



DEALING WITH DEGAS

REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN AND
THE POLITICS OF VISION

EDITED BY RICHARD KENDALL &
GRISELDA POLLOCK

Published in the United States of America
in 1992

by UNIVERSE
300 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10010

ISBN 0-57663-628-8

CIP data for this book is available
from The Library of Congress

92 93 94 95 96 / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Selection and introductions © 1991
Richard Kendall and Griselda Pollock.
Essays © 1991 Linda Nochlin,
Hollis Clayson, John House,
Debra Bershad, Griselda Pollock,
Heather Dawkins, Richard
Thomson, Arthica Cullen, Richard
Kendall, Heather Dawkins.

The contributors to this work assert
their moral rights to be identified as
the authors of their contributions.

Typeset by Harper Phototypesetters Limited,
Northampton, England
Printed in Hong Kong

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be
reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted,
in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical,
photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior
permission of the publishers.

The Gaze and The Look: Women with Binoculars – A Question of Difference

Griselda Pollock

I Seeing a Drawing

In the semi-religious gloom of the Grand Palais in Paris housing a major retrospective exhibition of Degas, I was startled by a tiny drawing of a woman looking directly at the spectator through a pair of field glasses, *Woman with a Longnette* by Edgar Degas (fig. 20).¹ Feminist theory has argued that there is a hierarchy of gender in Western culture's looking – men look; women are observed. Is a woman looking, therefore, *ipso facto* a transgression? Why would a man like Degas make an image so apparently threatening? Small, delicately brushed on pink tinted paper, a possibly pregnant woman stares at the viewer. Enchanting rather than perverse, the drawing seemed to unsettle the established terms of feminist analysis.

Into my mind came Dorothy Parker's famous dictum, 'Men seldom make passes at girls who wear glasses', used as an epigraph by Mary Ann Doane in her theorisation of female spectatorship.² As symbol of a woman's claim to the look, the woman with glasses is part of a general logic discerned by Doane in Hollywood cinema. Doane argues that 'in usurping the gaze she poses a threat to an entire system of representation'.³ Women who insist upon looking are always excessive. Linda Williams has analysed women's look in horror movies: 'The woman's active looking is ultimately punished. And what she sees, the monster, is only a mirror of herself – both woman and monster are freakish in their difference, defined either by 'too much' or 'too little'.⁴ The collapse of the feminine into the monstrous is echoed in Degas' disturbing drawing of a woman's face partly obliterated by the mechanical aggression of the binoculars protruding like the eyes of a monstrous bug.

It is not improbable to note correspondences between the sexual structures of looking in cinema and early modernist painting. A sexual imbalance determined the latter at both social and psychic levels. Nineteenth-century consumer capitalism generated new urban forms and spaces in which socially sanctioned voyeurism became the privilege of bourgeois men as '*fumeurs*'. Moreover, the bourgeoisie mapped its rigidly divided ideology of gender on to the social spaces of the spectacular modern

city. Thus masculinity enjoyed the public domain as the field of power, expressed by visual mastery, while femininity was associated with the interior, where Woman was guarded from intrusive scrutiny and made the object of an intimate, possessive regard.

Feminist theory has identified and tried to depose the binary opposition structuring bourgeois representation around gender. Often, however, feminist analysis remains trapped within it. Femininity is conceived and re-evaluated relatively, that is to say, as difference from masculinity, thus maintaining the opposition. From a post-structuralist perspective, masculinity and femininity are terms in a system, however, not the reflection of a given difference. They are products of *processes of differentiation* which are articulated through language but which are formed in a complex but irreducible interplay between social and psychic formations. We need to re-examine, therefore, how difference is produced and what that process means. This paper is such an attempt to read the trope of the gaze as a question of difference, that is to say questioning its conditions and its effects in both producing and displacing the divisions we call 'sexual difference'.

In the Grand Palais I was looking at *Woman with a Longnette*, being drawn to it enough to go on thinking about it, sufficient to propose it as the topic of a paper. The question, however, should not be 'What was I looking at?' but 'What was I looking for?' What



Fig. 20 Edgar Degas, *Woman with a Longnette*, c. 1866, oil sketch on pink paper, 28 x 22.7 cm, British Museum, London, L179.

knowledge and understanding, what pleasure does my look as a feminist scholar *now* desire? How is it that a drawing by this artist – of all artists – should pleasure me and sustain such repeated, concentrated looking back at her looking at me? What is it that I suspect lies beyond the visible? How does it speak across the gender of its maker and the form of its figure to my desire?

II Women: A Magnificent Obsession?

The drawing and its related oil sketches and painting regularly attract art historians.⁶ The catalogue to the exhibition 'Degas: Images of Women' in Liverpool was no exception. Richard Kendall used the British Museum drawing as one of three illustrations to the opening pages of the introductory text. A strange choice, for the theme of the essay and the exhibition both emphasise Degas' look at women. One of the major tropes of Degas literature is the preoccupation with vision and eyesight. Indeed the title of Richard Kendall's essay in the catalogue is, and note the possessive, 'Degas' discriminating gaze'. Degas signifies the active gaze, curious, obsessive but discriminating, and of course, self-possessing. But the reader is confronted with a sketch of a woman looking, intently assisting her scrutiny of some object in her direct line of vision by means of binoculars. As we stand before the little drawing we are placed as the objects of that look, drawn near by magnification to a drawing which keeps its distance by being so diminutive (it is 28 × 22 cm). Something so delicate could never threaten. It might even be a source of comfort and pleasure.

Richard Kendall also writes of a woman with an active gaze: 'The only individual to approach Degas's obsessional, life-long relationship with the female image was, paradoxically, a woman: the female painter much depicted by Degas himself, Mary Cassatt.'⁷

This sentence is quite shocking. It admits that Degas was an obsessional, though the admission is quickly domesticated. But how much more interesting, outlandish, yet how just, it is to suggest that we think of Mary Cassatt's work also in terms of a life-long obsession.

That women artists so often represent women typically invites scorn. It merely confirms that seamless identity between woman as producer (artist) and woman as subject (image) under the rubric of an innate femininity which encircles both as mere symptoms of this inescapable otherness and insufficiency. What Kendall has written explodes the feminine stereotype.⁸ Instead Mary Cassatt is posed as the subject of desire, looking at women not because that is all she was socially constrained to do, but because she was obsessed, desiring, curious, pleased and made anxious by doing so. This is an important revelation for which I am profoundly grateful.* Cassatt's desire is the central theme of this paper and the works by Degas

* In the end, the text brings Cassatt safely back to her place as yet another inscription of Degas himself by reference to his depictions of her. Cassatt is one of these female images he obsessively pursued.

will function as necessary objects of investigation on a journey to enunciate the feminine desire that traverses the history of Cassatt's work and my own as a feminist.

III Looking at Degas Looking: Varied Opinions

The drawing I saw at the Grand Palais is one of a group of oil paintings/drawings/sketches dating from the mid-1860s–1870s, which have been collectively linked to a project for a painting *At the Racetrack*, begun in the late 1860s which was never finished (fig. 21). This canvas was repainted many times during Degas' life-time and was found in the artist's studio on his death in 1917 (fig. 22). It entered art history when it appeared in a sale in 1960 and was cleaned at the National Gallery.⁹ This restoration removed sixteen layers of paint and recovered the original conception of the picture, dating from the late 1860s (fig. 21). In the foreground are two figures, a dandified race-goer, and a woman looking straight ahead through field glasses. This figure is the topic of several works, from a faint pencil sketch (fig. 23) to several worked up studies in oil which are dated well into the 1870s (figs. 20, 24, 25, plate 3).

In her book *Looking into Degas*, Eunice Lipton has written about the painting *At the Racetrack* (figs. 21, 22), focusing on the woman with binoculars:

Standing frontally, iconically and staring out through binoculars, this woman is an imposing personage whose monumental form and act of bold looking

Fig. 21 Edgar Degas, *At the Racetrack*, 1868–1919, oil on panel, 46 × 36.8 cm, Weill Bros-Cotton Inc, Montgomery, Alabama, L.184.





Fig. 23 Left Edgar Degas, *Maid at the Races*, pencil on light brown paper, 38 x 24.4 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Rogers Fund).



Fig. 24 Below left Edgar Degas, *Woman with a Longnettle*, c. 1865, oil sketch and pencil, 31.4 x 18.5 cm, Burrell collection, Glasgow Museums and Art Galleries, L 268.



Fig. 25 Below Edgar Degas, *Woman with a Longnettle*, c. 1875-6, oil on cardboard, 48 x 32 cm, Gemälde Galerie, Dresden, L 431.

expressed tremendous power, power which at that time was by definition male.¹⁰

Eunice Lipton suggests that this is a transgressive image. The bourgeois codes of femininity identified respectability with domesticity and chaperoned public appearances in opposition to women associated with the streets, pleasure and money signified as sexuality and figured as prostitution.

It is in this field of anxiety about sexuality – represented in the relations of looking and being seen in public space – that Lipton locates the threat which the image evokes. Of a related work, Lipton writes:

Degas's *Woman with Binoculars* [fig. 25] could be taken as that fear embodied and exaggerated. One can speculate that he removed her from *At the Racetrack*, both because she was potentially horrifying to bourgeois sensibility. None the less that she lingered in his mind is suggested by several small sketches depicting her alone.¹¹

Undoubtedly Lipton is correct about the social conditions in which a woman's steadfast gaze in public was a threat. But the passage again returns the woman as social image, to him – the artist's mind.¹² Paradoxically, that is where 'she' – the image – belongs, as a figment of fantasy.

Another interesting and radical study of these works is Deborah Bershad's paper 'Looking, power and sexuality: Degas' *Woman with a Longnettle*' (reprinted in this volume pp. 95–105).¹³ Bershad categorically refuses to make that return of woman to man. She states that she does not want to look back through this image to Degas. Instead she locates the paintings in a series of images and behaviours which would indicate some of the motivations for the practices of looking which she examines. She writes of establishing a 'wavering trajectory of interconnection'.¹⁴ But her most valuable point and her defining difference from the majority of Degas literature comes in this statement:

We could easily see Degas' woman with a *longnette* as an icon of this period, as a means of expressing in condensed form the common interest in looking. But this would be an avoidance of the problem of Degas' own difficulties with looking.¹⁵

Bershad connects these difficulties with sexuality. Psycho-analysis is on her horizon, but she does not go on to take on its insights which refer us beyond sexual practices in all their heterogeneous forms, to the very difficulties of the formation of sexuality at all. But Bershad offers important evidence about a general cultural trajectory connecting sexuality to surveillance of woman in public. She insists on the title, *Woman with a Longnettle*, for a longnettle derives from the verb *longner*, to look at with the aid of an instrument, that is, to ogle.

Bershad uses a Foucauldian model to implicate Degas' troubled looking and sexuality with the desire for social regulation. Foucault's work on sexuality and surveillance has been a powerful instrument in overcoming the preoccupations within art history with the creative subject, the artist. But Foucault's work on discipline and surveillance tends to replicate the truism of a sexually divided society and its familiar formula: men's surveillance disciplines women. The whole point of these drawings is precisely the interest they register in someone looking at the spectator, thus in the spectator's *being the object of a gaze*.

But the painting and drawings interrupt that gaze. The instrument for enhancing vision also conceals the eyes. In their biography, Robert Gordon and Andrew Forge admit the aggression of Degas' images, but they also stress its paradox:

By her direct stare, her symmetrical frontality, the severe pyramid of her dress, and the menacing concealment of her face, she becomes one of his most aggressive images. His preoccupation with looking and with all that looking could mean is for once stated in a way that is not oblique, but unnervingly direct. The power of looking and the power of concealment are linked in a single image.¹⁶

The conjunction of the power of looking and the power of concealment makes the image the site of constant movement, shifting positions, contradictory processes and conflicting impulses which, although tied back relentlessly to him, Degas, alerts us to the need to investigate what the process of investment and compulsion to repeat such a figure might be.

IV Looking into Cassatt Looking

But, after all, the 'woman with binoculars' about which I really want to write is not by Degas at all. Mary Cassatt's *Woman at the Opera*, dated variously to 1879 and 1880 (fig. 26), has been a constant companion in my journeys into feminist knowledge. Each writing finds something unexpected which makes possible another reading. Historically and theoretically, it can be analysed anew by being put into dialogue with the works by Degas.

Reversing the typical arrangements of woman as preferred object of an appraising, masculine look (Renoir, *La Loge*, 1874, Courtauld Institute Galleries, London, for instance), the painting takes as its theme the dialectics of looking, sexuality and gender in the spaces of the modern city. Women's vulnerability to intrusive scrutiny whilst out in public is exposed through the witty pun of the painting's spectator being mirrored by a figure in a distant loge with his binoculars trained on the woman in black. Because this woman looks away, and her eyes are not invitingly offered to the viewer but are masked by her lorgnette, she becomes not an object but the subject of the look.¹⁷

There is, of course, an active/passive division within the economy of the visual.



Fig. 26 Mary Cassatt, *Woman at the Opera*, 1879/80, oil on canvas, 80 x 64.8 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (The Hayden Collection).

The problem is that we too easily map that division absolutely on to masculine and feminine positions which are then equated with social men and women. Thus Cassatt's painting is read as an inversion of the Renoir within a binary opposition of artists of different genders and social experience. The theorisation of sexuality and the gaze derived from psychoanalysis opens the prospect of a more dialectical understanding of the dynamic which generated this, as well as Degas' paintings. Masculinity or femininity are effects which share some part of the journey the human infant must travel to attain social subjectivity. On that common field, the production and negotiation of sexual difference, we can mark out a theoretical difference which does not reproduce women's lack and negative place within existing accounts of its formation. Psychoanalysis, critically re-read by feminist interest, provides some preliminary maps.

V Looking and the Subject's History: Some Theories

Freud argued that in the component drives of sexuality in the infant, that is, well before the human infant is in any sense inscribed within a sexual regime or gendered body image, pleasure in looking (scopophilia) is matched by pleasure in being the

object of a gaze (exhibitionism).¹⁸ There is a further narcissistic investment in being the object of another's look. Indeed the still unformulated subject of these drives is volatile – moving easily between, and simultaneously enjoying, both active and passive postures.

Freud argued that there are many moments or structures in the formation of sexuality which only at a late stage polarise around gendered terms. Sexuality is not a given, innate, biological content or force, but a psychic structure, produced by the mapping of component drives on to the social systems of kinship at a psychic level.¹⁹ The component drives of sexuality are without aim or object and are initially indifferent to perceptual reality. But they are progressively captured and ordered within a system of meanings culminating in the crisis known as the Oedipal Complex, which orders the subject according to a patriarchal logic signified, according to Lacan, as the Law/Name of the Father. This generates what is known as the Symbolic which designates masculinity and femininity as contradictory positions. But, in the systems of representation governed by this regime, both psychically and in culture in general, femininity is appropriated as an outside point – an otherness – which signifies on behalf of masculinity. In the Symbolic, Woman is designated as image, that is, the almost exclusive repository of formative exhibitionism, while masculinity appropriates the activity associated with scopophilia.²⁰

The trope, 'woman-as-image' becomes the bearer of the fear of a 'lack in being' (Freud called this castration anxiety) which is projected out from the masculine psyche because it threatens the narcissistic integrity of the masculine subject as whole and masterful. In fact all masculinity is formed in lack; the male subject has to submit himself to the law and forego desire for his mother (and father) in order to become a tenant of the place of the father, that is, to take up a masculine position. The feminine subject also undergoes the force of the Law, and enters the symbolic. But this occurs on a different trajectory of symbolic lack *which is not signified by its projection on to the male body*, or an image of the male body as lacking, but occurs in a complex formation in relation to the *maternal body*. The normal psychoanalytical account only tells of the formation of masculinity, for which the image of woman is a psychic component of his castration anxieties. Feminist interrogations of such official sexism has led to our being able to represent the particularity of femininity so that it is no longer just the cipher of difference for masculinity, but a psychic formation of comparable complexity with its particular, different trajectories and signifiers of desire.

Psychoanalysis, therefore, suggests that there are several psychic pleasures and opposing treads associated with looking. The subject who looks from the masculine position is fundamentally split between the contradictory oscillating pleasures of the pre-Oedipal moments, which are themselves not free from aggressions and anxieties, and the Oedipal scenarios in which there is evident danger in the look. Thus any looking will contain within it the traces of pre-Oedipal moments, other pleasures, moving away from the fixities of the masculine place, and its price, archaic but still resonant fantasy positions where feminine and masculine subjects

share recollected pleasures, or rather retrospectively invented fantasies which are obsessed by the figure of the lost/repressed mother. There is a permanent oscillation between related but irreducible regimes – the Symbolic (a fixing into place according to a Law and a Paternal Authority) and what preceded it (the processes of psychic formation and their untidy traces dominated by a maternal figure). The latter remains active as the permanent, unconscious companion of the Symbolic because these processes are the pre-conditions of any Symbolic.²¹ For psychoanalysis, the infant becomes a subject as it passes, historically, through several stages. This conception does not imply a narrative of development. For the adult subject is formed by an almost archaeological layering, where all the subject has passed through is complexly sited in the psychic representational system we name the unconscious. Thus the mobile pleasures of looking and being looked at which define one moment of human subjectivity are perpetually present to destabilise the symbolic fixing of such pleasures to an arrangement called man (look) and woman (object).

The symbolic can be defined as the ordering of sexual difference hinged upon its opposing terms 'man' and 'woman-as-image/lack'. We can then turn our gaze to other moments in the process of the making of those sexed and gendered subjects which precisely unhinge that division. This affords space to consider femininity as a particular, but not totally other, articulation of desire. Allowing difference to play across formations of desire and the gaze opens out the question of the pleasures serviced by apparently transgressive or perverse images of women looking, painted by both Cassatt and Degas.

VI The Subject in the Field of Vision: Other Theories

In analysing these pre-symbolic formations of the human subject, Lacan's mirror phase has been highly influential. For Lacan the subject is only formed in relation to the gaze of the Other. The metaphor he used involves a very young child being held up to a mirror. It sees an image, but it also sees someone looking at it. The image in the mirror looks at the child who is also watched by the adult who holds the child to the mirror. The child looks to this Other for confirmation of what it has seen, an image which it is told is his/hers. But the act also affirms that the child has *been* seen. In this relay of looks, in which it is predominantly an object, the child is forced to recognise its spatial separation, and thus a minimal form of difference, from the mother. The conditions for being a subject are partition from a unity with another. We become a subject only because we are confronted with and distant from an Other. What the image in the mirror or frame reveals is a figure isolated in space from the world of things and people with which it fancied it was in a continuum. The looks which pass between child, image, mother in the triangle around the mirror define a threatening cleavage, but there is also a pressure to resurface the gap, establishing looking both as an action laden with anxiety and as a means of potential comfort, a life-line of light across the cleavage. The one is perpetually shadowed by its Other, distance created and disavowed by the exchange of looks.

The problem with Lacan's argument, however, was that he appeared to assume some proto-subject already there to recognise the identity between the image and the body looking at it, the child itself. His subsequent Seminar XI, published as *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1977), returned to the problem in a way that did not rely on some act of recognition by the potential subject. Rather he suggested that the subject is constituted by a gaze that is exterior to it, in what Kaja Silverman has called the 'photo-session', the 'clicking of an imaginary camera which photographs the subject and thereby constitutes him or her'.²²

This is Lacan's version:

In the scopical field the gaze is outside. I am looked at, that is to say I am a picture.

This is the function that is found at the heart of the institution of the subject in the visible. What determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside. It is through the gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive its effects. Hence it comes about that the gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which . . . I am photo-graphed.²³

Silverman concludes that the subject's relation to visual representation involves both

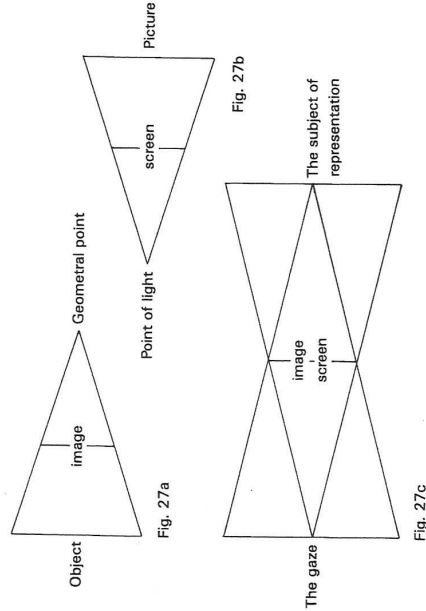


Fig. 27 From Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Alan Sheridan Smith, courtesy of the Estate of Jacques Lacan, The Hogarth Press and WW Norton Inc.

the subject who incorporates an image, and a subject appropriated as an image by and for the Other. The structure is thus triadic – subject, image (that is, what is present in the mirror) (mother). This dialectic is elucidated by a series of diagrams in Lacan's text (fig. 27). The first (a) replicates the scheme of Renaissance geometrical perspective, which imagines viewing and the visual field as deriving from and returning to a punctiform point, the mastering eye/I. At this point the gaze and the I coincide. The I is mapped on to a purely perceptual grid. But Lacan wants to undercut the Renaissance myth of optics, geometry, perception and the subject. So he produces an opposite scheme which he illustrates with the famous story of the sardine can which wasn't looking at him (fig. 27b).²⁴ Here the subject of the first diagram is merely the seen object of another, indifferent gaze. This introduces a radical doubt, and a degree of suspicion, that if the other/world is not looking at the subject, there may be something else out there to see. The final resolution is the superimposition of both diagrams to produce the subject of representation at once occupying a place of imagined mastery *vis-à-vis* the visual field, and a point in the visual field of the other (fig. 27c). As Joan Copjec has argued:

The second triangle diagrams the subject's mistaken belief that there is something behind the space set out by the first. It is this mistaken belief (this misrecognition) that causes the subject to *disbelieve* even those representations shaped according to scientific laws of optics.²⁵

This split, *suspicious*, subject is the subject produced by the gaze. Mastery is then a project to tame this gaze of the other, to produce lures for it so that, in settling on the subject in the place of the eye/I, the gaze is tamed as the look, and thus supports the subject's illusion of control over the visual field as the field of its desire.

Between the two triangles is not the transparent window of Renaissance optics and art theory, and not even the mirror of Lacan's earlier formulations. It is an opaque screen, and it is, as Joan Copjec argues, the screen of semiotics. It is a surface already organised with meanings.²⁶ Picking up on Lacan's phrase photo-graph, she writes:

Graph. Semiotics, not optics, is the science that clarifies for us the structure of the visual domain. Because it alone is capable of lending things sense, the signifier alone makes vision possible. There is and can be no brute vision, no vision totally devoid of sense. Painting, drawing, all forms of picture making then, are fundamentally graphic arts. And because signifiers are material, that is because they are opaque rather than translucent, because they refer to other signifiers rather than directly to a signified, the field of vision is neither clear nor easily traversable. It is instead ambiguous and treacherous, full of traps.²⁷

The formulation 'images of . . . ' perpetuates the Renaissance belief in the subject

as a stable point for vision, mastering the world by sight, his (sic) 'discriminating gaze' protected by and projected through a window on to a world translucently there. In Lacan's scheme this mastering subject of vision is an effect of a fantasy of control, signified by consciousness, which is, however, determined by and dependent on the other system, the unconscious. Consciousness (often signified in Cartesian logic by Sight) deceives. The conscious subject mis-recognises the world, and its place in it by virtue of being a subject constructed from outside, from the field of the other, through a gaze which is neither God nor the Mother, a singular, appropriable point, but which is diffuse and all surrounding. As Coppel argues, this makes the subject suspicious that there is always more than the subject can envisage. But the real irony is that this 'more' is nothing.

For beyond everything that is displayed to the subject, the question is asked: what is being concealed from me? What in this graphic space does not show, does not stop writing itself? This point at which something appears to be invisible, the point at which something appears to be missing from representation, some meaning left unrevealed, is the point of the Lacanian gaze. It marks the absence of a signified; it is a point that cannot be occupied. The image, the visual field then takes on a terrifying alterity that prohibits the subject from seeing itself in the representation. 'That belongs to me' aspect [of the mirror phase] is suddenly drained from representation as the mirror assumes the function of a screen.²⁸

Seeing enacts, therefore, a drama of loss and threat which the graphic arts can temper, which *framing* a visual field can momentarily master. But there is always the risk of an inversion of the triangles where the subject's illusory mastery dissipates, its centrality and fixity dissolve.

But even as Coppel re-reads Lacan, there is no suspicion of the issue of sexual difference pressing on the relation of the subject to the gaze as the lost object of desire. Ideas such as that of the suspicious subject – split but also doubting, the notion of the opaque, screen-like quality of representation – can be mobilised to theorise the differences which structure and are structured by paintings by Cassatt and Degas. They inhabit related yet distinct positions *vis-à-vis* the gaze as the locus of desire not just because one is a man and the other a woman. For these representations functioned within a historically specific configuration of subjectivities. What Lacanian psychoanalysis gnominically defines as a 'nothing', an unattainable effect of our capture with the laws of human sociality under the Law of the Father, is being contested by women. That 'more' or 'beyond the screen' is not nothing, but the imagined locus of a social as well as psychic desire for more, for renegotiated social orders, for other managements of sexuality and subjectivity. Their imprecision as what we can now but suspect does not diminish their symbolic power in motivating a struggle against what is currently inscribed on those screens of representation. Resistance

politically is motivated by the mechanism of that suspicious subject Coppel brilliantly defines.

VII Modernity and Visual Pleasure

We are usually told, and the Tate exhibition catalogue was itself symptomatic of this, that Impressionist artists in their various ways made the act of vision central to their project. But the opposite is the case: as Bershad insisted, they made seeing complex, treacherous and opaque.²⁹

Art historians teaching the early modern period will often quote the poet Baudelaire's important essay, 'The painter of modern life' (1863) which evoked an ideal of the modern artist voraciously consuming with *his* eyes the novel signs of the city, its goods on show in department stores, its women on display in the streets.³⁰ Artist as *flâneur* and man in the crowd enjoyed the seemingly insignificant 'pageant of fashionable life'. But do we recognise the desire, powerfully inscribed in Baudelaire's texts, to be seen – to be engulfed in the spectacle of the world, to be embraced by its all-seeing, dense space, both dangerous and protective, full of shocks but where the *flâneur* felt most 'at home'? Is there not some echo there of what Jacques Lacan identified as the Gaze as the object of desire? Thus we can invert a normative theory of men mastering the gaze by suggesting heretically that they also desire to be embraced by it.

Impressionists painted pictures of things Baudelaire itemised as icons of modern life. But these sights appeared to their contemporaries as devoid of meaning, aesthetic value and cultural importance. And they were in a way. Popular resorts of leisure and entertainment (race courses, ballet rehearsals, drives in the Bois, visits to cafés, concerts), details of the daily domestic life of the bourgeoisie, having lunch, washing children, playing cards were familiar if selective aspects of contemporary life, but what made them modern as art was the manner of the representation. As T. J. Clark has argued, the subjects in themselves were not *modern*, as revisionist art historians try to establish by their exhaustive archival reconstructions of these social habits and bourgeois customs.³¹ The places and spaces of leisure were the conditions for a new kind of urban subjectivity. Representations were modern only when artists turned these sites into a sight, a spectacle, throwing them on to the dense opaque screen of a knowingly flat, painted surface. The most formalist aspect of modern painting, flatness, reads as the form of a psychic as well as social flight from meaning, an evasion or a stalemate.³²

The 'New Painting' of Cassatt's and Degas' circle shared a muted, evasive and ambivalent quality with the perplexing and contradictory text Baudelaire published in 1863: 'The painter of modern life'. The Impressionists were seen by their contemporaries as wilfully refusing to endorse the accepted idioms for making paintings, completing an intellectually conceived and formally resolved picture. Instead they offered the public the allusive traces of mere impressions – which were systematically deceptive. What better way to signify your modernity than by offering

colourful, eye-catching paintings which provide a lure for the spectator's gaze only to rub the spectator's nose, at close range, in a mess of pigment, a lot of pastel barely configuring, which, when discerned offered ambivalent and often treacherous imageries? Early modernism was not so much about looking, as about new ways of mapping the field of the visual and the subject in visual representation which bear the charge of both the fascinations and anxieties of the field of vision. At its heart lay the difficulties of the subject of representation, the subject of the gaze, but that is always as question of difference, a matter of sexuality in both the psychic and social fields of vision.

VIII Historical Speculation: Two Hypotheses

I want to imagine how the Degas' pictures came into existence and then I want to suggest that Mary Cassatt's painting *Woman at the Opera* (fig. 26) is a considered response to Degas' studies of the *Woman with a lorgnette*. Dated to 1879–80 it is produced shortly after meeting Degas and joining the independent exhibiting group. As such we can read it as a commentary on the Degas, bringing out its suppressed subject – the figure being viewed through the binoculars, the figure who was caught looking.

The First Hypothesis

Imagine a man at the race course, scanning the sparse crowd with binoculars. He is ogling. He sees two figures. One he recognises. It is a professional rival, Edouard Manet. Later this figure is recorded in a drawing (fig. 23). A tentative outline marks a female companion and defines her as a woman who is using a lorgnette – the hands and the blank spheres of the binoculars are rapidly notated. These occluded eyes, the machine for looking and the hands will feature in many subsequent essays about this scene. But what do these element signify? The insistence but also the negation of vision? But whose vision? The drawing results from the vividness of a moment of being caught in the act of looking. Back at the studio, the man tries to recreate the situation and examine it, re-experience it, prolong it. Distance is abolished and the man controls the fragility of the moment. He can extend it as long as he wants. He can re-enact it whenever he fancies. He can also walk away.

Imagine the British Museum drawing being made back in the studio (fig. 20), the brush rapidly defining the shapes of the pregnant woman's dress but not delaying to fill in its uninteresting surfaces. What lay underneath the dress was not to be imagined if it is his pregnant sister Marguerite standing there.³³ Next imagine the plan to make a painting perpetuating the experience but justifying it within the narrative of a very modern Baudelairean scene, *At the Racetrack* (fig. 21). The painting never worked. All those years of worry from 1868 to 1917, and sixteen layers of paint, bear witness to some unresolved problem for the man. Eventually he abolished the woman with binoculars (fig. 22). She is painted out and attention returns to the man. Manet in the original sketch we are told; his brother posed for a later version.

They are either family or professional rivals. The original two-figure composition could not support the figure of the woman it was intended to house because it introduced another narrative. An Oedipal scenario is evoked by the triad of Manet, the woman and the watcher, Degas. Forgive a dedicated Freudian for not going into the primal scene at this point, but it's probably part of the problem that led to the effacement of the woman and the painterly aggression unleashed on the jockeys which characterise the final picture found turned to the wall and glued to another canvas because it was abandoned when its paint was still wet.

The studio provided a safe scenario for reliving and lingering over the memory of being looked at by a woman, initially experienced at the racetrack, in that public space of modernity (fig. 20). It is no part of my purpose to suggest what the private meanings of such a memory might have been. They are unavailable. But in the existence of the painting as traces of repeated re-enactment in the studio, figures on the screen of representation playing with viewing and being viewed we do have some basis for analysis of their effects within a public domain.³⁴

The figure of the woman with binoculars appears in several versions (plate 3, figs. 24, 25). The later ones are full length. The greater distance is mediated by a lot of fuss about ruffles and frills on the dress, or lace-edged overskirts. Effects vary. In the Dresden picture (fig. 25) the ghost of the standing male hovers in thin outline, reversing the relations of that early sketch of Manet, shifting the interest from man to woman. This masculine presence does not disrupt the impact of the heavily painted standing woman who is centred and dominant. The binoculars again attract the painter's skill and are now less bloody, with twin points of white highlight. But there is another version in a private collection (plate 3). The figure is all in black, full length on a lurid yellow/orange ground, an effect not a little sinister, but not so much as the sci-fi effects of a bog-eyed monster created by the binoculars extending from her face. The gentle femininity of the early British Museum drawing (fig. 20) has been collapsed into a monstrous image of excess and threat.

Repeated and varied, by turns gentle, elegant, winning, exciting or dangerous as this last fetishistic version, the point is not an 'image of woman'. The series was generated by an experience reworked as a memory become representation – of a gesture of looking, figured by a woman's face and hands, which in fact signified Degas' complex pleasures and fears of *being looked at*. In my imaginary scenario of the race-course which initiated the series of works, the man was surprised in his ogling by the chance discovery of someone looking at him. I am forced to quote to you Lacan paraphrasing Sartre on the Gaze and the voyeur's shame:

If you turn to Sartre's own text, you will see that, far from speaking of the emergence of this gaze as of something that concerns the organ of sight, he refers to the sound of rustling leaves . . . to a footstep heard in a corridor. And when are these sounds heard? At the moment when he has presented himself in the action of looking through a keyhole. A gaze surprises him in the function

of voyeur, disturbs him, overwhelms him and reduces him to shame. The gaze in question is certainly the presence of others as such.³⁵

While disassociating the gaze from the eyes and the look, this reference sets up a situation in which the pleasures of looking are threatened by being discovered ogling. I know the mention of a keyhole in a paper on Degas is irresistible, but I want to work in the opposite direction – not to accuse Degas of a voyeurism which the pictures enact – but in this instance to show how he used the studio situation to invert the dangers and threat of being discovered looking. The studio reverses the race course scene and returns him to the position of mastery. For what we, as the imagined and intended spectators, see is 'his looking at her looking'. *She* is surprised, discovered. And the effect is to reduce the shame associated with the paranoic moment of the ogler/voyeur discovered, by a fantasy of being able at all times to solicit the gaze of the Other, to be the picture which lures and tames it, to be its permanent and unique focus. Each work in this sequence handles the contradictory forces differently, with differing measures of success yielding different amounts of pleasure. The pleasure lies in the solicitation of the Maternal Gaze, the formative gaze, which is both distant and forever lost. But the possibility of repetition though art permits the artist to play Freud's famous game of *fort-da*.³⁶ The absence of the mother was symbolically mastered through a repetitious game with a toy, thrown away and recovered. The repeated act of drawing and painting, delineating and framing, is a device to capture the lost gaze. Perhaps this is why these pictures are so loved that they keep cropping up; why they arrest our attention. But attraction vies with repulsion as witness to impossibility. There is also the evident aggressiveness, the dreadful Medusa-like moment of being caught by a dangerous look, a threat associated in masculine psyches with Woman as bearer of lack, a threat which is displaced on to the always odd, sometimes horrendous, binoculars.³⁷

The Second Hypothesis

Mary Cassatt responded to the most peculiar version, the vast blackened creature on the page, her face almost entirely obscured by the cavernous tubes with their opaque highlights (plate 3). What did Cassatt do with this scenario? She put it back into the modern world, at the theatre where femininity and modernity were allowed to mingle (fig. 26). But the theatre was not, for a bourgeois woman, the place to enjoy the *flâneur's* public privacy and authorised voyeurism. In public, women are perpetually the object of an all-seeing gaze – not just this man, or that man – but an impersonal and ubiquitous 'voyeur'. Cassatt's sardonic tone in specifying that the gaze is merely some tiring fellow peering at you provides some defence against that constant menace. How else to read that the caustic brevity notating the man in the neighboring *logs*, embarrassingly eager to be noticed? Cassatt has not put into the picture just any spectator, but sardonically specifies the one who is the virtual but absent subject of Degas' work, the man intended to occupy the geometrical point

of Lacan's diagram 1 (fig. 27a).

But Cassatt's painting implies another spectator within the painting, there in the box beside her *matinée-goeur*. A logical necessity, the chaperone or companion in the box is the necessary guarantee of the respectability of the woman we can see. In the implied narrative she is also looking, seeing both the woman in the *logs* and the ogler. But as the unseen other, this fantasised space becomes the gaze of the other within which both figures and their relations assume meaning. This is also the place we the viewers are invited to share.

As viewers we can projectively identify with the main female figure, actively looking for something to see. We can also, empathetically identify with the gaze of the other because of the kind of proximity the painting's spatial system creates between viewers and the woman(e)n in the box. Because of that closeness this gaze does not master: mastery depends on a set distance. Rather it embraces and indulges the depicted female subject. Compositionally, therefore, we can read a specifically feminine logic in the painting's field of vision.

The feminine subject is equally the product of a scopic regime, which constitutes her in desire through separation from, and loss of, the Mother. Femininity is formed around loss of the Maternal space and look. Cassatt's paintings obsessively picture the presence of this look in images in which the look becomes almost tactile, embracing the figures. Evident in representations of mothers or nurses with small children, for instance *Marie Looking Up at the Mother* (fig. 28), the paintings are fantasies shaped in an adult feminine psyche.³⁸

Cassatt's repeated representations of maternity can be read as other than regression to an inevitable, pre-Oedipal attachment to the mother. Such fantasies of unity with the mother, popular in some current feminist theories of femininity, are stamped with ideological notions which conflate women with a primordial femininity, Woman. As much as it intuitively registers the presence of that comforting, constitutive gaze, *Woman at the Opera* registers the effect of the Symbolic; it inscribes distance between that all-seeing gaze and the main female figure, a dislocation between the gaze, her look and what she might be looking at [for]. Her look is directed to the space beyond the frame. Desire is written on the screen of representation by the suggestion of there being something else in the visual field which we, the viewers, cannot see. Her gaze is focused beyond the frame, even while ours seems tamed within it. We, the viewers, are thus 'discovered' looking at a picture which is not looking at us.³⁹

The approval of this painting for its simple reversal of the hierarchies of looking – the woman becomes the subject of the look – now seems woefully inadequate. The composition strategically produces its protagonist as the subject of desire. Desire is figured by that something else, not there in frame, the more that is always suspected. And that desire is feminine in so far as it is not fixed in its object, not fixated upon 'woman-as-image'.⁴⁰ Formed within the Symbolic and desire, the feminine subject is, like the masculine, the subject of lack. But in the visual economy of femininity, an image of a woman does not figure that lack. Feminine desire is projected by a



Fig. 28 Mary Cassatt, *Marie Looking Up at the Mother*, 1897, pastel on paper, 80 x 66.7 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (gift of Ralph J. Hines), B 278.

representation of a woman looking beyond the frame, suspecting that there is more than the social world envisages for her. It is also indicated by the intimation of the gaze of the other, there as the invisible frame.

The pattern of looks in Cassatt's works are indeed obsessional and repetitious. We can identify at least two dominant modes. In many stagings of the relation between children and their nurturers, the gaze becomes a kind of touch in the almost physical embrace of the mother's look which is underlined by the enfolding of the smaller body in a monumental form. But at the same time there is a sense of separation so that the exchange of glances both intimates partition and offers a compensatory memory. (See for instance, *The Mauser Dressing Gown*, 1908, Washington DC, Private Collection, B 510.) Such imageries of mother and child are often embarrassingly dismissed, even by feminist critics, for banality and sentimentality. Cassatt may not have been a mother, but like us all, she had one, and I am suggesting that it was the vividness and significance of that mother-daughter relationship, socially so important within the bourgeois world of women, that incited the repetitions and intensities of these works.⁴¹

The other mode, then, involves an adult woman's look away to a point outside the geometrical field of western pictorial space, the look off screen in filmic terms,

for example, *Young Woman in Black* (1893, Baltimore, Peabody Institute, B 129). In the works by Degas the look was captured and tamed. His fictive spaces isolated a figure forever focusing on the putative spectator a veiled look.

Memories of infantile pleasure vie with post-Oedipal dread to produce the contradictions of these images of *Woman with a Loquett*. Cassatt's response to Degas exposed, through a humorous trivialisation, what that burden of masculine formation meant for women. By implied citation, masculine desire is framed and overwritten by an inscription of feminine desire which yearns beyond the frame. Cassatt acknowledges, but claims the power, of the threat of femininity signalled in the physical appearance of the woman in black, quoting it from the Degas, but investing it with the splits and psychic complexities specific to the formations of adult femininity. These cannot be contained within this image. Denied by the ubiquity of the trope of woman-as-image, woman image makers are perpetually driven beyond the scopoc regimes of Western art.

IX Epilogue

The purpose of this paper has been to seek a way out of the relentless inscriptions of masculine desire in Western art and art history in order to invent ways to speak of, and from, a feminine place. Equally desiring knowledge, equally desiring certainties and secure objects for our scholarly gazes, we discover that the texts we have written are ourselves, caught in the act of peering into history, longing to see clearly yet having to admit that we are formed by what we find already written on the cultural screens of representation like art history. The representations we want to make as feminists are driven by our desire for that which seems outside current regimes of sense, ways of seeing art, doing art history, understanding the past.*

It has taken years to unpick my formation as an art historian and the required identification with its masculine regimes so that I might begin to glimpse something of the depth and meaning of Mary Cassatt's passion for women. Her works can only have meaning for those who will share the socially and psychically specific spaces

* I have to anticipate questions from art historians about Degas and the paintings. It will be an obvious defence against hearing the conclusion, ending with all that woman-talk. What, about Degas' paintings of women looking out of the frame, like *Woman Putting on her Gloves* (see cover, 1879, private collection) and the haunting *Portrait of Madame Janinaud Before a Mirror* (1878, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, L.371)? And there are pictures by women artists of women looking at the viewer, a device used often in the portrait but rarely by Mary Cassatt. But my hypothesis offers no exhaustive explanation of uselessly vague categories such as Degas' images of women or Cassatt's images of women. Each work is a particular strategic intervention which involves a play of subjectivity in the complex fields of representation which are marked by difference at all its psychic and social levels.

But I must just mention the final reply to Degas in his life-long rivalry with the man at the race course. Manet had the last word in a thoroughly modern painting which dealt with both a woman looking in public and the ambivalence of the gaze. After Manet produced *The Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1881, Courtauld Institute Galleries, London), no wonder Degas painted out his female figure and turned his canvas to the wall.

proposed for viewers, and recognise in their longing looks off screen both a psychic loss constituting desire and a powerful resistance to the social lack defined as bourgeois femininity. The force of her works can be acknowledged today because they find an echo of the current struggle of feminism to answer Freud's famous question: 'What do women want?' – 'They want their own way'.⁴²

Notes

1. Degas was shown at the Grand Palais, Paris, the Museum of Fine Arts, Ottawa, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York between February 1988 and January 1989. I am grateful to Lisa Tickner for drawing this work to my notice at the show.
2. M. A. Doane, 'Film and the masquerade: theorizing the female spectator' *Screen*, 1982, vol. 23, nos. 3–4, pp. 74–87.
3. *ibid.* p. 83.
4. Linda Williams, 'When the woman looks', in *Revision: Feminist Essays in Film Analysis*, M. A. Doane *et al.* (eds), New York: Greenwood, 1984.
5. This is Doane paraphrasing Linda Williams, Doane, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
6. The works in this series are as follows: (a) *Manet at the Races* (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art) pencil on light brown paper 38 × 24.4 cm; (b) *Woman with Fieldglasses* (London, British Museum) c. 1866 oil sketch on pink paper 28 × 22.7 cm, L 179; (c) *Woman with a Longnettle* (Glasgow, Burrell Collection) c. 1869–72, oil sketch and pencil 31 × 19 cm, L 268; (d) *Woman with a Longnettle* (Lyda) (Private Collection, Switzerland) 1869–72 oil sketch on paper glued to canvas 35 × 22 cm, L 269; (e) *Woman with a Longnettle* (Dresden, Gemäldegalerie) 1875–6 oil on cardboard 48 × 32 cm, L 431; (f) *At the Racetrack* (Montgomery, Alabama, Weill Inc.) 1868–1919 oil on panel 46 × 36.8 cm, L 184; Some of the works were known in Degas' lifetime and enjoyed a certain renown. The Burrell drawing (c) was in the collection of critic Edmund Duranty until 1881; the painter Puvis de Chavannes owned the work (d) now in a private collection in Switzerland. Version (e), in Dresden was given to James Tissot who sold it in Degas' lifetime to the dealer Paul Durand-Ruel.
7. R. Kendall (ed.), *Degas: Images of Women*, Liverpool, Tate Gallery, 1989, p. 7.
8. See R. Parker and G. Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women Art & Ideology*, Pandora Press, 1981, for a full discussion of this concept.
9. B. Nicholson, 'The recovery of a Degas race course scene', *Burlington Magazine*, December 1960, vol. CII, no. 693, pp. 536–37.
10. E. Lipton, *Looking into Degas: Uneasy Images of Women and Modern Life*, Berkeley, California University Press, 1986, p. 68.

11. *ibid.* p. 69.
12. This is the title of a major work on Degas by a leading modernist scholar, Theodore Reff, *Degas: The Artist's Mind*, New York, Harper and Row, 1976.
13. I am grateful to Eunice Lipton for bringing my attention to this paper and to Deborah Bershad for agreeing to allow us to include it here.
14. *ibid.* p. 103.
15. *ibid.* p. 102.
16. R. Gordon and A. Forge, *Degas*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1988 p. 120. They are discussing the figure as a compilation of three versions, the full length oil sketch in the Burrell Collection, the half length from the British Museum and the full length with a tiny hint of a male figure from Dresden. The page layout with all three pictures on a double page spread heightens the effects by the repetition of the gesture. Intriguingly, the very next page reverses the striking and powerful effects of these three direct and mechanically aided gazes, by reproducing three prints by Degas of his friend Mary Cassatt and her sister Lydia in the Eruscan galleries at the Louvre. Here the woman looks away, eyes hidden by hat or book, or totally averted by a figure only seen from the back, pp. 122–23.
17. For a fuller discussion of this reading see G. Pollock, 'Modernity and the spaces of femininity', in *Vision and Difference*, Routledge, 1988, p. 76.
18. S. Freud 'Three essays on sexuality' [first edition, 1905], in *The Pelican Freud Library, On Sexuality*, vol. 7, London, Penguin Books, 1977.
19. For a useful discussion of this, see P. Hirst and P. Woolley, 'Psychoanalysis and social relations' in *Social Relations and Human Attributes*, London, Tavistock Publications, 1982.
20. The most closely argued analysis of this formation is the much quoted and often superficially read paper by Laura Mulvey, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', *Screen*, 1975, vol. 16, no. 3, reprinted in L. Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, London, Macmillan, 1989.
21. For some readers familiar with these formulations it might seem that I am confusing different theoretical traditions; the Freudian pair would be Pre-Oedipal and Oedipal, the Lacanian would be the Imaginary and the Symbolic. I think it is helpful to be a little cavalier here. I want to stress, like Mulvey, that there is a symbolic order; however illusory it is, which sets up man versus woman, look versus object. But that cultural apparatuses and practices pleasure and excite us by the temporary suspension of the fixities, and the narrativisation or displays of the more fluid and contradictory materials, positions and fantasies of which the symbolic is an always precarious management. This formulation clearly owes a lot to writings by J. Kristeva with her theories of process (pre-symbolic) and unity (symbolic) which she perceives in constant dialectic, present at all times. This helps to escape the tiresome narratives of typical Freudian and Lacanian theory which has an ideological function in its insistent teleologies

- which drives its subjects towards the current symbolic solutions – i.e. the Law of the Father, the Primacy of the Phallus and the Repression of the Mother.
22. K. Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1988, pp. 161–62. I am deeply indebted to the important work of Kaja Silverman for the extension of feminist analysis towards both the new understanding of the gaze and masculinity and for the ways in which she enunciates her theories to insist upon women's desire and meanings.
 23. J. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* [first edition, 1973], J.A. Miller (ed.), A. Sheridan (trans.), London, Penguin Books, 1979.
 24. Lacan, op. cit., pp. 95–96.
 25. Joan Copjec, 'The orthopsychic subject: film theory and the reception of Lacan', *October*, 1989, no. 49, p. 68.
 26. 'It is crucial that we insist upon the social and historical status of the screen by describing it as that culturally generated image or repertoire of images through which subjects are not only constituted, but differentiated in relation to class, race, sexuality, age and nationality. The possibility of playing with these images then assumes a critical importance, opening up as it does an arena for political contestation.' K. Silverman, 'Fassbinder and Lacan: a reconsideration of gaze, look and image', *Camera Obscura*, 1989, no. 19, p. 76. This important paper offers further elaboration of Lacan's theory and stresses the place of the social within the psychic scheme.
 27. J. Copjec, *ibid.*, p. 68.
 28. *ibid.*, p. 69.
 29. See also, T. J. Clark on Pissarro, TV programme for the Open University's *Modern Art and Modernism*, 1983, for a very fine presentation of the difficulties of seeing in Impressionist painting.
 30. C. Baudelaire, 'The painter of modern life', in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, Jonathan Mayne (trans.), London, Phaidon Press, 1964; see G. Pollock, 'Modernity and the spaces of femininity', op. cit., for a feminist reading of this text.
 31. T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1984. On revisionist social histories of, see for instance Robert Herbert, *Impressionism, Art, Leisure and Parisian Society*, London and New York, Yale University Press, 1988.
 32. T. J. Clark, *ibid.*, p. 15: 'I wish to show that the circumstances of modernism were not modern, and only became so by being given the forms called "the spectacle".' Modernism is not to be reduced to a matter of formalism; but the forms of signification can be ideological and historical.
 33. The models are not really identified. It is a mere suggestion that this is Marguerite Degas, married in June 1865, pregnant in 1866. See also William Wells 'Who was Degas's "Lyda"?'', *Apollo*, vol. XCV, no. 120, February 1972, p. 130, who

- tried to suggest that the inscription on the Dresden painting, Lyda, referred to Mary Cassatt's sister Lydia. This is generally discounted.
34. For a discussion of this fantasy and the public realm, see Elizabeth Cowie, 'Fantasia', *m/f*, no. 9, 1984.
 35. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, op. cit., p. 84.
 36. Freud found his grandson repeatedly throwing away and retrieving a cotton reel and announcing each moment: *fort*, i.e. gone, which signified the absence of the mother; and *da*, i.e. here, signifying her return. This represented a primary moment in which the child symbolically attempts to control the anxiety evoked by his mother's absence. There are many readings of Freud's account and of the game. See K. Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1983, ch. 4.
 37. I am grateful to Heather Dawkins for a reference which is timely here: Alice Jardine cites a passage from an unpublished paper by Michèle Montrelay, describing a typical male fantasy: 'First, a central tube which cannot be the closed and satisfying container of an interior. It's not that the plan of the container is non-existent. Intestine, pipe, image of cavern, of dark, deep inner spaces, all that exists, but submitted to the forces of suction that empty them in the most painful fashion. Or else the void is already established. . . . On the surface – and isn't that characteristic of male sexuality – there's an eye.' A. Jardine, *Gynesis Configurations of Women and Modernity*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1985, p. 70.
 38. Limitations on illustrations prevent the kind of photo-essay this point requires. But reference can be made to Adelyn Breeskin's catalogue *raisonné*, *Mary Cassatt*, Washington, Smithsonian Institute, 1970, for illustrations of: *Emmie and her Child* 1889, (B 156); *Baby's First Caress*, 1891 (B 187); *Mother Looking Down at Thomas*, 1893 (B 225); *The Mauve Dressing Gown*, 1908 (B 510).
 39. Film theory has argued that the apparatus of cinema captures our desire by matching it to the scale, space and figures which is defined within the screen. Off-screen space must always be carefully managed, as in shot reverse shot sequences and rules about eye line matching across related shots and 180 degree camera turns. These constitute the process of suturing the spectator's look to what the camera shows and thus to the narrativisation of space and figure. See Noel Burch, *Theory of Film Practice* [first edition 1969], London, 1973; and Stephen Heath 'Narrative space', *Screen*, vol. 17, no. 3, 1976. This argument is suggestive for current analysis of the relation of look to frame within nineteenth-century painting. It does not imply that any picture of a woman looking out of the frame signifies woman's desire. It is rather an identification of a structural convention upon which the ideological order of women's availability to figure men's desire functions; it also indicates the means of its disruption. Thus suggestion that there is offscreen space is a historically conditioned tactic for Mary Cassatt which none the less had significant ramifications in the resources of expression through

which to register the pressure of feminine desire as something that seems to be outside the existing *frameworks* of meaning.

40. I am referring back here to the discussion in Section VI of the way in which 'woman-as-image' became an over-determined sign of masculine fantasy, bearing the lack projected out from the masculine subject, and at the same time carrying the trace of the lost mother. In the varying economies of feminine sexualities, an image of woman may be an object of desire, and may indeed figure feminine desire. The point I want to emphasise is that, in a system which recruits the image of woman as a fixed object mastered by a masculine look, feminine desire will figure itself or find forms of representation as that which exceeds fixing, picturing, framing, containing, objectifying. Not because women are good and do not objectify, but because the social screens of representation negate feminine desire, deny it forms of representation. It is not to be represented by objects, but in relations. The struggle for women artists is not for positive alternative images, but to write on the screen of representation that which is culturally excluded, offscreen, the more that is always suspected, and is signified by men as there, yet empty, the enigma, the excess, the monstrous. I am not suggesting other positive feminine systems of representation, but the way meanings for feminine subjects can only be generated as a strategic negotiation of the historically specific fields of representation.
41. See Carol Smith Rosenberg, 'The female world of love and ritual: relations between women in nineteenth century America', in *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1985.
42. I learned this from a children's book I was reading to my daughter, *Sir Gawain and the Loathly Lady*, retold by Selina Hastings, London, Walker Books, 1985. King Arthur meets a Knight who threatens to kill him unless he answers a riddle: 'What is it that women most want?' A hideous hag saves Arthur's skin by telling him the answer in return for one of his knights as her husband. Sir Gawain volunteers. Of course, the Loathly Lady becomes a beautiful woman, but will remain so only if Gawain answers her riddle. The answer is that she must do what she wants. What women most want is their own way – the pun is intended.