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Temma Balducci, *Gender, Space, and the Gaze in Post-Haussmann Visual Culture: Beyond the Flâneur*. London and New York: Routledge, 2017. 236 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. £100.00 (hb). ISBN 978-1-4724-4586-5; £36.99 (eb). ISBN: 978-1-315-21385-9.

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Temma Balducci's *Gender, Space, and the Gaze in Post-Haussmann Visual Culture* contributes to a robust literature arguing that Baudelaire's description of Parisian modernity and its protagonist, the flâneur, have been overprivileged in nineteenth-century studies. The author sets out to extend existing revisionist accounts by broadening our perspective on nineteenth-century French social life, making room in the canon for diverse practices and practitioners, and calling into question established interpretations of familiar works of art. Readers will be refreshed by Balducci's descriptions of women's presence in public space and their pleasure in looking. Of particular interest is her attention to Jean Béraud, the focus of her PhD and an understudied artist who has typically been cast as a generic representative of conservative stylistic tendencies within the field of modern-life painting. Balducci reveals a range and complexity in Béraud's paintings that prove they are well worthy of serious art historical attention. Perhaps the book's most significant achievement is to raise avenues for further research. In the present study, the ambition to unseat Baudelaire takes precedence over the development of those new directions. If this leaves many questions unanswered, it will motivate future scholarship.

In the introduction, Balducci identifies a core problem with literature on nineteenth-century French art and culture: it tends to assume that Baudelaire's flâneur can be taken as representative of bourgeois male experience. Feminist art history is most implicated here, and Griselda Pollock's important "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity" figures prominently.^[1] According to Balducci, Pollock "assumes not only that the flâneur is synonymous with bourgeois masculinity but also that bourgeois men are most 'at home' in the public spaces of the city" (p. 2). Undoubtedly, the prominence of the flâneur has limited our understanding of the embodied experiences of nineteenth-century men and women,^[2] and the rigidity with which Pollock demarcates the gendered terrain of city space suggests an acceptance of masculine authority which has been seriously debated since. But Balducci has somewhat flattened out the nuance in Pollock's argument for the purposes of her own. Pollock carefully positions the flâneur as a figure and not a person, and the detached observing gaze that characterizes "him" as an ideology rather than a practice. "We are here defining a mental map rather than a description of actual social spaces," Pollock explains as she describes the overlapping, but not entirely conflated, ideological maps of a bourgeois woman's "place" and the

concrete organization of Paris.[3] In a volume edited by Aruna D'Souza and Tom McDonough which, like the current study, aims to challenge the flâneur's mastery and write women into city space, D'Souza puts it like this: "Pollock's argument needs to be read not as a literal accounting of what men and women could *see* in modern Paris--what spaces they actually had access to, what sights/sites were authorized or forbidden to men or to women. Rather, hers is a map of what bourgeois men and women could be *seen to see*." [4]

When it comes to the construction of bourgeois gender roles, more is at stake than who went where and saw what, which means that unpacking the power that the flâneur has held in scholarship requires more than showing (as Balducci successfully does) that bourgeois women frequented the boulevard and bourgeois men were comfortable in domestic space.

Chapter one, "Making Up the Boulevard," argues that because of Baudelaire's understanding of the city, scholars have neglected the presence of bourgeois women and lower class men on the boulevard. Despite the art historical tendency to refer to self-consciously modern French painters and depicted figures as flâneurs, Balducci argues that there are relatively few paintings by those artists that show men perusing the urban outdoors. She asks: "If the flâneur--or, at least, male figures who can be read as such--is all but absent from the visual culture of the period, whence this desire on the part of art historians to promote Baudelaire's construction, to imagine an importance for the flâneur that is out of proportion with the significance of the figure in the late nineteenth century...?" (p. 21).

This is an excellent question, but not one that Balducci answers. Her discussion shifts to how the boulevard has been too narrowly understood as dominated by bourgeois men, leaving the reader to ponder what exactly about Baudelaire's construction has proven so popular and enduring. Is it the elusory and ambiguous nature of this figuration of male authority that makes it so? Moving beyond the flâneur requires that we dissect its appeal, that we know how its allure works and why, and so it would have been useful for Balducci to provide a close reading of Baudelaire's "The Painter of Modern Life" and define the flâneur beyond "a man with the leisure to stroll the streets of Paris observing the life of the city while also remaining detached from it" (p. 1). She does not offer this, presumably because it is not Baudelaire's version of modernity to which she objects, but the art historical literatures that have unselfconsciously promoted it. This means that the author's criticisms of existing scholarship assume that the flâneur always means the same straightforward thing, when it might actually be the impossibility of pinning the flâneur down that makes the construct so versatile, and it backs her into the position that she critiques in Pollock, a reading of flânerie that can be overly literal. For the purposes of this chapter, the flâneur is only a flâneur on the boulevard. Could the boulevard be more than a physical space, a space of possibilities where habits of observation and response, privilege and presentation, are learned and practiced? Indeed, in the third chapter, Balducci argues that exterior space should be seen as contiguous with the domestic interior, one result of which is that an artist in his studio might still be convincingly read as a flâneur even though he has left the street. The point seems not whether Tissot can rightly be called a flâneur in Degas's *Portrait of James Tissot* in a cluttered studio, but instead why Robert Herbert, whose description of the painting Balducci quotes at length, was determined to see both Degas and Tissot in those terms.[5] What is productive here is Balducci's claim that interpretations like Herbert's have elevated certain paintings over others and produced potential misreadings of them.

The discussion of bourgeois women in public space, the focus of the second half of the first chapter and chapter two, “Gazing Women,” opens intriguing areas of inquiry. Most significantly, Balducci argues that art historians have overestimated the extent to which women in public were necessarily sexualized. This is an important critique of certain early feminist accounts of nineteenth-century French painting, although at other times those foundational analyses of the gendering of French modernity are curiously elided. For example, Balducci writes: “While it is often assumed that women had little role in either the public spaces of the city or the development of modernity, Kathy Peiss in discussing New York City at the turn of the century has posited that modernity was marked precisely by a shift from homosocial to heterosocial culture, due in part to the larger numbers of women outside the home because of employment, leisure opportunities, and/or political activism, which suggests that women and femininity did, in fact, play a large role in public space as well as in the development of modernity” (p. 39).^[6]

Despite the good intentions of this passage, it is difficult reading. After nearly five decades of revisionist literature that has centered on nineteenth-century Paris, is it really necessary to refer to Peiss’s work on New York as the exception to a presumed trend, and explain that it merely “suggests” that women did in fact play a role in the development of modernity? This point by now goes without saying, and the generalized and tentative terms in which it is stated here are perplexing. Feminist historians and art historians of nineteenth-century France have proven time and again that women were central to the development of modernity, and that until we consider modernity as fractured and lived out differently by nineteenth-century individuals, we repeat masculinist myths of modernism—the central myth of course being that “women had little role in either the public spaces of the city or the development of modernity.”

“Gazing Women” raises the concept of the gaze, as does the title, which like the flâneur might have been productively analyzed. For Balducci it is a synonym for looking: “While the term ‘gaze’ has very specific, usually masculine, connotations in scholarship, I use it frequently to reference looking by women because alternatives such as ‘looking’ or ‘glancing’ do not carry the same meaning or scholarly weight” (p. 50). In a book that ambitiously sets out to challenge the scholarly weight carried by the flâneur, it is surprising that the weight granted to the gaze, the flâneur’s defining possession, is so easily accepted. The theorization of a gaze in psychoanalysis, film studies, and art history has frequently generated the same problems as considering the flâneur as the representative bearer of that gaze. And so Balducci’s core argument—that our understanding of how Parisians negotiated their city has been limited by overemphasis on the flâneur, theorized as male and taken as representative of bourgeois men’s experience—can equally be reframed in relation to the gaze: our understanding of how Parisians saw one another, their city, and its art has been limited by overemphasis on the gaze, theorized as male and taken to be the vehicle through which men were granted their mastery. The visual experiences of diverse groups of men have often been reduced to a false universal, a male gaze, which has also contributed (as Balducci herself argues) to scholarly neglect of the myriad ways in which women looked. Utilizing the gaze concept, so closely aligned with the mythology of the flâneur and the centrality of that figure for scholarship, impedes Balducci’s development of new insights about vision. For example, Balducci brings up, in order to call into doubt, “the presumption that power and the gaze are mutually defining and reinforcing” (p. 67). This seems like a call to reconsider the relationship between vision and power and it raises critical questions. What if to see is not to have power? What types of vision are possible, and how do they map to structures of power and modes of empowerment? This kind of inquiry could

destabilize frameworks of visual mastery, fracture how vision can be understood, and enable a radical rethinking of the sensory hierarchy. The concept of gazing lacks the specificity that this new set of questions would allow, questions that could be historically grounded in the visual, material, and textual sources at the heart of this book.

In addition, Balducci suggests provocatively that art historical neglect of paintings depicting active female viewing is the result of scholarly discomfort with them (pp. 90-91). In other words, art historians are complicit in neutralizing female vision and positioning women as the object of a male gaze. This is the start of a possible answer to why scholars have been so drawn to Baudelaire's version of modernity, and like the questions around vision and power, it begs for development. But the chapter does not return to these themes. Instead Balducci brings together a panoply of paintings, posters, and prints of women looking pointedly out at the viewer, at their environment, or at men, by artists including Manet, Degas, Béraud, Tissot, and Toulouse-Lautrec. Her point comes across incontestably: "female looking was rife across the cultural spectrum" (p. 93). But after opening up so many possibilities early in the chapter and introducing so rich a range of material, the conclusion that women in Paris were looking after all does not go far enough, and initiates a series of other questions: what do these images tell us about female looking? What modes of looking were explored in visual culture, and what is the role of medium, intended audience, or the aesthetic and political commitments of diverse artists?

Chapter three, "Windows and Balconies," positions those spaces as offering a semi-public urban experience to men and women alike. One delightful poster advertises a railing cushion for the elbows of female people-watchers. Through such examples of popular culture, as well as paintings, Balducci describes the sustained periods of looking, and exposure to the looking of others, that windows and balconies enabled. The strongest part of the chapter is the ending discussion of embodied spectatorship, in which Balducci shows that framing devices like windows and balconies often inscribed the physical presence of the artist and the long duration of his or her looking into the painting's structure--this in contrast to the mobile and fleeting type of vision conventionally associated with *flânerie*. The weakest parts of the chapter are the returns to Baudelaire. We are told that paintings under discussion challenge a Baudelairean division between public and private, prove that Baudelaire's *flâneur* was not the template for masculinity and male creativity, and demonstrate that the Baudelairean boulevard was not the primary source of artistic inspiration. As the book progresses, whatever the conclusions, when they refer back to Baudelaire it often hinders the development of new themes that, as Balducci herself argues, have little if anything to do with Baudelaire. These conclusions also implicate Balducci in the overemphasis of Baudelaire's art-worldview that she is all the while protesting.

The final chapter, "Men, Domesticity, and the Family," positions the domestic interior as playing a more important role than the boulevard in the construction of urban masculinity. The author rightly argues that overemphasizing the *flâneur* has elevated paintings of urban scenes above those of domestic life, and that feminist art historians have too readily interpreted interiors as feminizing the male sitters represented within them. While the dominance of separate spheres ideology in the later nineteenth century has been much critiqued and complicated, a tendency to read plush sofas and floral wallpaper as feminine has outlived it. In order to assert the importance of the interior for masculinity, Balducci brings together an array of art and popular culture depicting men at home. While interesting, an issue with this range is that it forces generalizations about the home and about masculinity. It does not distinguish

between different parts of the home, which is particularly evident in discussion of paintings of artists' studios, places of work but also frequently part of domestic space, and especially when filled with an artist's colleagues, settings for labor and leisure and even an extension of the boulevard. A second question prompted by the scope of material, from Degas's family portraits to Van Gogh's *Vincent's Bedroom*, is whether it matters which man made the painting or sat for it, and what version of masculinity is at stake. This is especially apparent in the discussion of how Edmond Duranty and Joris-Karl Huysmans both characterized men in their novels by describing their domestic interiors. While Duranty uses the home to establish the protagonist of "Bric-à-brac" (1878) as a respectable bourgeois family man, Huysmans describes his (Jean des Esseintes, in *À rebours*, 1884) as an outcast balking social convention through his bizarre decor. For Balducci, what matters is that both authors rely on the interior to define their characters. But the polar juxtaposition suggests that the point is not just that masculinity is constructed through reference to the home, but what sort of masculinity is being constructed, and what relationship masculinities have to one another and to sexuality, a question that Balducci seems conspicuously reluctant to engage. The analysis of paintings of men at home also lacks a rigorous consideration of the genre of portraiture. The self-consciously modern painters with whom the author is principally concerned were reshaping tradition, but they still worked within it. The choice to represent male figures in domestic space says as much about the conventions of the genre as about men's relationship to the setting, just as artists who painted parks and gardens, the final subject of this chapter, were also positioning their work in relation to the wider field of landscape painting and the *fête champêtre*, not just chronicling bourgeois leisure.

Balducci achieves her goal, for the material assembled here proves without a doubt that Baudelaire's framework for modernity was just one framework, limited in its application and overused since. Ironically, the book demonstrates the pitfalls of scholarly emphasis on Baudelaire, which is that its potential to generate new frameworks and fresh interpretations of works of art is circumscribed by the author's persistent recourse to him. Some of the most exciting implications of Balducci's material are not developed as a result, but they will give readers much to think with.

NOTES

[1] Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and Histories of Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 50-90.

[2] See for example the essays in the special issue of *Dix-Neuf*, "Rethinking the Flâneur: Flânerie and the Senses" (July 2012), guest edited by Aimée Boutin.

[3] Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, p. 68.

[4] Aruna D'Souza, "Why the Impressionists Never Painted the Department Store," in Aruna D'Souza and Tom McDonough eds., *The Invisible Flâneuse?: Gender, Public Space, and Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp. 129-147, quotation at pp. 36-137.

[5] Robert L. Herbert, *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society* (New Haven: Yale

University Press, 1988), pp. 34-35.

[6] Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

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