

Manet's *Bar at the Folies-Bergère*

Consumer Culture and the Commodification of the Feminine

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The flowering of Impressionist painting in France converged closely with the emergence of a burgeoning consumer culture. As artists like Edouard Manet heeded the call of the poet Baudelaire and others to eschew the classical forms of the Salon for painting what their eyes beheld in modern life, a radical transformation occurred in art. Fundamental changes in painting dovetailed with equally sweeping changes in society that accompanied the development of a culture of mass consumption in mid- to late nineteenth-century France and especially among the trendsetting Parisians.

One of Manet's last works, *Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, 1882 (Figure 1), provides a fascinating study of many of these complex concepts where modern woman has become consumer, commodity, clerk and, in some cases, clandestine courtesan. It was the genius of the mature artist that enabled him to capture so much on a single canvas even as his own art was not untouched by the same consumer culture he depicted. Using the *Bar* with

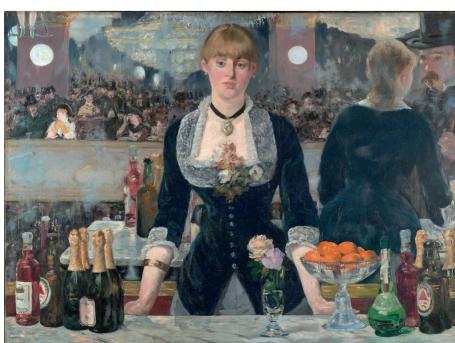


Figure 1. Edouard Manet, *Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, 1882. See the online article for the full-color image.

references to other works of Manet as a lens, this paper will explore the following themes: the rise of consumer culture in Paris, the influence of the culture of mass consumption on women, and the multiplication of gazes that was engendered by mass consumerism.

Rise of Consumer Culture in Paris

Before looking at and seeking to interpret the *Bar*, it is helpful to consider some general background on the emergence of consumer culture in Paris in order to situate the painting in its historical, economic, and social context. The mass production of manufactured goods that was made possible by the Industrial Revolution spawned many changes in society and particularly in the role of women. These seminal changes in society and culture bred major shifts in how women were perceived by the public and how they viewed themselves.

Primarily a feminine domain, department stores became iconic places for women who played a key role in driving the economic engine of consumption. As Justine De Young notes, “Mass production and industrialization enabled the rise of the department store and ready-to-wear clothing, which in turn prompted the invention of *haute couture* as a reaction against this *standardized confection*.¹ Wearing the latest fashions and makeup became a way of fashioning the self in the modern milieu. Émile Zola’s novel *The Ladies’ Paradise*, which was published shortly before Manet’s death in 1883, has a department store at the center of its narrative. The Bon Marché, Paris’s first department store and the world’s largest before 1914,² served as the model for Zola’s fictional *grand magasin*. Freshly arrived from the provinces, the female protagonist, Denise Baudu, is in awe as she beholds the great machine of commerce coming to life in the morning:

A crowd was looking at [the display windows],
groups of women were crushing each other in
front of them, a real mob, made brutal by

¹ Justine De Young, “Representing the Modern Woman: the Fashion Plate Reconsidered (1865–75),” in *Women, Femininity and the Public Square in European Visual Culture, 1789–1914* (ed. Temma Balducci and Heather Belnap Jensen; Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014), 98.

² Brian Nelson, introduction to *The Ladies’ Paradise*, by Émile Zola (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), ix.

covetousness.... There was the continuous roar of the machine at work, of customers crowding into the departments, dazzled by the merchandise, then propelled towards the cash-desk. And it was all regulated and organized with the remorselessness of a machine: the vast horde of women were as if caught in the wheels of an inevitable force.³

The department store is a place not only to fulfill one's needs, but to provoke desires and dreams. In his introduction to Zola's classic, Brian Nelson notes the manifold mechanisms of consumer enchantment as "the seduction of pure spectacle, the seduction of the eye through an almost orgiastic display of visual pleasures enticingly encased in their wrappings and sealed by the surrounding womb of warmth and light."⁴ This was indeed a far cry from the precursor little family shops with goods carefully tucked away and brought out for viewing upon request.

In addition, a new class of *petite bourgeoisie* emerged from this culture of consumerism with women often involved not only in the purchasing of fashion, but the selling of clothing and other goods as clerks. Because they were interacting with bourgeoisie clients, the saleswomen were expected to assume the manners and clothing of their patrons, which led to a blurring of lines between classes. The attractiveness of the female salesforce was part of the allure of the products they were purveying. Sometimes this seduction and solicitation progressed to the point of these same women selling their bodies as clandestine courtesans. In the rough and tumble capitalist economy of urban communities where women were often cut off from traditional family support systems that once served as havens of economic refuge, a woman might feel compelled to sell her body as the only way to makes ends meet.

Women were not only more frequently found in the workforce, but in their role as consumers and spectators, it became much more common for respectable ladies to inhabit public spaces that had previously been off limits to them. The massive urban renewal orchestrated by Baron Georges Haussmann "transformed Paris with new broad boulevards and expansive public parks and

³ Émile Zola, *The Ladies' Paradise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 16.

⁴ Nelson, introduction, xi.

gardens, producing new sites for sociability and display that reinforced the focus on fashion.”⁵ In addition to the physical reshaping of the city, international expositions, arcades, department stores, and places of entertainment like the Folies-Bergère all contributed to Paris becoming a showcase for spectacles. Yet, this visual panoply engaged not only the *flâneur*, but women who self-consciously engaged as spectators in the crowd while simultaneously becoming part of the spectacle, not only to attract the male gaze, but the female gaze as well.

Even at home, the culture of consumption was promoted through journals adorned with fashion plates. In the 1860s, more than 80 journals published in Paris were devoted to fashion,⁶ which gives some sense of their widespread influence among bourgeoisie women. As Justine De Young notes: “Fashion plates gave women a sense of control over their individual and class identity. This control and the transformation urged by the journals in turn drove mass consumption.”⁷ Capturing what was already occurring in society, the fashion plates no doubt also contributed momentum by shaping feminine ideas of their newfound agency in the public sphere. The fashion plates also helped shape womanly identity as extending beyond the previously somewhat cloistered domestic circle. By portraying women in a proliferation of public venues accoutered with purses and handbags, the plates symbolically “demonstrated their financial and physical autonomy.”⁸ A June 1868 issue of *La Mode Illustrée* featured two fashionably dressed women in an open carriage who are self-consciously on display with one looking flirtatiously out of the corner of her eye at the reader.⁹ Emerging from the cocoon of homebound domesticity that once confined her, the chic Parisian butterfly took wing to the streets and helped solidify her city’s reputation as the fashion capital of the world. Thus, Parisian women became not only buyers, but boosters that fueled fashion as international commerce.

Café-concerts were among the public places that women flocked with their newfound freedom. The Folies-Bergère was a popular, relatively high-end café-concert where “Visitors take seats

⁵ De Young, “Representing the Modern Woman,” 98.

⁶ Ibid., 99.

⁷ Ibid., 100.

⁸ Ibid., 111.

⁹ Ibid., 102.

where they please, or promenade in the galleries, while musical, dramatic, and conjuring performances are given on stage.”¹⁰ It was “famous for its *promenoirs* [part of the theater where people stood and could walk around], its garden, its constantly changing attractions, and its public of pretty women.”¹¹ In addition, it had a reputation as a “permanent fair for prostitutes.”¹² The Folies garish décor, bright lights, mirrors, activity, and bourgeoisie clientele made it a prototypical Parisian place of modern spectacle and consumption, an ideal microcosm for Manet’s artistic exploration of the ramifications of the consumer culture of his day.

Views of mass consumption in Impressionist painting could range from being critical of it, to being complicit with it, to outright celebration with an ambivalence that allowed for the juxtaposition of multiple interpretations in the same work. Because commissions of art by government agencies and wealthy benefactors were no longer their major source of funding, artists like Manet had to be conscious of selling their art to the public in order to make a living. Thus, the making and selling of art was itself intimately connected with the consumer culture it depicted.

Having considered some of the underlying social, economic, and historical underpinnings, we can now turn to a more detailed exploration of the *Bar* and how it reflects the themes of consumer culture, commodification of the feminine, and the multiplication of gazes in all its complexity and ambiguity. In order to keep the focus riveted on the painting itself, the ensuing discussion will break down the painting spatially before considering stylistic elements and the overarching implications of Manet’s culminating masterpiece as a whole.

En[counter] with Commodities for Consumption

As one approaches the *Bar*, they by necessity assume the role of consumer at the Folies and are immediately aware of commodities for sale on the counter, which are inescapably pushed forward and nearest the viewer’s space. As Ruth Iskin notes, “The bold composition...pushes the goods up to the foreground of the painting to confront the spectator with the utmost visual proximity, as if the

¹⁰ T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 244.

¹¹ Ibid., 245.

¹² Ibid.

products on the counter were actually within reach.”¹³ The alcoholic beverages and mandarin oranges for sale are artfully arranged into a beautiful still-life with the flowers evoking the pleasantries of domesticity. Everything is carefully composed to draw the consumer in. Yet unlike most still-lifes, a woman, the barmaid, stands at the



Figure 2. Edouard Manet, *Nana*, 1877.
See the online article for the full-color image.

center of the inanimate objects, not as an intrusion, but as a necessary completer of the picture. Manet goes so far as to sign and date the wine bottle in the far left corner of the painting, which “humorously marks *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* as his own Salon vintage of 1882.”¹⁴ Iskin notes that in so doing, Manet is ironically commenting on the commercial status of his own work.¹⁵ Even while his painting is a commentary on consumer culture, it is at the same time inescapably a product of that same culture.

The Blasé Barmaid

Returning to the *marchande* at the center of the items for sale, Carol Armstrong suggests that “the barmaid first presents herself to the viewer’s gaze as a fully fashioned, perfectly packaged commodity, brand-new, un-opened, and unused, not unlike the other wares for sale on the counter.”¹⁶ Armstrong goes on to point out how this is made clear by the manner in which the barmaid’s figure, clothing, and accessories rhyme with the items for sale: her shape and coloration matching that of the champagne bottles, the cuff of her right sleeve mimicking the labels on the bottles, and the

¹³ Ruth E. Iskin, “Selling, Seduction, and Soliciting the Eye: Manet’s *Bar at the Folies-Bergère*,” *The Art Bulletin* 77 (March 1995): 30.

¹⁴ Ibid., 31.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Carol Armstrong, “Facturing Femininity: Manet’s ‘Before the Mirror,’” *October* 74 (Autumn 1995): 102.

corsage in her bodice echoing the flowers on the countertop.¹⁷ In this way, Manet suggests that the *serveuse* is not simply selling drinks, but she is integral to the solicitation and may even be for sale herself. The low cut bodice of her dress and pendant hanging down from the black ribbon around her neck would tend to frame and point to a visual focus on her breasts. Yet, John House notes how the corsage carefully conceals the barmaid's décolletage.¹⁸ Therefore, even as she is expected to draw customers to the bar through her physical allurements, a subtle sense of reserve and control is perhaps signified and emphasized by the way she anchors herself with her hands on the marble bar.

In addition to her clothing, the *serveuse*'s self-fashioning is also seen in the white powder and delicately applied rouge on her face. Before Manet painted her visage, his model for the painting, Suzon, had painted her own face. Makeup both removes natural imperfections and accentuates sexual allure; a means of seeking to distinguish oneself from the crowd and capture the gaze of spectators that is not unlike Manet's yearning that his painting stand out from the myriad of others at the Salon. House notes how "notions of cosmetic concealment and deceit seem to act as metaphors for deeper anxieties"¹⁹ that characterize modernity. House also cites a contemporary critic's commentary about the "seething, powdery" background of the painting.²⁰ From telltale traces on the back of the barmaid's dress and beyond, the artifice of face powder seems to permeate the reflected images in the mirror. Whether seeking sales, sexual encounters, marriage, or something else entirely, the Parisian woman desires to be seen, not as she is in herself, but as a beautiful spectacle for the admiring gaze of both the *flâneur* and *flâneuse*. As T. J. Clark notes, "It is a picture of a woman in a café-concert, selling drinks and oranges, and most probably for sale herself—or believed to be by some of her customers."²¹ Whether the barmaid is a clandestine courtesan or not, she is clearly a modern Parisian woman who represents the

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ John House, "In Front of Manet's Bar: Subverting the 'Natural,'" in *12 Views of Manet's Bar*, ed. Bradford R. Collins (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 239.

¹⁹ Ibid., 242.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, 253.

self-fashioning of femininity. Her stylish clothing, corseted figure, accessories, and makeup are all carefully choreographed to make her both an object of desire and a successful purveyor of products for human consumption with the two goals intimately and inextricably linked.

Perhaps the most arresting feature about the barmaid is her enigmatic stare. Robert Herbert notes how advertising posters for the Folies often depicted top-hatted gentlemen flirting with barmaids²² as ex-emplified by Chéret's, *Aux Folies-Bergère* (1875), where the *verseuse* appears to be a consummate coquette. In this sensual setting that is perfectly staged for seduction, one might presume at least the faintest trace of a smile, yet such expectations are overthrown.

Although she appears to be looking directly at the person in front of the counter, it might be more correct to say that she seems to be looking through them. Hers is not the seductive look of Manet's *Nana* (Figure 2, 1877), nor the unabashed and fixed gaze of his *Olympia* (1863). What are we to make of the apparent discontinuities between the engaging and flirtatious barmaid we would presumably expect and the detached and seemingly alienated figure before us at the bar? Noting that the barmaid's remoteness is one of the keys to Manet's picture, Herbert states that "In this austere figure we find the anonymity and loneliness inherent in the arbitrary encounters of human life."²³ This is a condition that is all too prevalent in the metropolis.

In commenting on the psychological effects of the large city on its inhabitants in the nineteenth century, George Simmel notes that "The mental attitude of the people of the metropolis to one

²² Robert L. Herbert, *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1988), 80.

²³ Ibid.

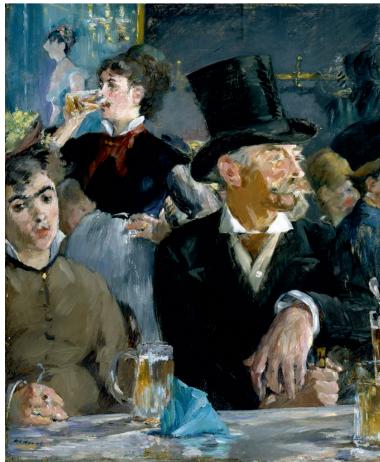


Figure 3. Edouard Manet, *Café-Concert*, 1878. See the online article for the full-color image.

another may be designated formally as one of reserve.”²⁴ He goes on to note that “the inner side of this external reserve is not only indifference but more frequently than we believe, it is a slight aversion, a mutual strangeness and repulsion.”²⁵ This seems to capture the essence of the barmaid’s look. As Simmel explains: “There is perhaps no psychic phenomenon which is so unconditionally reserved to the city as the blasé outlook.”²⁶ Thus, the barmaid is a prototypical Parisian, everywhere surrounded by people, yet emotionally isolated. Furthermore, this blasé attitude is a psychological defense mechanism against immoderate sensual stimuli of the nerves “by renouncing the response to them.”²⁷ Perhaps there were few places in Paris that better represented the overstimulation of the senses than the Folies-Bergère, and one can only imagine what it was like to work there night after night in the glittering lights and social spectacle.

Yet, this look is not unique in Manet’s oeuvre to the barmaid. Two of his paintings from 1878, *Café-Concert* (Figure 3) and *The Plum* (Figure 4), depict women in pensive and lonely abstractedness. As Herbert points out, the fact that both women are smoking is a telltale sign that they are not proper bourgeoisie,²⁸ although their dress is respectable enough. However, such mental malaise is not restricted to the *petit bourgeoisie* in Manet’s paintings. The modern woman depicted in *In the Conservatory* (1879) has a similar blasé facial expression. Iskin describes the woman with a parasol depicted in *Spring*, 1881



Figure 4. Edouard Manet, *The Plum*, 1878. See the online article for the full-color image.

²⁴ Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and the Mental Life” in *The Blackwell Reader*, ed. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (Oxford & Madden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002), 15.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 14.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Herbert, *Impressionism*, 76.

(Figure 5) as a “mixture of tough urban femininity, coquettish but aloof and self-assured, a comportment communicating control along with an exquisitely stylish toilette.”²⁹ Perhaps like the “perfect Parisienne” in *Spring*, Suzon is an apt illustration of

“feminine agency under the rule of spectacle.”³⁰ All the women noted in the paintings above seem to share an aloofness, but whether this is accompanied by sad resignation or self-assurance is so subtle that it adds to the ambiguity.

The self-assuredness of the gentleman sitting beside the woman in *Café-Concert* (Figure 3) provides a striking juxtaposition. The flâneur with his commanding grip on his cane seems quite comfortable as the consumer of spectacle. In general it seems that the woman is more likely to be the bearer of the blasé look in Manet’s paintings. Perhaps in her psyche, the barmaid is all too aware

that she has become a commodity, an anonymous cog in the machine of commerce serving equally unknown clients who may desire her body, but could care less about her soul.

The Mirror and the Multiplicity of Gazes

The wall behind the barmaid is completely covered in a mirror, which reflects her backside, some of the bottles for sale on the counter, a customer who presumably occupies the space in front of the bar, and the audience of spectators observing a trapeze artist and perhaps other entertainments in the space that would have been in front of the *marchande*. As Albert Boime notes, “By aligning the counter and the mirror with the picture plane, the canvas almost pretends to be a reflection of our world with the barmaid negotiating the interval in between the fictional and actual

²⁹ Ruth E. Iskin, *Modern Women and Parisian Consumer Culture in Impressionist Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 214.

³⁰ Ibid.



Figure 5. Edouard Manet, *Spring*, 1881. See the online article for the full-color image.

realms”³¹ The mirror allows Manet to give us a sense of the larger spectacle within which the bar functions, and therefore, to explore related ideas.

The first thing one notices when looking at the reflected images of the barmaid and her client in the mirror is that they appear set way too far to the right. The contemporary critics that once again lampooned what they perceived as Manet’s lack of artistic skill apparently missed the point. Like many of Manet’s works, traditional artistic conventions developed over centuries of Western civilization are subverted for a reason. As Boime notes, Manet’s approach in the *Bar* is “an attempt to embrace the scenic totality of the Folies as a construction of multiple views and states of mind.”³² Whereas a mirror reflects the image before it, Manet’s mirror does not operate according to the laws of optical physics any more than the painter considered himself straitjacketed by the artistic formalities of his time.

Manet is not simply capturing what the eye can see in a mirror, but his painted mirror becomes a looking glass that allows its viewers to see through the image and to reflect upon what is represented. As Armstrong notes, the painting seems to say about itself that it is not a mirror and insists on its status as a painting rather than a reflection.³³ Manet captures more than one viewpoint than the eye can see in a given instant and gives us instead a multifaceted perspective.

The barmaid’s reflection in the mirror appears to be leaning toward the mustachioed gentleman with the top hat in a way that seems much more engaging and solicitous than the woman standing before us at the counter. Thus, although we are clearly expected to see the reflection in the mirror as that of the barmaid in the foreground, the disjunctions in the positioning and attitude of the reflected image seem to indicate that there is more going on. Does the mirror image of the barmaid perhaps reflect what the flâneur expects or desires her to be rather than what she really is like? Does the apposition of these different views of the barmaid reflect the disjointedness she feels between her innermost self and the image of purveyor and purveyed that her employer and society

³¹ Albert Boime, “‘Un Bar aux Folies-Bergère’ as an Allegory of Nostalgia,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 56:2 (1993), 235.

³² Ibid., 238.

³³ Armstrong, “Facturing Femininity,” 101.

expect of her? Rather than providing resolution of these ambiguities, the artist seems to want his viewers to feel this psychic tension that is pervasive in metropolitan life, as Simmel points out.

Significantly, the reflected image of the gentleman is prominently holding a cane in his white gloved left hand. Rather than just serving as a commonplace prop, could this cane perhaps have deep symbolic significance as phallus and scepter of male royal dominance over women while yet belying his own weakness, as it were, to stand unsupported on his own two feet? Clearly, he reflects the male gaze; the flâneur who is ever about taking in spectacles in the city appears to have now focused on a commodity that he desires to consume rather than own. However, by shifting the male patron so far to the right, Manet allows room for the viewer of the painting not to associate themselves with the top-hatted gentlemen as they approach the bar.

Whether male or female and at any time in history, they may approach the bar, enter into its world, and consume what they may. Yet, at the same time, they must subject themselves to the gaze of the *marchande* because they cannot escape from being part of the spectacle themselves.

Yet, the blasé gaze of the barmaid and the focused gaze of the flâneur are not the only gazes to be encountered in the mirror. The crowd in the balcony clearly displays a mixture of apparently bourgeoisie men and women. For the most part, the throng of people is perceived as an amorphous mass of humanity. Despite the apparent vibrancy of the entertainment and social interaction that made the Folies such a popular attraction, Simmel's statement that "under certain circumstances, one never feels as lonely and as deserted as in this metropolitan crush of persons"³⁴ comes to mind, especially as the anonymous audience serves as backdrop for the barmaid's blank facial expression. The experience and entertainment are as evanescent as the smoke hovering overhead.

Although most of the audience is quickly sketched with brief brush strokes, some of the women in the front of the balcony (apparently friends of Manet) are delineated with greater detail. The female gaze is emphasized in these women and is particularly accentuated in the woman using binoculars, a trope used by other Impressionist painters like Mary Cassatt. These fashionable and apparently respectable women are now allowed to be out in public

³⁴ Simmel, "Metropolis and Mental Life," 16.

venues like the Folies where they are spectators of the spectacle, not only on stage, but in the crowd. This is highlighted by the fact that both women seem to be gazing at something other than the trapeze act in front of them. They are consumers of the experience.

Yet, the female spectators are also conscious of being seen themselves. As Lisa Tiersten notes, “consumer culture and its commodities offered a whole new range of possibilities for theatrical self-display and feminine posing.”³⁵ While focusing their own gazes, fashionable women sought to attract the gazes of others. David Carrier helpfully summarizes the theory of Jacques Lacan with regard to the mirror effect of self-perception: “Whenever I see the world, I also see myself being seen by others. My awareness that I exist in an intersubjective world in which others perceive me is built into the very structure of perception.”³⁶ Manet’s *Bar* quintessentially represents Lacan’s concept in paint: gaze looking at the subject (barmaid), subject looking at the gaze with the overlapping images being superimposed on each other to produce the screen on which the image of the subject is cast.³⁷ Manet masterfully uses his mirror to reflect the multi-perspectival complexities of seeing, being seen, and seeing ourselves being seen.

Like the barmaid, the other women in the *Bar* are consumers of commodity culture, pursuing a self-fashioning of their own femininity. Simmel notes the “difficulty of giving one’s own personality a certain status within the framework of metropolitan life.”³⁸ Residents of the metropolis seek to cope by making themselves noticeably different as a way of gaining attention from others, obtaining some sort of self-esteem and finding a position to fill in society.³⁹ This constant desire to differentiate oneself fuels the economy of consumption, especially among chic Parisian

³⁵ Lisa Tiersten, “Marianne in the Department Store: Gender and the Politics of Consumption in Turn-of-the-Century Paris” in *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store, 1850-1939*, ed. Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain (Brookfield, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1999), 124.

³⁶ David Carrier, “Art History in the Mirror Stage: Interpreting the ‘Bar at the Folies-Bergère’” in *12 Views of Manet’s Bar*, ed. Bradford R. Collins (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 81.

³⁷ Ibid., 82.

³⁸ Simmel, “Metropolis and the Mental Life,” 18.

³⁹ Ibid.

women. Yet, the collocation of the fully accoutered *petite bourgeoisie* barmaid with the image of the fashionable bourgeoisie women spectators, points to the difficulty in distinguishing between classes in the modern consumer economy. Thus, women gaze as consumers and gaze at one another as competitors vying for attention. In so doing they become not only customers, but objects of visual, and in some cases bodily, consumption.

Rather than taking classical Greek models for their imaging of the feminine form and visage, the Impressionists like Manet painted women who were clearly Parisian in their facial features, toilette, personality, and carriage. As Iskin notes, the Bar “marks a shift of pictorial codes of representation from an exclusive male gaze to an accompanying female spectatorial gaze and a new paradigm of crowd spectatorship that include some women alongside men.”⁴⁰ Although the male gaze remained, the female gaze as spectator/consumer emerged in modern painting. Furthermore, respectable women who were prominently seen in many public places that were previously off limits to them became part of the crowd spectatorship that further contributed to a multiplicity of gazes.

Manet’s Fascination with Women’s Fashion and Morisotian Facture

Although the discussion up to this point has focused on the content and elements of Manet’s *Bar*, it is also important to consider the form or manner in which the artist painted his masterpiece. In her article, “Facturing Femininity: Manet’s ‘Before the Mirror,’” Armstrong demonstrates Manet’s fascination with women’s fashion and the painterly style of his good friend and sister-in-law, Berthe Morisot, especially during the last few years of his career.

In discussing several works that deal with various stages of a woman’s *toilette*, Armstrong shows how the female consumer collapses production and consumption by consuming fashion in the process of producing her own femininity.⁴¹ In this series of paintings, Manet moves between a feminine painterly style akin to Morisot’s *non-fini* manner and his own *fini* style. Armstrong describes Morisot’s style as focusing more on form than content

⁴⁰ Iskin, “Selling, Seduction, and Soliciting the Eye,” 41.

⁴¹ Armstrong, “Facturing Femininity,” 95.

such that her works are more intuited than seen and characterized by bodily occlusion and elision, amorphousness, insubstantiality, evanescence, disembodied formlessness, cosmetic light touch; deobjectification, fragility, incorporationality, and unpossessability.⁴²

The contrast between Manet's appropriation of the Morisotian facture and his own more typical style can be seen in the contrast between *Before the Mirror*, 1875–76 (Figure 6) and *Nana* (Figure 2), respectively. Although the paintings were completed approximately a year apart and there are several clues indicating the same woman wearing the same clothing is being depicted in each, the facture is remarkably different and leads to quite different apprehensions of the paintings. Armstrong states that:

Nana displayed the *fille* as the commodity she was—the woman for sale, dressed in her fancy undergarments, engaged in her own painterly artifices—putting on makeup—perfecting her function as object of delectation...gazed upon by her buyer a piece of pure erotic spectacle, and glancing out, with an attitude of flirtatious come-on.⁴³

In fabricating their own femininity through consumable items and selling their bodies, courtesans like Nana were the ultimate representation of the consumer culture.

On the other hand, Armstrong argues that *Before the Mirror* represents an alternative version of *Nana* that is a kind of painterly argument with it because “the narrative of feminine artifice, the



Figure 6. Edouard Manet, *Before the Mirror*, 1875–76. See the online article for the full-color image.

⁴² Ibid., 91.

⁴³ Ibid., 84.

male gaze, and sexual consumerism that *Nana* enacts so fully in paint is denarrativized, denaturalized, and somewhat undermined in *Before the Mirror*.⁴⁴ Quite a bit more is given to the gaze in *Nana* than in *Before the Mirror* and the difference in facture leads to a different apprehension entirely.

Armstrong argues that Manet's project of experimenting with the relationship between painterly illusionism, femininity, and commodity culture culminated in the *Bar*:

the barmaid...is a hard, flat cutout of a figure inserted between two other surfaces, that of the counter with its range of glistening objects, and that of the glittering mirror. In contrast, her reflected body is soft and blurred at its edges, her hair is veiled by the white scumbling that indicates the glare of the mirror... Aside from its illusionistic function, the logic of this contrast between the finished and the unfinished, the Manetian and the Morisotian, is severalfold.⁴⁵

Thus, the barmaid and consumable objects on display are painted with the more finished quality considered to be typical of Manet, whereas the mirror reflection is given the 'unfinished' Morisotian treatment as a way to highlight the more subjective realm of consumerism embodied in the crowd as well as illusionistic aspects of painting.

The barmaid stands in the middle and mediates the two realms of consumer and commodity because she represents and feminizes both. She is consumer and commodity, purveyor and purveyed, and she associates painting with both the production and consumption of femininity.⁴⁶ Therefore, both the content and mix of styles Manet used in the *Bar* were vital to his communication of the pervasive influence of consumer culture in the late nineteenth century.

Conclusion

Manet's *Bar at the Folies-Bergère* masterfully captures the essence of the consumer culture of nineteenth century Paris within

⁴⁴ Ibid., 85.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 102.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

the microcosm of the famed café-concert hall that served as a cathedral of consumption and spectacle. In the enigmatic barmaid, her gentleman customer, and the crowd of spectators, Manet presents a prism through which to behold the many facets of the culture of mass consumption that reshaped Paris during his career as a painter.

Although no one in the metropolis could remain untouched by such transformative changes, the culture of consumerism had perhaps its most dramatic impact on women, who played the roles of consumer and seller in the marketplace. While fashioning their own femininity to serve both functions, modern Parisian women were also searching for significance to combat the alienating influences of big city life even as they were sometimes viewed as objects of consumption. Although the male gaze remained intact, the individual female gaze, as well as that of females in the crowd of spectators, led to a more complex multiplicity of gazes. By painting modern Parisians and eschewing classical models and academic conventions, Manet and the Impressionists developed a transformative art that spoke to the complexities of their cultural situation and continues to speak to the heirs of the culture of consumption today.