the bar? What relation is there between sexuality, modernity and modernism. If it is normal to see paintings of women's bodies as the territory across which men artists claim their modernity and compete for leadership of the avant-garde, can we expect to rediscover paintings by women in which they battled with their sexuality in the representation of the male nude? Of course not; the very

* While accepting that paintings such as *Olympia* and *A bar at the Folies-Bergère* come from a tradition which invokes the spectator as masculine, it is necessary to acknowledge the way in which a feminine spectator is actually implied by these paintings. Surely one part of the shock, of the transgression effected by the painting *Olympia* for its first viewers at the Paris Salon was the presence of that 'brazen' but cool look from the white woman on a bed attended by a black maid in a space in which women, or to be historically precise bourgeois ladies, would be presumed to be present. That look, so overtly passing between a seller of woman's body and a client/viewer signified the commercial and sexual exchanges specific to a part of the public realm which should be invisible to ladies. Furthermore its absence from their consciousness structured their identities as ladies. In some of his writings T. J. Clark correctly discusses the meanings of the sign woman in the nineteenth century as oscillating between two poles of the *fille publique* (woman of the streets) and the *femme honnête* (the respectable married woman). But it would seem that the exhibition of *Olympia* precisely confounds that social and ideological distance between two imaginary poles and forces the one to confront the other in that part of the public realm where ladies do go – still within the frontiers of femininity. The presence of this painting in the Salon – not because it is a nude but because it displaces the mythological costume or anecdote through which prostitution was represented mythically through the courtesan – transgresses the line on my grid derived from Baudelaire's text, introducing not just modernity as a manner of painting a pressing contemporary theme, but the spaces of modernity into a social territory of the bourgeoisie, the Salon, where viewing such an image is quite shocking because of the presence of wives, sisters and daughters. The understanding of the shock depends upon our restoration of the female spectator to her historical and social place.

suggestion seems ludicrous. But why? Because there is a historical asymmetry – a difference socially, economically, subjectively between being a woman and being a man in Paris in the late nineteenth century. This difference – the product of the social structuration of sexual difference and not any imaginary biological distinction – determined both what and how men and women painted.

I have long been interested in the work of Berthe Morisot (1841–96) and Mary Cassatt (1844–1926), two of the four women who were actively involved with the impressionist exhibiting society in Paris in the 1870s and 1880s who were regarded by their contemporaries as important members of the artistic group we now label the Impressionists.[9] But how are we to study the work of artists who are women so that we can discover and account for the specificity of what they produced as individuals while also recognizing that, as women, they worked from different positions and experiences from those of their colleagues who were men?

Analysing the activities of women who were artists cannot merely involve mapping women on to existing schemata even those which claim to consider the production of art socially and address the centrality of sexuality. We cannot ignore the fact that the terrains of artistic practice and of art history are structured in and structuring of gender power relations.

As Roszika Parker and I argued in *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (1981), feminist art history has a double project. The historical recovery of data about women producers of art coexists with and is only critically possible through a concomitant deconstruction of the discourses and practices of art history itself.

Historical recovery of women who were artists is a prime necessity because of the consistent obliteration of their activity in what passes for art history. We have to refute the lies that there were no women artists, or that the women artists who are admitted are second-rate and that the reason for their indifference lies in the all-pervasive submission to an indelible femininity – always proposed as unquestionably a disability in making art. But alone historical recovery is insufficient. What sense are we to make of information without a theorized framework through which to discern the particularity of women's work? This is itself a complicated issue. To avoid the embrace of the feminine stereotype which homogenizes women's work as determined by natural gender, we must stress the heterogeneity of women's art work, the specificity of individual producers and products. Yet we have to recognize what women share – as a result of nurture not nature, i.e. the historically variable social systems which produce sexual differentiation.

This leads to a major aspect of the feminist project, the theorization

and historical analysis of sexual difference. Difference is not essential but understood as a social structure which positions male and female people asymmetrically in relation to language, to social and economic power and to meaning. Feminist analysis undermines one bias of patriarchal power by refuting the myths of universal or general meaning. Sexuality, modernism or modernity cannot function as given categories to which we add women. That only identifies a partial and masculine viewpoint with the norm and confirms women as other and subsidiary. Sexuality, modernism or modernity are organized by and organizations of sexual difference. To perceive women's specificity is to analyse historically a particular configuration of difference.

This is my project here. How do the socially contrived orders of sexual difference structure the lives of Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot? How did that structure what they produced? The matrix I shall consider here is that of space.

Space can be grasped in several dimensions. The first refers us to spaces as locations. What spaces are represented in the paintings made by Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt? And what are not? A quick list includes:

dining-rooms
drawing-rooms
bedrooms
balconies/verandas
private gardens (See Figures 3.4–3.11.)

The majority of these have to be recognized as examples of private areas or domestic space. But there are paintings located in the public domain, scenes for instance of promenading, driving in the park, being at the theatre, boating. They are the spaces of bourgeois recreation, display and those social rituals which constituted polite society, or Society, *Le Monde*. In the case of Mary Cassatt's work, spaces of labour are included, especially those involving child care (Figure 3.10). In several examples, they make visible aspects of working-class women's labour within the bourgeois home.

I have previously argued that engagement with the impressionist group was attractive to some women precisely because subjects dealing with domestic social life hitherto relegated as mere genre painting were legitimized as central topics of the painting practices.[10] On closer examination it is much more significant how little of typical impressionist iconography actually reappears in the works made by artists who are women. They do not represent the territory which their colleagues who were men so freely occupied and made use of in their works, for instance bars, cafés, backstage and even those places which Clark has seen as participating in the myth of the popular – such as the bar at the

3.4 Berthe Morisot
In the dining room (1886)

3.5 Berthe Morisot
Two women reading (1869–70)

3.6 Mary Cassatt
Five o'clock tea (1880)

3.7 Mary Cassatt
Susan on a balcony (1883)

3.8 Mary Cassatt *Lydia at a tapestry frame* (*c.* 1881)

3.9 Mary Cassatt *Lydia crocheting in the garden* (1880)

3.10 Mary Cassatt
The bath (1892)

3.11 Berthe Morisot
On a summer's day (1880)

3.12 Berthe Morisot *The harbour at Lorient* (1869)

3.13 Berthe Morisot *On the terrace* (1874)

3.14 Berthe Morisot
On the balcony (1872)

3.15 Claude Monet
The garden of the princess (1867)

representation as the very territory of their engagement with modernity. There is evidence that bourgeois women did go to the cafés-concerts but this is reported as a fact to regret and a symptom of modern decline.[33] As Clark points out, guides for foreigners to Paris such as Murray's clearly wish to prevent such slumming by commenting that respectable people do not visit such venues. In the journals Marie Bashkirtseff records a visit she and some friends made to a masked ball where behind the disguise daughters of the aristocracy could live dangerously, playing with sexual freedom their classed gender denied them. But given both Bashkirtseff's dubious social position, and her condemnation of the standard morality and regulation of women's sexuality, her escapade merely reconfirms the norm.[34]

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

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

Femininity should be understood therefore not as a condition of women but as the ideological form of the regulation of female sexuality within a familial, heterosexual domesticity which is ultimately organized by the law. The spaces of femininity – ideologically, pictorially – hardly articulate female sexualities. That is not to accept nineteenth-century notions of women's asexuality but to stress the difference between what was actually lived or how it was experienced and what was officially spoken or represented as female sexuality.[35]

In the ideological and social spaces of femininity, female sexuality could not be directly registered. This has a crucial effect with regard to the use artists who were women could make of the positionality represented by the gaze of the flâneur – and therefore with regard to

modernity. The gaze of the flâneur articulates and produces a masculine sexuality which in the modern sexual economy enjoys the freedom to look, appraise and possess, is deed or in fantasy. Walter Benjamin draws special attention to a poem by Baudelaire, 'A une passante' ('To a passer-by'). The poem is written from the point of view of a man who sees in the crowd a beautiful widow; he falls in love as she vanishes from sight. Benjamin's comment is apt: 'One may say that the poem deals with the function of the crowd not in the life of a citizen but in the life of an erotic person.'[36]

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

MEN AND WOMEN IN THE PRIVATE SPHERE

I have redrawn the Baudelairean map to include those spaces which are absent – the domestic sphere, the drawing-room, veranda or balcony, the garden of the summer villa and the bedroom (Grid II). This listing

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

produces a markedly difference balance between the artists who are women and men from that on the first grid. Cassatt and Morisot occupy these new spaces to a much greater degree while their colleagues are less apparent, but importantly, not totally absent.

GRID II

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

By way of example, we could cite Renoir's portrait of *Madame Charpentier and her children*, 1878 (New York, Metropolitan Museum) or Bazille's *Family reunion*, 1867 (Paris, Musée d'Orsay) or the painting of Camille in several poses and different dresses painted by Claude Monet in 1867, *Woman in the garden* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay).

These paintings share the territory of the feminine but they are painted from a totally different perspective. Renoir entered Madame Charpentier's drawing-room on commission; Bazille celebrated a particular, almost formal occasion and Monet's painting was devised as

an exercise in open-air painting.[37] The majority of works by Morisot and Cassatt deal with these domestic spaces: for instance *Two women reading*, 1869-70 (Figure 3.5) and *Susan on a balcony*, 1883 (Figure 3.7). These are painted with a sureness of knowledge of the daily routine and rituals which not only constituted the spaces of femininity but collectively trace the construction of femininity across the stages of women's lives. As I have argued previously, Cassatt's oeuvre may be seen to delineate femininity as it is induced, acquired and ritualized from youth through motherhood to old age.[38] Morisot used her daughter's life to produce works remarkable for their concern with female subjectivity especially at critical turning-points of the feminine. For instance, her painting *Psyché* shows an adolescent woman before a mirror, which in France is named a 'Psyché' (Figure 3.24). The classical, mythological figure Psyche was a young mortal with whom Venus's son Cupid fell in love and it was the topic of several paintings in the neo-classical and romantic period as a topos for awakening sexuality.[39]

Morisot's painting offers the spectator a view into the bedroom of a bourgeois woman and as such is not without voyeuristic potential but at the same time, the pictured woman is not offered for sight so much as caught contemplating herself in a mirror in a way which separates the woman as subject of a contemplative and thoughtful look from woman as object – a contrast may make this clearer; compare it with Manet's painting of a half-dressed woman looking in a mirror in such a way that her ample back is offered to the spectator as merely a body in a working room, *Before the mirror*, 1876–7 (New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum).

But I must stress that I am in no way suggesting that Cassatt and Morisot are offering us a truth about the spaces of femininity. I am not suggesting that their intimacy with the domestic space enabled them to escape their historical formation as sexed and classed subjects, that they could see it objectively and transcribe it with some kind of personal authenticity. To argue that would presuppose some notion of gendered authorship, that the phenomena I am concerned to define and explicate are a result of the fact that the authors/artists are women. That would merely tie the women back into some transhistorical notion of the biologically determined gender characteristics, what Rozsika Parker and I labelled in *Old Mistresses* as the feminine stereotype.

None the less the painters of this cultural group were positioned differently with regard to social mobility and the type of looking permitted them according to their being men or women. Instead of considering the paintings as documents of this condition, reflecting or expressing it, I would stress that the practice of painting is itself *a site for the inscription of sexual difference*. Social positionality in terms of both class and gender

3.24 Berthe Morisot *Psyché* (1876)

determine – that is, set the pressure and prescribe the limits of – the work produced. But we are here considering a continuing process. The social, sexual and psychic construction of femininity is constantly produced, regulated, renegotiated. This productivity is involved as much in the practice of making art. In manufacturing a painting, engaging a model, sitting in a room with someone, using a score of known techniques, modifying them, surprising oneself with novel and unexpected effects both technical and in terms of meanings, which result from the way the model is positioned, the size of the room, the nature of the contract, the experience of the scene being painted and so forth – all these actual procedures which make up part of the social practice of making a painting, function as the modes by which the social and psychic positionality of Cassatt and Morisot not only structured their pictures, but reciprocally affected the painters themselves as they found, through the making of images, their world represented back to them.

It is here that the critique of authorship is relevant – the critique of the notion of a fully coherent author subject previous to the act of creation, producing a work of art which then becomes merely a mirror or, at best, a vehicle for communicating a fully formed intention and a consciously grasped experience. What I am proposing is that on the one hand we

consider the social formation of the producer within class and gender relations, but also recognize the working process or practice as the site of a crucial social interaction between producer and materials. These are themselves economically and culturally determined be they technical – the legacy of conventions, traditions and procedures – or those social and ideological connotations of subject. The product is an inscription of those transactions and produces positions for its viewers.

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

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

Thus it becomes especially necessary to develop means by which we can represent women as cultural producers within specific historical formations, while at the same time dealing with the centrality of the issue of femininity in structuring their lives and work. Yet femininity must not be presented as the founding cause of their work. This involves moving away from stressing the social construction of femininity as taking part in privileged social practices such as the family prior to the making of art which then becomes a merely passive mirroring of that social role or psychic condition. By stressing the working process – both as manufacture and signification – as the site of the inscription of sexual difference I am wanting to emphasize the active part of cultural practices in producing the social relations and regulations of femininity. They can also conceivably be a place for some qualification or disruption of them. The notion springs women from the trap of circularity. Socially shaped within the feminine, their art is made to confirm femininity as an inescapable condition understood perpetually from the ideological patriarchal definition of it. There is no doubt that femininity is an oppressive condition yet women live it to different purposes and feminist analyses are currently concerned to explore not only its limits but the concrete ways women negotiate and refashion that position to alter its meanings.

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

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

relation at the point of both production and consumption.

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

WOMEN AND THE GAZE

In an article entitled 'Film and the masquerade: theorizing the female spectator', Mary Ann Doane uses a photograph by Robert Doisneau titled *An oblique look*, 1948 to introduce her discussion of the negation of the female gaze (Figure 3.25) in both visual representations and on the streets.[41] In the photograph a petit bourgeois couple stand in front of an art dealer's window and look in. The spectator is hidden voyeur-like inside the shop. The woman looks at a picture and seems about to comment on it to her husband. Unbeknownst to her, he is fact looking elsewhere, at the proffered buttocks of a half-naked female figure in a painting placed obliquely to the surface/photo/window so the spectator can also see what he sees. Doane argues that it is his gaze which defines the problematic of the photograph and it erases that of the woman. She looks at nothing that has any meaning for the spectator. Spatially central she is negated in the triangulation of looks between the man, the picture of the fetishized woman and the spectator, who is thus enthralled to a masculine viewing position. To get the joke, we must be complicit with his secret discovery of something better to look at. The joke, like all dirty jokes, is at the woman's expense. She is contrasted iconographically to the naked woman. She is denied the picturing of her desire; what she looks at is blank for the spectator. She is denied being the object of desire because she is represented as a woman who actively looks rather than returning and confirming the gaze of the masculine spectator. Doane concludes that the photograph almost uncannily delineates the sexual politics of looking.

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

3.25 Robert Doisneau *An oblique look* (1948)

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

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

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

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

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

* In earlier drafts of this chapter I explore the possibilities of co-ordinating the historical perspectives on the spaces of modernity and femininity with those of feminist psychoanalytical writing on femininity (Cixous, Irigaray and Montrelay) between which there was tantalizing coincidence on the issues of the look, the body and the tropes of distance and proximity in the construction and feminine negotiation of sexual difference under a patriarchal system. The use of a statement by Luce Irigaray as introit, and the citation from Mary Kelly, marks the possibility of that reading which could not be undertaken here without massively enlarging this chapter.

3.26 Berthe Morisot in her studio

works (Figure 3.26). The majority of women painted by Cassatt or Morisot were intimates of the family circle. But that included women from the bourgeoisie and from the proletariat who worked for the household as servants and nannies. It is significant to note that the realities of class cannot be wished away by some mythic ideal of sisterhood amongst women. The ways in which working-class women were painted by Cassatt, for example, involve the use class power in that she could ask them to model half-dressed for the scenes of women washing. None the less they were not subject to the voyeuristic gaze of those women washing themselves made by Degas which, as Lipton has argued, can be located in the maisons-closes or official brothels of Paris.[44] The maid's simple washing stand allows a space in which women outside the bourgeoisie can be represented both intimately and as working women without forcing them into the sexualized category of

3.27 Mary Cassatt *Woman bathing* (1891)

the fallen woman. The body of woman can be pictured as classed but not subject to sexual commodification (Figure 3.27).

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

modernity and modernism, to discern its sexualized structures, to discover past resistances and differences, to examine how women producers developed alternative models for negotiating modernity and the spaces of femininity.

4

Woman as sign in Pre-Raphaelite literature: the representation of Elizabeth Siddall

This essay by Deborah Cherry and Griselda Pollock was first published in *Art History*, 1984. It has been revised by Griselda Pollock.

The feminist critique of art history began by berating the discipline for its discriminatory exclusion of women artists. This was a necessary but limited tactic. For art history as discourse actively produces its meanings by exclusion, repression and subordination of its Other. The feminine is located by the textual strategies and ideological formations of art history as the passive, beautiful or erotic object of a creativity exclusively tied to the masculine. Therefore feminist deconstruction of art historical texts and their highly political effects is a fundamental necessity as a preliminary for developing appropriate strategies for analysing women as cultural producers.

In 1975 I was invited to give a short paper at the second conference of the newly founded Association of Art Historians. I was offered the token space of speaking about 'Women in Victorian art'. Instead of attempting to catalogue the many women active as artists in the period or itemize their specialities, I chose to consider the complex issues raised by the case of Elizabeth Eleanor Siddall (1829–62). Well known in art history books as the beloved model and later wife of the leading Pre-Raphaelite artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–82), Siddall attracted feminist attention because she too produced paintings and drawings as well as poetry. Her case epitomized the contradictions of woman as muse for, and object of, art celebrated by art historians and woman as ignored producer. This drama had been played out at a moment of considerable historical significance in the history of women. The art