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Therese Dolan, ed., *Perspectives on Manet*. Surrey, U.K. and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012. xiii +230 pp. Illustrations, bibliography and index. \$119.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-1-4094-2074-3.

Review by Hollis Clayson, Northwestern University.

A collection of essays on the work of the French and thoroughly Parisian artist, Édouard Manet (1832-1883), has a built-in significance for art history that is somewhat concealed, even belied, by the unassuming “perspectives on” title of, and the neutral cast of the introduction to, Therese Dolan’s splendid anthology of nine new texts.[1] The interpretive stakes are high *ipso facto* because the history of modern art is rooted in Manet studies. As the influential scholar, Michael Fried, put it: “Manet is by common agreement the pivotal figure in the modern history of painting.”[2] Thus museum exhibitions of his art attract crowds as well as passionate scrutiny and debate, and pacesetting monographic studies are thick on the ground, appearing with increasing frequency since the centenary of the artist’s death.[3]

Once upon a time not long ago (the 1980s), the axis of methodological range in Manet studies extended from radical formalism, at one end, to Marxist- and feminist-inflected social art history at the opposite pole. The history of that antipathy is too complex to delve into in an abbreviated review. Suffice it to note that that spectrum and its antitheses are not the principal hermeneutic frameworks of the scholarship gathered in the new anthology. Indeed, Steven Z. Levine’s painstaking philological and historiographic essay, a tour de force of intertextual scrutiny which analyzes T. J. Clark’s and Michael Fried’s critical concepts, effectively reconciles and heals the rift between the old antagonistic stances. To wit, Levine concludes that the positions are “distended mirror images of one another” (p. 201).

The prior scholarly anthologies of Manet essays date from the later 1990s, and focus exclusively on specific art works.[4] Those essays were haunted and consistently informed by the formalism-social art history rivalry, but also shaped by some of the primary interpretive enthusiasms of their era including the exploration of the visual image via gender analysis and theories of postmodernism, and the hunt for personal meaning through the lens of authorial subjectivity. Interestingly, though no such focus was obligatory, five of the authors who contributed to the 2012 compilation (Brown, Dolan, Lethbridge, Rubin, and Sidlauskas) also elected to concentrate closely on specific individual paintings (or in one case a lithograph). This may be explained by the widespread agreement among present-day specialists, whatever their interpretive commitments, that a close encounter with his art’s formal properties and the identification of its myriad sources are critical to laying hold of its meaning. Furthermore, pictorial modernism, however it is defined, is believed by the majority of practitioners to have been given birth in the art of Manet.[5]

There is plenty of variety in Dolan’s volume nonetheless, but the interests that dominate are preponderantly philosophical and epistemological. The degree to which later nineteenth-century literary and art critical figures, on one hand, and several of the key French theorists who emerged in the 1970s, on the other, loom large in these new accounts of Manet’s artwork is striking and provides evidence that the volume may instance a “philosophical turn” in modern art studies. By “philosophical

turn,” I mean a marked and steady increase in the frequency of direct appeals to literary sources and philosophical literatures, as opposed to aesthetic resources on the one hand, and social and political history evoked to illuminate the contingencies of context on the other. Time will tell if the Dolan anthology is a bellwether.

Charles Baudelaire’s poetic and artistic principles, for example, are keys to Suzanne Singletary’s persuasive efforts to integrate “[James McNeill] Whistler into a study of French art during a critical period in which he fully participated” (p. 50). And Baudelaire’s theory of correspondence is the linchpin of Therese Dolan’s fascinating discussion of Ernest Cabaner’s synesthetic theory of colored hearing. Robert Lethbridge’s compelling essay revisits the Manet-Émile Zola relationship via a re-assessment of the importance of Manet’s 1868 portrait of Zola to the writer-critic himself. His entirely fresh look at the Manet-Zola saga demonstrates that Zola’s engagement with Manet was grounded in a process of identification, defined by “the tensions between resemblance and differentiation, and between solidarity and rivalry;” (p. 99) and the recognition that Manet was the consummate “not Cézanne” (p. 100). Marilyn Brown offers a smart new reading of one of the most studied paintings in the canon of modern art, *Un bar aux Folies-Bergère* (1882), by likening it to a short story by Edmond Duranty, “La Double vue de Louis Seguin,” via an expert deployment of Jacques Lacan’s theory of the Imaginary. Nancy Locke’s bracing point of departure is her urging that we consider “not only the material aspects of subject matter, but also the moral aspects suggested by those subjects” (p. 10). In an illuminating discussion of the ethics of realism, she analyses the difference between morality and ethics in French thinking of Manet’s day. She puts Michel Foucault’s distinction between a moral code imposed on someone and the *rapport à soi* that defines the individual as a moral subject to good use.

Susan Sidlauskas’ essay, which also has theoretically ambitious concerns, takes a dramatic and somewhat counter-intuitive, but highly effective tack. She reads the 1862 portrait of Victorine Meurent through examples of contemporary art (by Till Friewald, Rineke Dijkstra, and Thomas Ruff) in acknowledgment of the “trans-historical, cross-media appeal” of Manet’s picture (p. 31). This conjunction results in an illuminating discussion of issues of resemblance, resistance and recognition in portraiture. Jane Mayo Roos challenges certain of the taxonomic routines in use in the history of nineteenth-century art, *viz.* Realism and Impressionism, in order to stress Manet’s singularity. She effectively draws upon Roland Barthes’ thinking, especially his concept of the “*ça-a-été*” to problematize the deceptive realism of a painting of a real thing. James H. Rubin’s essay is the most explicitly political in the book and the least philosophical, in the sense we have been exploring. He looks again at the sources of the 1871 *Guerre civile* lithograph making a strong case for the relevance of hitherto under-explored predecessor works by Eugène Delacroix and Honoré Daumier, arguing convincingly in the process for the political resonance between three moments of turmoil and lower class oppression, 1830, 1834, and 1871, and the links between three episodes of art censorship.

I highly recommend *Perspectives on Manet*. Granted it bears a high dollar price and it is decidedly disciplinarily specialized, but the very high intellectual and expository level of the essays and the imaginative verve of the contributions overall make it a very worthwhile, in fact an exciting, read for students of modern art. But it should also interest France specialists from across the disciplines, which leads to my only quibble. As the Director of an Institute for the Humanities, I am always trying to get scholars to articulate the stakes of their work so that great projects will signify and compel across disciplinary borders. While not taking up a philistine position here at the review’s end, and, moreover, speaking from a position of admiration for the new work showcased in the anthology, I wish nevertheless that a case had been made for the interest and importance of the *recherché* debates about Manet’s art in this book for scholars of France working in different spheres. So many humanities scholars, not to mention social scientists, consider art history to be a marginal or at best a secondary field. Dolan’s introduction as it stands does an excellent job of portraying the coverage of the essays, but without outreach to the concerns of scholars studying other realms of France and indeed without really

characterizing the innovations to be found in these perspectives on Manet hot off the Ashgate presses.[6]

A different kind of overview or a mini-intro to each essay may have helped to draw the doubting Thomases of literary studies and history to the flame of art history. (Hope springs eternal.) If I am at all right about the philosophical/literary cast of much of the volume, calling attention to the character of its interpretative maneuvers may enhance its appeal to readers in other fields. Last point: a more capacious framing may also have served to demonstrate that without understanding “the Painter of Modern Life” (a term coined by Baudelaire routinely affixed to Manet) and the debates that have swirled around his art for almost 150 years, the status of Paris as “the Capital of the Nineteenth Century” and Walter Benjamin’s stress upon the visual when he devised that influential accolade for the French capital will not be fully fathomed, or worse: may be unintelligible.[7]

#### LIST OF ESSAYS

Therese Dolan, “Introduction: Perspectives on Manet”

Nancy Locke, “Manet and the Ethics of Realism”

Susan Sidlauskas, “The Spectacle of the Face: Manet’s Portrait of Victorine Meurent”

Suzanne Singletary, “Manet and Whistler: Baudelairean *Voyage*”

Jane Mayo Roos, “Manet and the Impressionist Moment”

Robert Lethbridge, “Zola’s Manets”

James H. Rubin, “Manet’s Heroic Corpses and the Politics of Their Time”

Therese Dolan, “Manet’s Synesthetic Portrait: Composing Cabaner”

Marilyn R. Brown, “Yet Another Look at the *Bar*: Manet, Duranty, and the Double View”

Steven Z. Levine, “Reconstructing Manet”

#### NOTES

[1] Full disclosure: I was invited to write an afterword for this volume.

[2] Michael Fried, *Manet’s Modernism or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 1.

[3] The recent major career overview, the first since 1983, was the hotly-debated *Manet: Inventeur du Moderne*, a 2011 exhibition at the Musée d’Orsay, Paris, curated by Stéphane Guégan. A typical putdown was penned by Julian Bell: “For all the large promise of its title, “Manet: The Man Who Invented Modernity” is a diffident, even whimsical venture, with its multiplicity of tentative themes and its bemusing guest appearances.” “Manet: ‘Sudden Sensuous Dazzle,’” *New York Review of Books* LVIII/12(July 14, 2011): 19. T. J. Clark’s revered and reviled *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985) inaugurated a nonstop outpouring of Manet studies.

[4] Bradford Collins, ed., *12 Views of Manet's Bar* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996) and Paul Hayes Tucker, ed., *Manet's Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). The art historians who published in two of the three anthologies are Carol Armstrong, the late John House, Nancy Locke, and Steven Z. Levine; only Locke and Levine straddled the late 1990s and 2012.

[5] Charles Harrison, *Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 19-21.

[6] The academic world owes a great debt to Ashgate, by the way: it is among the few presses that continue to publish the intellectually vital genre of the edited anthology.

[7] Walter Benjamin, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century" [1935 and 1939], *The Arcades Project*, Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, trans. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 3-26, 955-958. And see Vanessa Schwartz, "Walter Benjamin for Historians," *The American Historical Review* 106/5(December 2001): 1721-1743.

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